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PUBLIC POLICY, INTERNAL SECURITY AND ARMED BANDITRY IN NIGERIA: A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF ZAMFARA AND KADUNA STATES

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine internal security and armed banditry in Nigeria, with Zamfara and Kaduna States as case studies. The study relies on the social exchange theory and the wobble economy thesis as its theoretical framework. The study methodology is qualitative, which relied heavily on secondary data and content analysis. A content analysis of armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna States revealed two main areas: structural causes of banditry and ineffective policy responses. Key factors include geographical vulnerabilities, such as expansive forest reserves and proximity to borders, which facilitate criminal activity, combined with socio-economic issues like poverty and unemployment that fuel recruitment for bandit groups. Environmental changes have exacerbated resource conflicts between farmers and herders, resulting in organised banditry. Policy measures, both coercive and conciliatory, have been largely ineffective due to fragmented strategies, lack of trust, and weak institutional frameworks. Reports indicate serious shortcomings in security agency capacities, including understaffing and inadequate technology. Therefore, addressing banditry and internal security challenges requires comprehensive reforms in governance, border management, and environmental security, such as the integration of ICT into the security architecture of Nigeria, partnerships with advanced countries, and training and development of armed personnel on modern warfare. Government should ensure social justice across the states and with the local inhabitants of the communities to aid intelligence gathering and protection of residents.

Keywords: *Internal Security; Armed Banditry; Insecurity; Governance, Public Policy*

1. Introduction

In contemporary times, the protection and security of lives and properties of the citizenry have emerged as one of the most fundamental functions of governments across the globe. This has become so apparent because of the heightened security and humanitarian crises that have come to characterise the 21st century. The marketplace of violence on the continent of Africa, for instance, has been saturated with a variety of armed groups – many of which are affiliated with major international terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, or ISIS (Mroszcyk & Abrams, 2021). In Nigeria, as in many African countries, terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and bandits have increasingly targeted civilians in their campaigns of violence and have wrecked more havoc on the lives and properties of the citizenry than any known natural disaster in the continent. In recent times, banditry has become a harsh and catastrophic reality in contemporary Nigerian society; it has come in different manifestations – insurgency, kidnapping, suicide attacks, self-suicide bombing, corruption, and armed robbery (Enders, 2002; Lake, 2000). The implosion of insecurity and violence occasioned by the violent secessionist groups (e.g., the Movement for the Emancipation of Biafra, Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and armed militias (e.g., bandits, herdsmen, Boko Haram, etc.) in Nigeria has not only threatened peaceful

co-existence of indigenous people of Nigeria but has also culminated in dwindling economic fortune of the country. Salami, Fatimah, Makua, Gazi, and Oke's (2012) study depicts that a one-unit increase in foreign direct investment in the oil sector has the capacity to increase the GDP by 15-16 units. But as a result of insurgency, foreign direct investment (FDI) has decreased; it declined from $8.9 billion in 2011 to about $7 billion in 2012 (World Investment Report, 2013).

While the problem of insecurity from an axiological point of view represents a recent social-political menace, the preceding years of the country's political evolution were characterised by clement conditions that made for an unruffled peaceful existence. Between 1960 and the late 90s, insecurity was not a national concern per se. But by the early 2000s insecurity became a national concern. The country ranked 147 in the Global Peace Index of 2008 when it was launched. The 2014 and 2022 Global Peace Index, which ranked 162 countries by measures such as extent of conflict, security, and degree of militarisation, puts Nigeria at 151 and 143 in the respective years, representing a disproportionate increase (The Fund for Peace, 2014; Global Peace Index, 2022). Nigeria has remained in the top 140 in the rating from 2008 till date. In the past years, Banditry and insecurity in Nigeria have ignited religious tensions across the country, disrupted development activities, heightened tensions among various ethnic communities, and frightened off investors (Eme & Ibietan, 2012).

Despite being a member of the U.S. Security Governance Initiative, the TSCTP, and the Coalition to Defeat ISIS, insecurity has persisted in most parts of Nigeria. While the foregoing depicts the graphical representation of Nigeria's insecurity snapshot, the Northwestern part of Nigeria, especially Zamfara and Kaduna states, has been the hot spot and hub of insecurity (banditry) in the country. While violence in other parts of the country is subsiding, northwestern Nigeria has remained volatile, as bandits and terrorist groups have continued to ravage the region. In the past five years, more than 5,000 people have been killed in Zamfara State (Ogbonnaya, 2020). Times Insight further provides that between January 11 and 17 of 2020, armed attacks in Kaduna and Zamfara have affected 1,125 people (including 17 fatalities), over 600 women, over 200 children, and approximately 300 men. According to Anyadike (2021), in Zamfara, as in the rest of the northwest, the term "bandits" is shorthand for nomadic Fulani pastoralists. Banditry is used in association with armed robbery or associated violent crimes characterised by vicious attacks on rural communities, local communities, destruction of lives and property and kidnapping of people by criminal groups (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014; Chris, Iyidobi, Ronnie & Victor, 2021). The banditry violence started as a farmer-herder conflict in 2011 and intensified between 2017 and

2018 to include kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, killings, and sexual violence, affecting not only the region but 35 out of 92 local governments in the Southwest zone of Nigeria (Chris et al., 2021). Aside from displacing over 210,000 people by March 2020, banditry activities have halted agricultural activities and pervaded to trigger food insecurity (Chris et al., 2021).

Empirically, this study is also designed to fill some gap in knowledge. While other research (e.g., Levitt (2009); Olabanji and Ese (2014); Adebanjoko and Okorie (2014); Rotimietal. (2013); Odita and Akan (2014); Achumba, Igbomerho and Akpor-Rabaro (2013); Ekene (2015); Adesina (2017); and Ewetan and Urhie (2014)) has investigated the impact of insecurity on socio-economic development, the impact of cybercrime on national development, the impact of the Boko Haram menace and its implications on Nigeria's stability, and the corruption and challenges of insecurity in Nigeria and its political/economic implications, this study seeks to examine armed banditry and internal security in Kaduna and Zanfara states, Nigeria. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the paper is divided into 5 sections. Section 1 provides a preamble to the thrust of the study; 2 conceptualisation of variables and literature review, which is at the heart of our discussion; 3 details the research methodology deployed for the study; and 4 present results and data. This is followed by a conclusion and recommendations.

