

Banditry and Food Security in North West Nigeria, 2015-2025

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between banditry and food security and the impact of banditry-induced displacement on household food security in North West Nigeria between 2015 and 2025. Armed banditry, comprising killings, kidnapping, cattle rustling and farm destruction, escalated sharply across Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Kebbi States over the decade, disrupting a region long regarded as Nigeria's agricultural heartland. The study was anchored on Human Security Theory and the Political Economy Theory of Conflict, which together linked the human consequences of insecurity to its economic and institutional causes. A case study research design was adopted, relying entirely on secondary qualitative sources, including academic journals, government and institutional reports, publications of international organisations, and credible media reporting, since the prevailing insecurity made primary fieldwork in the affected communities unsafe. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Findings established a structural and consistently negative relationship between banditry and food security, with over 60 percent of farmers abandoning farmland during peak attack periods and rural food insecurity in Zamfara State rising from 38 percent in 2015 to 61 percent in 2024. Displacement was found to severely undermine household food security, stripping families of farmland, livestock, tools and stored grain, and leaving them dependent on humanitarian assistance that was often inadequate and irregular, with women, children and the elderly disproportionately affected. The study concluded that banditry operated as a structural and self-reinforcing driver of food insecurity, and recommended enhanced security for farming communities, targeted food and livelihood support for displaced households, and livelihood restoration programmes for returnees.

Keywords: *banditry; food security; internal displacement; North West Nigeria; human security*

I. Introduction

Food security has long been recognised as one of the basic conditions for sustainable development and social welfare, yet consistent access to adequate and nutritious food remains a major concern in North West Nigeria (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022a). The zone, comprising Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Kebbi States, has historically been one of Nigeria's principal producers of maize, millet, sorghum, rice and groundnuts (Ekpa, Adeola, Ojoko, & Amadu, 2025), yet over the past decade it has experienced escalating disruption of food production and distribution due to armed banditry, organised criminal attacks on rural communities involving killings, kidnapping, cattle rustling and farm destruction (International Crisis Group, 2020). Banditry in the North West became markedly more prominent from around 2015, when the relative pacification of the North East following the military campaign against Boko Haram left security gaps that armed groups in the North West's forests and ungoverned rural spaces were able to exploit (Ismail & Nwogbo, 2024). Porous borders with neighbouring countries further facilitated the movement of criminal elements and illicit weapons, sustaining the phenomenon over time (Nsiegbé & Gabriel, 2024). Farmers in Zamfara and Katsina States, among the worst affected, responded to recurring attacks by abandoning farmland altogether, with more than 40 percent of farmland in rural Zamfara reported abandoned by 2023 (Mahmud & Salihu, 2024). Beyond direct attacks, banditry has displaced entire communities, forcing families to flee, leaving farmland untilled and livestock unattended, and severing the traditional support networks, cooperative labour arrangements and channels of agricultural knowledge transfer that had previously sustained rural food production (Lamidi, 2025; Ekpa et al., 2025). Cattle rustling compounded the crisis by depriving households of a principal source of protein, income and savings, while forcing herders onto unfamiliar routes that increasingly brought them into conflict with farmers, further reducing agricultural output (Julius, 2024; Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). The economic consequences of this insecurity extended well beyond the direct loss of crops and livestock. Disrupted transport routes, rising insurance and security costs, and reduced market participation combined to push food prices upward, with reports indicating increases exceeding 25 percent in Zamfara and Katsina between 2022 and 2023 (Reuters, 2024a). Humanitarian responses, while necessary, have often been constrained by limited accessibility and funding, with the World Food Programme (2023a) repeatedly noting severe food insecurity in the region, particularly during planting and harvesting seasons. Displacement, in particular, sits at the intersection of banditry's human and economic consequences. Displaced households lose not only their farmland but the productive assets, livestock, tools, seed stock and stored grain, that would allow them to resume production, while the erosion of kinship and community labour-sharing networks removes a further layer of resilience (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2020; Abdullahi & Shehu, 2022). The result, as Lamidi (2025) documents, is that displaced families experience acute livelihood and nutritional hardship that frequently persists even after security nominally improves, since farmland may remain unclaimed, degraded or occupied by the time households are able to return. Despite the accumulating evidence of banditry's harm to food security, existing research has tended to examine individual states or specific dimensions of the problem, such as farmer-herder conflict or cattle rustling, in isolation (Mahmud & Salihu, 2024; Ekpa et al., 2025), leaving the cumulative relationship between banditry and food security, and the specific mechanisms through which displacement undermines household food security, without a systematic regional treatment covering the full 2015-2025 decade. This gap matters because the North West supplies a substantial share of Nigeria's national grain basket, so that its destabilisation carries consequences for food security well beyond the region itself (Umar, 2025; Okoli & Lenshie, 2018).

