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An Analysis of the Rising Incidence of Banditry and Kidnapping in North-Western Nigeria

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Abstract: *The research investigated the rising incidence of banditry and kidnapping in the north-western Nigeria. The research objectives are to: identify the factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping in North-western Nigeria; examine the consequences of banditry and kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria; and suggest effective policies for fighting banditry and kidnapping in the region. Social Disorganisation Theory (also known as Cultural Transmission Theory) was used to explain the rising rates of armed banditry and kidnapping in the north-western Nigeria. The theory examines how urban environmental conditions influence crime rates. Methodologically, the study is descriptive research design and adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative evidence from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). A total of 312 questionnaires were administered, of which 301 were successfully retrieved, alongside 17 qualitative interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Findings reveal that poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, weak law enforcement, political neglect, environmental stress, and the proliferation of armed groups are key drivers of banditry and kidnapping. The study further shows that these crimes have resulted in widespread loss of lives, displacement of communities, disruption of agricultural production, school closures, economic decline, and pervasive fear among residents. Respondents expressed low confidence in government effectiveness, despite recognising the role of local security support and community-based initiatives. The study concludes that banditry and kidnapping are rooted in structural socio-economic deprivation and weakened community and institutional control. The paper recommends a holistic response that integrates strengthened security operations with community policing, youth employment and skills development, educational revitalisation, anti-corruption reforms, and arms control measures to achieve sustainable peace and security in Northwestern Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Banditry; Kidnapping; Rising incidence; North-western Nigeria.*

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Introduction

Crime remains a significant global concern, but its extent in Nigeria has become particularly worrisome. For many years, the country has struggled with various security threats resulting from criminal activities (Jamri, 2020; Barnett, Rufa'i & Abdulaziz, 2022; Jamri, 2023). These crimes encompass both individual offenses against people and property, as well as organised criminal enterprises, terrorism, and insurgency. The security challenges affecting Nigeria are not confined to a specific region; rather, they span across all geopolitical zones. Among the most pressing security threats in Nigeria today are banditry and kidnapping, which have escalated dramatically in recent

years (Jamri, 2019). These crimes are particularly prevalent in the northern and central regions of the country, where armed groups operate with increasing sophistication. In the northwestern Nigeria, bandits engage in violent attacks on rural communities, raiding villages, stealing livestock, and displacing residents (Jamri, 2021; Jamri, 2024).

Kidnapping, on the other hand, has evolved into a lucrative criminal enterprise, targeting individuals across various social classes, including students, travelers, and even high-profile figures (Balarabe, 2025). The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has further fueled these crimes, allowing criminal gangs to perpetrate large-scale abductions and demand exorbitant ransoms. The weak enforcement of laws, porous borders, and lack of coordinated security measures have exacerbated the crisis, making banditry and kidnapping some of the most severe challenges threatening peace and stability in Nigeria. Both problems have precipitated a multifaceted crisis in Northwestern Nigeria, affecting humanitarian conditions, economic stability, educational access, social structures, and overall security (Barnett et al. 2022).

To address the security challenges associated with banditry and kidnapping in the northern Nigeria, the government has adopted several security measures. Most of these strategies focused on security reinforcement (Balarabe, 2025), but economic revitalisation, educational support, and community resilience building should be emphasised. For example, Mukhtar & Abdullahi (2022), the Nigerian government has established various military operations across different geo-political zones. These operations aim to counter terrorism, insurgency, and other security threats. In the North-East, operations like Operation Zaman Lafiya Dole and Joint Task Force Operation Hadarin Daji focus on counter-terrorism and anti-banditry in both northeastern and northwestern Nigeria.

In view of this background, the research will analyse the rising incidence of kidnapping and banditry in the north-western Nigeria. The research will investigate the perspectives on the factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping in the north-western Nigeria, such as social structures, economic conditions, and institutional weaknesses. It will also examine the consequences of the problem as well as effective measures for addressing the problems.

Statement of the Problem

The rapidly growing employment gap in Africa has been as issue for economists and policymakers. To understand why some individuals engage in banditry and kidnapping, it is important to examine social structures, economic conditions, and institutional weaknesses. Nigeria's high unemployment rate has pushed many young people into crime as a means of survival. With limited job opportunities, particularly for graduates, many resort to illicit activities. While some engage in cybercrime and fraud, others take up more violent crimes such as banditry and kidnapping. These crimes are lucrative, especially in rural areas where weak security structures make it easy to abduct individuals for ransom (Balarabe, 2025). The lack of swift and decisive punishment for kidnappers and bandits further emboldens these groups. Many criminals secure their release through bribery or political connections, making kidnapping a low-risk, high-reward crime. In some cases, security operatives are even complicit in the operations of these criminal groups, either due to bribes or fear of reprisal.

Mismanagement of resources has led to political thuggery, where politicians arm young people during elections but abandon them afterward. Many of these individuals, left without a livelihood, turn to banditry and kidnapping as a way to sustain them. The weakening of traditional family structures has contributed to rising crime rates. Families that once served as moral guardians have lost their influence, leaving many children without proper guidance. Without parental supervision, young people often seek approval and support from criminal groups (Jamri, 2021). Small and light weapons are also coming from multiple sources, including stolen military stockpiles; arms smuggled through West African ports, and locally manufactured weapons (Centre for Democracy

and Development, 2022). The ease of access to weapons has allowed non-state actors to challenge government security forces. As a result, kidnapping and banditry have become more frequent and more violent. Other factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping include drug abuse, social inequality and marginalisation.