2. Conceptual Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Concept of Banditry

Banditry refers to organized and recurrent acts of violence carried out by armed groups against civilians, communities, and state institutions for economic, political, or survival-related gains. It commonly involves activities such as armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, village raids, and illegal taxation, often accompanied by killings and destruction of property (Onifade et al., 2013). In contemporary Nigeria, banditry has evolved from isolated criminal acts into a complex security challenge driven by weak governance, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, porous borders, poverty, and environmental pressures (ICG, 2020).

Banditry is distinct from conventional crime because it thrives in ungoverned or poorly policed spaces, especially rural and forested areas, where state authority is limited. Scholars argue that

banditry reflects state fragility, as criminal groups exploit institutional weaknesses and public distrust in security agencies (Fukuyama, 2004). In northwestern Nigeria, particularly Zamfara and Kaduna States, banditry is closely linked to farmer–herder conflicts, climate-induced resource scarcity, and unemployment, which provide both motivation and recruits for armed groups (Chris et al., 2021). Overall, banditry undermines internal security by causing mass displacement, disrupting livelihoods, weakening social cohesion, and eroding citizens' confidence in the state's capacity to provide security and governance (ICG, 2020).

2.2 Internal Security

Internal security connotes a state of affair where the inhabitants of a given geographical area village, community, town, state pursue their lives unfettered without restrain or threat to their lives and properties. Achumba, Ighomenho, and Akpor-Rabaro (2013) see security as "the situation that exists as are sult of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information and property against hostile persons, influence and actions". Conversely, insecurity is the antithesis of security which attracts such common descriptors as want of safety, danger, hazard, uncertainty, want of confidence, state of doubt, inadequately guarded or protected, instability, trouble, lack of protection and being unsafe which point to a condition of vulnerability to harm, loss of life, property or livelihood (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor-Robaro (2013). To guarantee internal security in Nigeria, past and present political regime shave explored a wide range of public policy options ranging from the declaration of state of emergency to 'counter insurgent force as policy deterrence, with the imposition of sanctions, to curb actual attempts by putting appropriate measures in place to reduce the menaces of banditry and insecurity in the country' (Adegoke, 2020). One of the major public policy measures deployed to tackle insecurity in Nigeria is the National Security Strategy which has been implemented with diverse strategies (The National Security Strategy, 2019; Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduehie, & Dariya, 2018).To abate insecurity in the past five years, the Nigerian government has spent over 462 million on national security (Olufemi, 2015).

Onifade, Imhonopi, and Urim (2019) examined insecurity in Nigeria's Northwest and found that armed banditry is closely linked to weak state presence in rural and forested areas. Their study showed that poor governance and ineffective policing created permissive environments for organized bandit groups to flourish, thereby undermining internal security. Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) analyzed rural banditry and cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria, revealing that economic deprivation and breakdown of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms significantly contributed to the escalation of violence. They concluded that banditry represents a transformation of livelihood conflicts into organized criminal violence.

International Crisis Group (2020) provided empirical evidence that armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna is driven by competition over resources, arms proliferation, and cross-border criminal networks. The report documented how bandit groups operate from forest enclaves, posing a sustained threat to national and regional security. Amnesty International (2020) investigated attacks on rural communities and found that state failure to protect civilians enabled recurring mass killings, kidnappings, and displacement. The study linked human rights abuses directly to declining public trust in security institutions.

Akinwale (2018) assessed the impact of violent conflicts on internal security in Nigeria and found that banditry exacerbates humanitarian crises, weakens social cohesion, and diverts state resources from development to emergency security spending.

Centre for Democracy and Development (2020) empirically demonstrated that intelligence gaps, inadequate manpower, and arms smuggling significantly constrain Nigeria's counter-banditry operations. Their findings highlighted institutional weakness as a core internal security challenge. WANEP (2021), using conflict early-warning data, showed that banditry-related incidents in Zamfara and Kaduna increased steadily between 2018 and 2020, correlating strongly with displacement, food insecurity, and local economic collapse. Adamu and Rasak (2021) studied farmer–herder conflicts in Kaduna State and found that environmental stress and climate variability intensified competition over land and water, which later evolved into armed banditry and organized violence.

These review studies reveals that armed banditry in Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara and Kaduna States, is not an isolated criminal phenomenon but a systemic internal security crisis.

The literature converges on four interconnected drivers: weak governance and state absence, economic deprivation, environmental stress, and institutional capacity deficits. Empirical evidence consistently shows that banditry thrives where policing is limited, livelihoods are fragile, and forest spaces are poorly regulated. Moreover, the humanitarian consequences mass displacement, food insecurity, and erosion of social trust further weaken internal security by creating cycles of vulnerability and violence. Collectively, the studies demonstrate that military responses alone are insufficient; sustainable internal security requires integrated governance, socio-economic development, environmental management, and institutional reform.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The study relies on the social exchange theory and the wobble economy thesis as its theoretical framework. The social exchange theory was developed by George Homans in 1961. The theory is a progenitor of the rational choice approach, which "views human behaviour as being guided by hedonistic principle or pleasure-seeking" tendency (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016). Homans' theory laid emphasis on the cost and reward – that humans continue to do that which has rewarded them in the past while discontinuing that which has seemed unprofitable (Chris et al., 2021).