The problem is not confined to North West Nigeria alone, even though the region has borne its most sustained and severe expression. Abiodun and Olaniyi (2021) found that rural violence more broadly depresses agricultural productivity across several Nigerian regions by discouraging investment in farming, disrupting extension services and reducing the labour available for cultivation, a pattern consistent with what has since unfolded at greater scale in Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Kebbi States. Oyewole and Utibe (2024), reviewing the broader phenomenon of armed banditry across Nigeria, similarly situate the North West's experience within a wider national pattern in which criminal violence targeting rural producers has become one of the most significant, if under-examined, threats to the country's food system. Positioning the North West case within this broader literature underscores both the severity of the regional crisis and the wider relevance of the mechanisms this study identifies.

This study therefore examines the impact of banditry on food security in North West Nigeria, pursued through two objectives: to determine the relationship between banditry and food security in North West Nigeria, 2015-2025, and to assess the impact of banditry-induced displacement on household food security in affected North West Nigeria, 2015-2025. The corresponding research questions ask what the relationship between banditry and food security has been over this period, and how banditry-induced displacement has affected household food security, guided by the assumptions that banditry has influenced food security in the region and that banditry-induced displacement has affected household food security. Investigating these questions is necessary because policymakers, security agencies and development partners require systematic regional evidence, rather than isolated case accounts, on which to design interventions capable of protecting both lives and livelihoods.

II. Theoretical Framework

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory was introduced by the United Nations Development Programme as a paradigm shift in the conception of security, moving from a state-centric focus on territorial defence toward a people-centred concern with the safety, dignity and wellbeing of individuals (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2020). The theory rests on the premise that security must protect people from threats to the quality of their lives, encompassing not only physical violence but also economic, social, health and environmental threats, and that these threats are multi-faceted and interconnected, such that violence produces displacement, which in turn produces food insecurity, economic hardship and disrupted education in a self-reinforcing cycle (World Food Programme, 2023a). Central to the theory is the distinction between freedom from fear, protection from physical violence, armed conflict, kidnapping and coercion, and freedom from want, the socio-economic capacity to secure adequate food, healthcare, education, housing, income and livelihood (Mahmud & Salihu, 2024; Lamidi, 2025). The theory further emphasises prevention and protection over reactive response, and stresses empowerment and resilience, the capacity of individuals and communities to withstand and recover from crises (Olanrewaju, 2023; Audu, 2021). Applied to North West Nigeria, Human Security Theory illuminates how banditry in Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Kebbi States has violated both dimensions of security simultaneously. Communities living under the constant threat of attack experience a direct infringement of freedom from fear that itself makes farming, trading and movement difficult (Umar, 2025; Lamidi, 2025), while the resulting farm abandonment, asset loss and market disruption represent a parallel infringement of freedom from want, since diminished incomes and rising food prices leave households unable to secure sufficient food even where markets nominally function (Reuters, 2024a; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022a). The theory's emphasis on resilience and empowerment is equally relevant to displaced households, whose recovery depends on more than the restoration of physical safety alone.

Political Economy Theory of Conflict

The Political Economy Theory of Conflict holds that conflict and violence do not occur spontaneously but are shaped by economic, social and political conditions, with armed groups resorting to violence because it offers a more efficient route to money, property and resources than legal alternatives (Abdullahi & Shehu, 2022). Weak states and institutions create the permissive conditions in which such violence can flourish, since law enforcement lacks the capacity to prevent or deter it, a dynamic especially acute in the many rural territories of North West Nigeria where government presence is thin and bandits operate with relative freedom (Audu, 2021). The theory further holds that conflict is economically driven, poverty, unemployment and scarce land, water and market access generate grievances that make banditry an attractive option for young men with few legitimate alternatives (Mamman, 2024), and that conflict is self-reinforcing, since established armed groups build networks of robbery, kidnapping and resource control that sustain their operations over years (Lamidi, Nsiegbe, & Ojo, 2024). This economic and institutional lens complements Human Security Theory by explaining not merely the consequences of banditry but why it persists despite its evident harm. In North West Nigeria, the Political Economy Theory of Conflict clarifies why banditry has proven so difficult to contain: bandits gain materially from cattle rustling, ransom and levies, while weak institutional capacity and porous borders sustain their operations (Nsiegbe & Gabriel, 2024). The theory also explains the mechanisms most relevant to this study's two objectives, since predatory economic activity by bandits directly reduces agricultural production and drives displacement, and displacement itself, by destroying livelihoods, can feed back into the poverty and unemployment that make banditry attractive in the first place (Amadi & Nnadozie, 2022). Read together, Human Security Theory and the Political Economy Theory of Conflict provide this study with both the human lens through which to assess banditry's impact on food security and displaced households, and the structural lens through which to understand why that impact has proven so persistent.

