



Banditry in northern Nigeria: Terrorists or marauders?

By

¹ETIAN Uduak Monday., & ²BEMGBA Paul Terlumun PhD.

Legislative Centre for Security Analysis (LeCeSA),
National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS),
National Assembly, Abuja

uduaketian@gmail.com, paulbemgba@gmail.com

International Journal of Social Science, Management, Peace and Conflict Research, 09(01), 096-109

Publication history: Received August 29, 2025; Revised Sept 7, 2025; Accepted on Sept 12, 2025

Abstract

Banditry in Northern Nigeria has emerged as one of the most critical security challenges confronting the Nigerian state in the twenty-first century. Manifesting in forms such as mass killings, kidnappings for ransom, cattle rustling, and village raids, banditry has disrupted livelihoods, displaced communities, and deepened humanitarian crises across the region. While initially considered a localized criminal activity, its growing sophistication, organization, and reliance on violence have drawn comparisons with terrorism, raising the question of whether these groups are simply marauders or terrorists in disguise. The study interrogates this complexity by examining the conceptual distinctions between banditry, terrorism, and marauding, with specific focus on their operations in Northern Nigeria. Adopting a secondary qualitative methodology, the study relies on scholarly publications, policy reports, and empirical evidence published between 2020 and 2025. The inclusion criteria emphasized peer-reviewed journal articles, credible institutional reports, and current analyses on security, governance, and conflict studies, while excluding media commentary and opinion pieces. The findings reveal that while bandits in Northern Nigeria primarily operate as marauders motivated by economic gains, their adoption of violent tactics such as mass abductions and attacks on state institutions, introduces elements of terrorism. Furthermore, the operations of marauders are sustained by porous borders, proliferation of small arms, and weak policing systems. Efforts to address banditry have combined military offensives with non-military strategies such as amnesty programs, peace dialogues, and community resilience-building. However, challenges remain due to corruption, lack of trust, and the failure to address structural drivers of insecurity. The paper concludes by recommending integrated approaches that balance security enforcement with socio-economic reforms, while also reframing policy debates to differentiate between criminality and terrorism for effective response.

Keywords: Banditry, Marauders, Political Economy of Violence, Terrorism

Introduction

Banditry has become one of the most pressing security challenges confronting Nigeria in the twenty-first century, particularly in its northern region where attacks on rural communities, mass abductions, and violent dispossession of land and resources have grown in scale and frequency. The crisis has undermined human security, strained state capacity, and triggered mass internal displacement, raising serious concerns about the governance of security in Africa's most populous country (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021; Hassan & Pieri, 2022). What makes the situation more problematic is the debate over how to categorize the phenomenon of banditry in Northern Nigeria. While some analysts see it as a manifestation of terrorism given its violent methods and destabilizing impact, others describe it as marauding criminality driven by resource capture and socio-economic marginalization (Edeko, 2021; Osimen & Oyewole, 2023).

* Corresponding author: ETIAN Uduak Monday

Legislative Centre for Security Analysis (LeCeSA), NILDS, National Assembly, Abuja, Nigeria.

Copyright © 2025 Author(s) retain the copyright of this article. This article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0.

Globally, the phenomenon of banditry is not new, as history is replete with instances where armed groups emerged to challenge weak or overextended state structures. For instance, parts of Latin America, particularly Venezuela and Brazil, have long contended with violent groups that operate as rural bandits, often preying on marginalized communities while simultaneously resisting state authority (Velásquez, 2022). Similarly, Southeast Asia, especially in the Philippines and Indonesia, has witnessed forms of rural banditry tied to piracy and local insurgencies, blurring the line between political violence and criminality (Chan, 2020). These global patterns suggest that banditry often thrives where governance is weak, poverty is widespread, and access to justice is limited.

At the continental level, Africa has grappled with various forms of organized banditry that overlap with terrorism, insurgency, and violent extremism. In the Sahel region, for instance, armed groups labeled as bandits operate alongside jihadist groups, sometimes cooperating and other times competing for control of territory and resources (International Crisis Group, 2021). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, banditry has manifested in the form of armed militias engaging in raiding and looting, complicating peace-building processes (Stearns & Vogel, 2022). In East Africa, cattle rustling among pastoralist groups in Kenya, Uganda, and South Sudan has been reframed in academic debates as a form of localized banditry that often escalates into wider communal conflicts (Mkutu, 2020).

