



## Nigerian Security Conundrum: An Analysis of Patterns and Trends of Banditry in Northwest Nigeria

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### Abstract:

With the ever-increasing security challenges, resulting from the activities of different militia groups in Nigeria, the researcher chose to single out the growing incidence of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria for analysis and to direct policy approach. Guided by two objectives, (1) causative factors of banditry (2) patterns and trends in banditry; information and data on the subject were gathered through literature review (books, journals, policy reports and newspapers). The Political economy, Means-End and the Sub-cultural theories were integrated to further support the discourse. Both theoretical and empirical evidence implicated poverty and other harsh economic conditions, porous borders, low education, and bad governance as major causes of banditry in the region under review. There is an exponential increase in the trend and pattern of this phenomenon,

with dire consequences on security and national development and cohesion, as well has resulted in outright destruction of lives and property. The advocacy is on all level of government (Local, State and Federal) to build and sustain inclusive social capital and functional political economy and social structure for enduring public safety and peaceful coexistence. These will go a long way I addressing the issues of abject poverty, low education, bad governance and corruption in border security, which coalesce with other push-pull factors to escalate banditry in the Northwest Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *banditry, insecurity, Nigeria security conundrum, northwest, patterns, trends.*

### Introduction

There is a growing security challenge in Nigeria, with each State/region presenting its peculiarities, and this has raised the curiosity of scholars, researchers, practitioners and policy makers to identify and uniquely investigate an aspect of insecurity situations perceived to be common in a particular State/region. For instance; cultism in the Southwest, separatist

agitation and its inherent vices in the Southeast, kidnapping cum militancy in the South-south, the gradual encroachment of bandit activities in the North-central, on the other hand, the Northeast is eroded with terrorist activities (Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and the emergence and surge of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria. The Northeast zone has been witnessing widespread of Boko Haram terrorist activities in the last



decade, herders-farmers clashes in the North central, while rural banditry holds sway in the Northwest (Attah, Sambo, Sule, Bello, & Saragih, 2021). On the other hand, Okoli and Ugwu (2019) argued that the Northwestern region of Nigeria has recently been enmeshed in the rapid upsurge of rural banditry along its international borders as well as the interior forest. Hence, the emerging and reemerging trends in banditry in the Northwest Nigeria are the focus of this study, hoping to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by expanding our horizons on the social problem.

Banditry has been adjudged to mean the occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime...which involves the use of force or the threat of it by a person/s to intimidate another person with the intent to damage property, rob, rape and/or kill (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). Banditry is a criminal act against people (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014). It is a common type of crime that results in violence in modern societies (Nigeria Watch, 2011). Nigeria generally and northwest in particular, has been under the scourge of bandits for nearly a decade. The recent trend in the activities of bandits in the region and its predictors are particularly the concern of this research.

Banditry is a syndicate crime that involves in stealing for material benefit (economic benefit), and kidnapping for the purposes of ransom (Ojo, 2020). This has been the recent security challenge in Nigeria and the Northwest in particular. Sambo and Sule (2021) argue that, rural banditry is understood to be armed violence with the rationale of criminal aim to steal, loot and waste local area assets using either local weapons or modern firearms to accomplished the objective. Rural banditry is not a new concept world over. Record shows it was reported in the ancient China, ancient Greek City States, and the Medieval Rome (see Butts, 2016). During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Balkans and the satellite areas of Central and the Eastern Europe had also witnessed rural banditry and/or armed violence. On the other hand, the expanding frontier of the economy in Latin America made banditry to thrive for a very long while even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Cassia,

2019). Africa and Nigeria in particular are not exempted from the menace of banditry. Devastating cases of banditry have pervaded the land over the last decade. Study shows that, events of armed violence and banditry in Nigeria and the Northwest in particular have been on the rise (Attah et. al., 2021).

Banditry in the Northwest has not only impacted negatively on the security of the region but also the entire country. Studies, though sparse, have been carried out on various aspects of the subject matter to understand and explain the nature, causes, patterns, trends and implications of banditry (see Attah et. al., 2021; Sambo & Sule, 2021; Akinwotu & Sanyinnawal, 2020; Ojo, 2020; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Suleiman, 2019). However, the need for consistence research on the phenomenon can never be overemphasised. Since scholarly works on this area of research interest are sparse, coupled with the urgent need to consistently explore the complexities of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria, birthed the current research. Therefore, the paper sets to achieve the following objectives, i.e., to ascertain the causative factors of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria; and examine the patters of and trends in banditry in the Northwest Nigeria.

