

**POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BANDITRY IN NIGERIA:
A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY**

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Abstract

Banditry in Nigeria has become a prayer point in many homes. Over the years, the term has metamorphosed and grown into a structured and organized institution, creating its own political and economic system. Its organization and mode of operation has made it a huge threat to national security. People are constantly on the lookout in order to avoid being robbed, raped, kidnapped, or murdered. The response of the government to this vice has not been as swift as expected. Even, the economic strength of bandits seems to be more effective than that of the military that is funded by the government. This study, therefore, explores extensively the political economy of banditry and how they have evolved over the years. For its theoretical framework, it adopted the Queer Ladder Theory (QLT). “Queer Ladder Theory is of the notion that organised crime thrives in contexts where the government's capacity to dictate, sanction and deter crime is poor; where public corruption is endemic; and where prospects for legitimate livelihood opportunities are slim.” Studies of other researchers were carefully visited, with relevant information sifted out to guide this study. By recommendation, the paper encourages the government to invest heavily in security so that the economy of the military could outmatch that of the bandits. It also suggests to citizens to be careful of their movements, especially around the forest areas, as those are mostly the hideouts of the bandits.

Keywords: Bandits, Banditry, Government, Nigeria, Economy, National Security.

Introduction

The Nigerian state has for a long time suffered through the hands of bandits. The reports often broadcasted about banditry activities are alarming. Adegoke (2020) expressed his concern when he noted that “banditry has become a harsh reality in today's Nigeria society; it has come in different forms of manifesting as kidnapping, suicide attacks, self-suicide bombing, insurgency, armed robbery and the likes.” Their manifestation is becoming wider and their modes of operation are becoming bigger by the day. Their weapons are sometimes said to dwarf those of the Nigerian military. Most often, they carry out their operations in smooth manner, and often get away with it. “Hand in glove

with insurgency, banditry has transformed into an aggravated national security conundrum that can be rightly characterized as crime-terror convolution” (Makarenko, 2004).

Okoli and Ochim's (2016) concern, which was later reinforced by Mustapha (2019) that “the increasing attacks of bandit groups have led to the destruction of lives and properties, displacement of people from their communities; and a growing numbers of widows; widowers and orphans, who now reside in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps following the continued attacks of armed bandits on both farming and pastoral communities across different areas of the states.” This is something that should reinforce serious concern. The number of people that have been rendered as internally displaced are of numbers that are almost uncountable, mostly across the northern states.

In commemoration of their smooth operations, which, of course, is a huge problem to the society, they keep building structures, and expanding their territories. Olaniyan (2014) noted that “reports indicate the flourishing of bandit groups, whose members were seen displaying automatic weapons, terrorising herders’ settlements, farms, villages and the highways with the mission of killing people, kidnapping and pillaging cows.” The government, in many ways, have contributed to the development and expansion of banditry, in that some of their actions are ways of agitating their grievances, thereby causing harms to innocent citizens. “Banditry may well be a political economy problem resulting from the absence of equitable access to resources and a deliberate agenda to exclude others from social formations.” (Oluyemi-Kusa & Salihu, 2016).

The effect of banditry is mostly tragic, leading to loss of lives of innocent people, loss of properties, and, of course, retrogression in the country's economy. “Banditry leads to disruption of life as we know it. The desire to avoid strife and its attendant consequences leads to displacement and loss of lives and properties. Armed bandit also leads to the existence of constant fear of attacks, which take away human dignity and people's ability to organize, seek and engage in livelihoods” (This Day, 2014). Porter (2007) put it in a more succinct manner when it said that “this lone avenue for survival—petty trading is disrupted by banditry.” “Banditry counts as one of the critical challenges to Nigeria's contemporary national security” (Okoli, 2021). “This is in view of its fatal consequences in various parts of the country over the years” (Kuna and Jibrin, 2016).

Some of the actions of the bandits are actually their chosen ways of forcing the government to acknowledge them. Some of the bandits often release videos after attacks, directing their messages to the government. At times, in cases where innocent citizens have been adopted, they demand ransom from the government.

Conceptual Discourse

Shalangwa (2013) regards “banditry as the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defence, especially in semi-organised groups for the purpose of overpowering the victim

and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals. Such bandits are usually perceived as outlaws, desperate and lawless marauders who do not have a definite residence or destination but roam around the forest and mountains to avoid being identified, detected and arrested.”