Nigeria's case, however, has gained global attention because of the unique scale, intensity, and visibility of its banditry crisis. Mass kidnappings for ransom, which initially gained prominence through Boko Haram's abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls in 2014, have become a major feature of bandit operations in Northern Nigeria, affecting schoolchildren, women, and vulnerable communities (Adesoji, 2021; Hassan & Pieri, 2022). Beyond abductions, bandits have attacked highways, looted villages, and established quasi-governance in ungoverned rural spaces, demonstrating organizational sophistication that blurs the boundary between terrorism and marauding criminality (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2021).

The academic and policy discourse is therefore divided: should Northern Nigeria's bandits be classified as terrorists, which would invoke international counter-terrorism measures, or as marauders, which would emphasize local criminal justice and socio-economic interventions? Addressing this question requires a careful interrogation of historical antecedents, conceptual definitions, theoretical explanations, and the empirical realities of how these groups operate. By situating Nigeria's banditry problem within both global and continental experiences, this paper seeks to critically examine whether Northern Nigeria's bandits should be understood primarily as terrorists or as marauders, and what the implications of such classification mean for policy, security governance, and human rights.

Objectives of the Study

The study critically interrogates the phenomenon of banditry in Northern Nigeria by pursuing the following objectives:

- i. Examine banditry contemporary manifestations in Northern Nigeria.
- ii. Investigate extent to which banditry exhibit defining features of terrorism in Northern Nigeria.
- iii. Analyze socio-economic implications of banditry in Northern Nigeria.
- iv. Provide evidence-based strategies for addressing banditry within the Northern regional.

Conceptual Clarifications

Banditry

Banditry refers to organized or semi-organized criminal violence involving the use of force, intimidation, or threat to dispossess individuals or communities of their property, safety, or freedom. In the context of Northern Nigeria, banditry has become an entrenched security challenge involving cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, destruction of farmlands, and violent attacks on rural communities (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). Banditry is not merely opportunistic crime but has grown into a systemic threat with networks that thrive on weak governance, porous borders, and proliferation of small arms (Aliyu, 2022). Scholars note that in Nigeria, the phenomenon has moved beyond petty robbery to large-scale violence, with armed groups capable of challenging state authority in parts of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Niger States (Abdulazeez & Yahaya, 2023). Thus, banditry in Nigeria represents a hybrid form of organized crime and violent social disruption that destabilizes both rural livelihoods and state sovereignty.

Terrorism

Terrorism broadly denotes the use of violence or threat of violence by non-state actors to instill fear, achieve political, ideological, or religious goals, and disrupt social order (Hoffman, 2022). While global debates persist on the definitional boundaries of terrorism, the Nigerian state has, through the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act of 2022, legally categorized certain acts such as mass killings, abductions, and coordinated attacks as terrorism. In Northern Nigeria, the overlap between terrorism and banditry has generated scholarly interest because many bandit groups deploy terror-like tactics, indiscriminate killings, mass kidnappings of schoolchildren, and destruction of villages, mirroring the operations of groups such as Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Onapajo, 2022). Though many bandit groups lack overt ideological foundations, their modus operandi often blurs the lines between terrorism and criminal violence, raising questions about their classification as purely marauding criminals or emergent terrorists.

Marauders

The term “marauders” historically refers to groups of armed raiders who plunder and pillage communities, often driven by material gain rather than ideological or political motives (Musa & Ahmed, 2020). In the Nigerian context, marauders are often associated with violent cattle rustlers, kidnappers, and rural raiding

gangs who thrive in ungoverned spaces. Unlike terrorists who usually have political or religious goals, marauders are primarily motivated by economic gains, engaging in ransom-taking, extortion, and looting (Okeke, 2021). However, the persistence of these marauding groups in Northern Nigeria has evolved into a sophisticated form of violence that occasionally intersects with terrorism, as some groups now adopt terror-style attacks to consolidate control or negotiate with state actors (Adamu, 2023). Thus, marauders in the region represent a complex dimension of rural violence where criminality, survival, and organized violence converge.

In summary, while banditry in Northern Nigeria encapsulates widespread organized criminality, terrorism reflects violence with ideological or political underpinnings, and marauders signify raiders primarily motivated by material gain. The challenge for policymakers and scholars is how to categorize and address actors who increasingly exhibit overlapping characteristics of all three.