The wobble economy thesis, according to Adaga, Ugwu and Eme (2012), is a theoretical strand that seeks to develop a plausible relationship between the array of qualified and unqualified youths competing in the saturated labour market and insecurity. The theory seeks to establish a nexus between youth unemployment and dysfunctions within a country's economy that cause deprivations and insecurity. Adaga, Ugwu and Eme (2012) assert that the large pool of youth unemployment is a rich reservoir from which armed groups and politicians lure them with offers to cause violence to achieve their goals. Stressing further, the authors contend that,

> "*...set against the inability of the government to provide basic infrastructure and basic services for its populace, new conflicts have emerged through politicised agents who have used the conditions of the poor to address the responses or non-responses of the state to the lawful earnings of the citizens. This has led some groups to engage in and try to influence the political process themselves. These conflicts in Nigeria are purposeful in intent and directed at key targets, whether economic or political. Armed violence is about more than oil, ethnicity, or politics.*

> *In essence, such actions are about access to resources, whether through committing crimes, playing communal tension, stealing oil or winning elections (Adaga, Ugwu and Eme, 2012:80).*

The justification for the adoption of the theory is based on the premise that the theory allows for the explanation of the nature of internal security governance and armed banditry in Northeastern Nigeria from two strands of theoretical perspectives for better understanding of the problem. One (the social exchange theory) attempts to indigenously explain the remote factors within the groups that motivate them to sustain violent activities in the Northwest, while the second (the wobble economy thesis) exogenously explains the factors in the Nigerian economic system that have birthed and sustained armed groups in Nigeria and the Northwestern region. Through the lens of the theories, the study attempts to create a theorem of crime causation in Northwestern Nigeria.

3. Methodology

The research utilised qualitative methods. This method offers insights, reveals opinion trends, and explores phenomena more deeply. The majority of the data for this study was obtained from secondary sources. The secondary data used in this study were gathered from articles, publications, and internet sources and publications by reputable international and national organisations such as Amnesty International (AI), the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the Nigerian Intelligence Agency (NIA), the Global Conflict Tracker, the Global Peace Index (GPI), the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), the World Bank, etc. related to internal insecurity and armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna states, leading to conclusions based on content analysis. The analysis of the secondary sources involves systematically reviewing reports, government documents, security briefs, and academic studies on armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna States. Relevant texts are coded into themes such as causes, patterns of attacks, security responses, and impacts on internal security to enable structured interpretation and comparison. Data extraction for this study involved systematically reviewing government documents, security briefs, and peer-reviewed academic studies relevant to armed banditry and internal security in Zamfara and Kaduna States. Relevant information was identified, recorded, and categorised based on predefined variables such as causes, actors, impacts, and state responses. Thematic analysis followed a deductive-inductive approach, where initial codes were developed from existing

security and conflict literature, then refined through repeated reading. Related codes were clustered to generate coherent themes reflecting recurring patterns across data sources.

4. Data and Results

4.1 Causes of Armed Banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna States

Despite the increased budgetary allocations and military hardware and software procured to enhance and improve security situations in Zamfara, Kaduna, and Nigeria as a whole, insecurity has remained unabated. Among the Northwestern zone of Nigeria, which comprises the Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, and Jigawa states, insecurity and volatile situations increased and remained unabated in Zamfara and Kaduna states. The endemic question remains: Why has banditry remained in increasing proportion in these two particular states? Onifade, Imhonopi, and Urim (2013) and ICG (2020) answer that this situation has remained sustained because of the savannah interspersed with vast forest and unregulated and poor government-controlled forest areas, some of which are situated within under-policed border areas between Nigeria and neighboring countries, thus aiding cross-border criminality. Also, in the list include weak regulation of pastoral activities in the forests that has fostered the infiltration of livestock bandits (WANEP, 2020). Adeolu (2018), Adegoke (2020), and in (2014) and (2019) include porous security systems, poverty/poor governance, and high levels of unemployment. These authors establish the nexus between poverty, bad governance, high unemployment, and insecurity in Zamfara and Kaduna States.

According to Chrisetal (2021), Nduka (2020), and the International Crisis Group Report (2020), the incidence of armed banditry in Kaduna, Zamfara, and Northwestern Nigeria arose as a result of the occurrence of climate change and environmental degradation. They explain that climate change and massive deforestation arising from desert encroachment from the Sahara Desert and pastoralists and farmers have faced the intense competition for land resources such as water and green vegetation, which is required by cattle herders for the sustenance of their livestock. According to them, this competition has caused a major conflagration that has caused farmer-herder clashes in the states. Chris et al. (2021), on their part, enumerate the causes of armed banditry in the Northwest to include arms and weapons trafficking, porous Nigeria-Niger borders and difficult terrain, overburdened security apparatus and diminishing presence of the federal government, and controversial peace agreements between some state governments and criminal groups.

4.2 Strategies Adapted to Address Armed Banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna States: The Challenge of Public Policy

To address the recurring level of insecurity in Zamfara and Kaduna States, past and present governments have explored a plethora of options to curtail the menace. This has ranged from "force-for-force" to a carrot-and-stick approach to diplomacy (Jimoh, 2020). The federal government has banned motorcycles within the hinterland and forests and sought security collaboration and cooperation with neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Chad, Benin, and Niger (WANEP, 2020; Global Conflict Tracker, 2020). Aside from the strategies adopted by the federal government, the state governments have also made some approaches. This includes financial