The complementarity of the two theories is not merely additive but analytically necessary for this study's purposes. Human Security Theory alone would document that banditry harms people's food security and wellbeing without fully explaining why the phenomenon has persisted and intensified over a full decade despite that harm being well documented; the Political Economy Theory of Conflict alone would explain banditry's persistence as economically rational for its perpetrators without capturing the full human cost borne by farming and displaced households. Applied jointly, as this study applies them, the two theories allow Objective 1 to be read as evidence of human-security violation sustained by an identifiable economic logic, and Objective 2 to be read as a demonstration of how that logic, once it produces displacement, continues to generate human-security harm well after the initial act of violence has passed.

III. Conceptual Review

a. Banditry

Banditry may be defined as organised criminal attacks in rural and semi-urban areas, comprising killings, kidnapping, cattle rustling and the destruction or seizure of farm produce and property, that threaten community safety and livelihoods (International Crisis Group, 2020; Mamman, 2024). Unlike ordinary criminal activity, banditry in the North West context is continuous and coordinated, directed primarily against farmers, herders and traders through the theft of resources, the creation of fear, or the assertion of territorial control (Audu, 2021). Two features distinguish the bandit from other armed actors: material gain rather than political or ideological objective is the primary motive, and violence is directed mainly at civilians and their property rather than at the state itself (Julius, 2024; Amadi & Nnadozie, 2022).

This distinguishes banditry from terrorism, whose violence pursues an ideological or religious cause and is symbolic as well as material, and from insurgency, which seeks to challenge or replace state authority over territory; bandits in the North West, by contrast, have generally sought extraction, through levies, ransom and stolen produce, rather than the capture or replacement of government (Julius, 2024; Audu, 2025). It is similarly distinct from the farmer-herder conflict associated with pastoralist herdsman, which is rooted in competition over land, water and grazing routes rather than organised predation, though the two phenomena intersect where displaced herders are pushed onto farmland and where some bandit gangs recruit from pastoralist communities (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018; Aina, 2023).

Banditry in North West Nigeria became markedly more pronounced after 2015 as armed groups exploited the security vacuum left by the redeployment of military resources toward the North East, operating from remote forest camps that were difficult for security forces to reach (Ismail & Nwogbo, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2020). Its effects have been documented as multidimensional, combining physical attacks against persons, the destruction of farmland and property, and cattle rustling, with rural communities across Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Kebbi States bearing the brunt (Lamidi, 2025; Mahmud & Salihu, 2024). It is this profit-seeking, civilian-directed conception of the bandit that anchors the analysis of both objectives examined in this article, since the pathways through which banditry undermines food security, farm abandonment, asset loss and displacement, follow directly from this predatory economic logic. The conceptual boundary between banditry and climate-linked farmer-herder conflict deserves particular attention, since the two are frequently conflated in public commentary despite operating through distinct causal pathways. Lebari, Onuegbu, and Adeniran (2022) show that climate change, through desertification and the shrinking of traditional grazing land and water sources, independently intensifies competition between farmers and herders in ways that can escalate into violence without any element of organised criminal predation. Where such climate-driven competition and organised banditry occur in the same geographic space, as they increasingly do across parts of the North West, their effects on food security compound one another, but the mechanisms remain analytically distinct: climate-linked conflict arises from resource scarcity confronted by both parties in good faith, whereas banditry, as conceived in this study, is defined by the deliberate, profit-oriented targeting of farming communities and their assets.

b. Food Security and Internal Displacement

Food security denotes a state in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022b). Four components are conventionally distinguished: availability, whether food is physically present through production, importation or aid; accessibility, whether individuals can obtain that food through purchase, production or social transfer; utilisation, how effectively the body makes use of food consumed, shaped by dietary diversity and sanitation; and stability, whether availability, access and utilisation are sustained over time without disruption from shocks (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022b; Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023). These four components function systemically rather than independently, so that a shock to one, such as the farm abandonment produced by banditry, cascades into the others, reduced availability drives price increases that undermine access, which in turn narrows dietary diversity and undermines utilisation, while repeated shocks erode stability (Olanrewaju & Balana, 2023).

Internal displacement, the forced movement of individuals or groups within their own country because of conflict, violence or other threats, without crossing an international border (Yusuf & Mohammed, 2019), operates as one of the most direct mechanisms through which banditry undermines each of these four components simultaneously. Displaced households lose access