Egwu (2016) “in a restricted manner, described banditry as a practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle from their ranches.” In the same vein, banditry is reflected in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape and the brazen and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen and reprisal attacks from surviving victims, a development that has been brought to the front burner of national security (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018).

“However, where the term banditry is connected to rural, it implies a group of rural outlawed involved in illicit activities such as raiding of villages, kidnappings and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, bandits are gang groups terrorising and dispossessing local people or travellers of their valuable items or properties such as merchandise, money, cattle, camel, and sheep, among others. They operate within and along rural borders with the assistance of their local collaborators including in some cases, state agents deployed to work for the safety and security of the people” (Abdullahi, 2019). In this regard, Onimode (2001) highlights that “car snatching robbery of homes and offices, way-laying of travellers (high-way robbery) are common forms of armed robbery in African countries. Their incidence has been rising since the African crises started in the 1980s.”

“Economic or political interests motivate banditry. The former refers to banditries motivated by the imperative of material accumulation while the latter has to do with those driven by the quest to rob, to assault or to liquidate a person or a group of persons based on political or ideological dispositions” (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). According to Rotberg (2007), “crime against persons, including murder, rape, and robbery has grown in scale and viciousness in Nigeria since 1999”.

The evolution of this menace has been a huge threat to national security. Some researchers like Igbuzor (2011) and Oche (2001) while conceptualising security placed importance on the “absence of threats to peace, stability, national cohesion, political and socio-economic objectives of a country.” Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) described security as “stability and continuity of livelihood (stable and steady income), predictability of daily life (knowing what to expect), protection from crime (feeling safe), and freedom from psychological harm (safety or protection from emotional stress which results from the assurance or knowing that one is wanted, accepted, loved and protected in one's community or neighbourhood and by people around.”

Security embraces all measures designed to protect and safeguard the citizenry and the resources of individuals, groups, businesses and the nation against sabotage or violent occurrence (Ogunleye, Adewale, Alese, & Ogunde, 2013).

The inability of the country's security system to put banditry under subjection has regarded major parts of the country as insecure. In Beland's opinion, "insecurity is the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection." Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Rabaro(2013) defined insecurity from two perceptions. Firstly, "insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune."

Methodology

Due to the nature of the problem under investigation, qualitative method was used in data collection. Qualitative method mainly depends on secondary source of data like historical documents, books, magazines, journal articles, websites, etc. However, it is the nature of our investigation that defines this method of data collection adopted. The study adopted a content analysis approach whereby data was mainly obtained through extensive literature from books, scholarly journal articles and relevant internet materials. Each of the data used to conduct this study is relevant to the study and it enabled the reliability and credibility of the study.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted Queer Ladder Theory (QLT) as its theoretical framework. Queer Ladder Theory is associated with the American Sociology, Daniel Bell (1919-2011). The framework was coined in his attempt to explain the "instrumental essence of organised crime as a desperate means of socio—economic empowerment and social climbing." "Often ascribed to Queer Ladder Theory is the notion that organised crime thrives in contexts where the government's capacity to dictate, sanction and deter crime is poor; where public corruption is endemic; and where prospects for legitimate livelihood opportunities are slim" (Nwoye, 2000; Lyman, 2007). The absence of opposition only gives the bandits a viable atmosphere to thrive. As a result, they wield power beyond imagination and build their own mini-economy in such a way that their structure becomes impenetrable.

"The basic assumptions of QLT are; organised crime is an instrumental behaviour, it is a means to an end; it is an instrument of social climbing and/or socio-economic advancement; and it is a measure to accumulate wealth and build power" (Mallory, 2007; Okoli&Orinya, 2013). "Under these circumstances, the incentive to indulge in crime is high, while deterrence from criminal living is low. In other words, the benefits of committing a crime surpass the costs and/or risks involved. This creates pretext for criminal impunity and franchise" (Okoli&Orinya, 2013).

The concept of "Ladder" in QLT signifies untoward pattern of social mobility. Hence, those who take to organised crime, such banditry, do so as a desperate means of economic accumulation and socio-economic empowerment (Mustapha, 2019). "Therefore, a necessary consequence of this trend is prevalence in crime rate and a state of insecurity" (Okoli&Orinya, 2013).