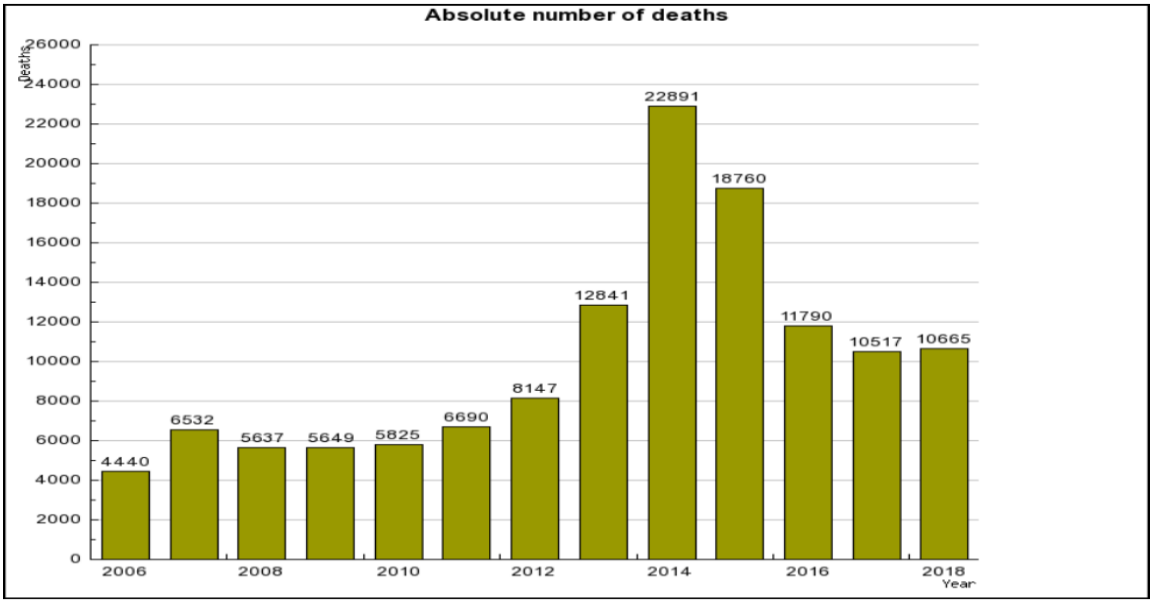
support, formation and empowering of vigilantes to protect communities, granting of amnesty, arms-for-cash programs, establishment of rural grazing areas including settlements with social amenities, use of integrative methods consisting of state and non-state actors-security agencies, traditional, religious stakeholders, Hausa/Fulani community, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association(MACBAN),Farmers Associations and local vigilante groups, bombardments (air and land) of the various abodes of the bandits by the military and police under different code names, unfortunately, this did not yield expected result, and the declaration of state of emergency and intermittent cut off cell phone coverage to inhibit terrorists communication (Africa Growth Initiative, 2014; Onifade, Imhonopi,& Urim, 2013; WANEP, 2020;Chris et al., 2021). As part of the effort, in 2019, a peace deal was secured between the bandits and governors of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Sokoto, whose treaty includes disarmament, pardoning of bandits, and the release of kidnapped civilians (Chris et al., 2021). However, despite these regimes of security defence options, insecurity has persisted in the states. Sunday (2021) attributes that failure of the peace deal to two main factors – lack of commitment to the terms of the deal by bandits, and lack of identifiable leadership for which the broking of agreement for a set cause the proliferation of further groups. Chris et al. (2021), on their part, attribute the unyielding security regimes in combating insecurity to the topography of the area, lack of modern security warheads and technology, leakage of strategic information to bandits, and movement of small arms and light ammunition to the bandits. Also, the peculiar nature of the area that is geographically coterminous with the Republic of Niger makes border regulation difficult, thereby facilitating cross-border

criminality and trafficking in arms, persons, contraband, and narcotics (Sunday, 2021). The Centre for Democracy and Development in its September 2020 report provides that insecurity has remained unabated due to the under-policed territory with only one police officer for 666 Nigerians and a total of 301,737 police officers in a country with over 200 million citizens. The agency further adds that a Nigerian military base with about 6,000 officers and 150,000 soldiers is also grossly understaffed. Irrespective of this, it is axiomatic that the government must find a quick-fix solution to the problem and then a lasting solution.

4.3 Internal Security and Armed Banditry in Nigeria: The Human Cost of Uncontrolled Arms in Nigeria

Nigeria is not an exception to unconventional insurgency with the attendant political instability, crisis of sustainable socio-economic development and legitimacy crisis (Adegoke, 2020). Since the 1960 independence, Nigeria has experienced attacks by terrorists like the Maitatsine of 1980 and 1982 (Ogundiya & Amzat, 2008); the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) that occurred between the years 2000 and 2010; and the Boko Haram terrorist crisis, which has been ravaging the country since 2009 to date (Adegoke, 2020).

Figure 1: Insecurity scale in Nigeria between 2006 and 2016 with number of deaths



Source: Nigeria Watch (Eighth Report on Violence in Nigeria) (2018).

The mortality figures presented in Figure 1 demonstrate a sustained escalation of insecurity in Nigeria, which provides critical context for understanding armed banditry and internal security challenges in Zamfara and Kaduna States. The steady rise in deaths from 2006 to the peak in 2014, and the persistently high fatality rates thereafter, reflect the entrenchment of violent non-state actors. In Zamfara and Kaduna, armed banditry manifesting through cattle rustling, mass kidnappings, village raids, and highway attacks has become a dominant driver of insecurity, contributing significantly to these national casualty trends. The displacement of over 200,000 persons and cross-border refugee flows into the Republic of Niger further underscore the severity of internal security breakdowns in the northwest.

Reports by the International Crisis Group and Jimoh (2020) link this violence to the convergence of herder-allied militias, criminal gangs, vigilante groups, and jihadist elements, whose activities overlap spatially and operationally in Zamfara and Kaduna. These dynamics are reinforced by structural weaknesses, including poor institutional capacity, weak governance, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The spillover effects of Boko Haram–related violence, sectarian riots, and post-election unrest further compound insecurity in Kaduna, while artisanal mining and rural bandit networks intensify violence in Zamfara. Collectively, these factors illustrate how armed banditry both reflects and deepens Nigeria's internal security crisis, resulting in mass killings, humanitarian emergencies, and the erosion of state authority in the affected states.

Table1: Incidence of Kidnapping in Nigeria (2005-2009)

Year	**Fact**	**Figure**
2006	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	189
2009	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	690
2010	Cases of kidnapping recorded By the Police	579
2011	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	441

2012(Jan 1 toJune30 only	Cases of kidnapping recorded by the Police	285
Total		**2,184**

Source: Alemika (2012).

The kidnapping data in Table 1 indicate a sharp rise in abduction cases between 2006 and 2009, revealing the early consolidation of kidnapping as an organized criminal enterprise in Nigeria. This trend laid the structural foundation for contemporary armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna States, where kidnapping for ransom has evolved into a principal financing strategy for bandit groups. The persistence of recorded cases up to 2012 suggests weak deterrence capacity and limited policing effectiveness, conditions that later enabled bandit networks to expand across rural and forested areas of the North-West.