Banditry and kidnapping have several negative impacts on the Northwestern Nigeria (Jamri, 2019). They lead to severe humanitarian, economic, and social consequences in the region. The region has witnessed massive displacement due to escalating violence. Insecurity as a result of banditry and kidnapping has weakened trust in the government and security agencies. Many citizens feel abandoned and have resorted to self-defense groups, sometimes worsening the violence. The proliferation of weapons among bandits has also fueled more criminal activities, making it difficult for law enforcement to restore order. Some studies have been conducted on either banditry (Barnett, Rufa'i & Abdulaziz, 2022; Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2022) or kidnapping (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017; Jamri, 2019; Ayuba, 2020; Balarabe, 2025). Others conducted researches on security challenges that included both banditry and kidnapping, such as Jamri (2021) and Jamri (2024). There were those conducted on how to address the security problems, such as Jamri (2020b). To the best of the researcher's knowledge; no previous study examined both banditry and kidnapping at once, focussing on their causes and consequences. Thus the present study will analyse the rising incidence of banditry and kidnapping in North-western Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping in North-western Nigeria;
2. To examine the consequences of banditry and kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria; and
3. To suggest effective policies for fighting banditry and kidnapping in the region.

Literature Review

This section reviews existing literature on the concepts of banditry and kidnapping; the factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping, and their consequences. The section also reviews theoretical framework.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of banditry has been changing over time, space and circumstances. A bandit in the 19th century Europe and Americas was a freedom fighter whose aim was partly to ensure the emancipation of the downtrodden from the upper class or colonised over the colonizer (Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2022). Furthermore, bandits like Chucho el Roto, Herachio Bernel and Santanon were often celebrated as heroes of Mexican independence. Therefore, Mexicans have warm regards and respect for those "social workers" termed bandits, while on the contrary, the State often considered them as nuisance and outlaws that need to be eradicated (Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2022). Therefore, in some pre-industrial societies peasants see bandits differently from the State not as outlaws, hoodlums and miscreants but as avengers and 'bread winners'. However, a bandit in traditional African setting is entirely opposite to that of Americas and Europe, the former specialised in armed robbery and other related crimes. The most common feature of banditry in Africa has been maiming, killing and wanton destruction of properties and hence, it has a direct relationship with cattle rustling (Rufai, 2017). Since most herdsmen could do anything possible to prevent the rustling of their herds, then the bandit also apply force with the aid of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) to ensure effective stealing of livestock. Hence, the application of force during livestock theft is what is herein considered cattle rustling and armed banditry (Rufai, 2018).

Kidnapping is defined variously by different authors. A comprehensive definition is offered by Fage and Alabi (2017: 289) who conceived kidnapping as "forceful or fraudulent abduction of an individual or a group of individuals for reasons ranging from economic, political, and religious to [struggle for] self-determination". However, the authors later admitted that the forcefully or fraudulently abducted individuals are carried off as hostages for ransom purposes. This implies that while political and economic factors can instigate kidnapping, the economic reason is the most common predisposing factor of the phenomenon (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017). Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014:132), also defined kidnapping as the "act of seizing and detaining or carrying away a person by unlawful force or by fraud, and often with a demand for ransom. It involves taking a person from their family forcefully without their consent with the motive of holding the person as a hostage and earning a profit from their family". From the foregoing, the definition of kidnapping has no one best way to describe it, but it is clear that for an act to be deemed kidnapping, it shall involve coercive movement of a victim from one place to another, detention or seizure of that person be it a child or an adult (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017; Jamri, 2019).

Factors Responsible for Banditry and Kidnapping

Economic hardship remains one of the leading causes of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. Studies have shown a strong connection between poverty levels and crime rates (Fajnzylber, Lederman, & Loayza, 2001; Jamri, 2024). This link arises due to the combined effects of income inequality and economic instability. Poverty in a country is measured by the percentage of people earning below a certain threshold, often determined by the cost of acquiring basic food supplies necessary for survival. Essentially, poverty is shaped by both the overall national income and the way this income is distributed among the population (Fajnzylber et al., 2001). Similarly, the inefficiency of law enforcement agencies has emboldened criminals (Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2022). The failure of the government to prevent terrorism is a significant factor that allows crime to flourish. As Crenshaw (2012) noted, when police and intelligence agencies fail to implement effective crime prevention strategies, criminal activities spread unchecked. Corruption within the police and judicial system allows criminals to evade justice, which in turn encourages more people to engage in illegal activities.

Corruption among politicians and public officials has created an enabling environment for crime. The diversion of public resources meant for economic empowerment into private hands has left many Nigerians impoverished. Holmes (2010) and Jamri (2021) have all agreed that, organised crime like kidnapping and banditry, corruption and terrorism are entwined. Aro (2013) argues that corruption contributes to crime by depriving citizens of essential services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. The lack of these services fuels resentment and creates conditions where crime becomes a viable alternative for survival. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, cited in Edobor, 2014), corruption has significantly worsened poverty levels in Nigeria, with about 69% of the population living in extreme poverty. The report further reveals that 112.47 million Nigerians survive on less than $1 per day, making it difficult for them to afford basic necessities such as food, clothing, healthcare, and shelter.

Durkheim (as cited in Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2022) observed that a breakdown in moral norms leads to law violations. When there are no clear social rules guiding behavior, individuals struggle to adapt to societal changes. In Nigeria, many young people grow up in environments where crime is normalised, making it easier for them to participate in criminal activities such as banditry and kidnapping. Also, the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons has escalated the scale of banditry and kidnapping. Many civilians, including criminal groups, now have access to sophisticated firearms (Egbuta, 2018). The influx of illegal arms has increased violent crimes, making these criminal activities more difficult to control. General Abdulsalam Abubakar recently estimated that approximately six million firearms are in circulation across Nigeria.