In application to the context of this paper, “QLT enables one to come to terms with the prevalence of organised crime in Northwest region of Nigeria. In this regard, it is observed that the phenomenon of banditry in Northwest Nigeria has been driven by criminal quest for economic accumulation in an environment. This has been worsened by the prevailing socio-economic discontent and attendant livelihood crisis in the state, in addition to the seeming indolence of relevant government agencies towards arresting the ugly situation”(Rosenje& Adeniyi, 2021).

Banditry from the Historical Standpoint

During the nineteenth century in Europe and the Americas, a bandit was known as a freedom fighter whose objective was to make sure that the oppressed and subjugated are liberated. In the words of Warty (1994), “a bandit in the 19th century Europe and Americas was a freedom fighter whose aim was partly to ensure the emancipation of the oppressed from the upper class or colonised over the colonizer.”In Mexico, “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” (Watts, 1987). As a result, the common man of the pre-industrial age sees bandits as heroes, while the government sees them as outlaws and hoodlums. This was because the common man is mostly oppressed by the fat government, automatically making the government a major target of bandits. Bandits in traditional African setting are, however, very different from the bandits of the Americas and Europe. According to Curott and Fink (2008),“they are specialised in armed robbery and other related crimes.”Rufa'i (2018) further added that “the most common feature of banditry in Africa has been maiming, killing and wanton destruction of property, hence, it has a direct relationship with cattle rustling.” “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 effect the stealing of livestock” (Addo, 2006). In many ways, the idea of the introduction of armed weapon into banditry has further increase the threat of it therein.“Hence, the application of force during livestock theft is what is herein considered cattle rustling and armed banditry” (Murtala, 2018).

While the idea of banditry has been a major part of the history of the Americas and Europe, it has also been a long debacle in Africa, especially in West Africa. “Its origin and development are as old as the sub-region itself dating back to inter-tribal periods characterised by conflicts and wars over scarce economic resources and territorial expansion for political influence. Most parts of Africa experienced these forms of conflicts during the slave trading, colonial, and post-colonial periods”(Rosenje& Adeniyi, 2021). Abdullahi (2019) is of the opinion that “though there have been remarkable changes on the nature and pattern of banditry and other forms of conflicts in West Africa, the socio-economic and political reasons remain significant in explaining the prevalence of the phenomenon in the sub-region.” He went further to assert that “perhaps this explains why the struggle for political independence and the subsequent establishment of the post-colonial state in West Africa were considered as some of the major events which shaped the pattern of banditry in the sub-region. It also suggests that socio-economic and political realities could be used to explain the intensity, prevalence, and the dynamics of banditry as evident in different parts of West Africa. For instance, in

Tillaberi and Tahoua region of Niger Republic, banditry such as cattle and sheep rustling as well as the killing of innocent citizens in border communities has a strong connection with the general poverty situation of the people arising from poor governance of the country” (Abdullahi, 2019). The progression of banditry in Mali, for instance, has been associated with religious extremist groups which, over time has been provoked by feeble state institutions as it relates to service delivery. The United Nation Office for West Africa and the Sahel (2018) reports that “weak state institutions, insurgency, and lawlessness have pushed more pastoralists into religious extremism, leading to rising in bandits' activities in northern Mali.” Abdullahi (2019) added that “the frequency of bandits' activities has created tensions between farmers and herders as well as exacerbated the proliferation of armed groups in different regions of Mali.” In Mauritania, however, trans-border banditry by the resident groups as well as encounters that relates to resource management and distribution of pastoralists lands clarifies the nature and form of rural banditry in the country. “Unlike Mali and Niger, competition over resources, particularly water resources, pasture, and animal feeds led to a rapid increase of banditry in Mauritania” (UNOWAS, 2018). “Similarly, livestock theft is becoming a trans-border criminal activity affecting movement and relations along Burkina Faso and Ghanaian border. Local bandit groups mostly Burkinabe connived with traditional elites to rustle livestock and share the proceeds of their criminality” (Abdullahi, 2019).