## Methodology

Being a theoretical study, the research largely depended on secondary source (theories and literature) for the collection of the relevant data and information. As a result, it adopted the integrated theoretical perspective approach, in which three criminological and sociological theories were logically woven together and triangulated to provide a robust explanation and understanding of the casual factors of banditry, as well as patterns and trends in banditry in Nigeria. More so, themes were used to portray the material, and its analysis was done thematically for clarity. Thereby, providing a tangible explanation of and/or response to the study objectives.

## Theoretical Framework

For wider-based exposition and achieving the objectives of the study, the integrated theoretical

perspective was adopted for the study. Hence, the logical combination of three theories namely: the Social conflict theory, Means/End theory and the Sub-cultural theories were necessary for the study. The adoption of the integrated approach in the paper is justified, following Lanier and Henry's (2004) argument that, the approach is necessary in investigating the successive chain of occasions particularly when crime (such as banditry) is as a result of multiple unique causes. They further their argument by affirming that the essence of integrating theories is to present a cooperation of possibilities according to several theoretical standpoints that could offer explanation to elements increasing the chances of an individual committing crime (Lanier & Henry, 2004).

The three theories are relevant to the paper not just for establishing crime as class based phenomenon but as well giving an understanding to the causation of crime, including banditry. The social conflict theory affirms that society is polarized, mainly into two groups with different orientations. Therefore, conflict, exploitation, and human struggle are basic characteristics of every society including Northwest Nigeria Marx posited.

The exploitation, conflict and human struggle associated with every society according to the social conflict theory are in economic terms (see Idowu, Arua, Nwosu, & Nwankwo, 2021). Hence, high rate of poverty, low education, deficit infrastructure and social amenities including access to clean water, health care and generally, social exclusion etc. observed in the Northwest Nigeria (see NBS, 2020; ICG, 2020) can be explained as part of the schemes of the political class to further their dominance, subjugation, repression and control of the lower class. Expanding the frontier of social conflict using the political economy perspective to further explain the subject matter, Taylor (1997) argued that "an understanding of the pattern of crime is inextricably connected to an understanding of political economy" (cited in Haralambos, Holborn, & Heald, 2008, p. 355). On the other hand, Otu and Nnam (2018) stressing from the political economy standpoint, argued that the participation of human in crime

(including banditry) is majorly based on the consequences of the character, kind and procedure of the social interactions emanating from the economic, political, and social order of a particular society. In the same vein, Nnam, Arua, and Otu (2018) posited that, in every society, the political economy is a determinant in itself; it characterises and decides, in expansive terms, the nature, patterns and examples of criminal conduct among other get-togethers and organisations commonness in any one specific society.

The means/end theory was propounded by Robert K. Merton in the year 1938. The theory took its strength from the work of Emile Durkheim titled Anomie theory. Means/end theory is one of the theories under the social structure/strain perspective of sociological/criminological theories. The central idea of the perspective is that (i) society is made up of different structures and layers which individuals within the society are naturally grouped. Hence, the society comprises of two major classes; that is, class of the 'haves' and the class of the 'haves not;' (ii) that stress and/or frustration arouse from failed aspirations propels an individual to be law violator. The perspective suggests that members of the lower class are more prone to be law violator based on their inability to achieve their aspirations within the purview of the law.

Relying on this background, Merton (1938) opines that every society has a cultural system that embodies socially approved values and goals, and institutionalised means of achieving the socially approved values and goals. The societal values and goals are in material/economic form. The author further argued that the institutionalised means of achieving the societal goals are unfortunately not available to all members of the society. Based on the theory, members of the lower class lack the equal opportunity to reach success goal of the society by the available means provided to them by the society. Hence, individual members of the lower class are free to reach success goal by any means available to them, as a strategy of coping with structural strains.

Validating his point, Merton identified five possible ways people would respond when confronted with structural stress, and they are: Conformity, Innovation, Ritualists, Retreatists and Rebellion. The second and the last possible responses proposed by Merton are the focus of this work, since they represent deviant act in all the five possible responses (Merton, 1938).