to farmland and abandon crops, livestock and stored produce, collapsing food availability at the household level; loss of income-generating assets and reliance on uncertain humanitarian assistance undermines accessibility (Abdullahi & Shehu, 2022; World Food Programme, 2023a); crowded and under-serviced displacement settings, combined with reduced dietary diversity, compromise utilisation (International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023); and the risk of repeated or prolonged displacement undermines any prospect of stability (Lamidi, 2025). Displacement further erodes the social capital, kinship ties, cooperative labour arrangements and channels through which agricultural knowledge and resources were traditionally shared, that had previously supported household food security independent of formal markets (Ekpa et al., 2025). Even where security nominally improves and households are able to return, recovery is rarely immediate: farmland may have been degraded, occupied or left fallow, livestock and tools are frequently unrecoverable, and the resulting shortfall in productive capacity leaves returnee households dependent on external assistance well beyond the period of physical displacement itself (Nwankpa, 2024). It is this compounding relationship, between the loss of physical safety, the loss of productive assets, and the erosion of the four components of food security, that this study examines under its second objective. Vulnerability to food insecurity is not, however, uniformly distributed within a displaced household, a distinction that matters for how the concept is applied in this study. The International Displacement Monitoring Centre (2023) notes that women, who in much of rural North West Nigeria bear primary responsibility for food preparation and childcare, together with children and the elderly, typically face the sharpest nutritional consequences of displacement, since they are frequently the last to eat within resource-constrained households and the least able to independently seek alternative income or food sources. This distributional dimension of vulnerability means that aggregate household-level food security measures, while useful for establishing the overall scale of the problem this study documents, can understate the severity of the crisis facing the most vulnerable individuals within affected households, a caveat this article returns to below in discussing the study's key findings.

IV. Research Methodology

This study adopted a case study research design, a qualitative approach suited to an in-depth analysis of banditry and food security in North West Nigeria within a defined geographical and temporal frame, relying on existing literature rather than the collection of new primary data from respondents. This design was chosen for three principal reasons. First, the prevailing insecurity across Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Kebbi States, characterised by farm attacks, cattle rustling and kidnapping, made primary fieldwork in affected rural communities unsafe for both researcher and prospective respondents. Second, the design allowed the study to trace trends and patterns across the full 2015-2025 decade, tracking how the problem evolved and how its effects on food production, distribution and availability changed over time, which a cross-sectional primary survey could not have captured as effectively. Third, the design enabled triangulation across government reports, academic literature and credible media reporting, allowing figures such as agricultural production statistics to be cross-checked against independent assessments of banditry activity and food security conditions.

The study's scope was North West Nigeria, with particular focus on Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Kebbi States, the states most consistently identified in the literature as experiencing high rates of banditry while also constituting major agricultural producing areas for the country. This area combines savannah grassland, semi-desert and arable terrain supporting the cultivation of millet, sorghum, maize, rice, groundnut and vegetables alongside livestock rearing, an agrarian economy in which the great majority of farmers operate from rural villages that leaves them directly exposed to attack. The study period spanned 2015 to 2025, a decade during which banditry escalated from a localised security concern into a

regional crisis with measurable consequences for agricultural production, displacement and food prices. Data for the study were drawn from secondary qualitative sources, comprising peer-reviewed academic journals and articles on banditry, insecurity, agricultural output and food security in Nigeria and comparable settings; official data from government sources including the National Bureau of Statistics and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; reports from international organisations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme, addressing food security, agricultural activity and the socio-economic effects of insecurity; and credible news reporting documenting specific incidents of banditry violence against farming communities and their consequences. Data collection proceeded through a systematic review of this literature, in which the researcher sourced, screened and compiled material from journals, books, government papers, policy documents, international agency reports and credible newspapers addressing armed banditry and food security in North West Nigeria. Material was selected on the basis of peer-review status, institutional credibility and direct relevance to the study's objectives, and was organised thematically around incidents of banditry, its effects on agricultural production and distribution, and the interventions undertaken in response, allowing the study to assemble the required evidence base without conducting fieldwork in an active conflict setting. Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis, a technique for systematically examining documentary sources to identify patterns, trends and meanings relevant to the study's objectives. This approach allowed the researcher to compare findings across the range of secondary sources consulted, to identify convergence and divergence in their conclusions, and to draw conclusions about the effect of armed banditry on food security in North West Nigeria while remaining attentive to the broader socio-economic conditions, including poverty, weak governance and climatic stress, within which the crisis has unfolded. Reliance on secondary sources in place of primary fieldwork carries an acknowledged limitation, namely that the study could not independently verify figures such as farm-abandonment rates or food-insecurity prevalence beyond what the original authors and institutions reported, and could not capture perspectives that have not yet found their way into the published or institutional record. This limitation was mitigated, though not eliminated, through the triangulation strategy described above, cross-checking figures and claims across academic, governmental, international-agency and media sources rather than relying on any single account, and through a consistent preference for peer-reviewed and institutionally credible sources over unverified reporting. Where sources diverged in emphasis or detail, this is noted in the analysis rather than resolved by silent selection of the more convenient figure.

V. Data Presentation

As a desk-based case study relying entirely on secondary qualitative sources, this article draws on no primary respondents; instead, the evidence gathered from the systematic literature review is consolidated into a single table. Table 1 presents the key secondary evidence relevant to the study's two objectives, drawn from academic, institutional and media sources.