Being the state with the largest population in West Africa, Nigeria too is faced with very serious banditry threats. This menace has found its way into the country even before the country attained its political entity. In regard to this, Jaafar (2018) opined that “there were recorded instances of banditry in the colonial Nigeria as far back as the 1930s.” Putting this claim in a sort of historical perspective, Jaafar clarifies that “in those days, wayfarers and merchants travelling along our local economic roads usually faced the threats and dangers of ambush from nondescript bandits. Armed bandits and criminals were known to be targeting goods ferried on the back of donkeys, camels and ox carts. Those bandits on our trade routes would forcefully take those goods and disappear into the bush. That is just one dimension of the problem then. In other instances, the bandits would sometimes raid farming communities and villages with the intent of wilful killing and wanton destruction of property. During such raids, the bandits would destroy virtually everything in their path, including valuables, farm produce, etc. This subculture has been in existence even before the coming of colonialists to the territories of northern Nigeria” (Jaafar, 2018).

“Although banditry is as old as Nigeria, it has nevertheless gradually transformed in scope and dimension overtime from its rudimentary phase, as affirmed by the foregoing Jaafar's citation, to a more complex and complicated pattern of criminality” (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2015; Egwu 2016). The contemporary evolution of banditry could be understood against the framework of the prevailing security tensions in Nigeria. “Accordingly, gangs of criminal, often youth from farming and herding communities and/or local bandits, take advantage of the growing insecurity, fear and cyclical attacks to loot villages, engage in highway robbery, and rustle cattle for personal gain. Both farming and herding communities often suffer from this criminality” (Bagu and Smith, 2017; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

The Economy of Banditry in Nigeria.

The economy of banditry in Nigeria has grown beyond just robbing and smuggling petty things. These days, banditry has built its own political economy, and operated in a more structural manner. The North-western part of Nigeria consists of drivers of banditry in socio-existential conditions that exemplify the interior as well as the frontiers of the region. “Most attacks occur in remote villages, close to forested regions in the north-west where there is little security presence” (Gaye, 2018). “In likewise manner, banditry occurs in large swathes of forest reserves that are generally out of the reach of the Nigerian security operatives. Most of the bandit activities take place in state-owned reserves such as the Kamuku, Kiyabana, and Fagore forests in Northern Nigeria. The forests offer perfect locations as hide outs for the criminals to evade arrest from security forces” (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021). “The reluctance of the Nigerian security operatives to enter these forest areas seems to be largely due to inefficiency, connivance of the local people, lack of sophisticated equipment and poor motivation of the Nigerian security forces” (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016).

The high rate of unemployment is yet another factor that greatly promotes the act of banditry. This has invariably led to high rate of poverty, which often agitate some of the people and force them to indulge in criminal acts. “The poverty index in the Northwest is 77.7% (NBS, 2012; Rosenje & Moliki, 2016). “These figures have continued to drastically increase yearly as Nigerian institutions keep graduating batches of youths with the prior impression of getting better jobs and opportunities after graduation” (Adegoke, 2019). “The anxiety from Nigerian graduates that later turn to frustration, and then to aggression on the government is what has fuelled the emergence of most of these bandit attacks and security threats in the country” (Suleiman, 2017; Mustapha, 2019). Additionally, Kilishi, Mobolaji, Usman, Yakubu and Yaru (2014 as cited in Abdulkabir, 2017) campaigned that “the rising wave of crime in Nigeria has been blamed on the increasing level of unemployment.” As a result, the idle youths tend to be occupied in unlawful activities in order to meet up with modern inclinations. “Suffice to say that the youths easily get enticed to riches as a result of the prevailing 'get rich quick syndrome' that pervade the country. Hence, they tend to do whatever it takes to get rich quick. Therefore, the Nigeria's high rate of unemployment, especially the increasing rate of youth's unemployment is what majorly prompts the jobless youths in the country to resort to violent crime like banditry” (Adagba, Ugwu, & Eme, 2012; Epron, 2019).

It is almost unarguable that the nation's weak security and intelligence system contributes to the alarming rate of banditry activities. “This could have possibly been caused by the inadequate equipment for the security arm of government, both in weaponry and training” (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Rabaro, 2013). “This is in addition to poor attitudinal and behavioural disposition of security personnel. In many cases, security personnel assigned to deal with given security situations lack the expertise and equipment to handle the situations in a way to prevent them from occurring. Even when these exist, some personnel get influenced by ethnic, religious or communal sentiment and are easily prejudiced by their personal interest to serve their people, rather than the nation” (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Rabaro, 2013). “Instead of being national watchdogs and defending national interest and values, and protecting people from being harmed by

criminals, they soon become saboteurs of government efforts, by supporting and fuelling insecurity through either leaking vital security information or conniving with criminals to acquire weapons or to escape the long arm of the law” (Offem&Ichoku, 2015).