Empirical Review

Danjuma and Caleb (2025) interrogated Rural banditry in northern Nigeria and its implications on national security. The study engaged qualitative research design. The study established that banditry in the Northern region are characterized by culture of unleashing violence on individuals and communities. such that insecurity has dominated life in both rural and urban centres of most affected communities with consequences on the socio-economic activities of individuals in the country as farmers could not access their farms in some remote areas because of pervading insecurity. Study emphasised that banditry create fear in the minds of travellers on the highways across Nigeria.

Ebonine (2022) while Assessing Impact of Banditry on Educational and Socio-Economic Development in Northern Nigeria, pigeonholed the nexus between banditry and rentierism. The study did not adopted field work; hence it adopts a qualitative approach that draws data from scholarly works, newspapers, and publications from international bodies. The3 study concluded that the rising menace of banditry in the Northern Nigeria has the mission of annihilating western education which would further set the region on the track of socio-economic backwardness and form the catalyst for Islamization. The study submitted that form of banditry has a close relationship with known terrorist groups in the Nigerian state (Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Ansaru).

Okoli and Abubakar (2025) examined ‘Crimelordism’ as a new phenomenon in armed banditry in Nigeria. The research engaged mixed qualitative method. Findings from the study affirmed that the prevalence of grossly under-governed territorial spaces, especially in the countryside and borderlands of Nigeria, has created a vacuum of security that is being exploited by criminal kingpins to establish enclaves of criminality

where they wield and exercise quasi-territorial powers. The study emphasised that the emergence of crime lords deepen self-aggrandizing status and makes banditry a socially sensitive criminal career.

Okoli and Nwangwu (2022) assessed organized crime terror nexus of banditry and terrorism in northern Nigeria. The study employed descriptive analysis predicated on a combination of primary and secondary studies. Result that emanated from that study showed that both groups have functionally adapted each other's structures and strategies. While Boko Haram and its splinter groups have occasionally engaged in acts of banditry, there has been mutual co-option by both groups as the exigencies of their operations demand. Nigeria's drive at mitigating the banditry-terrorism conundrum must proceed with a pragmatic understanding of the gamut and dynamics of their situational nexuses.

Rufus and Ogbe (2024) evaluated pathways to stability from rise of banditry in northwest Nigeria. The research employed empirical review of literature from peer reviewed journal, books, publication and government reports on banditry and strategies ahead. Result from the study showed that strengthening local governance, improving law enforcement capabilities, addressing the underlying socio-economic drivers of crime, cross-border cooperation between Nigeria and neighbouring states are essential strategies, given the transnational nature of bandit operations. The study argues that a comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategy is key to mitigating the threat of banditry and restoring peace and security in Northwest Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The Political Economy of Violence

This paper adopts the Political Economy of Violence as its central analytical lens. The political economy approach explains collective violence by tracing how incentives, institutions, and markets shape the behaviour of armed actors and the communities around them. Rather than treating banditry as irrational brutality or as purely ideological terror, the framework situates it within the interplay of state authority, local governance, illicit economies, and opportunity structures that reward coercion. In Northern Nigeria, this approach is especially useful because bandit groups operate where state presence is thin, where security and justice are unevenly provided, and where profitable shadow markets in cattle, gold, arms, and ransom payments flourish alongside patronage and corruption networks that enable violence to pay (Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023; Osasona, 2023).

At the core of the framework is rent seeking through coercion. Bandit groups extract value from communities by controlling roads and forests, by taxing farming and herding, by stealing cattle, and by monetizing kidnapping for ransom. These revenue streams mirror features of a protection economy, where non state actors sell security, decide who can pass, and mete out punishment, often with the tacit tolerance of elites who benefit from disorder or from proceeds in illegal mining and cross border trade. Evidence from the North

West shows that bandits have diversified from cattle rustling into large scale ransom kidnapping, highway robbery, and the taxation of informal mining sites, thus building durable cash flows that fund recruitment, procurement of weapons, and political influence at the local level (Ojo et al., 2023; Aina, 2023; UNIDIR, 2024).

The political economy lens also clarifies the much-debated crime and terror nexus. It does not assume that bandits are ideologues, rather, it examines how material incentives lead criminal actors to adopt terror like tactics when doing so maximizes leverage. In the North West, some groups co-exist with jihadist factions, sometimes trade in weapons, sometimes clash over territory, and sometimes copy one another's methods, for instance mass abductions that generate both fear and ransom revenue. This fluid mix is consistent with observed patterns in which criminal organizations adopt techniques associated with terrorism, while insurgents engage in criminal rackets to survive. The political economy perspective therefore explains convergence without forcing a binary label, and it highlights that groups will move along a spectrum depending on which activities yield the greatest rents at a given time and place (Osasona, 2023; Barnett, Rufa'i, & Abdulaziz, 2022; Ojo et al., 2023; UNIDIR, 2024).