Table 1: Consolidated Secondary Evidence on Banditry, Food Security and Displacement in North West Nigeria

Objective	Author/Source	Major Finding
Objective 1: Banditry and Food Security	Audu (2021)	Armed attacks forced farmers to abandon farms, reducing crop production.
	Mashi and Husaini (2024)	More than 60% of farmers abandoned farmlands during peak banditry periods.

Objective	Author/Source	Major Finding
	Ismail and Nwogbo (2024)	Banditry reduced food availability through farm destruction and restricted cultivation.
	Mahmud and Salihu (2024)	Rural food insecurity in Zamfara State rose from 38% (2015) to 61% (2024).
	Food and Agriculture Organization (2022a)	Insecurity weakened agricultural productivity and disrupted food systems.
	Lamidi (2025)	Banditry-affected areas recorded an average 30% decline in crop yields.
Objective 2: Displacement and Household Food Security	Yusuf and Mohammed (2019)	Displacement reduced access to farmland and agricultural production activities.
	Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2020)	Internally displaced households experienced significantly higher food insecurity.
	Abdullahi and Shehu (2022)	Loss of productive assets (livestock, tools, stored grain) reduced household food access.
	Lamidi (2025)	Displaced households faced severe livelihood and nutrition challenges.
	World Food Programme (2023a)	Displaced households relied heavily on humanitarian assistance for survival.
	ACAPS (2022)	Displacement increased vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition.

Source: Researcher's compilation 2025

Table 1 consolidates the secondary evidence drawn from the systematic literature review, organised by the two objectives this article examines. For the relationship between banditry and food security, the evidence spans farm-level accounts of abandonment (Audu, 2021; Mashi & Husaini, 2024), state-level food insecurity prevalence data (Mahmud & Salihu, 2024), and institutional documentation of productivity and yield decline (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022a; Lamidi, 2025). For the impact of displacement on household food security, the evidence spans documentation of lost access to farmland (Yusuf & Mohammed, 2019), comparative food insecurity prevalence between displaced and non-displaced households (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2020), asset loss (Abdullahi & Shehu, 2022), livelihood and nutritional consequences (Lamidi, 2025), and reliance on humanitarian assistance (World Food Programme, 2023a; ACAPS, 2022). Read together, the sources converge on two points relevant to this article. First, across independent authors, institutional bodies and media investigations, the reported figures are consistent in direction and substantial in magnitude, farm abandonment exceeding 60 percent in the most affected communities, food insecurity prevalence in Zamfara State rising by 23 percentage points over nine years, and crop yield decline averaging 30 percent, indicating that the relationship between banditry and food security is not a marginal or contested finding but one replicated across multiple independent lines of evidence. Second, the evidence on displacement shows that its effects on household food security operate through several compounding channels simultaneously, loss of land, loss of productive assets, and

dependence on uncertain aid, rather than through any single mechanism, a pattern this article examines in detail under Objective 2 below.

A further observation from Table 1 concerns the range of source types that converge on these findings. The evidence base combines peer-reviewed academic studies conducted by researchers with direct familiarity with the affected states (Audu, 2021; Mahmud & Salihu, 2024; Ismail & Nwogbo, 2024), assessments by international humanitarian and development agencies with operational presence in Nigeria (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022a; World Food Programme, 2023a; ACAPS, 2022), and independent case documentation (Lamidi, 2025; Yusuf & Mohammed, 2019; Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2020; Abdullahi & Shehu, 2022). Because these source types differ in their methods, institutional incentives and data collection approaches, yet arrive at substantially the same conclusions regarding both the direction and rough magnitude of banditry's effect on food security and the compounding effects of displacement, the convergence itself constitutes a form of methodological triangulation that strengthens confidence in the findings presented in the sections that follow, notwithstanding the absence of new primary data collected specifically for this study.

VI. Data Analysis

Objective 1: The Relationship Between Banditry and Food Security

Evidence assembled from the secondary literature establishes a consistently negative relationship between banditry and food security in North West Nigeria across the 2015-2025 period, operating through four identifiable mechanisms.

Before turning to these mechanisms individually, it is worth noting how they were identified. The literature reviewed for this study did not, for the most part, set out explicitly to map a causal chain between banditry and food security; rather, each mechanism emerged from a distinct strand of research, farm-level case documentation, state-level survey data, institutional food-systems assessment and market-price analysis, that this study's qualitative content analysis brought together and organised around the shared outcome of reduced food security. The four mechanisms identified below should therefore be read as an analytical synthesis of findings that, in their original sources, were typically presented separately rather than as an integrated framework. The first and most direct mechanism is production disruption through farm abandonment. Audu (2021) documented that armed attacks forced farmers to desert their fields, directly reducing the area under cultivation and the volume of crops harvested. Mashi and Husaini (2024) quantified the scale of this response, finding that more than 60 percent of farmers in heavily affected communities abandoned farmland during periods of peak banditry activity, a proportion large enough to represent not an exceptional response by a minority but a structural shift in how agriculture was practised across the region. Ismail and Nwogbo (2024) distinguished two related pathways within this mechanism, the physical destruction of farms and crops, and the psychological deterrent effect of the threat of violence, which suppressed cultivation even on farmland that had not itself been directly attacked.

