

## BANDITRY AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN ZAMFARA STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the emergence and development of banditry in Zamfara State, Nigeria, highlighting its causes, consequences, and potential solutions. The study reveals that banditry in the state is sparked by factors such as poverty, unemployment, proliferation of firearms, and perceived injustices. The activities of bandits have had devastating effects on the socio-economic and security landscape of the state, resulting in loss of lives, displacement of people, and destruction of properties. The paper is a conceptual analysis paper and it broke down complex concepts into their constituent parts thereby examining their meanings, relationships and implications. The paper established that the increase in the act of banditry are the availability of transportation such as motorcycles mostly donated by the politicians and which are used by the criminals for banditry; the perceived injustices by some people; the illicit mining; increase poverty and unemployment; proliferation of fire arms and climate change. The paper also found that the implications of the act of banditry range from the economic, social, livelihood, agriculture and security. The paper recommends a multi-faceted approach to addressing the problem, including poverty alleviation, youth empowerment, and improved security measures. It also calls for politicians to desist from sponsoring bandits and for the government to exercise justice in the execution of legal systems.*

**Keywords:** *Banditry, Nigeria, Poverty, Security, Unemployment, Zamfara State.*

### Introduction

Banditry has been defined as a crime against persons which grossly violates the natural and constitutional endowments bestowed on man (Avrich, 2021). Banditry has also been seen as an umbrella term for number of violent crimes, such as; kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle rustling, raiding of villages and setting houses ablaze etc, while the perpetrators of these heinous crime may claim to have reasons to opt for such actions (Palmer & Allan, 2010.). The acts of banditry have constituted subject of discussion or cause for concern in not only Northern part of Nigeria or Nigeria as a whole but the whole West Africa and Sahel region (Sule, Mikail & Yahaya, 2020). The menaces of banditry started like a child play and gradually spread across many States in Northern Nigeria and even beyond. The situations have become so detrimental to the entire sectors of the Zamfara state and it has apparently extended to those states that share common boundary with it (Ladan, & Iguda, 2019).

Zamfara State is located within the North-Western geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It was created in the year 1996 out of the then Sokoto State, by the General Abacha led Military Administration. The state has fourteen (14) Local Government Areas which include: Anka, Bukkuyum, Bakura, BirninMagaji, Bungudu, Gusau, Gummi, Tsafe, Kaura Namoda, Talata Mafara, Maradun, Shinkafi and Zurmi Ota., (Ecoma, Wambu & Ota, 2020). The 2006 census revealed that Zamfara State has human population of nine million two hundred and seventy-eight thousand eight hundred and seventy-three 9,278,873 (NPC, 2006). The State is bordered to the north by the Republic of the Niger; to the south by Kaduna State; to the east by Katsina State and to the west by Sokoto, Kebbi and Niger State. (Hassan, Shehu, Zezi, Magaji, & Yaâ, 2020).

Zamfara State inhabitants are predominantly farmers, however, they also engage in other traditional economic activities. The dominant tribes are Hausa and Fulani. While Hausa remained the official language of the state, other languages spoken are English, Fulfulde, Yoruba, Igbo and other minority languages. Zamfara State is endowed with a fertile land and forest, as well as grazing reserves which are attractive to both the farmers and herders (Mohammed, Othman & Osman, 2019). There are various definitions that have been proffered by scholars when discussing banditry. Banditry has been described as occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime which involved the use of force or threat to that effect for the purpose of intimidating someone with the intention to cart away properties, rape or kill. (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). This paper examined the acts of banditry in Zamfara state, how it has been responsible for the current security challenges in the State with a view to identifying the havoc and damages it caused to socio-economic activities. The paper will thereby proffer probable solution to the menaces of banditry in Zamfara State.

### **Methodology**

This paper is a Conceptual analysis paper that seeks to break down complex concepts into their constituent parts thereby examining their meanings, relationships and implications.