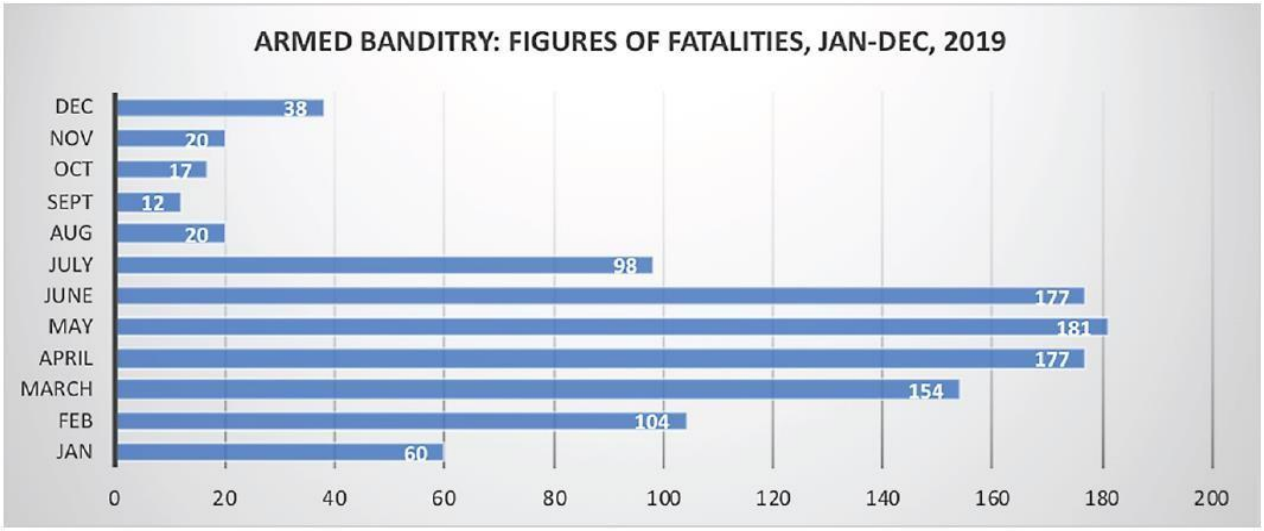
Table2: Impact of armed banditry in North-West Zone in Nigeria between 2019 and 2020.

S/N	Categories	Total Number of affected people
1	People Displaced	485,000
2	Fatalities Reported	2,454
3	People in Need	3,679,000

Source: ACAPS, 2020 extracted and compiled by Austin 2021.

Table 2 further links this criminal evolution to severe internal security breakdowns in the North-West zone. The displacement of about 485,000 persons and over 2,400 reported fatalities between 2019 and 2020 demonstrate the humanitarian and security consequences of armed banditry, with Zamfara and Kaduna among the most affected states. According to **ACAPS**, millions now require humanitarian assistance due to repeated village raids, mass kidnappings, and destruction of livelihoods. The identification of 2019 as the most perilous year underscores how banditry intensified into a full-scale internal security crisis, overwhelming state response mechanisms. Overall, the data illustrate that kidnapping and armed banditry are not isolated crimes but interconnected threats that have significantly undermined internal security and social stability in Zamfara and Kaduna States.

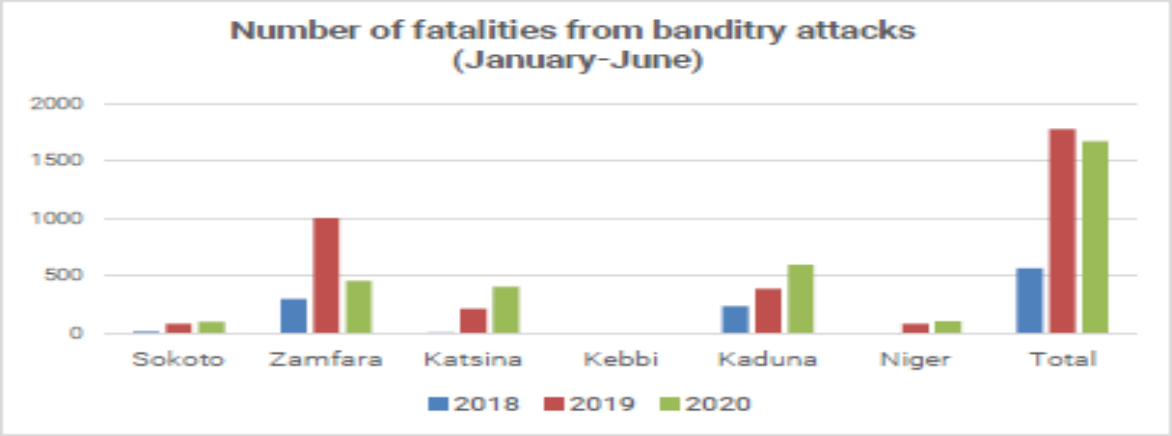
Figure 2: Armed banditry in Nigeria: figures of fatalities (January - December 2019)[8]



Source: WANEPNEWS (www.wanep.org/news/).

Figure 2 has May as the month with the highest fatality rate of 181, followed by June and April with 177 and 177 respectively, followed by March with 154 fatalities, followed by February with 104 fatalities, and January with 60 fatalities. December has 38, November and August with 20 fatalities each, November has 20, October 17 and September with 12 fatalities. While this holds for the entire country, armed banditry is peculiar to the Northwestern states. Figure 5 below present data on insecurity in five (5) Northwestern states.

Figure 3: Banditry attacks in selected Northwestern states



Source: Council on Foreign Relations 07/2020; Chart: A CAPS

Figure 3 above shows that Sokoto, Katsina, and Niger States have the lest number of fatalities from January to June in the three years under consideration while Zamfara and Kaduna States have the highest level of fatalities from banditry attacks. Zamfara State had over 200 fatalities in 2018, 1,000 in 2019, and approximately 500 fatalities in 2020 while Kaduna State had over 200 fatalities in 2018, approximately 500 in 2019 and over 500 fatalities in2020.