The second mechanism is the direct destruction of agricultural resources, including crops, storage facilities and farming implements, which Ismail and Nwogbo (2024) identified as compounding the effect of abandonment by removing productive capacity that would otherwise have persisted even through a period of reduced access. The third mechanism, documented institutionally by the Food and Agriculture Organization (2022a), is disruption across the food system as a whole, extending beyond individual farms to processing, distribution and market functions, so that reduced agricultural productivity in one part of the region propagated into shortages and price effects elsewhere. The fourth mechanism is price inflation driven by supply shortage, identified by Reuters (2024a), whereby reduced production interacting with steady or rising demand pushed prices upward, converting a production-side shock into a demand-side accessibility problem for consumers who might never have been directly attacked

themselves. The magnitude of these effects is best illustrated by the longitudinal evidence from Mahmud and Salihu (2024), who recorded that rural food insecurity prevalence in Zamfara State rose from 38 percent in 2015 to 61 percent in 2024, a 23-percentage-point increase over nine years that tracked the corresponding rise in banditry activity over the same period. This finding is corroborated by Lamidi's (2025) observation of an average 30 percent decline in crop yields across banditry-affected areas, a figure consistent with, and somewhat more conservative than, the 60 percent farm-abandonment rate reported by Mashi and Husaini (2024), since not all abandoned land translates one-to-one into lost yield once partial cultivation and staggered abandonment are taken into account.

State-specific evidence corroborates this regional picture at finer resolution. Emmanuel (2023), focusing specifically on Katsina State, similarly documented that recurrent banditry attacks reduced the area of land under cultivation and disrupted the seasonal farming calendar, as households delayed planting or harvesting in response to security alerts, a timing disruption that itself lowers yield independent of the area actually abandoned. Okeke and Ekpe (2021) extended the price-inflation mechanism identified by Reuters (2024a) into a more systematic national account, showing that security crises of this kind, by simultaneously reducing domestic supply and raising the transport and storage costs associated with moving food through insecure corridors, function as a significant independent driver of food price inflation in Nigeria, a dynamic that compounds the accessibility problem facing consumers across the North West and beyond. Taken together, the convergence of farm-level, state-level and institutional evidence, spanning individual case documentation, systematic survey-based prevalence figures, and food-system-wide institutional assessment, establishes that the relationship between banditry and food security in North West Nigeria is structural rather than incidental. Production disruption, resource destruction, food-system-wide disruption and price inflation operate as interlocking rather than alternative mechanisms, meaning that interventions addressing only one, such as farm security without corresponding attention to market and price stabilisation, are unlikely to restore food security on their own.

Objective 2: The Impact of Banditry-Induced Displacement on Household Food Security

The evidence on displacement demonstrates that its consequences for household food security extend well beyond the immediate loss of farmland, operating through five compounding channels identified across the secondary sources reviewed.

Yusuf and Mohammed (2019) documented the most direct channel, the loss of access to farmland itself, since displaced households were physically separated from the land, crops and agricultural infrastructure on which their food production depended, converting them from producers into a population reliant on markets or aid for which many had neither income nor entitlement. Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2020) extended this finding by showing that food insecurity prevalence among internally displaced households was measurably higher than among non-displaced households, confirming empirically that displacement affected not merely production but each of the four components of food security, availability, access, utilisation and stability, simultaneously rather than in isolation. Abdullahi and Shehu (2022) identified a further channel operating alongside land loss, the rapid loss of productive assets, livestock, farming implements, seed stock and stored food, that displaced households were rarely able to carry with them during flight. This finding matters because it explains why displacement produced effects that outlasted the physical relocation itself, households that eventually returned to their communities frequently lacked the livestock, tools and seed capital needed to resume production immediately, converting a temporary security shock into a prolonged recovery problem. Lamidi (2025) documented the resulting livelihood and nutritional consequences in detail, finding that displaced populations shifted from self-reliance to dependence on external assistance that was frequently unreliable, delayed or insufficient, a pattern the World Food

Programme (2023a) corroborated institutionally in noting that many internally displaced households across conflict-affected Nigeria depended substantially on emergency food aid for survival. ACAPS (2022) completed this evidentiary chain, finding that displacement measurably increased vulnerability to both hunger and malnutrition, distinguishing chronic food shortage, insufficient quantity, from malnutrition, insufficient quality or diversity even where some food was available, and noting that both risks were disproportionately borne by women, children and the elderly within displaced households.