### **Emergence and Development of Banditry in Zamfara State**

The acts of banditry in Zamfara State was said to have started long before the arrival of colonial masters (Barnett, Rufa'i, & Abdulaziz, 2018). Some traditional rulers of that time were accused of conniving with bandits and armed robbers. It was also reported that during the colonial period, bandits killed almost 210 traders and cart away goods worth £165,000:00. This act was said to have been perpetuated in the Zamfara axis and against victims who are on their way from Kano to French neighbouring country (Abdulrasheed, 2021).

It was observed that the menace of banditry basically resurfaced in 2011 when armed group who were led by the two Fulani leaders namely: Kundu and Buharin organized themselves together and by 2012, their banditry activities manifested in cattle rustling. Banditry gradually and steadily continues growing to an uncontrollable magnitude (Rufai, 2018). The banditry activities continue in the form of villages raiding and rustling of domesticated animals. The acts are being carried out mostly with the use of guns, sticks, swords, cutlasses (Ladan & Mutawalli, 2020). This obnoxious act, provoked the farmers and other cattle owners whose villages were raided and cattle rustled. They organized themselves into volunteer groups to bring this situation to an end. This eventually gave birth to the local vigilante groups called "Yan Sa-kai" and they were saddled with the responsibility of protecting their communities from the excesses of the banditry activities (Barnett, Rufa'i, & Abdulaziz, 2018).

The first operation of the "Yan Sa-kai" vigilante group was said to have taken place on the 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2011 at chilli market in Dangulbi District of Maru Local Government Area. (Nadama, 2019). The operation was where three people who are likely targets of the vigilante group were killed. Those killed in the operation are: Alhajilshe Bello who was the Chairman Miyetti Allah Cattle Rearers Organisation Dansadau District; Samaila Yakubu who was a retired police officer and an unidentified Fulani man. These corpses were put in the pickup vehicle and burnt to ashes. The success of the operation expanded it to cover all the fourteen Local Government Areas of the state and before long, an estimated number of 500 tagged bandits (Fulani people) or thereabouts were said to have been killed. While some are innocents, some are actually involved in the activity (Rufai, 2018).

The killings and many other ones, that was seemingly targeted at Fulani (both the criminals

and innocents) were said to have led to a form of reaction in 2013. Such as Fulani organizing themselves into groups and acquiring sophisticated weapons as well as inviting other Fulani both within outside the state to plan and carry out reprisal attacks on all the villages assumed to have actively participated in the killing of the bandits and the perceived innocent Fulani (Rufai, 2018). The consequences of which were various attacks that were planned and executed on different rural communities (Ibid, 2018).

Between 2017 and 2019, things started taking different dimension to the acts of banditry; most prominent and worrisome was the act of kidnapping of rural dwellers for ransom. This has been regarded as technical means of dispossessing rural dwellers of their wealth (Rufai, 2018). This is by abducting them and compelling their relatives to sell of their farms and houses to pay an agreed amount as ransom in exchange of the abducted victims (Ibid, 2018).

Having discussed the emergency and development of banditry in Zamfara state, it is pertinent to identify and discuss some other factors responsible or contributing to banditry in Zamfara state. The followings are some of them:

### Factors responsible or contributing to banditry in Zamfara State

1. **Motorcycles mostly donated by the politicians are used for banditry:** Motorcycles which has mostly been refer as the means of transportation for the bandits whenever they are on their mission to attack were said to be donated by politicians (Ejiofor, 2022). Politicians have been blamed for the rising profile of armed banditry in the state. this is because the first and many other attacks in the state were made with motorcycles donated by politicians. The donation seems to be authenticating the speculation that politicians in the state sponsored as well as provide ammunitions for some youths to act as political thugs for their political ambition (Vergani& Collins, 2015). Youths were mostly abandoned after the politicians have won their elections (Onyekpe, 2007). Youths are therefore left to either go into drug abuse, cattle rustling, robbery or joined armed gangs, thereby attacking villages on their motorbikes (Barnett, Rufa'l & Abdulaziz, 2018).
2. **Perceived Injustices:** There are perceived injustice in the executions of legal systems. There seems to be notions by the Fulani that they are not given fair hearings in many of the cases before the law (Afolabi, 2016). Courts are responsible for executing legal issues, however, when there is loss of faith in the system; people tend to take law into their hands. Some of the attacks by the bandits are practical displaying of taking law into ones' hands and it is manifesting in what the bandits are doing. There was a narration by a Fulani person that was captured as follows:

*"Whenever pastoralists are involved in a kind of squabble with farmers, the case would usually delay unnecessarily. The accused Fulani, known to have a phobia for courts and their unwarranted justice delay, would be ready to bribe his way out of the court" (Rufai, 2018).*

The following is another narration by a Fulani person: *"Cases involving the police were the worst, both the judges and police were 'birds of the same feathers". The Fulani men have become source of income for the law enforcement agents". (Rufai, 2018).*

3. **Illicit Mining:** Illicit mining has been regarded as a probably reason why there are increasing rate of banditry (Ojo, 2020). This is because there was never a time any foreign illicit

miners were either abducted or killed (Olaniyan, 2018). This is questionable because it became apparent that it was only the locals that were mostly kidnapped. This raised the suspicion among locals that armed banditry was an international conspiracy, possibly to deny or displace locals of the natural resource.

4. **Poverty:** This entails situation of impecunious, indigent or scarcity of means of subsistence (Sheehy-Skeffington, 2019). It is a condition that predisposes people to several uncertainty of life which may necessitate people to device some unlawful means of survival. Poverty is a social condition that makes human behaviour to be unpredictable and the level of poverty in many of the rural areas of Zamfara state is appalling (Mohammed & Abdullahi, 2021). Youths in a bid to survive, resort to all survival strategies to be able to cater for themselves. Initially, some are not part of the acts of banditry, but once they are invited by friends to engage in anything that brings income to them, they succumb without hesitation. This is one of the factors keeping banditry activities growing each day.
5. **Unemployment:** - Many of the youth in Zamfara State, are not fully employed. They are either unemployed or underemployed (Shehu& Giro, 2021). They often engage in subsistence farming and because of activities of bandits in the rural areas, this farming is becoming increasingly difficult to practice (Abubakar, 2021). This situation therefore, compels youths to become errand boys and informants to bandits. On the other hand, ecological factors like climatic change have forced many herders to look for alternative ways of survival (Yeh, Nyima, Hopping & Klein, 2014). This bid, more often than not, clashes with the interest of farmers whose farms are to them, as cattle are to herders. As a result of this, tension develops and conflict is generated which may culminate in bloodshed. (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). Some of the youth who are employed in the informal sector are mostly into income generating activities on seasonal basis. During dry season, they stay idle because they work mostly on farms. Irrigation techniques of farming have not been fully embraced to enable farmers to work throughout the year (Obasanmi & Anthony, 2022). This is another opportunity for those who want to recruit youth into banditry to do so without much difficulty. Since youth can be easily tempted at their difficult moment. Some have been recruited to serve as informants to bandit and they give them huge financial rewards. If banditry fighting must succeed, then this trend must be reversed.
6. **Proliferation of fire arms:** The spontaneous overflow of small and light arms into Nigeria from other countries through the countries with whom we share borders is one of the formidable factors underlying continuous banditry activities (Goldman, 2020).
7. **Porosity of our borders:** Our borders are open to all persons including the criminal elements from other countries to either trade in firearms or take part in all manner of crime (Adewoyin& David, 2019). That is to say, our borders have no control, and because of this poor border control system, criminal elements gain free access to our border towns (Banko, 2016).
8. **Financial rewards:** The huge amount of financial rewards which banditry offers to its perpetrators, makes the phenomenon daring to them (Volkov, 2016). The big sum of money kidnapers collects from the relatives of abductee as ransom and the money they realize from the sale of cattle they often rustle, encourage them to indulge more

in it. That seems to be the reason why people from different tribes and regions of the country across the nation are being recruited into it (Umaru, 2020).