While poverty contributes majorly to the thriving economy of banditry in Nigeria, not all forms of criminal acts could be linked to it. According to Epron (2014) and Adegoke (2019), “it was discovered that because of the attractive benefits accruing from banditry activity, most people, especially the youths tend to join the bandit gangs in the Northwest of Nigeria.” Another major factor of the thriving of banditry in Nigeria that is worthy of consideration is the issue of arms proliferation. “There has been an incremental influx of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) into Nigeria from the Sahel since the fall of Ghadaffi's regime in Libya” (Gaye, 2018). “These arms and weapons end up in the hands of non-state actors like terrorists, militants and bandits, who use them to terrorise individuals and communities. In September 2018, military troops in joint operations with personnel of the Department of State Service (DSS) arrested two suspected illicit arms dealers along Funtua-Gusau road with 1,479 rounds of 7.62mm (special) ammunition, on their way to deliver the 10 weapons to armed bandits” (Adeniyi 2018). “Incidents such as this have been prevalent in various states in Nigeria where banditry has become the order of the day” (Okoli&Ugwu, 2019).

Chikwuma and Francis (2014) observes that “crimes thrive in context where there's little deterrence. In most of Nigeria's rural communities, there are many opportunities for criminal activity. Some of these communities are located in remote areas where there is little or no government presence. More importantly, households are in some cases separated by and interspersed with forest areas. This renders them vulnerable to banditry. The situation is made worse by the absence of effective community policing mechanisms capable of addressing the hinterlands peculiar security challenges.” “Geography plays a role, too. North-western Nigeria's forestlands are vast, rugged and hazardous. They are also grossly under policed. Some of the forests run alongside the diverse porous borderlines on the region's frontiers. Borders are poorly delineated, under-policed and thus not well governed. The consequences of this are an abundance of nefarious activity, often facilitated by the criminal syndicates” (Rufai, 2018).

“The areas are also interspersed by diverse forested landscapes, some of which are dotted by wetlands, rocks and caves. Apart from being separated from each other, they are equally far separated from the centres of governance at the local and state levels. The forestlands of the region are vast, rugged and hazardous. Most importantly, they are grossly under-policed to the point that makes them conducive for all forms of jungle criminality. In view of this, violent crimes, such as banditry, have festered and thrived in such forested areas. Most attacks occur in remote villages, close to forested regions in the north-west where there is little security presence” (Gaye, 2018). This enables them to execute their plans in more organized ways, and of course, expand their territories and establish their presence in more places.

Conclusion

Banditry, over the years, has evolve and become a huge threat to humanity. In Nigeria, during the nineteenth century, bandits were known to strike only people with merchandise, collecting their goods and running into the bush. Today, the word bandits often bring fear into the minds of people. They are now known to be armed, operating in different dimensions, from kidnapping, to raping, and even murdering people when ransom isn't paid quickly. Travellers are sceptical as to which mean of transportation to use as there are constant reports of bandits attacking travellers taking over the headlines. The slow response of the government has further strengthened the political system of banditry, making them to organize their structure and operate in more systematic and organize ways. In most of those reports, these bandits often carry out their operations smoothly, without the intervention of security forces. As a result, these bandits use this to brainwash their recruits during recruitment procedures, assuring them that they would not be intercepted upon by the security. To dispute that this is working will only be a denial of the reality, as it is obvious that the body of bandits in the country keeps enlarging by the day.

Recommendations

In order that the national security of the country might be strengthened, the following recommendations are made:

1. The political and economic structure of bandits need to be disrupted. For this to happen, the national security and intelligence needs to be proactive and start invading the areas where these bandits often seek refuge.
2. Citizens should be absolutely careful of the places they go to. Most at times, these bandits use the forests as their hideouts. It is therefore advised that forests area, especially area that has history with violence, should be avoided.
3. Government needs to invest more in national security, as it has often been reported that the economic strength of the bandits seems to far be stronger than that of the military. It will be difficult to combat these criminals with flimsy weapons when the bandits themselves are making use of sophisticated weapons.
4. Anytime bandits are carrying out their operations, which often take hours in some instances, reports should quickly be made to the authorities, and it is expected that the authorities take adequate and immediate steps that would liberate the people.

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