The consistency of these findings across five independent channels, land loss, asset loss, comparative prevalence data, livelihood and nutritional documentation, and institutional aid-dependency evidence, supports treating displacement not as one among many minor contributors to food insecurity in North West Nigeria but as one of its most severe and multidimensional drivers. Because displaced households lose the physical, productive and social means of securing food simultaneously, restoring their food security requires interventions addressing land, assets and social support together rather than any single dimension in isolation, a conclusion with direct implications for how humanitarian and recovery programming in the region should be designed.

VII. Discussion of Findings

The Relationship Between Banditry and Food Security

The structural negative relationship between banditry and food security established in this study is consistent with what Human Security Theory would predict from sustained violation of both freedom from fear and freedom from want (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2020). Farmers who abandoned their land in numbers exceeding 60 percent (Mashi & Husaini, 2024) were not making an isolated economic choice but responding to a direct threat to physical safety that, under the theory's framework, cannot be separated from its downstream economic consequence, since the same act of violence that threatened their lives also removed their capacity to produce food. The 23-percentage-point rise in food insecurity prevalence in Zamfara State over nine years (Mahmud & Salihu, 2024) illustrates precisely the kind of interconnected threat cascade the theory anticipates, violence produces displacement and production loss, which produce food insecurity, which in turn produces further economic vulnerability. Read through the Political Economy Theory of Conflict, the persistence and scale of this relationship reflects banditry's character as an economically self-sustaining activity rather than a series of unrelated criminal incidents (Abdullahi & Shehu, 2022; Mamman, 2024). Because bandits derive material benefit, through cattle rustling, ransom and levies, from the same activities that destroy agricultural production, the theory explains why farm abandonment and yield decline have proven so difficult to reverse through security measures alone: as long as predation remains profitable relative to legitimate rural livelihoods, and as long as weak institutional presence leaves that predation largely unpunished, the economic logic sustaining banditry continues to operate independently of, and often faster than, any single intervention aimed at its consequences (Nsiegebe & Gabriel, 2024).

That this structural relationship is not unique to the North West strengthens confidence in the mechanisms identified here. Amadasu and Etinosa (2024), examining rural banditry and food security in Ovia North-East Local Government Area of Edo State, well outside the North West and in an ecologically distinct part of the country, documented a comparable pattern of farm abandonment and reduced food availability following armed attacks on farming communities. The replication of essentially the same causal pathway, violence producing farm abandonment producing food insecurity, in a different region with a different agro-ecological profile suggests that the relationship this study documents reflects a generalisable consequence of rural banditry as a form of predatory violence, rather than a set of circumstances peculiar to Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna or Kebbi States alone.

The Impact of Displacement on Household Food Security

The finding that displacement undermines household food security through the simultaneous loss of land, assets and social support networks (Yusuf & Mohammed, 2019; Abdullahi & Shehu, 2022) is best understood through Human Security Theory's insistence that human security threats are multi-dimensional and interconnected rather than confined to a single domain. Displacement sits precisely at the point where freedom from fear, the reason households flee, converts directly into a violation of freedom from want, since the same flight that protects physical safety simultaneously strips households of the farmland, livestock and stored produce that constituted their food security. The elevated food insecurity prevalence Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2020) documented among displaced relative to non-displaced households is the clearest empirical confirmation of this theoretical prediction available in the evidence reviewed. The Political Economy Theory of Conflict further clarifies why displacement's consequences for food security have proven so persistent even where physical security nominally improves. Because displacement strips households of the productive assets needed to resume farming (Abdullahi & Shehu, 2022), and because reduced production plausibly narrows legitimate economic opportunity in ways that can perpetuate the very poverty and unemployment identified as drivers of banditry (Mamman, 2024), displacement-driven food insecurity and the economic conditions sustaining banditry risk reinforcing one another over time. The dependence of displaced households on humanitarian assistance that the World Food Programme (2023a) and ACAPS (2022) both document is therefore properly read not merely as a humanitarian gap but as evidence of a structural interruption to household productive capacity that ordinary market recovery cannot resolve without deliberate livelihood restoration support. Taken together, the findings on both objectives carry a shared policy implication that neither theory alone would fully reveal. A security response that stops attacks but leaves displaced households without their land, livestock and tools restores freedom from fear without restoring freedom from want, leaving the food security deficit largely intact even after the violence itself has ended. Conversely, humanitarian or livelihood support extended to displaced households while farming communities remain exposed to renewed attack addresses immediate want without addressing the fear that produced displacement in the first place, and risks being undermined by further rounds of violence and displacement. The interlocking character of the two theoretical lenses applied in this study therefore points toward the same conclusion reached independently through the empirical evidence, that security and livelihood interventions must be pursued together rather than sequentially if the food security consequences of banditry in North West Nigeria are to be durably reversed.