9. **Arbitrary use of power by local vigilante group:** The fact that local vigilante group otherwise known as Yan Sakai have been complementing the efforts of formal security agencies cannot be disputed. However, in most cases, they overstep their limits (Rufai, 2018). The vigilantes were seen as not only involved in extra judicial killings but they are also involved in the confiscation of the properties of their victims (Nadama, 2019). This acts of excessive use of power by the vigilantes have been regarded as what in a fuelled banditry to tis present magnitude (Rufai, 2018)
10. **Climate change:** It has been observed that, climatic change brought about by global warming and other related factors have adverse effect on grazing lands (Silanikove & Koluman, 2015). This poses some kind of threat to farmers and herders who use land as a means of survival. Both of them sustain their livelihood on land. However, farmers and herders eventually have conflicts while struggling or competing for the scarce resource which is the land. While farmers' lives are tied crop production herders' lives are attached to livestock rearing. These situations consequently lead to bloody clash between herders and farmers and consequently pave way for banditry (Bello & Abdullahi, 2021).
11. **Diminishing of our value system:** Our society is increasingly deviating from the communal values on which it was built (Matza, 2017). People are becoming individualistic by the day our traditional society used to be communal in outlook. We used to be our brothers' keepers. That was what kept the society relatively stable, embracing and cohesive. Now that we threw away these sociological ideals, people are now emotionally attached only to their closer families. That is what is breeding grievances, ethno-centricism disaffection and religious bigotry. Consequently, the unity for which we were known eroded and we became disunited. This threatens our corporate existence thereby making our society unsafe and precarious (Owhoko, 2018).

#### Concerned on how bandits get their weapons

It has been observed that bandits have over time generated huge capital from many outlets and spent handsomely in arms procurement and intelligent gathering (Emeh, Isah, Olise & Ikeanyibe, 2021). Importantly also, it has been discovered that within the bandits, some were notoriously associating with weapon suppliers. For example, some high profile bandits in Zamfara and Kaduna used their international connections. They have contacts across the Sahel, particularly Libya and Mali. They are being supply arms

*"Members could sell or even rent out weapons to someone but could not give him food to eat. Thus, the arms business is an industry of its own in the forests and camps. There are members that do not go out for operation but only remain in the camps to rent out guns and sell ammunition to others"*

Another one was said to have revealed the following:

*"Sometimes, this class of arms dealers made more money than the field fighters. Aging and incapacitated gang leaders could retire and become gunrunners or renters. That is enough"*

*to sustain them within the camp,”*

Above information were basically adopted from Rufai's paper's presentation, titled "I am a Bandit: A Decade of Research in Zamfara Bandit's Den"

### **Banditry: Implications on Socio-Economic Activities in Zamfara State**

The activities of bandits have been attributed to many of the setbacks that have been witnessed and still witnessing in the socio-economic, political, and educational progress of the Zamfara state. The followings are some but not all the activities that have been affected as a result of the banditry:

1. **Social implications:** Banditry has been seen as responsible for many of the current social disruptions among rural communities (Effiong, 2024; Abdurashed, 2021). A huge number of people have lost their lives, thereby affecting human population across all the local government areas in the state (Cribb. 2008). Many aging persons and little children have been turned to beggars as a result of losing their breadwinners. People have been displaced. They have been turned into refugees in their home state. Orphans and widows are increasing by the day in the state. Some families have lost all their means of livelihood for which they have no alternative that to leave their communities to look for other means of survival elsewhere. This destabilized the family for quite a long time before they could be able to regain balance (Anka, 2017). For example, below shows the number of people who have been killed in communities of Zamfara state in 2019 alone.