Another pillar of the framework is institutional weakness and the market for violence. Where policing, adjudication, and land governance are weak or predatory, violence becomes a rational business strategy. Communities with limited access to formal justice may pay protection levies, negotiate directly with bandit leaders, or withdraw from contested spaces, which further lowers the cost of armed predation. Empirical accounts from Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, and Niger describe extensive displacement, withdrawal from schooling after mass abductions, and routinized ransom negotiations, all of which signal that violent extraction has become embedded in local economies and social life. These patterns are consistent with a market in which armed actors supply a mixture of insecurity and selective protection, and in which households and firms adjust by reducing investment, altering mobility, or exiting entirely, thereby deepening underdevelopment and making violent enterprise more attractive relative to licit livelihoods (Ojo et al., 2023; Reuters, 2024; AP, 2024).

Environmental and resource pressures fit neatly within this lens. Desertification, competition over water and pasture, and the rush for alluvial gold create new rents that armed actors seek to control. As mining camps, grazing corridors, and forest reserves become revenue nodes, bandits, corrupt intermediaries, and complicit officials compete to capture them. The result is a patchwork of micro sovereignties where who controls violence determines who extracts value. Political economy analysis therefore treats climate stress and rural poverty not as distant background, but as drivers that alter the price of coercion and the returns to criminal governance (Ojo et al., 2023; UNIDIR, 2024).

Applied to the paper's central question, the framework yields three analytic payoffs.

First, classification. The approach suggests that whether bandits are terrorists or marauders is an empirical question about their incentive structures and organizational choices. When ransom, looting, and shadow taxation dominate, marauding logics prevail. When groups deploy spectacular violence to influence political outcomes, to punish communities for collaboration with the state, or to signal ideological allegiance, terror logics are present. Many Northern Nigerian groups display a blend, and they shift as opportunities shift. A political economy lens therefore recommends classification that is granular by group, by location, and by time, rather than a blanket label for the entire phenomenon (Osasona, 2023; Barnett et al., 2022).

Second, mechanism. The framework highlights the mechanisms that sustain banditry, including protection rackets, elite collusion, money from kidnap markets, trafficking routes for arms, and control of artisanal mining sites. Disrupting these mechanisms, for example by drying up ransom liquidity, securing road corridors, formalizing artisanal mining with traceability and community benefit sharing, and prosecuting facilitators who launder proceeds, will shrink the profitability of violence and raise the costs of armed predation (Aina, 2023; Ogbonnaya, 2024; UNIDIR, 2024).

Third, policy alignment. Political economy analysis aligns countermeasures with incentives. Security operations that clear forests without holding territory simply displace rent seeking. Amnesty that rewards leaders without restructuring revenue flows can perversely increase the expected returns to violence. By contrast, policies that combine targeted enforcement against high value facilitators, reforms that improve dispute resolution and land governance, community based early warning, and credible service delivery can shift local calculations away from violent entrepreneurship. Education security for rural schools and transparent compensation for victims reduce the leverage that mass abductions create in ransom markets, thereby weakening a key profit center for bandit groups (Ojo et al., 2023; Reuters, 2024; AP, 2024; UNIDIR, 2024; Ogbonnaya, 2024).

In sum, the Political Economy of Violence best suits this study because it explains why banditry has become lucrative, why some groups adopt terror like tactics, and why responses that ignore incentives often fail. It reframes the terrorists or marauders debate as a question about how resources, rules, and rents shape armed group behaviour in Northern Nigeria, and it points directly to levers that can change that behaviour.

Brief History of Banditry in Nigeria

Banditry in Nigeria has deep historical roots linked to socio-economic, political, and security dynamics that have evolved over time. Historically, Nigeria has experienced various forms of violent criminality, including cattle rustling, armed robbery, and communal violence, which created the foundations for contemporary manifestations of banditry (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2021). The northern regions, particularly the North West and North Central, have long been characterized by pastoralist–farmer disputes, weak governance, and porous borders, which have provided fertile grounds for the emergence of bandit groups (Akinyemi, 2021).