The Council on Foreign Relations in its 7th report in (2020) provides that:

> *Anew humanitarian crisis is emerging in Nigeria's northwest with the ongoing activities of armed groups referred to locally as 'bandits' in six states, namely Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, Niger and Kebbi. Attacks have included shooting and killing, cattle rustling, kidnapping, rape, torching of entire villages, and looting of valuables, and the numbers of fatalities and displaced people have continued to rise.While more than 1,100 people were killed in 2018 in the six states, over 2,200 were killed in 2019,and more than 1,600 fatalities were recorded between January – June 2020.*

The WFP 9th report of 2019 and UNHCR 9th and 26th report of 2019 and 2020 notes that by September 2019, banditry attacks had displaced over 160,000, producing over 41,000 refugees while by July 2020 the number of displacement rose to over 247,000 IDPs and over 60,000 refugees. Zamfara state accommodates about 69,000 IDPs, Kaduna 71,000, Katsina 61,000, Sokoto 45,000, and Niger 3,000 (UNHCR05/2020).About 60,000 people displaced from Sokoto, Katsina

and Zamfara have crossed the border to Maradi, in the Republic of Niger. More than 30,000 of the refugees arrived in Niger between May and June 2020 alone (UNHCR26/06/2020). While Katsina and Niger states have formal IDP camps (Faskari, Dandle, Dandume, and Batsari for Katsina, and Gwada and Central School Camp for Niger), most IDPs informally organise themselves by seeking shelter in football fields, and primary and secondary school buildings (Ummu Ameena Alyateem Foundation 29/06/2020)**.**

4.4 A Review of Internal Security and Armed Banditry in Zamfara State: Human and Material Cost.

Armed banditry has become a major source of insecurity concern in Zamfara state whose historicity is traced back to2009 and reached its crescendo after the 2011 general election (Anka, 2017; Nadama, 2019). Armed banditry in the state which constitutes the hub of banditry in the entire northwest has ignited serious suspicion between the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups in the state with the former accusing the latter of causing acute insecurity in its territory (Bagu&Smith, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018). In Zamfara State, the main source of insecurity is cattle rustling (Sulaiman, Umar, & Bar, 2018).

Commenting on the state of insecurity in Zamfara State, lawmaker Alhaji Sanusi Rikiji, stated that:

> *On Saturday in Gusau that from 2011 to date, 1,321 people were killed, 1,881 people's injured, and 185 cars and motorcycles were lost as a result of bandit attacks in the state. Rikiji, who is the Chairman of the state government Damage, Assessment and Relief Committee, said that more than 10,000 cattle were lost to rustlers and 2,688 hectares of farm lands and 10,000 houses were destroyed within the period under review"(Nigerian Expression, Feb. 2018).*

Table 3 provides more details about the state of insecurity in Zamfara state with their socio-economic implication.

Table 3: Profile of Armed banditry incidence in Zamfara State and impact on socio-economic development

Incidence	**Implications on socioeconomic development**
15 June, 2019: 34 killed in Tungar Kafau and Gidan waya, Zamfara state (Altine, 2019) [12]. **27July2018:**42 killed in the villages of Mashema, Kwashabawa and Birane districts of Zurmi local government area of Zamfara state.	**(i).** The undesired migration of Fulani and their cattle out of some affected areas in Zamfara to neighboring countries of Niger has serious socio-economic implications for the country. Tukur (2017)as cited in Anka(2017) noted that it cost a whole lot of money coupled with stress/risk to import cows from neighboring countries for consumption, aside from dairy and manure for farming activities. **(ii).** Socio-economic development has been brought to its knees by these acts of banditry especially in Zamfara and other neighboring states.
December 2018: 17 people in an attack on Magami Village of Faru District in Maradun Local Government Area (LGA) of Zamfara State (plus tv, 2018). **May 2019:** 23 persons killed in Tunga and Kabaje villages, Kaura Namoda Local Government Area by suspected bandits, Zamfara state.	Mohammed (2019) noted that schools have been destroyed and so most students do not go to school. Parents are not able to send their children to far school due to fear of being kidnapped or killed by the armed bandits. Mohammed further noted that socio-economic activities have been crippled as people are living in constant fear of the unknown. **(iii).**Cases of rape have continued to be on the increase and constitute another setback in the socio-economic development of the affected areas. Badaru (2017) argued that since 2014, there have been recorded cases of rape along The Dansadau forest by the armed bandits.

	(iv). Onuah &Akwagyram(2019) reported that mining activities have been suspended in Zamfara due to frequent attacks by armed bandits. The implication of the suspension is that revenue generated through mining in the state has been cut off, and this may likely affect the aggregate economic activities in the country.

Source: Silas 2019 cited in Adegoke (2020).

Tukur (2017), Daniya (2017), and Kiruwa (2017) cited in Epron (2019) documents that banditry has crippled economic life in Zurmi, Dansadau, Maradun, Shinkafi, Anka, and Tsafe communities of Zamfara state. The authors also provide that'no fewer than 36 communities have been destroyed and no fewer than 15,000 cattle were rustled'. Table 4 presents data on the number of persons killed in 25 villages in Zamfara state since 2013.

Table 4: Number of people killed in some villages of Zamfara State

S/N	Place	Number ofpeople killed
1.	Kizara	48
2.	Lilo	50
3.	Kwokaya	52
4.	Gidankaso	42
5.	Lingyado	25
6.	Bagega	2
7.	UnguwarGaladima	150
8.	TungerBaushe	26
9.	Guru	28
10.	Badarawa	11
11.	RakumiMallamawaand Kagara	20
12.	Cigama	20
13.	Malmo underDummavillage	37
14.	Yargada	1
15.	Jangeme	1
16.	Madaba	58
17.	Mutunji	30
18.	Mashema	26
19.	Dangulbi	24 including one Police Officer
20.	BirninMagaji	15
21.	Filinga	2
22.	Kabaro	19
23.	Tungar Rakumi	22 including one Police Officer
24.	Zurmi	10
25.	Wonka	10
Total		**729**

Source: (Anka, 2017; Police Report, 2014).

Table 4 shows that a total of 729 people have been killed in bandits attacks in 25 villages of Zamfara state since 2013. While the discourse on insecurity have mainly centered on human lives, available data shows that animals too have received a faire damage from the insecurity

in Zamfara state. Table 4 shows the trend in 19 villages of Zamfara state.

Table 5: Estimated number of livestock rustled in the Zamfara State in 2016

Area	Number of Animals
Badarawa	Over 200
Bagega	Over 4,500
Dorayi	Over 2,500
Filinga	Over 5,000
GidanKaso	1,455
Guru	270
Jangeme	Over 600
Kizara	Over 4,000
Lilo	90
Lingyado	Over 2,100
Madaba	106
NasarawaGodal	Over1000
NasarawaMai Layi	500
Rukudawa	250
ShigamaandKwokeya	1,020
Tsabre	Over 3,500
TungarBaushe	1,110
Unguwar Galadima	850
Yargada	230

Source: MACBAN (2016), citadoem RUFAI (2016).