Table 1 shows the number of people killed in certain villages in Zamfara State in 2019

S/N	Location	Number of the people killed
1.	Kizara	45
2.	Lilo	50
3.	Kwokaya	52
4.	GidanKaso	42
5.	Lingyado	25
6.	Baggage	2
7.	UnguwaGaladima	150
8.	TungarBaushe	26
9.	Guru	28
10.	Badarawa	11
11.	RakumiMaallamawa and Kagarawa	20
12	Cigama	20
13.	Malmo under Dumma village	37
14.	Yargada	1
15	Jangebe	1
16.	Madaba	58

17.	Muturji	30
18.	Mashema	26
19	Dangulbi	24 including one police officer
20.	BirinMagaji	15
21.	Filinga	2
22.	Kabaro	19
23.	TungarRakumi	22 including police officer
24.	Zurmi	10
25.	Wonaka	10
	Total	729

Source: Anka, (2017)

2. **Economic Implication:** Economic activities have been distorted in many rural communities (Abdullahi, 2019). Petty trading and traditional income generating activities are common to rural people cannot take place because, without peace and security, no economic activity can thrive. Rural dwellers have deserted their villages in fear possible attacks from the bandits at any given time (Abang, 2021). Rural markets where rural communities converge on periodic basis weekly or otherwise are no longer accessible as bandits block the route leading those markets on the market days. That consequently affected the daily income of most rural people (Effiong, Udoyen, and Udoh, 2021; Ebonine, 2022).
3. **Security Implication:** Banditry has largely affected the peace and harmony that were preciously enjoyed in Zamfara State. Security situation has recorded like never before several causalities and these have become a major problem (Olayola, 2014). Fulani and Hausa are herders and farmers respectively. Both inter married and have so many things in common. However, the rising criminality of the bandits has made the relationship to go sower. This banditry has led to destruction of properties worth billions of naira, indiscriminate killings of human beings, raping, humiliation, and in dignifying of women both married and unmarried. Kidnapping and abduction of persons for ransom became rampant. Broad day armed robbery on almost all the major ways in the state became more and more precarious despite efforts by security agencies to put the situation under control. In a bid to bring to an end to the insecurity the State government called for the need to embrace dialogue and suggested amnesty to those bandits who wish to surrender their arms and give way for peace to rein. Some of the bandits agreed and appreciated the idea. However, this peace accord broke down at a point (Rufai, 2018).
4. **Implication on Agriculture:** The major occupation and means of livelihood of people of Zamfara state is farming (Abdulrasheed, 2021). Most of farming communities in Zamfara state are rural in nature. The work on farms inherited from their parents and grandparents for many years. The banditry activities in Zamfara` have contributed to food shortage (Ladan & Mutawalli, 2020). Previously the State used to be the major supplier of fresh cow milk and other diary supplies to the neighbouring state is now far below its position (Asadu, Ogbuke, Ngwu, & Onyia, 2021). This is because; most farmers were forced to flee the state or at least their villages to where they have no farms to work on. Many herders were compelled by the surrounding social

circumstances and security situation to flee the state to save their cattle from being confiscated by bandits and save their lives from being terminated (Mohammed & Abdullahi, 2021).

5. **Implication on the livelihood:** Banditry has resulted to loss of lives and properties in Zamfara state (Bello & Abdullahi, (2021). It has resulted to increasing number of orphans, widows, street beggars and child labour. Many households are destabilized having lost their breadwinners (Effiong, Udousung, and Udoh, 2018; Rufai, 2018). Many women and old people are compelled to go into street begging because they have lost those able bodied who were shouldering their responsibilities. Little children are now forced to work or run homely errands for some people in order to get what to eat and some help their helpless mother (Ibid, 2018). For instance, Anka, Maru and Tsafe Local Government Areas have witnessed a number of incessant attacks by bandits. Maru local government area of Zamfara state alone compiled a list of 318 widows and orphans who lost their lives. Bandits have attack many homes, raped women, stole livestock and other valuables (Rufai, 2018).
6. **Implications on the livestock business:** Predominantly, Zamfara State are either into farming or live stocking business. However, farming activities has become difficult because many have been sent out of their farmland. Livestock business has also become a difficult venture to partake in because of the activities of the bandits (Rufai, 2018). For example, the table below shows the number of livestock stolen in each of the Zamfara communities. It should be noted that, the figures reflect only the ones officially reported to the authorities concerned cases that are not reported are not included.