During the colonial period, the imposition of new administrative and land tenure systems disrupted traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution, thereby intensifying resource-related disputes (Kuna & Ibrahim, 2020). Post-independence Nigeria witnessed the escalation of rural poverty, youth unemployment, and corruption, which combined to fuel organized bandit activities in agrarian communities (Akinbi, 2022). By the 1980s and 1990s, cattle rustling had evolved into organized criminal gangs armed with sophisticated weapons smuggled across porous borders from neighboring states such as Niger, Chad, and Libya (Idowu, 2022).

In more recent decades, especially from the early 2000s, banditry in Nigeria became a significant national security challenge, as armed groups increasingly adopted violent tactics such as kidnapping for ransom, mass killings, and large-scale displacement of rural populations (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). The deteriorating security environment in the Sahel, coupled with the inflow of small arms after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, exacerbated the situation, enabling local bandits to expand operations and coordinate attacks with transnational criminal networks (Eze, 2021).

By the 2010s, the phenomenon of rural banditry in Nigeria escalated into a complex crisis involving thousands of deaths, mass abductions of school children, destruction of villages, and large-scale internal displacement (Alemika, 2021). This period also marked the blurring of lines between ordinary criminality and terrorist-like violence, as some bandit groups began to adopt the language and tactics of insurgents, challenging the state's authority and legitimacy (Murtala, 2022). Thus, the history of banditry in Nigeria reveals a trajectory shaped by structural inequality, governance failure, and transnational insecurity, making it one of the most pressing threats to national stability today.

Banditry in Northern Nigeria, Element of Terrorism

The rise of banditry in Northern Nigeria has sparked a critical debate among scholars, policymakers, and security analysts over whether the phenomenon constitutes mere acts of marauding criminality or whether it possesses features akin to terrorism. Banditry in the region is characterized by large-scale attacks on rural communities, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, arson, and the indiscriminate killing of civilians, which are tactics that overlap significantly with terrorist strategies globally (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). For instance, the systematic use of violence to instill fear in targeted populations, alongside the political and economic motivations often disguised within ethnic and communal grievances, positions banditry within the domain of terrorism (Akinola, 2022).

Unlike traditional armed robbery or isolated crimes, banditry in Northern Nigeria often involves heavily armed groups with sophisticated weapons, motorbikes, and logistical coordination that resemble insurgent networks. These groups operate across porous borders, sometimes linking with established terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram or the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), creating a hybridized form of organized crime and terrorism (Ewi, 2021). Their activities not only disrupt local economies but also

weaken state legitimacy, as communities increasingly perceive government institutions as incapable of providing protection (Higazi, 2022).

Furthermore, the use of kidnapping as a revenue-generating mechanism mirrors the financing strategies of many terrorist organizations globally, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Taliban, who have historically relied on ransom as a steady source of income (Campana & Ducol, 2021). In Northern Nigeria, high-profile kidnappings—such as those targeting school children, religious leaders, and government officials—are calculated to gain maximum publicity, undermine social stability, and embarrass the Nigerian state (Olonisakin, 2023).

Another dimension that underscores the terrorist element is the ideological rhetoric increasingly employed by some bandit leaders, who justify their actions as responses to perceived state neglect, marginalization, and poverty. While not as coherent or doctrinal as Islamist terrorism, this narrative resonates with disenfranchised youth in the region, fueling recruitment and perpetuating cycles of violence (Abdullahi, 2023). Moreover, attacks on state institutions, such as police stations, military convoys, and correctional facilities, indicate that their activities transcend criminal opportunism, as they directly challenge the authority of the state (Osaretin & Iwuoha, 2022).

Despite these elements of terrorism, scholars caution against a wholesale classification of all bandit groups as terrorists. Many lack a coherent political or religious ideology, focusing instead on survival, profit, and revenge for long-standing conflicts such as farmer-herder clashes (Fadeyi, 2021). However, the fluidity of Nigeria's security landscape makes it clear that the lines between terrorism and banditry are increasingly blurred, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of their convergence.

The Operations and Challenges of Marauders

Marauders in Northern Nigeria operate through complex, loosely structured networks that rely on mobility, violence, and local knowledge of the terrain. Their operations often include raiding rural communities, abducting for ransom, stealing livestock, and disrupting farming activities, which significantly affect local economies and livelihoods (Afolabi, 2022). Unlike traditional bandits, marauders display a degree of organization and sustained violence that pushes their activities closer to protracted criminal insurgency.

One of the primary operational strengths of marauders is their adaptability. They exploit porous borders, weak state control in rural hinterlands, and limited security presence in many Northern states (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). They also employ guerrilla tactics, attacking suddenly and retreating into forests such as the Rugu, Kamuku, and Sambisa forests, which serve as sanctuaries (Osumah & Ikelegbe, 2021). These forested hideouts not only shield them from military advances but also provide bases for logistics and planning.