Drug abuse plays a significant role in violent crimes. Many kidnappers and bandits use hard drugs such as tramadol, codeine, and cannabis, which impair judgment and fuel aggressive behavior. The abuse of these substances has been linked to increased levels of violence in Nigeria. Hussein et al. (2017) observed that drug abuse is not only prevalent among street youths but also common among university students. The connection between drug use and crime is mutual. In other words, drug use can lead to criminal behavior, while criminal activities can lead to drug abuse. Many criminal groups rely on drugs to suppress fear and boost confidence before engaging in violent activities. Additionally, money obtained from banditry and kidnapping is often used to purchase more drugs, further fueling the cycle of crime (Hussein et al., 2017).

Social inequality has contributed to the rise of violent crimes such as banditry and kidnapping. Abdullahi & Mukhtar (2022) argue that when certain groups feel marginalised, crime and violence become inevitable. In states such as Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna, perceived injustice in handling cases of cattle rustling has pushed many Fulani youths into banditry. Many of these young men feel that the government has failed to protect their interests, leading them to resort to violence as a means of survival. Economic disparity between the rich and the poor has also fueled resentment. Many Nigerians feel excluded from government programs and economic opportunities, leading to frustration and anger. This sense of alienation makes it easier for criminal groups to recruit young people into kidnapping and banditry. In many rural areas, crime has become a form of protest against perceived social and economic injustices.

Thus, the rise of banditry and kidnapping in Northwestern Nigeria is driven by a combination of economic hardship, weak law enforcement, corruption, the breakdown of family structures, the availability of firearms, drug abuse, and social inequality. Each of these factors contributes to an environment where crime thrives.

Consequences of Banditry and Kidnapping in the Northwestern Nigeria

Banditry and kidnapping have profoundly affected Northwestern Nigeria, leading to severe humanitarian, economic, and social consequences. The region has witnessed massive displacement due to escalating violence. As of December 2022, approximately 1,087,875 individuals from rural communities were displaced, seeking refuge in urban centers and neighboring countries. This displacement has strained resources and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities among affected populations (The Global Observatory, 2024). The persistent insecurity has also disrupted economic activities, particularly agriculture, which is the primary livelihood for many in the region. Farmers face constant threats to their safety, leading to reduced agricultural output and worsening food insecurity (Babagana, Madaki, Ibrahim, Adamu & Gujja, 2019). Additionally, the prevalence of banditry has deterred foreign direct investment, further hindering economic development and perpetuating poverty. Educational institutions have not been spared, with numerous schools shutting down due to security threats. This has resulted in significant disruptions to children's education, contributing to rising illiteracy rates and limiting future opportunities for the youth (Barnett et al. 2022).

The pervasive fear of abduction has led to restricted movement among residents, disrupting daily life and weakening social cohesion. Communities live in constant fear, undermining trust and collaboration essential for societal well-being (Barnett et al. 2022). Meanwhile, the increasing boldness of bandits has led to more frequent and severe attacks. For instance, in December 2024, gunmen abducted at least 50 individuals, including women and children, in Zamfara State, highlighting the growing insecurity in the region (Mukhtar & Abdullahi, 2022). As observed by Jamri (2023), there are certain conditions that permit money laundering to thrive in one society more than in the other. Some of these factors include high rate of corruption, terrorism, arm trafficking, drug trafficking, tax fraud, smuggling, kidnapping among and other forms of financial

crimes that permit and reinforce some organised criminal syndicates to make transnational financial transactions. Jamri (2019b) observed that human trafficking takes place in the context of kidnapping.

Thus, banditry and kidnapping in Northwestern Nigeria have had devastating effects on society, the economy, and national security. They led to widespread loss of lives, with countless individuals killed in attacks on villages, highways, and schools. Many people have also been displaced, as communities flee their homes due to fear of attacks. Economically, these crimes have crippled agriculture and trade. Farmers are unable to cultivate their land due to insecurity, leading to food shortages and rising prices. Businesses in affected areas struggle to operate, while foreign and local investors shy away from the region, further deepening poverty and unemployment. The social fabric of communities has also been damaged. The abduction of schoolchildren has disrupted education, leading to school closures and a decline in literacy rates. Families of kidnapped victims often suffer emotional and financial distress as they struggle to pay ransom demands.

Furthermore, insecurity has weakened trust in the government and security agencies. Many citizens feel abandoned and have resorted to self-defense groups, sometimes worsening the violence. The proliferation of weapons among bandits has also fueled more criminal activities, making it difficult for law enforcement to restore order.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, Social Disorganisation Theory will be used to explain the rising rates of armed banditry and kidnapping in the north-western Nigeria. Also known as Cultural Transmission Theory, this framework was developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (as cited in Dukku & Mukhtar, 2019). Shaw and McKay expanded on existing studies of delinquency to establish a distinct perspective within the Chicago School of Urban Sociology. The theory examines how urban environmental conditions influence crime rates. A socially disorganised area is one where institutions responsible for maintaining order, such as families, businesses, and schools; have deteriorated and can no longer perform their intended functions (Siegel, 2010).

In northwestern Nigeria, the collapse of family structures and educational institutions has contributed significantly to youth involvement in crime. Many parents no longer fulfill their responsibilities and instead send their children to participate in almajirci, a traditional Quranic education system where children are placed under the care of a mallam in distant locations. However, this practice has deteriorated, and many of these children now engage in deviant behaviors rather than receiving proper education. Some of them become political thugs, members of urban gangs, or radicalised youths (Dukku & Mukhtar, 2019). The absence of parental guidance and structured education leaves many young people vulnerable to recruitment into criminal activities such as banditry and kidnapping. Without access to legitimate opportunities, they turn to crime as a means of survival.