**Innovation:** in the reaction, Merton noted that this is most common form of adaptation to structural stress. Here, people (members of the lower class) could not achieve success goal based on the institutionalised means set by the society. Therefore, they devised their own means of achieving the societal success goals. That is, they accept the societal goals but reject the institutionalised means of achieving the goal. Example of this people includes: drug dealers, fraudsters, armed robbers, kidnappers, and bandits (Merton, 1938).

**Rebellion:** this set of people rejects both the societal goal and the institutionalized means of achieving it; and replaced them with their own goal and means. Example includes: terrorist, religion fundamentalists, political revolutionaries (Merton, 1938). Although, the theory has been accused of oversimplifying social structures, values and the relation between individuals and social values (Axelrod & Antinozi, 2003); class biased, that is, trying to suggest that it is only members of the lower class that commit crime. The theory is considered apt, adequate and encompassing in giving logical understanding to the cause, trend and pattern of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria.

On the other hand, the Sub-cultural theory contends that, status frustration i.e. the inability of members of the society (mainly members of the lower class) to achieve status in the society propels them into criminality. It argues that, members of the lower class suffer status frustration mainly as a result of low education and dead end jobs. Hence, such individuals withdraw back to their neighborhood to find solution to their common problem (Cohen, 1955). Thus, the emergence and reemergence of sub-cultural groups in the society, where they can compete favourably, using their own rules,

standards, methodology and the likes to achieve what they could not achieve in the mainstream society.

Triangulating the theories while showing their relevance to the paper. The social conflict/political economy perspective explains the persistence poverty that pervades the Northwest Nigeria, which can be described as part of the willful act of the political class for their continuous oppression, exploitation, suppression and social exclusion of the lower class. These characteristics have aggravated the problem of crime (including banditry) in Nigeria (see Nnam, Agboti, & Otu, 2013). Poverty being a tool of oppression, suppression and exclusion by the political class serves as a factor inhibiting members of the lower class from achieving societal goal of economic value, causing members of the lower class to act and react in different ways which may include criminal/deviant behaviour (see Merton, 1938). On the other hand, low education and dead-end jobs occasioned by poverty as part of the master plan of the political class may have accounted for the coming together of the oppressed and socially excluded youths to form sub-cultural groups (including banditry) to find solution to common problem facing them (see Cohen, 1955). However, the formation and reformation of bandit groups as a response to collective challenges including economic challenge in the Northwest are witnessed (see Altine, 2019).

Furthermore, as observed in literature, one of the main drivers for the continuous banditry in the region under study and the trends observed in the recent times is poverty, high rate of out of school children/ low education (see Attah et. al.,2021; Sambo & Sule 2021; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Studies have also shown that members of the lower class within the regions terrorizing by bandits form the greater part of the bandit cell. Furthermore, kidnapping for ransom and cattle rustling which is one of the main acts of bandits within the region justifies the economic stance of the theories adopted in the study (see Sambo & Sule 2021; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). The means/end theory is apt for the study in the sense that society has a cultural approved goal, i.e., success goal (economic goal) and

institutionalized means (legitimate means) of achieving the success goal; members of the lower class believe in the societal success goal but find it difficult to achieve with the institutionalized means. This is because the means are not available to them, hence, the resultant deviant behavior (banditry) as a coping mechanism to the structural stress. Banditry; Sambo and Sule (2021) argued that economic factor is seen as one of the core motivating factors behind the act in most cases.

While the Sub-cultural theory gives a background to the proliferation of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria, which is gradually extending to the North central. The argument is that, with low education, dead end jobs and cattle rustling without strong intervention from the government either at the Local, State or Federal level; these teaming youths are more frustrated than ever in achieving societal status. The resultant effect is coming together to find a solution to the common problem facing them (see Cohen, 1955), hence, the birth of banditry (as a sub-culture), its recent trend, pattern/proliferation, and all its social vices in the region under study (Altine, 2019). This is evidenced in an exclusive interview with Maiharaji Altine (Punch newspaper journalist) where Hassan Dantawaye (an ex-bandit commander in Zamfara State) made it known to the world that 10 years ago, they were peaceful law abiding citizens...when cattle rustling started in the 2013, they did all they could to attract the attentions of the Governments to come to their rescue by providing them, their property, and livestock (cattle) with adequate security against the unknown criminals, however, the government turned deaf ears to their cries, and they had no further option but to go into criminality, including banditry (Altine, 2019).