VIII. Key Findings

- i. Banditry and food security show a consistently negative, structural relationship across North West Nigeria, evident in farm-level abandonment, state-level prevalence data, and institutional food-system assessment alike. This convergence across independent methods and data sources indicates that the relationship reflects a genuine regional pattern rather than an artefact of any single study's approach.
- ii. More than 60 percent of farmers in heavily affected communities abandoned their farmland during peak periods of banditry activity, representing a structural shift in agricultural practice rather than an isolated response. At this scale, the disruption is properly understood as a regional agricultural crisis rather than a series of unconnected local incidents.
- iii. Rural food insecurity prevalence in Zamfara State rose from 38 percent in 2015 to 61 percent in 2024, tracking the escalation of banditry activity over the same period. The near-doubling of this figure across less than a decade illustrates how quickly sustained insecurity can erode food security gains built up over much longer periods.

- iv. Displacement undermines household food security through at least five compounding channels: loss of farmland access, loss of productive assets, elevated food insecurity prevalence, livelihood and nutritional decline, and dependence on humanitarian assistance. Because these channels operate simultaneously rather than singly, displaced households face a food security deficit considerably deeper than any one channel would produce on its own.
- v. The consequences of displacement for food security frequently outlast the period of physical displacement itself, since returnee households often lack the livestock, tools and seed capital needed to resume production immediately. This means that the end of physical insecurity does not automatically translate into restored food security, a distinction with direct implications for how recovery programming should be timed and designed.
- vi. Women, children and the elderly within displaced households bear a disproportionate share of the resulting hunger and malnutrition risk. This distributional pattern indicates that displacement-related food insecurity is not experienced uniformly within affected households, and that interventions insensitive to this internal distribution risk overlooking the members most acutely at risk.

IX. Conclusion

This study set out to determine the relationship between banditry and food security in North West Nigeria and to assess the impact of banditry-induced displacement on household food security between 2015 and 2025. The evidence assembled from a systematic review of secondary academic, institutional and media sources establishes that banditry has produced a structural and sustained deterioration in food security across the region, operating through farm abandonment, resource destruction, food-system disruption and price inflation, with farm-abandonment rates exceeding 60 percent and food insecurity prevalence in Zamfara State rising by 23 percentage points within nine years. The study further establishes that displacement, one of banditry's most direct human consequences, undermines household food security through the simultaneous loss of farmland, productive assets and social support, converting households from food producers into a population dependent on humanitarian assistance that is frequently inadequate and irregular, with effects that persist well beyond the period of physical displacement itself. Read jointly through Human Security Theory and the Political Economy Theory of Conflict, these findings confirm that banditry in North West Nigeria functions simultaneously as a violation of human security and as a self-sustaining economic activity, meaning that neither security-focused nor purely humanitarian interventions, applied in isolation, are likely to restore food security on their own. The study concludes that reversing the food security consequences of banditry in North West Nigeria requires an integrated response that secures farming communities against further attack while directly restoring the productive assets and livelihoods of households already displaced, since addressing either dimension without the other leaves the underlying structural relationship between insecurity and food insecurity substantially intact. These conclusions are drawn from a systematic review of secondary sources rather than from new primary fieldwork, a design necessitated by the prevailing insecurity in the affected communities themselves. Future research, conducted as and when security conditions permit direct engagement with affected farming and displaced households, would usefully extend this study's findings by capturing lived experience and localised detail that documentary sources alone cannot fully convey, while the consistency of this study's findings across a wide range of independent secondary sources provides a reasonably firm evidentiary basis for the policy response recommended below in the interim.

X. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Government security agencies should provide enhanced protection for farming communities across Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna and Kebbi States, including security coverage during planting and harvesting seasons, protected farming corridors, and early warning systems, since farm abandonment is the most direct and immediate mechanism through which banditry undermines food security.
- ii. Government and humanitarian agencies should provide targeted food and livelihood support for households displaced by banditry, including emergency food assistance, financial support for basic needs, and the restoration of farming inputs such as seed, tools and livestock, recognising that displaced households' food insecurity stems from the simultaneous loss of land, assets and social support rather than any single deficit.
- iii. Dedicated livelihood restoration programmes, including livestock restocking, input support and access to credit, should be established for returnee households, since this study's findings show that the food security consequences of displacement typically persist well beyond the period of physical displacement itself unless productive capacity is deliberately rebuilt.
- iv. Government agricultural and security agencies should invest in improved regional monitoring of the relationship between banditry incidents, farm abandonment and food security outcomes, since the consistency of the structural relationship identified in this study across independent sources indicates that better-integrated, real-time data would allow interventions to be targeted more precisely to the communities and periods of greatest need.
- v. Security and humanitarian interventions in North West Nigeria should be sequenced and coordinated jointly rather than pursued in isolation, since this study's findings indicate that security measures alone leave displaced households' food insecurity substantially unresolved, while livelihood and humanitarian support alone remains vulnerable to disruption by renewed attacks; a jointly planned response, combining protective security coverage for returning and resident farming households with simultaneous restoration of their productive assets, offers the most direct route to durably reversing the food security consequences documented in this study.

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