Shaw and McKay used three different types of maps to trace male delinquency rates in Chicago between 1900 and 1933. Through this analysis, they explored how various community characteristics influenced crime. Their findings revealed that areas with high delinquency rates often had declining populations, a high percentage of foreign-born and African American heads of households, a significant number of families receiving welfare, low home ownership rates, and low median rental values (Brown et al., 2010). As a result, people living in these communities often faced conflict and distress, leading to an increase in antisocial behaviors (Siegel, 2010).

This trend is evident in Nigeria, where factors such as high unemployment, school dropout rates, deteriorating housing conditions, low-income levels, and a growing number of single-parent households indicate social disorganisation. The theory highlights three primary factors that

contribute to this breakdown: poverty, residential instability, and ethnic diversity (Brown et al., 2010; Dukku & Mukhtar, 2019). These elements create environments where social control weakens, allowing criminal activities such as banditry and kidnapping to thrive. Poor communities struggle to address these issues due to a lack of resources. For instance, the absence of funding for recreational facilities and social programs leaves many young people idle, making them easy targets for recruitment into criminal gangs. High residential mobility leads to anonymity among residents, reducing social control as people remain unfamiliar with one another. This anonymity makes it easier for criminal networks to operate undetected. In diverse communities where social ties are weak, shared values fail to develop. This absence of collective norms allows criminal behaviors to persist and be transmitted across generations in a process known as cultural transmission (Brown et al., 2010).

The theory is crucial in understanding the persistence of crimes like banditry and kidnapping in contemporary Nigerian society. Crime is closely linked to poverty, and with a significant number of Nigerian youths unemployed, uneducated, and struggling with economic hardship, their likelihood of being recruited into criminal networks is extremely high. The lack of social control, coupled with economic desperation, fuels these crimes, making them difficult to eradicate.

Methodology

Background of the Study Area:

The study area is the North West Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The region is one of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, including North-East, North Central, South-South, South-West and South-East. The historical sketch, geographical profile, economic profile, socio-cultural nature and security profile of the region are somehow similar to North-East and North Central. For instance, Sani (2013) related Islam to the socio-political evolution of the region, which then became a principal factor in the spread of a political system in the early part of the 19th century after the jihad of Shehu Uthman Fodio. Salawudeen (2019) narrated Uthman Dan Fodio of Sokoto supported the Bornu Fulani to rebel in 1805 which would have prevailed if the Mai had not called upon Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi, a Kanembu cleric, for assistance.

The North West Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria is now made up of seven state governments- Kaduna, Jigawa, Kano, Kebbi, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states. Nigeria's north-west region has been affected by a multidimensional crisis, rooted in historic ethno-social strife. The crisis rekindled in 2013 following the degradation of socioeconomic and environmental conditions. The crisis includes long-standing conflict between ethnic and linguistic groups, tensions between nomadic pastoralists (transhumance) and sedentary farmers, attacks by criminal groups on local populations and banditry/hirabah (kidnappings and grand larcenies along major highways). The situation escalated in January 2018 with the intensification of attacks, resulting in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of individuals. At the end of 2018, one million individuals had been displaced. While many of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been able to return, hundreds of thousands remain displaced due to a lack of security and fear of being attacked en route or upon their return to their locations of origin. The crisis continues to displace populations periodically in Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara (International Organization for Migration, IOM, 2023).

In the region, a complex and volatile insurgency is rolling. The region's size equates that of the United Kingdom. The violence leads to more civilian deaths in 2021 than the conflict in the northeast (Barnett et al. 2022). Well-armed bandits are terrorizing communities and wearing down overstretched security forces, getting rich through criminal activity such as kidnapping for ransom, and assuming de facto sovereignty over swathes of the region. Most of the militants are Fulani herdsmen who claim to be fighting to redress the government's neglect of pastoralist communities.

But their insurgency, to the extent the violence can be classified as such, is fractured into dozens of competing bandit groups loosely organized around warlords of varying power (Barnett et al. 2022).

Disputes between herders and farmers are key phenomena in this crisis. The farmers and herders crisis in Nigeria emanates from competing claims to natural resources. These tensions are compounded by exponential population growth, expanding human settlements, land privatization, year-round farming, environmental degradation, weakened traditional conflicts resolution mechanism and climate change. These further weaken the adaptive capacities of involved parties and most often result in tensions between communities that sometimes lead to deadly conflicts.

Research Design*:* The study is descriptive research design. It will describe the factors responsible for armed banditry and kidnapping and their consequences in the study area. It also proposes some policies as strategies for addressing the problems. Both primary and secondary data will be used. For the primary data, quantitative data was collected through questionnaire and qualitative data will be collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII). The data was analysed using qualitative data analysis, with thematic approach. Data is obtained from secondary sources, including academic journals and books related to crime, security, and socio-economic conditions in Nigeria. Also, government reports, policy papers, and security agency publications on banditry and kidnapping were generated from libraries. Media reports and credible online sources that document incidents and responses to these crimes were also gathered from the internet. By focusing on secondary data, this study provides a comprehensive and well-documented examination of the causes of banditry and kidnapping in Northwestern Nigeria. Also, thematic analysis is conducted to identify recurring factors contributing to banditry and kidnapping in the data analysis. The study categorises data into economic, social, political, and institutional factors to provide a structured understanding of the issue.

Population: The study population included male and female youths of 18 years and above in, Northwestern Nigeria. The target population of the study will also include victims of banditry and kidnapping; political and traditional leaders, law enforcement agents (Nigerian Police Force, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, etc.), academics, representatives of NGOs and CSOs.