Table 2: Estimated number of stolen livestock rustled in Zamfara state in the year 2016

Locations	Number
Badarawa	Over 200
Bagega	Over 4,500
Dorayi	Over 2,500
Filinga	Over 5,000
Kidankaso	1,455
Guru	270
Jangebe	Over 600
Kizaxa	Over 4,000
Lilo	90
Lingwado	Over 2,100
Madaha	106
NasarawaGodal	Over 1,000

*Source: Rufai M.A (2018)*

Banditry activities have been responsible for loss of many lives and properties in Zamfara

State. This has significantly affected the overall socio economic development of the State.

### **Conclusion**

It is worthwhile to conclude this paper by referring to the widely notion that there can be no smoke without fire. Herders and farmers have lived for hundred years in peace and the long standing good relationship between the two groups must have been stained by a series of events that could have been prevented if government had employed adequate preventive measures early enough. Due attention was not accorded to the issue of banditry right from beginning. This was because; government and the general public did not anticipate that the issue could degenerate to this alarming dimension as it did. Now that the situation is seemingly getting out of hand, the government, which showed care-free attitude towards putting an end to these acts of banditry, seems to be making frantic efforts to bring the situation under control.

Meanwhile, the trends of conflict between farmers and herders are yet to be properly taken care of. The activities of bandits are still going as well as the mode of operation which shifted from raiding villages to blocking the highway linking Zamfara State and the neighbouring states almost every day. The whole situation is worrisome as the national security is at stake generally and the socio-economic activities of Zamfara State are on the verge of collapse specifically.

The following recommendations have therefore been proffered to bring to an end the acts of banditry in Zamfara State.

### **Recommendations**

Having examined the root causes of banditry in the state and the problems associated with effective tackling of the matter once and for all so as to ensure a sustainable peace, the paper recommends the follows:

1. It is suggested that politicians should stop donation of motorcycles which is a major transportation for the bandits whenever they are on their mission to attack. This will go a long way to end the speculation that politicians in the state sponsored or provide ammunitions for some youths to commit the act of banditry.
2. There are needs for exercising of justice in the executions of legal systems. This is in a bid to correct the notions by the Fulani that they are not given fair hearings in many of the cases before the law. It is important to correct the wrong impressions of 'I will not be given justice' to enshrine the confidence in every one before the legal system.
3. It is pertinent that illicit miners are stop from carrying out their activities. Their acts have been regarded as a probably reason why there are increasing rate of banditry. There may be international conspiracy, possibly to deny or displace locals of the natural resource. There should be proper monitoring by the government on who and who should be mining gold
4. Poverty alleviation programme of many types should be introduced to minimize the situation of impecunious, indigent or scarcity of means of subsistence. Human behaviour can be a bit predictable when they have something to survive on.

5. Youth empowerment of various types should be introduced. Employment should be provided in the form of mechanized farming and security in the farm land should be enhanced. Modern irrigation techniques should be introduced and financial assistance should be provided.
6. The spontaneous overflow of small and light arms into Nigeria from other countries should be control. Whoever is found with any illegal arms should use a scape goat to deter others.
7. Nigeria borders should be properly monitored to prevent criminal elements from other countries to either trade in firearms or take part in all manner of crime.
8. The local vigilante group otherwise known as 'Yan Sakai' who have been complementing the efforts of formal security agencies should be orientated on the need not to overstep their limits. The acts of excessive use of power by the vigilantes may fuelled the banditry to terrible magnitude.
9. Our society norms and value should be reiterated to the citizens. There are need to love our neighbours the way we love ourselves.

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