A Review of Internal Security and Armed Banditry in Kaduna State: Injuries and Fatalities

In Kaduna state, the Kamuku forest popularly referred to as"Sambisa"forest has become a home for terrorist groups. Available data shows show that as early as 2012, Kaduna State was already awash by the incidence of banditry attacks with its corresponding impact on lives and properties. Table 5 shows this trend.

Table 6: Cases of banditry attacks in Kaduna State (2012and2013)

Date	Place/Impact
14thOctober,2012	Bandits attack the Dogon Dawa village in Birnin Gwari district, killing 20 people
8thJune, 2013	Bandits attack three villages in Birnin Gwari District, Kaduna State, killing seven residents and carting away over 300 cattle. The attack displaced 3,000 residents, who were sheltered at a primary school.
13thJune, 2013	Bandits raid Kwasa-Kwasa village in Birnin Gwari district of Kaduna State, killing five people, including two soldiers and three local vigilantes.

Source: IRIN (2013)

Table 6 shows the incidence of banditry attacks in 14th October 2012, 8thJune 2013, and 13thJune 2013 in Birnin Gwari District and Kwasa-Kwasa village of Kaduna State led to the killing of a total of twenty- five persons, and displaced 3,000 residents. The armed group assaulted women, stole money, and burnt homes (IRIN, 2013). The Centre for Democracy

and Development in its September 2020 report provide that in July 2020, 100 people were killed in 11 coordinated attacks in Chikun, Kaura and Zango-Kataf Local Governments with 511 deaths caused by different

Cases of attacks. The report also adds that from 5th – 6th July, 33 people were killed in attacks on Zangon-Kataf Local Government while 8 abducted (7 students and 1 teacher in Chikun Local Government) on 24th August 2020.

According to Amnesty International (2018:22),

> *Several villages in Birnin-Gwari LGA of Kaduna State continue to face security challenges similar to those in Zamfara State. Their situation is even more volatile, due to the proximity of the LGA to Zamfara State. The forests that cut across the two states (Kaduna and Zamfara states), made the residents vulnerable to repeated abductions.*

Okoli and Ugwu (2019) further provide that in 2013, over 1,000 cows were stolen by armed-to- the-teeth rustlers from a farm belonging to the former Vice President, Namadi Sambo, in the Birin- Gwari area of Kaduna State; on March 25, 2019; a catholic priest in Ankuwa, Kachia Local Government of Kaduna State; scores of suspected bandits raided Gwaska village in Birnin–Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State, killing 45 persons on May 6, 2018; on April 28, 2018, 40 miners were killed at Janruwa Village and a week later (May 5th), 71 people were killed in Gwaska (these are villages in Birnin-Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State); scores of suspected bandits raided Gwaska village in Birnin–Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State, killing 45 persons on May 6, 2018; on April 28, 2018, 40 miners were killed at Janruwa Village and a week later (May5th), 71 people were killed in Gwaska (these are villages in Birnin- Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna State); travelers were attacked by suspected bandits near Gidam Busa along Kaduna-Abuja expressway on July 22, 2018. The 2021 annual security report in Kaduna revealed that:

> *A total of 1,192 fatalities and 891 injured victims from armed banditry, communal clashes, and other violent attacks across the State. Out of the total fatalities (1,192), 1,038 were males, 104 females and 50 children. 2021 recorded a rise in casualty figures compared to 2020 which recorded 937 deaths.*

The report also adds that 3,348 people–comprising of 2,033 males, 340 children, and

985women –were abducted in 2021. The statistics indicates a significant increase in the abductions compared to 1,972 victims recorded in 2020 in the state. The report also provides that there were 45 (of which 29 children of) victims of sexual based violence (SGBV), namely rape, committed by armed bandits in 2021. Between March 22 and 30, 2022, accumulative total of 91 people were reportedly killed, 112 abducted and 3 others injured in coordinated attacks carried out by suspected armed bandits in Kaduna State (WANEP). On March 30, 2022, armed bandits reportedly abducted 6 people including an official of the Nigeria Custom Service (NCS) at Kofar Gayan in Zaria LGA (ChannelsTV,2022),while 23 people were killed and several others injured in coordinated attacks by bandits in Anguwar Maiwa and Anguwar Kanwa Villages of Giwa LGA on March 29, 2022 (Daily Trust, 2022). Similarly, 15 people were also killed by bandits at Hayin Kanwa Village in Giwa LGA on March 27, 2022 (Punch, 2022).Several other violent attacks by suspected militia herders and reprisal attacks in Agbanand Maraban Kagoro Community in Kaura LGA of Kaduna State led to the death of 37 people and 7 others injured with two herders' settlements in Zauru and Kurdan Villages of Zango-Kataf LGA burnt down in the incident on March 20, 2022 (Daily Trust, 2022).

Discussion of Findings

The compiled figures and narratives reveal a clear escalation, spatial concentration, and deepening consequences of armed banditry in Nigeria, with Zamfara and Kaduna States emerging as epicentres of the crisis. Content analysis of the data shows three dominant themes: intensity of violence, humanitarian and socio-economic costs, and institutional security failure.

First, the temporal pattern of fatalities in 2019 indicates that armed banditry is not random but cyclical and coordinated. Fatalities peaked between March and June, with May recording the highest death toll nationwide, suggesting intensified operations during the dry season when rural mobility is easier and farming communities are more exposed. Although these figures represent national trends, the disaggregated data show that Zamfara and Kaduna consistently recorded the highest fatalities among Northwestern states, confirming their centrality to the banditry landscape.

Also, the state-level comparison demonstrates a disproportionate burden on Zamfara and Kaduna. Zamfara's fatalities rose dramatically from about 200 deaths in 2018 to

over 1,000 in 2019, while Kaduna showed a sustained upward trend, culminating in over 500 deaths by 2020. This pattern reflects entrenched bandit networks operating from forest corridors spanning both states, notably the Dansadau–Kamuku axis, which facilitates cross-border movement, arms trafficking, and repeated attacks. Reports by the Council on Foreign Relations further corroborate that banditry in these states involves killings, mass kidnappings, cattle rustling, village destruction, and sexual violence, indicating a multidimensional internal security threat rather than isolated criminality.