Sample Size: Because the populations of Northwestern Nigeria are too large to cover in this research work, a total of 329 sample size was selected. From this total sample, 312 represent respondents for quantitative data and 17 for qualitative data. In the respondents for qualitative data, 10 represent respondents for FGD; and 4 respondents out of the total sample were respondents for IDI; i.e. 1 respondent from traditional rulers, 1 political leader, 2 victims of banditry and kidnapping, 3 represent respondents for KII (2 to be selected from the law enforcement agents and 1 academic).

Sampling Technique: The sampling technique for selecting the respondents were multi-stage sampling. In stage one, the Northwest geopolitical zone was treated as the study region, comprising seven states: Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. Each state constitutes a primary cluster. In stage two, one state (Katsina) was purposively selected. In stage three, one LGA was purposively selected from the State based on the observation that it is one of the most affected LGAs, which was Kankara LGA. In the fourth stage, six political wards were selected from the Local Government Area (LGA). In the fifth stage, four streets were selected from each political ward (i.e. 24 streets). In the sixth stage, twenty one (13) households were randomly selected from each street. This gave 312 houses. From each house, one male or female respondent was selected to administer questionnaire. The total for quantitative data (312) and qualitative data (17) was 329.

***Data Colleting Instruments*:** the instruments of data collection will be FGD and KII. Literature/desk review will also be used in conceptual and theoretical framework.

***Method of Data Analysis*:** the study will adopt qualitative method of data analysis, through thematic approach.

Results and Discussions

This section analysed and interpreted the data collected from the field survey. Out of the 312 questionnaires distributed, 301 were successfully completed and retrieved. Therefore, the analysis is based on the retrieved questionnaires (N = 301). Additionally, 17 qualitative data were gathered in FGD, IDIs and KIIs.

Section A: Socio-Economic and Demographic Data of the Respondents

This Section deals with the socio-economic and demographic data of the respondents, such as gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation and monthly income of the respondents.

Table 1.1: Socio-Economic and Demographic Data of the Respondents

S/N	Variables	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	264	87.7
		Female	37	12.3
		Total	**301**	**100.0%**
2.	Age	18-27	143	47.5
		28-37	71	23.6
		38-47	61	20.3
		48-57	14	4.6
		58 and above	12	4.0
		Total	**301**	**100.0%**
3.	Marital Status	Single	153	50.8
		Married	128	42.5
		Divorced	04	1.4
		Widowed	16	5.3
		Total	**301**	**100.0%**
5.	Educational Qualification	No formal education	96	31.9
		Quranic education	56	18.6
		Primary education	18	6.0
		Secondary education	61	20.3
		OND/NCE	36	20.1
		First Degree/HND	24	12.0
		Postgraduate	10	3.3
		Total	**301**	**100.0%**
8.	Occupation	Civil Servant	126	41.9
		Student (western education)	54	18.0
		Student (Quranic education)	16	5.3
		Traders	94	31.2
		Others	11	3.6
		Total	**301**	**100**
9	Monthly Income	No income	68	22.6

		N10,000-N29,999	85	28.3
		N30,000 – N49,999	54	17.9
		N50,000 –N69,999	38	12.6
		N70,000-N89,999	30	10.0
		N90,000-and above	26	8.6
		Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1.1 presents the socio-economic and demographic profile of the respondents (N = 301) from Northwestern Nigeria. The variables analysed include gender, age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, and monthly income. These characteristics are important for understanding how vulnerability to banditry and kidnapping may be shaped by social and economic conditions in the study area of Northwestern Nigeria. The data also show that males constitute the majority of respondents (87.7%), while females account for only 12.3%. This large gender imbalance suggests that men are more accessible or more available for participation in field surveys in the study area. It also reflects cultural and security constraints that limit women's public participation. Substantively, this distribution is significant because young men are often both the primary victims and, in some cases, recruits into bandit groups, making their perceptions crucial for understanding the dynamics of banditry and kidnapping.

The respondents are predominantly young people, with 47.5% aged 18–27 and 23.6% aged 28–37. Together, over 70% of the respondents fall within the economically active youth and young adult categories. This suggests that banditry and kidnapping are issues that strongly affect younger populations, who are more exposed to unemployment, poverty, and insecurity. The small proportion of older respondents (48 years and above) indicates that younger age groups are more visible and directly impacted by the insecurity in the region. About half of the respondents are single (50.8%), while 42.5% are married. The high proportion of single respondents aligns with the youthful age structure of the sample. This has implications for social stability, as unmarried youths facing limited economic opportunities may be more vulnerable to recruitment into criminal networks or forced involvement in banditry activities. Widowed and divorced respondents together make up a small proportion, but their presence reflects the social disruption associated with insecurity and violence in the region.

Educational attainment is generally low. A significant proportion of respondents have no formal education (31.9%) or only Quranic education (18.6%). Those with secondary education or higher are fewer in comparison. This pattern highlights the role of limited access to formal education in shaping vulnerability to insecurity. Low educational attainment reduces employment opportunities and civic engagement, which can indirectly contribute to the persistence of banditry and kidnapping by creating a pool of economically and socially marginalized youths. The occupational structure shows that civil servants (41.9%) and traders (31.2%) form the largest groups, followed by students. This indicates that insecurity affects both formal and informal economic actors. The presence of students, including those in Quranic education, suggests that educational institutions and young learners are directly exposed to insecurity, which aligns with broader concerns about school closures and disrupted education in banditry-affected areas.

Income distribution reveals widespread economic vulnerability. About 22.6% of respondents report no income, while the majority earn less than ₦30,000 per month. Only a small fraction earn ₦90,000 and above. This pattern reflects high levels of poverty and underemployment in the study area. The prevalence of low income strengthens the argument that economic hardship is a key underlying factor contributing to banditry and kidnapping, as later tables in the study also identify poverty and unemployment as major drivers.