The challenges posed by marauders are extensive. Their activities have displaced millions of people in Northern Nigeria, worsening the humanitarian crisis (International Crisis Group, 2022). Many communities suffer food insecurity due to abandoned farmlands and disrupted markets (Abdullahi, 2023). In addition, their

operations stretch the capacity of Nigeria's overstretched security forces, who face difficulties distinguishing marauders from other violent actors such as Boko Haram insurgents or opportunistic criminals.

Furthermore, corruption and limited intelligence-sharing among security agencies hinder coordinated efforts to dismantle marauder groups. In some cases, communities are reluctant to collaborate with security operatives due to mistrust and fear of reprisals (Aluko, 2021). This weakens the state's ability to dismantle marauder networks and restore peace to affected regions.

Efforts Towards Addressing Banditry in Northern Nigeria

The Nigerian state has pursued a dual approach: military and non-military interventions, in addressing banditry in Northern Nigeria. Military efforts have involved airstrikes, ground offensives, and the deployment of special task forces across bandit-infested regions. For instance, the Nigerian Air Force has conducted bombardments of marauder camps in forests, significantly disrupting their operational capacities (Nwankpa, 2022). Joint military operations such as "Operation Puff Adder" and "Operation Hadarin Daji" have been launched to degrade bandit networks and restore security to rural areas (Ezeani & Danjuma, 2021).

However, these efforts have yielded mixed results. While they occasionally succeed in dislodging marauder groups, the operations are often hampered by inadequate intelligence, insufficient manpower, and the risk of collateral damage, which undermines trust between communities and the state (Yahaya, 2023). Moreover, military operations alone have not addressed the root causes of banditry, such as poverty, unemployment, and weak governance.

Non-military approaches have included peace negotiations, dialogue, and amnesty programs for repentant bandits. Some state governments in the North, such as Zamfara and Katsina, have attempted peace deals that involve offering bandits economic incentives, vocational training, and integration into society (Aliyu, 2021). Additionally, humanitarian organizations and civil society groups have promoted community-level peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives aimed at reducing hostilities and rebuilding trust among affected populations (Onuoha & Ezirim, 2022).

Nevertheless, these non-military approaches face challenges of sustainability and credibility. Amnesty programs have been criticized for rewarding perpetrators while neglecting victims of violence. Furthermore, some bandits exploit peace deals as opportunities to regroup and strengthen their networks, thereby undermining long-term peace (Bappah, 2020).

Overall, the effectiveness of Nigeria's counter-banditry efforts lies in balancing military offensives with long-term structural reforms, including poverty reduction, effective governance, and enhanced community-security collaboration.

Methodology

This study adopts a secondary qualitative research design, drawing on an interpretive and analytical approach to review relevant scholarly works, policy documents, and credible reports on banditry in Northern Nigeria.

The choice of a qualitative method is premised on its suitability for exploring complex social phenomena, particularly those rooted in political, socio-economic, and security dimensions (Silverman, 2021; Given, 2022). The study relied primarily on desk-based research that synthesizes data from existing literature. Peer reviewed academic journal, books, working papers, government reports, and credible publications from reputable think tanks and international organizations form the key sources of data.

The study critically engaged the selected literature through thematic content analysis, identifying patterns in conceptualizations of banditry, assessing the extent to which such activities align with definitions of terrorism, and highlighting the socio-political implications of the phenomenon in Northern Nigeria. By doing so, the methodology ensures that the findings are rooted in evidence-based academic and policy debates, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the research.

Discussion of Findings

Conclusion

This study has examined banditry in Northern Nigeria, framing the discourse within the debate of whether bandits are terrorists or marauders. The paper traced the historical context of banditry in Nigeria, clarified the conceptual differences between banditry, terrorism, and marauders, and applied the Social Disorganization Theory to explain its persistence. The findings suggest that banditry in Northern Nigeria exhibits elements of terrorism due to its organized violence, sustained campaigns, and political implications, yet it also retains features of marauding criminality rooted in economic deprivation and weak governance. Efforts by the Nigerian state to curb the menace have been notable, combining military offensives and non-military strategies such as dialogue and amnesty. However, these interventions face limitations including sustainability, mistrust, and failure to address structural causes of insecurity. The study thus reinforces the need for holistic measures that integrate security operations with long-term socio-economic reforms, governance strengthening, and active community participation in counter-banditry strategies.