## Literature Review

### Causative Factors of Banditry in Nigeria

Over the years scholars and researchers have examined the predictors of banditry in Nigeria (Attah et. al., 2021; Sambo & Sule, 2021;

Akinwotu & Sanyinnawal, 2020; Ojo, 2020; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Suleiman, 2019). The results of these studies have uncovered array of factors as responsible for this crime and its trending nature. As earlier observed, while trying to link the causative factor to poverty, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) revealed that Northwest is the poorest zone in Nigeria, having all its States above the poverty level of the country which stood at 40.1%, and three out of the seven States (Sokoto, Jigawa and Zamfara) are at the apex of the poverty index chart (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Attah et. al., (2021) argued that the widespread poor matrix of socio-economic conditions in the geopolitical zone have served as stimulant to the perilous security situation of the area. The poor economic factor, that is, per capital income has accounted for one of motivating factors of banditry in the zone. Supporting this claim, Okoli and Ugwu (2019) affirm that “economic factor is seen as one of the motivating drivers of banditry in this geopolitical zone” (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019, as cited in Attah et. al., 2021, p. 36). Therefore, economic factor plays a major role in the formation, reformation and the trending nature of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria.

Ungoverned territories/porous borders have been identified as strong causative factors of banditry. Available literature shows that pivot to the drivers of equipped savagery (armed violence) in Northwestern Nigeria is ungovernable spaces-remote and dry nature of certain areas in the zone with insignificant or all out shortfall of administration (Attah et. al., 2021). In another voice, the current ungoverned spaces account for local vulnerability for propagating terrorist groups and criminal organisations (including banditry) in Northern Nigeria (see Ojo, 2020). The zone’s climatic and geographic conditions constitute grave challenges for federal and state authorities (International Crisis Group, 2020), which account for the large expanse of ungoverned territory in the area. A significant part of the Northwest is savannah, however the district is likewise scattered with immense timberlands, some of which are home to huge number of for the most part Fulani herders these woods step

by step became safe-houses for lawbreakers including dairy cattle rustlers, roadway burglars, criminals/scoundrels and weed producers (ICG, 2020).

The role of these ungoverned spaces to the formation and continuous perpetration of banditry within the region under study can never be overemphasised. However, the test of porous borders has additionally set off an expansion of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), particularly from the Sahel; proof of this is the appearance of equipped Fulani herders who conveyed AK47 under the camouflage of shielding their groups from steers rustlers (Ojo, 2020). Ungoverned spaces, such as Birnin Gwari, Kamara, Kamuku, Kunduma, Rugu and Sububu forests, have been adjudged used by bandits as safe haven from which they unleash attacks on the Northwest region and neighboring communities and village. By implication, inability to screen these ineffectively administered territories may ultimately change themselves into creation destinations for Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD), make overpowering security mayhem, blemish strategy decisions and at last reason a state breakdown (Ojo, 2020) submitted.

Furthermore, poor governance has also interplay as a driver for the growth of banditry in the Northwest region of the country. The region is poor, poorly governed and industrialised (The International Crisis Group (ICG); the area likewise experiences exceptionally helpless nearby administration, described by the botch of public assets (ICG, 2020). These, we must admit, are arguably the characteristics of failed States which are mostly vulnerable to banditry, as in the case of Afghanistan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia (see Prokić, 2017). Poor governance and mismanagement of public funds/corruption create and maintain the margin between the 'haves' and the 'haves not', thereby creating an impoverished society with individual languishing in abject poverty. This in-turn serves as a motivating factor towards crime and criminality (banditry inclusive). Corroboratively, Ojo (2020) observed that, governance failure has a strong relationship with banditry.