The dominance of young males with low income and low formal education aligns with studies linking poverty and youth marginalisation to crime (Fajnzylber et al., 2001; Jamri, 2024). Hopelessness and recruitment pressures, reflecting Durkheim's norm breakdown and Social Disorganisation Theory: weak family, school, and economic structures create conditions for deviance (Shaw & McKay). The high proportion of respondents earning below ₦30,000 monthly supports literature that economic hardship fuels vulnerability to banditry and kidnapping.

Section B: The Factors Responsible for Banditry and Kidnapping in North-west, Nigeria

This Section deals with the factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping in North-west, Nigeria, such as socio-economic, political and insecurity factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping. It also covers climate change as a factor responsible for banditry and kidnapping.

Table 1.2: Socio-Economic Factors Responsible for Banditry and Kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poverty	93	31.7%
Unemployment	91	30.0%
Illiteracy	51	16.7%
Inadequate government presence	55	18.3%
Others	11	3.3%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.2 presents the socio-economic factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping. The highest response was 'Poverty' with 95 responses, accounting for 31.7% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive this option as a major issue in the context of banditry and kidnapping. According to FGD participant:

Most young men here have no work and no money. With farms destroyed by drought and insecurity, many feel hopeless. When there is no income and no support, some youths join bandit groups just to survive. (FGD with a male participant, 34 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to KII participant:

Poverty and unemployment are major drivers of banditry in this area. Idle youths are easily recruited because bandits offer them money, food, and a sense of belonging. (KII with a law enforcement officer, 41 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to IDI participant:

During my captivity, the kidnappers told us they had no jobs and no support from government. They said hunger pushed them into kidnapping. (IDI with a male victim of kidnapping, 36 years, Katsina State, 2026).

This corroborates Jamri (2024) on poverty-crime links. The finding also reflects Abdullahi & Mukhtar (2022) that deprivation creates fertile ground for organised crime. The qualitative accounts of failed livelihoods mirror the theory's claim that social disorganisation weakens legitimate pathways, pushing youths toward crime.

Table 1.3: Political Factors Responsible for Banditry and Kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	242	80.4%
No	59	19.6%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.3 shows the political factors responsible for banditry and kidnapping. The highest response was 'Yes' with 242 responses, accounting for 80.4% of the total. This indicates that political factors are responsible of banditry and kidnapping. According to FGD participant:

Government only remembers us during elections. There is little security presence in our villages, so criminals operate freely without fear. (FGD with a female participant, 29 years, Katsina State, 2026).

The strong "Yes" response (80.4%) aligns with Jamri's (2021) accounts of weak governance and poor political will, linking ineffective institutions and corruption to crime persistence.

Table 1.4: Insecurity contributors for Banditry and Kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Weak security institutions	79	26.2%
Porous borders	71	23.6%
Armed group proliferation	85	28.3%
Ethno-religious tensions	66	21.9%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.4 shows data on insecurity contributors for banditry and kidnapping. The highest response was 'Armed group proliferation' with 85 responses, accounting for 28.3% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive armed group proliferation to be a major contributor of banditry and kidnapping. According to KII participant:

Poor governance and weak security institutions have created a vacuum that allows banditry to flourish. Many communities feel abandoned by the state. (KII with an academic, 47 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to IDI participant:

Bandits move easily through villages because there are no security checkpoints on these routes. The government response is slow whenever attacks happen. (IDI with a traditional ruler, 58 years, Katsina State, 2026).

Respondents identified armed group proliferation as the leading contributor. KIIs referenced easy movement of criminals and weak border control. This aligns with Egbuta (2018) on SALWs proliferation escalating violence and Abdullahi & Mukhtar (2022) on law enforcement inefficiency. Qualitative accounts of criminals' mobility reinforce how weak formal controls create spaces for banditry to thrive. Qualitative data on slow security response and neglect mirrors Mukhtar & Abdullahi (2022) on institutional failure enabling crime. This supports Social Disorganisation Theory: weakened institutions reduce social control, allowing criminal networks to operate.

Table 1.5: Climate Change is a Factor Responsible for Banditry and Kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	122	40.5%
Agree	99	32.9%
Neutral	31	10.3%
Disagree	29	9.6%
Strongly Disagree	20	6.7%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.5 shows data on the statement climate change is a factor responsible for banditry and kidnapping. Majority of the respondents, accounting for 40.5% of the total strongly agree that climate change is a factor responsible for banditry and kidnapping. According to FGD participant:

Rainfall is no longer regular, and crops fail often. When farming fails, young men stay idle and some drift into criminal groups. (FGD with a male participant, 21 years, Kankara, Katsina State, 2026).

According to KII participant:

Environmental stress caused by drought and land scarcity increases conflict and creates conditions that bandit groups exploit for recruitment. (KII with an NGO representative, 36 years, Katsina State, 2026).

High agreement that climate change contributes to banditry is supported by FGDs describing crop failure, dry seasons, and risky bush movement. While not central in classical crime theory, environmental stress exacerbates poverty and resource competition, indirectly reinforcing pathways to crime noted by Fajnzylber et al. (2001).

Section C: The Consequences of Banditry and Kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria

This Section deals with the consequences of banditry and kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria, such as loss of lives, displacement of people, economic hardship, school closures and fear of migration.