Recommendations

- i. Nigeria should enhance coordination between military, police, and intelligence agencies, ensuring real-time intelligence-sharing and community involvement in security operations.
- ii. Socio-economic Interventions of long-term solutions must prioritize youth employment, poverty reduction, and rural infrastructure development to address the root causes of insecurity.
- iii. Reform of Amnesty Programs such that future peace deals should balance accountability and reintegration by including restorative justice for victims while offering rehabilitation opportunities for repentant bandits.
- iv. Regional Cooperation as banditry thrives along porous borders, Nigeria should strengthen bilateral and multilateral security collaboration with neighboring countries.

References

- Abdullahi, M. (2023). Banditry and food insecurity in Northern Nigeria: Implications for sustainable development. *African Security Review*, 32(1), 55–71.
- Adebayo, A. A., & Olaniyan, A. O. (2021). Banditry and challenges of security in Nigeria's North-West region. *African Security Review*, 30(2), 176–194.
- Adesoji, A. (2021). Boko Haram and the evolving patterns of terrorism in Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 30(1), 15–32.
- Afolabi, O. (2022). Criminal networks and rural insecurity in Nigeria: The role of marauders. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 60(2), 203–220.
- Agbiboa, D. E. (2021). Origins and patterns of violent banditry in Nigeria: A historical and sociological perspective. *African Studies Review*, 64(3), 654–673.
- Akinbi, J. O. (2022). Rural violence and the persistence of banditry in Northern Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 31(2), 145–162.
- Akinola, A. O. (2022). Social conflict and insecurity in Nigeria: A theoretical reflection. *African Security Review*, 31(1), 55–71.
- Akinyemi, T. O. (2021). The political economy of rural banditry in Nigeria's Northwest. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 56(8), 1773–1790.
- Alemika, E. E. O. (2021). Insecurity and governance challenges in Nigeria: An overview. *Journal of Security Studies and Global Politics*, 6(1), 20–34.
- Aliyu, M. (2021). Amnesty and peace deals in Nigeria's bandit crisis: Between pragmatism and failure. *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 16(3), 345–362.
- Aluko, Y. (2021). Community relations and counter-banditry operations in Nigeria. *Conflict Studies Quarterly*, 35(3), 77–95.
- Bappah, H. Y. (2020). Banditry and governance challenges in Nigeria's North West. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 10(2), 89–112.
- Campbell, J., & Harwood, A. (2020). Boko Haram, banditry, and terrorism in Nigeria: A shifting security landscape. *Council on Foreign Relations Special Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org>
- Chan, S. (2020). Piracy and banditry in Southeast Asia: The blurring boundaries of crime and insurgency. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 7(2), 145–165.
- Coser, L. A. (1956). *The functions of social conflict*. Free Press.
- Danjuma, I.A., & Caleb, A. (2025). Rural banditry in northern Nigeria and its implications on national security. *Lwati: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 22(1)
- Ebonine, V. C. (2022). "Darkening the Dark": Assessing the impact of banditry on educational and socio-economic development in northern Nigeria. *Sage Journal*, 53(6). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219347221086312>
- Edeko, S. E. (2021). Rural banditry and human insecurity in Nigeria: Rethinking state responses. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 14(1), 67–84.
- Ejiofor, P. F. 2025. Accumulation by and for terrorism, the political economy of terrorism financing in Nigeria. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 36 1, 120–159.
- Ewi, M., & Adebisi, B. (2022). Rethinking terrorism and banditry in Nigeria: Emerging hybrid threats. *Institute for Security Studies (ISS) Policy Brief*, 162. Retrieved from <https://issafrica.org>
- Eze, C. (2021). Transnational organized crime and security challenges in West Africa: The Nigerian banditry experience. *Conflict Trends*, 2021(4), 15–23.
- Ezeani, E., & Danjuma, S. (2021). Military counter-banditry operations in Northern Nigeria: Assessing effectiveness and gaps. *Defence and Security Analysis*, 37(4), 456–472.
- Francis, M., & Ojo, E. (2021). Conflict dynamics and insecurity in Northern Nigeria: A conflict theory perspective. *Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 8(2), 112–128.
- Given, L. M. (2022). 100 Questions (And Answers) About Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Though published earlier, this work remains a respected resource for practical questions about qualitative research methods, ethics, and design. Sage College Publishing Lisa Given