The study analysis shows of displacement and livelihood data highlights the humanitarian dimension of insecurity. By mid-2020, over 247,000 persons had been displaced across the Northwest, with Zamfara and Kaduna accounting for the largest proportions of internally displaced persons. The forced migration of pastoralists and farmers, large-scale cattle rustling, and destruction of farmlands have crippled local economies, undermined food security, and weakened social cohesion. The suspension of mining activities in Zamfara and school closures due to fear of abduction further demonstrate how banditry erodes human capital development and long-term stability.

The Kaduna case illustrates the spillover and convergence of security threats. Recurrent attacks in Birnin Gwari, Chikun, Giwa, Zango-Kataf, and Kaura LGAs reveal the overlap between armed banditry, communal violence, and militia activity. The sharp rise in fatalities and abductions between 2020 and 2022, including attacks on highways and schools, signals declining state control and weak preventive security mechanisms. As noted by Amnesty International, the porous forest borders linking Kaduna and Zamfara have amplified vulnerability to repeated abductions and raids.

The evidence shows that armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna is systemic, organized, and persistent, with severe implications for internal security, humanitarian stability, and socio-economic development. The data collectively portray a security crisis marked by rising fatalities, mass displacement, economic paralysis, and the erosion of state authority, underscoring the need for integrated security, governance, and development responses.

More so, a content analysis of the literature on armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna States reveals two interrelated analytical clusters: **structural causes sustaining**

banditry and **policy responses constrained by institutional and contextual weaknesses.**

On the causal dimension, the texts consistently emphasize **geographical and governance-related factors.** Zamfara and Kaduna are repeatedly identified as more vulnerable than other Northwestern states due to their vast, poorly regulated forest reserves, difficult savannah terrain, and proximity to porous international borders. These conditions facilitate cross-border criminality, arms trafficking, and the establishment of bandit enclaves. Studies by Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim and reports by the **International Crisis Group** and **WANEP** converge on weak state control of forests and pastoral spaces as a core driver of insecurity. Poverty, unemployment, and poor governance further provide a fertile recruitment base for bandit groups, reinforcing the persistence of violence in both states.

A second dominant theme is **resource-based conflict exacerbated by environmental change**. Climate change, desertification, and deforestation have intensified competition between farmers and pastoralists over land and water. This competition has escalated into recurrent farmer–herder conflicts, which, over time, have mutated into organized armed banditry. Content analysis shows that this environmental-security nexus is central to understanding why banditry has become entrenched in Zamfara and Kaduna rather than episodic.

Regarding policy responses, the literature reflects a **fragmented and largely reactive security strategy.** Governments at federal and state levels have alternated between coercive approaches (military offensives, aerial bombardments, communication shutdowns) and conciliatory measures (amnesty, arms-for-cash, peace deals). Despite the involvement of stakeholders such as traditional leaders, vigilante groups, and associations like **Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association**, these interventions have yielded limited results. The failure of peace agreements is repeatedly attributed to lack of trust, absence of centralized bandit leadership, and weak enforcement mechanisms.

Institutional capacity constraints form the final analytical strand. Reports from the **Centre for Democracy and Development** highlight severe understaffing of security agencies, intelligence leakage, inadequate technology, and the unchecked flow of small

arms across borders. These weaknesses undermine both short-term "quick-fix" security measures and the prospects for sustainable peace.

The review shows that armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna is driven by a convergence of geography, environmental stress, socio-economic deprivation, and weak institutions, while policy responses have been undermined by poor coordination, limited capacity, and structural vulnerabilities. Addressing the crisis therefore requires not only military solutions but long-term governance, border management, and environmental-security reforms.

The dynamics of armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna States can be theoretically illuminated by integrating Social Exchange Theory and the Wobble Economy Thesis, as both provide complementary explanations for the persistence and organization of violence.

From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, banditry is sustained by rational cost–benefit calculations made by actors operating in contexts of weak state authority. The data showing cyclical violence, coordinated attacks, and negotiated peace deals reflect strategic exchanges in which bandits weigh risks against rewards such as ransom payments, cattle, territorial control, and temporary amnesty. The repeated collapse of peace agreements further indicates a breakdown of trust and reciprocity between the state and armed groups, undermining cooperative security outcomes.

The Wobble Economy Thesis deepens this explanation by situating banditry within structurally unstable local economies characterized by poverty, livelihood collapse, environmental stress, and informal survival strategies. In Zamfara and Kaduna, displacement, cattle rustling, mining suspensions, and agricultural disruption reveal an economy "wobbling" between legality and criminality. Armed banditry thus emerges as an alternative economic system embedded in forest-based networks and cross-border markets, rather than mere criminal deviance. Both theories explain banditry as a rational response to economic precarity and governance failure, where violence becomes an exchange mechanism within an unstable political economy.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

A content analysis of armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna States highlights two main areas: structural causes of banditry and ineffective policy responses. Key factors include geographical vulnerabilities, such as expansive forest reserves and proximity to borders, which facilitate criminal activity, combined with socio-economic issues like poverty and unemployment that fuel recruitment for bandit groups. Environmental changes have exacerbated resource conflicts between farmers and herders, resulting in organised banditry. Policy measures, both coercive and conciliatory, have been largely ineffective due to fragmented strategies, lack of trust, and weak institutional frameworks. Reports indicate serious shortcomings in security agency capacities, including understaffing and inadequate technology. Therefore, addressing banditry requires comprehensive reforms in governance, border management, and environmental security, beyond military interventions. To address the challenges that inhibit the country from stemming the tide of armed banditry in Nigeria identified in this study to make for an enduring peace to foster socioeconomic development, we recommend the following public policy measures:

i. Integration of ICT into the security architecture of Nigeria, partnership with advanced countries, training and development of arm personnel on modern war fare.

ii. Government should ensure social justice across the states and with the local inhabitants of the communities to aid intelligence gathering and protection of residents.

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