Table 1.6: The Consequences of Banditry and Kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Loss of lives	98	32.6%
Displacement of people	81	26.9%
Economic hardship	69	22.9%
School closures	42	14.0%
Others	11	3.6%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.6 shows the consequences of banditry and kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria. The highest response was ‘Loss of lives’ with 98 responses, accounting for 32.6% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive loss of lives as a major consequence of banditry and kidnapping. According to FGD participant:

Many youths have been killed during attacks on villages and on the roads. Families mourn in silence because they fear further attacks. (FGD with a male participant, 26 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to FGD participant:

Entire families have fled their homes after attacks. Many who once farmed freely now hide in towns; fields lie fallow. (FGD with a male participant, 22 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to IDI participant:

Most farmlands are abandoned because farmers fear being attacked. This has reduced food production in the area. (IDI with a traditional leader, 58 years, Katsina State, 2026).

Loss of lives and displacement were ranked highest, matching qualitative trauma narratives and it corroborates with literature (The Global Observatory, 2024; Babagana et al., 2019) documenting mass displacement and humanitarian impacts. The findings described abandoned farms and disrupted markets, reflecting reduced agricultural output and food insecurity. School disruptions align with Barnett et al. (2022), linking insecurity to educational decline.

Table 1.7: Whether There were Personal Effects of Banditry and Kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	219	72.6%
No	82	27.4%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.7 shows data on whether there were personal effects of banditry and kidnapping. The highest response was 'Yes' with 219 responses, accounting for 72.6% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive personal effects as a major issue in the context of banditry and kidnapping. According to KII participant:

We often recover dead bodies after raids. The trauma to families and communities is long-lasting and creates deep fear. (KII with a law enforcement officer, 44 years, Katsina State, 2026).

The high "Yes" response (72.6%) is mirrored in KII describing trauma, fear, and stigma. Literature notes fear of abduction restricts movement and weakens social cohesion (Barnett et al., 2022). These lived experiences show how crime erodes trust and collective efficacy.

Table 1.8: Economic Impact of Banditry and Kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very High	132	43.9%
High	88	29.3%
Moderate	51	16.9%
Low	21	7.0%
Not at all	09	2.9%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.8 presents data on the economic impact of banditry and kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria. The highest response was 'Very High' with 132 responses, accounting for 43.9% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive the economic impact of banditry and kidnapping in the North-western Nigeria to be severe. According to KII participant:

> Economic activities have reduced significantly. Transporters avoid these routes, and markets now close early due to fear. (KII with an NGO worker, 36 years, Katsina State, 2026).

Perceived "Very High" economic impact aligns with KIIs on collapsed markets and transport avoidance. Literature shows insecurity undermines agriculture and deters investment (Babagana et

al., 2019), perpetuating poverty cycles (Jamri, 2023). This feedback loop sustains the structural conditions that enable banditry.

Table 1.9: Fear of Migration is One of the Impacts of Banditry and Kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	153	50.8%
Agree	81	26.9%
Neutral	28	9.3%
Disagree	18	6.0%
Strongly Disagree	21	7.0%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.9 shows responses on whether fear of migration is one of the impacts of banditry and kidnapping. The highest response was 'Strongly Agree' with 154 responses, accounting for 50.8% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive this option as a major issue in the context of banditry and kidnapping. According to FGD participant:

People no longer move freely in the evening. Once it is dark, everyone rushes home because of fear of abduction. (FGD with a female participant, 20 years, Katsina State, 2026).

Strongly high agreement reflects the FGD, describing night-time immobility and IDIs reporting forced relocation. Literature documents restricted movement and social fragmentation (Barnett et al., 2022) and displacement due to violence (The Global Observatory, 2024). Fear-driven mobility further weakens community networks, reducing informal social control.

Section D: The Effective Policies for Fighting Banditry and Kidnapping in the Region

This Section deals with the effective policies for fighting banditry and kidnapping in the region, such as increased military operations, dialogue and negotiation, improved youth employment and community policing.

Table 1.10: Strategies to Reduce Banditry and Kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increased military operations	113	37.5%
Dialogue and negotiation	69	22.9%
Improved youth employment	61	20.3%
Community policing	47	15.6%
Others	11	3.7%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.10 presents strategies to reduce banditry and kidnapping. The highest response was 'Increased military operations' with 113 responses, accounting for 37.5% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive this option as a major issue in the context of banditry and kidnapping. According to KII participant:

Rehabilitation programmes with skills training and counselling can prevent repentant bandits from returning to crime. (KII with a law enforcement officer, 45 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to KII participant:

Dialogue alone will not work unless government provides real support for reintegration and monitors compliance. (KII with an NGO worker, 36 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to FGD participant:

Some bandits are willing to surrender if given amnesty and support to start a new life, but they must first drop their weapons. (FGD with a male participant, 22 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to KII participant:

Vocational training and small business support will reduce youth involvement in banditry by addressing unemployment. (KII with an NGO representative, 36 years, Katsina State, 2026).

Preference for military operations reflects immediate security needs voiced in FGDs. However, KIIs and IDIs stressed jobs and community policing, aligning with literature cautioning that enforcement alone fails without addressing poverty and corruption (Holmes, 2010; Jamri, 2021). There is the need for combined structural (jobs, schools) and control (community policing) approaches to rebuild social order.

Table 1.11: Whether There is Local Security Support

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	212	70.4%
No	51	16.9%
Not sure	38	13.7%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.11 shows data on whether there is local security support to address banditry and kidnapping in the study area. From the Table highest response was 'Yes' with 212 responses, accounting for 70.4% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive this option as a major issue in the context of banditry and kidnapping. According to KII participant:

Security agencies need better intelligence from local communities. Trust and collaboration will improve response to attacks. (KII with a law enforcement officer, 46 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to IDI participant:

When vigilantes work with the police, attacks reduce. Community policing can help because locals know the footpaths used by bandits. (IDI with a traditional ruler, 58 years, Katsina State, 2026).