At the core of causes of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria are the low/zero education of children in the region. The formal education cum literacy level of the region stood 29.7 per cent (NBS, 2015). This statistic is believed to have gone up due to the economic downturn of the country, the effect of the COVID-19 scourge and the continuous engagement of bandits in the area. The ICG posits that the zone is at the top of the list of out of school children in the country. Furtherance to the non-attendant school children, a large number of kids running into millions are in the inadequately resourced and poorly regulated Quranic educational system, or almajiranci, which engenders companions of incompetent adolescents (ICG, 2020). More to it, low/zero education cum millions of unskilled youths provide a platform of would-be-offenders and motivated offenders who are ready to do anything (including banditry) to survive the hard economic conditions of the land. In the African local parlance, it is said that 'an idle mind is a devil's workshop.

### Patterns of and Trends in Banditry in Nigeria

In understanding the trend of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria, it is pertinent to note that armed banditry began in the region as a localised clash among farmers and herders (Attah et. al., 2021), it became complex between 2014-2019 towards the run-up to 2019 general elections with political and economic implications (Suleiman, 2019). What we have today as banditry in the northwest began in the 2011 as a conflict between herders and farmers, however, it grew exponentially since 2017 till date, leading to a geometric increase in the destruction of lives and property. Commencing in 2011 and escalating since 2014, the Northwest has suffered an efflux of violence between pastoralists and allied armed groups usually called "bandits" (ICG, 2020). Assessment Capacity Projects (2020) reported that about 1,586 lives were perished to rural banditry and 318,000 displaced. The violence has however affected over 35 out of the 92 local government areas in four states of Northwest (see Attah et. al., 2021). The continuous farmers-herders

conflict coupled with the activities of illegal miners in the region have accounted for the rise in the trend of banditry over the years.

In a report by ACAPS Nigeria, in March, 2020, it pointed out that over 210,000 persons have been internally displaced, while over 35,000 refugees have sought refuge across the borders of Nigeria into Niger Republic (ACAPS Nigeria, 2020). Events have shown that this figure is on the rise on daily basis. Owing to the activities of banditry in the region, it was observed that over than 6,319 persons were killed in the space of 2011 and 2018, and 190,340 were displaced in Zamfara state alone. In Katsina, more than 2,000 persons were killed and nothing less than

500 communities were destroyed, while over 33,000 displaced (see Kola, 2020). In the space of January to December, 2019, 1,058 persons lost their lives to banditry in Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara, including Niger States; and about 10,000 houses were destroyed and over 147,800 vehicles were lost to the bandits in Zamfara State alone (Hamrouni, 2020). More so, Kaduna State recorded 4,000 people as internally displaced persons, with thousands of deaths between November, 2019 and March, 2020 (see West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, 2020). The below is the fatalities rate of banditry in Northwestern Nigeria between January and December 2019 by graph.