- Hassan, I., & Pieri, Z. (2022). Criminal banditry, violence, and governance in Nigeria's northwest. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 22(4), 375–398.
- Idowu, A. (2022). Cattle rustling and rural banditry in contemporary Nigeria: Implications for national security. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 12(1), 89–112.
- International Crisis Group. (2021). *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling back the Mayhem*. Brussels: ICG. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org>
- Kuna, M. J., & Ibrahim, J. (2020). *Rural banditry and conflict in Northern Nigeria*. Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development.
- Kwaja, C. M. A., & Ademola-Adelehin, B. I. (2020). Violent extremism and armed banditry in Northern Nigeria: Implications for national security. *Center for Democracy and Development (CDD) Working Paper*. Retrieved from <https://cddwestafrica.org>
- Mkutu, K. (2020). Pastoralist conflicts, cattle rustling, and banditry in East Africa: Drivers and responses. *African Studies Review*, 63(2), 292–314.
- Murtala, I. (2022). Banditry, terrorism, and state response in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of African Security*, 15(2), 98–115.
- Nwankpa, M. (2022). Airpower and counter-banditry operations in Nigeria: Potentials and limitations. *African Security*, 15(1), 22–39.
- Ojewale, O. 2024. Triad of violence, evolution and dynamics of conflict, terrorism, banditry and armed groups in northwest Nigeria. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*.
- Ojo, J. S., Aina, F., & Oyewole, S. 2023. Shock and awe, military response to armed banditry and the prospects of internal security operations in Northwest Nigeria. *African Security Review*, 32 4, 440–457.
- Okoli, A. C., & Okpaleke, F. N. (2021). Cattle rustling and the criminality of rural banditry in Nigeria. *African Security*, 14(1), 34–54.
- Okoli, A. C., & Ugwu, A. I. (2021). Banditry and the crisis of rural insecurity in Northern Nigeria: A conflict theory interpretation. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 21(2), 45–67.
- Okoli, C. A. I., & Abubakar, m. (2025). 'Crimelordism': Understanding a New Phenomenon in Armed Banditry in Nigeria. *Sage Journal*, 56(7). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909621990856>
- Okoli, C. A. I., & Nwangwu, C. (2022). Organized crime–terror nexus: Interrogating the linkage between banditry and terrorism in northern Nigeria. *Sage Journal*, 58(5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096211069650>
- Onapajo, H., & Ozden, K. (2023). Terrorism, banditry, and the governance crisis in Nigeria. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 34(1), 102–125.
- Onuoha, F., & Ezirim, G. (2022). Community-based peacebuilding in contexts of armed banditry in Nigeria. *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(6), 824–837.
- Osasona, T. 2023. The question of definition, armed banditry in Nigeria's North West in the context of international humanitarian law. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 105 923.
- Osimen, G. U., & Oyewole, S. (2023). Banditry, terrorism, and organized crime: Unpacking the Nigerian security conundrum. *Journal of African Security Studies*, 32(1), 77–98.
- Osumah, O., & Ikelegbe, A. (2021). Forests as sanctuaries of violent non-state actors in Nigeria. *Security Journal of Africa*, 18(4), 213–229.
- Rufus, A. I., & Ogbe, E. B. . (2024). The rise of banditry in northwest Nigeria: Examining the security implications and pathways to stability. *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3(1), 22–35. Retrieved from <https://journals.fukashere.edu.ng/index.php/kjpir/article/view/399>
- Silverman, D. (2021). *Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd. This edition provides comprehensive and accessible guidance on qualitative methods, including research design, data collection, and analysis.
- Stearns, J., & Vogel, C. (2022). The politics of insecurity: Armed groups and violence in Eastern Congo. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 60(1), 1–25.
- Turner, J. H. (2020). Theoretical sociology: 1830 to the present. *Sage Publications*.
- Umar, M. (2024). Banditry and terrorism in Northern Nigeria: Distinctions and convergences. *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 17(1), 89–108.

- United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research UNIDIR. 2024. *Banditry violence in Nigeria's North West, insights from affected communities*. Geneva, UNIDIR. https://undir.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/UNIDIR_Banditry_Violence_Nigeria_North_West_Insights_Affected_Communities.pdf.
- Velásquez, R. (2022). Rural banditry and state legitimacy in Latin America: Lessons from Venezuela and Brazil. *Latin American Perspectives*, 49(5), 33–48.
- Yahaya, A. (2023). Civil-military relations in Nigeria's war on banditry: Insights from the North West. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 44(2), 201–223.