Most respondents acknowledged local security support, echoed by IDIs noting vigilante–police collaboration. This aligns with theory emphasizing community institutions in restoring informal social control. However, literature warns that without state legitimacy and accountability, local groups can escalate violence, indicating the need for coordinated governance (Crenshaw, 2012).

Table 1.12: Government is Effective in Addressing Banditry and Kidnapping

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very effective	21	6.9%
Effective	38	12.6%
Ineffective	139	46.2%
Very ineffective	103	34.3%
Total	**301**	**100.0%**

Source: Field survey, 2026

Table 1.12 shows data on the statement government is effective in addressing banditry and kidnapping. From the Table, the highest response was ‘Ineffective’ with 139 responses, accounting for 46.2% of the total. This indicates that respondents strongly perceive that ineffectiveness of government is a major issue in the context of banditry and kidnapping.

According to KII participant:

Government empowerment programmes should reach rural youths, not only those in towns. (KII with an academic, 47 years, Katsina State, 2026).

According to FGD participant:

If young people get jobs or skills training, many will stop thinking about joining criminal groups. (FGD with a male participant, 22 years, Katsina State, 2026).

The dominance of "ineffective/very ineffective" mirrors qualitative complaints of slow response and neglect. Literature on corruption and weak institutions (Aro, 2013; Holmes, 2010; Jamri, 2021) explains why citizens lose trust and resort to self-help. This erosion of trust exemplifies social disorganisation, sustaining crime through weakened legitimacy and compliance.

Conclusion

This study examined the causes, consequences, and policy responses to banditry and kidnapping in Northwestern Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that banditry and kidnapping in the region are not isolated criminal acts but outcomes of deep-rooted structural, socio-economic, political, and institutional failures. The study established that poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, and weak state presence constitute major drivers of banditry and kidnapping. The predominance of young, low-income respondents shows the vulnerability of youths to recruitment into criminal networks. Qualitative evidence further revealed that economic desperation, disrupted livelihoods due to environmental stress, and perceived government neglect push some individuals toward criminal activities as a survival strategy. The consequences of banditry and kidnapping in the study area are severe and multidimensional. The research documented widespread loss of lives, displacement of households, disruption of agricultural production, market decline, school closures, and pervasive fear that restricts movement and weakens social cohesion. Beyond the material losses, survivors reported lasting psychological trauma and social stigma. These outcomes have deepened poverty, food insecurity, and educational setbacks, thereby reinforcing the same conditions that fuel insecurity in a self-perpetuating cycle.

The policy-related findings indicate that while residents favour increased military operations as an immediate response, there is strong support for complementary long-term strategies, including community policing, youth employment, and dialogue-based reintegration for repentant bandits under strict conditions. However, respondents expressed low confidence in government effectiveness, reflecting weak trust in public institutions. This distrust has encouraged the emergence of local security arrangements, which, although helpful in intelligence gathering and deterrence, remain limited without sustained state support, accountability, and coordination. Theoretically, the findings strongly align with Social Disorganisation Theory, which explains how poverty, institutional breakdown, educational decline, and weakened family and community structures reduce social control and create environments conducive to criminal behaviour. In the study area, deteriorating livelihoods, limited state capacity, and fragile community institutions have collectively undermined informal and formal mechanisms of social regulation, enabling banditry and kidnapping to persist.

In conclusion, addressing banditry and kidnapping in Northwestern Nigeria requires a holistic and sustained approach that goes beyond coercive security measures. While military and law enforcement interventions remain necessary for immediate protection of lives and property, durable peace will depend on tackling the structural drivers of insecurity. This includes expanding youth employment and skills acquisition, strengthening education and social welfare systems, restoring trust in governance through anti-corruption and accountability reforms, controlling the proliferation

of small arms, and institutionalising community policing frameworks. Without addressing these root causes, security operations alone are unlikely to produce lasting stability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study on banditry and kidnapping in Northwestern Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed to address both problems:

1. Government should enhance the operational capacity of security agencies through improved logistics, training, welfare, and deployment of personnel to vulnerable rural communities. Intelligence-led policing should be prioritized.
2. Community policing frameworks should be formally institutionalised to integrate traditional leaders, community vigilante groups, youth representatives, and women's groups into security planning and intelligence gathering.
3. Targeted youth employment programmes should be implemented in rural and semi-rural areas, including vocational training, apprenticeships, and microcredit schemes for small businesses and agribusiness.
4. Government and development partners should prioritise the reopening and protection of schools in affected communities, provide conditional cash transfers to vulnerable households, and expand access to basic education and adult literacy programmes.
5. Transparent management of public resources and strict enforcement of anti-corruption laws are necessary to restore public trust in government institutions. Development funds earmarked for poverty reduction, security, and community development should be monitored through independent oversight mechanisms to ensure they reach intended beneficiaries.
6. Coordinated arms control strategies should be strengthened through border surveillance, disarmament initiatives, community sensitisation, and buy-back or amnesty programmes tied to strict monitoring and reintegration support.
7. Dialogue and reintegration initiatives should be conditional and structured, requiring disarmament, psychosocial support, vocational training, and community reconciliation processes. These programmes must be closely monitored to prevent recidivism and ensure community safety.
8. Government should invest in climate-resilient agriculture, irrigation schemes, and rural development projects to mitigate the livelihood shocks linked to environmental stress.
9. Comprehensive support services should be provided for victims of banditry and kidnapping, including medical care, psychosocial counselling, legal assistance, and livelihood restoration. Community-based trauma support programmes can help rebuild trust and social cohesion.

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