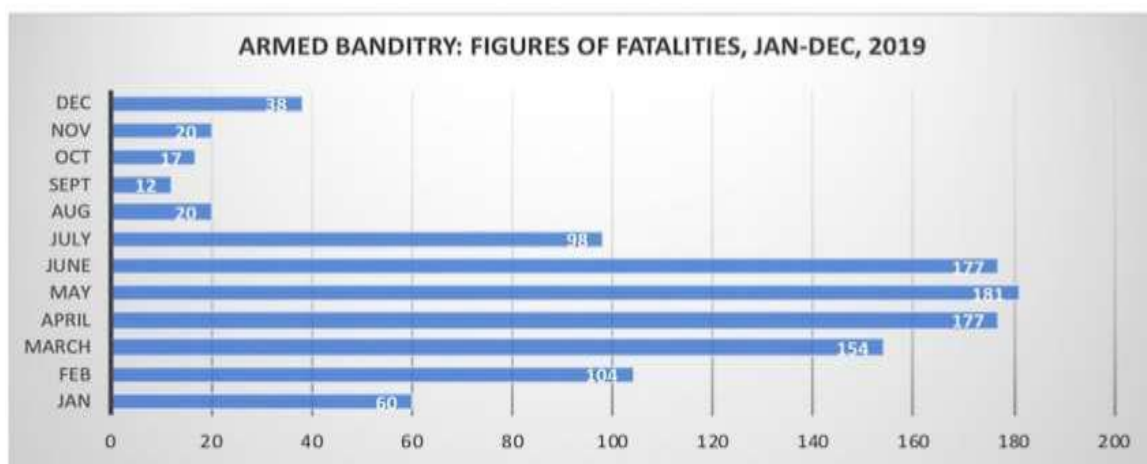


FIG 1: ARMED BANDITRY IN NIGERIA: FIGURES OF FATALITIES (JANUARY-DECEMBER 2019)\*

**Figure 1. Death Rate Based on Banditry in Northwest Nigeria (January - December, 2019)**

**Source:** West Africa Network for Peace building, 2020

The above graph shows the fatality rate of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria, specifically, January-December, 2019. It brings to bear how the bandits have been ravaging the region, leading to thousands of lives lost. Within this period, livestock counting into thousands, properties worth billions (including houses, vehicles, farmlands and other valuables) have been lost to banditry in the region. It was recorded that bandits murder a greater number of Nigerians than cultists, Boko Haram, kidnapers, robbers etc. (Daily Trust, 22 September 2019).

The activities of the bandits keep escalating despite the cry of the society and the governments counter measures. Year 2020 witnessed incessant banditry attacks despite the COVID-19 saga. For instance, between April and June, 2020, over 50 major attacks were launched by the armed bandits in Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and Zamfara states (see Akinwotu & Sanyinnawal, 2020). Notably, on 26 May, 2020, it was report that heavily armed bandits on motorbikes attacked a village named Sabon Birni, leaving scores of more than 80 persons dead and several others injured in a day (Campbell et. al., 2020, as cited in Attah et. al.,

2021, p. 38). In fact, April and July 2020 recorded attacks close to that of Sabon Birni, where over 100 lives were lost (see Akinwotu & Sanyinnawal, 2020). In the same vein, on May 30th, armed bandits on motorbikes numbering 500 with AK 47 attacked different villages in Katsina, resulting to the death of about 18 villagers, including a traditional chief, they also confiscated livestock (especially cattle) in their thousands (Campbell & McCaslin, 2020). More to it, Attah et. al., asserted that equipped outlaws (armed bandits) proceeded with their crimes unabated when on 10 June, 2020, they assaulted six towns in Katsina State, killing in excess of 60 individuals and firing a whole town. A few inhabitants described how the criminals assaulted ladies, stirred 200 dairy cattle and plundered shops in an activity that went on for more than five hours (Attah et. al., 2021).

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, over 1,100 persons were killed in 2018 in Katsina, Kebbi, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara and Niger due to banditry, noting that over 2,200 were killed in 2019, and more than 1,600 fatalities were recorded between January – June 2020 (CFR, 2020). On the other hand, at least 1,137 fatalities recorded by Global Rights in 2020 (compared to 974 in 2019) due to incidents related to banditry in the North-West Region (Global Rights, 2020). Also, In the space of December 2020 and March 2021, a greater number of than 600 kidnappings have occurred from schools in northern Nigeria, for example, in excess of 300 students in Kankara, Katsina state in December 2020, 27 school young men and their educators on 17 February 2021 in Kagara, Niger state and on 26 February 2021 317 school young ladies in Jangebe, Zamfara state (European Asylum Support Office, 2021). In a similar event, The Champion (2021) reported suspected bandit killed police officer and kidnapped many students and teacher in an attack on Federal Government College, Birnin-Yauri in Kebbi State. Furthermore, in the space of December 2020-June 2021, more than 1,000 staff and students have been abducted in nine schools in Northwest Nigeria (ACAPS, 2021).

## Conclusion and Policy Implications

As observed, the paper uncovered array of factors as responsible for the formation and trends of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria. It was also observed that the trends of banditry are on the increase with nearly every day attacks launched on the region, leaving scores of fatalities, displaced persons and kidnapping for ransom etc. Evidently, on 23rd August, 2021 bandits killed 21, and injured many in Kaduna and Kastina. Also in a similar event, on 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2021, the bandits stormed the Nigerian Defence Academy killing 2, abducting 4 while leaving scores injured. The paper concluded that, there might not be an end in sight to the trending menace of banditry in the Northwest Nigeria, and the entire country at large if absolute and necessary measures are not put in place by the authorities. The call is thus, on all levels of government (Local, State and Federal) to build and sustain inclusive social capital and functional political economy and social structure for ensuring public safety and peaceful coexistence. These will go a long way in addressing the issues of abject poverty, low education, bad governance and corruption in border security, which coalesce with other push-pull factors to escalate banditry in the Northwest Nigeria and the entire country at large.

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