Drivers of Insurgency, Armed Militancy, and Banditry in Nigeria: Implications for National Integration and Security

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Abstract

This study explores the drivers of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria and their implications on national integration and security. Nigeria has faced significant challenges in maintaining peace and stability due to the rise of various insurgent groups, armed militias, and criminal bands across the country. This study examines the underlying factors that contribute to the emergence and sustenance of these violent activities, such as socio-economic disparities, lack of political will, religious and ethnic tensions, corruption, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. By analyzing these drivers using secondary data archival records, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria. This study suggests that addressing the drivers of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry is crucial for promoting national integration and enhancing security in Nigeria. It highlights the importance of adopting a multifaceted approach that combines efforts in socio-economic development, political inclusivity, conflict resolution, and law enforcement. Additionally, the study noted that enhanced security measures, including intelligence gathering, border control, and disarmament initiatives, are necessary to disrupt the operations of insurgent groups, armed militias, and criminal bands. By comprehensively addressing these underlying factors, Nigeria can foster a more inclusive society, promote peace and unity, and ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens the study recommended.

Keywords: Armed Militancy, Banditry, Insurgency, National Integration and Security

Introduction

The security situation in Nigeria has become increasingly complex and uncertain due to the prevailing threat in recent years posed by various non-state armed groups. These groups have emerged and consolidated coercive power to terrorize the population, engaging in activities such as insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry (Ojewale, 2021). They are known by various names, including criminal gangs, separatist groups, Islamic fundamentalists, amorphous kidnappers, and "unknown gunmen" in the Nigerian media. Despite their diverse labels, these actors share similar objectives, tactics, and operational simulations. This study revolves around understanding the

causal factors and challenges faced by Nigeria in curbing the menace of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry. These violent activities have significantly impacted the nation's peace, stability, and national integration. According to Oyewole, Aina and John Ojo (2023), the violent activities are being carried out by different insurgent groups, armed militias, and criminal bands, necessitating a comprehensive examination of the underlying factors contributing to their emergence and persistence (Oyewole, Aina and John Ojo 2023).

The study's purpose is to delve into the drivers of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria, as well as to examine their effects on national integration and security. It acknowledges that numerous factors can explain the emergence of these violent activities, which can be broadly categorized as primary causes or existing conditions (such as poverty, ungoverned spaces, fragile security, and weak border management), immediate causes or triggers (including climate change, resource competition, informal security, jungle justice, ethno-communal factors, religious intolerance, resource curse, criminality, and drug abuse), and crisis enablers causes (such as state complicity, foreign powers, traditional rulers, weapon suppliers, food suppliers, informants, and bandits' negotiators) (Ojo, Oyewole and Aina 2023). All of these factors have contributed to the recent surge in insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry, posing the most prevalent threat to Nigeria's national security. The study aims to explore the complex interplay of these factors and shed light on their impact on the nation's security and integration. By gaining a deeper understanding of these drivers, policymakers and stakeholders can work towards formulating effective strategies to address and mitigate these challenges.

Contextual Clarifications

 Insurgency

The context of insurgency in Nigeria refers to the existence and persistence of armed rebellions or uprisings within the country. Insurgency in Nigeria has been a significant security challenge that the nation has faced for several decades. Various militant groups, driven by different motivations and ideologies, have engaged in acts of violence and insurgency across different regions of the country (Agbiboa, 2013). One of the most prominent and well-known insurgent groups in Nigeria is Boko Haram. Boko Haram, founded in the early 2000s, seeks to establish an Islamic state based on its extremist interpretation of Sharia law. The group gained international attention for its violent attacks, kidnappings, bombings, and abductions of civilians, including the notorious abduction of over 200 schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014.

Another prominent group is the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which is a splinter group of Boko Haram. ISWAP emerged in 2016 and has been involved in its own campaigns of violence and insurgency, often targeting military and civilian targets alike (Agbiboa, 2013). In addition to Boko Haram and ISWAP, there have been other regional and ethnic-based insurgent movements in Nigeria. For example, in the Niger Delta region, there have been armed groups advocating for greater control and sharing of the region's oil wealth, leading to what is commonly referred to as the Niger Delta insurgency (Obi, 2010). The context of insurgency in Nigeria is complex and multi-faceted. It is often linked to a combination of factors, including political and economic grievances, religious extremism, corruption, poverty, weak governance, and regional

disparities (Agbiboa, 2013). The presence of ungoverned spaces, porous borders, and the proliferation of small arms also contribute to the challenges in addressing and containing insurgencies. The Nigerian government has employed various strategies to counter insurgency, including military operations, community engagement, and efforts to address the root causes of the conflicts (Obi, 2011). However, achieving lasting peace and stability remains a significant challenge, and the situation continues to evolve, making it a matter of ongoing concern for Nigeria and the international community.

Armed Militancy

 Armed militancy in Nigeria has been a significant security challenge and has manifested in various regions of the country. The context of armed militancy in Nigeria is complex, and it is influenced by a combination of historical, socio-political, economic, and environmental factors (Obi, 2011). One of the notable instances of armed militancy in Nigeria is the Niger Delta conflict, which has its roots in the oil-rich Niger Delta region (Obi, 2010). The Niger Delta conflict according to Ukiwo, (2009) has been characterized by militant groups and insurgents who engage in acts of violence, sabotage, and kidnapping, targeting oil installations and personnel, demanding a share of the region's oil wealth and better living conditions for the local population (Ukiwo, 2009). The main reasons behind the Niger Delta conflict include issues of resource control, environmental degradation due to oil exploration, and the perception of economic marginalization by the local communities (Obi, 2010). Historically, the region has felt neglected and exploited by the federal government and multinational oil companies, leading to a sense of grievance and discontent (Agbiboa, 2013).

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) was one of the prominent militant groups involved in the Niger Delta conflict (Obi, 2010). They carried out attacks on oil facilities and kidnapped oil workers to draw attention to their demands and grievances. However, over the years, the situation has evolved, and some militant groups have engaged in dialogue and disarmament processes with the government, leading to a relative reduction in violence in the region (Obi, 2010). Apart from the Niger Delta conflict, other forms of armed militancy have also emerged in different parts of Nigeria, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern region of the country. Boko Haram, an Islamist extremist group, seeks to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria and has been responsible for numerous deadly attacks, including bombings, kidnappings, and mass killings. The roots of Boko Haram's insurgency are multifaceted, involving factors such as social and economic marginalization, inadequate governance, corruption, religious extremism, and regional disparities. The group's actions have caused significant human suffering and disrupted social and economic activities in the affected areas. It's important to note that the context of armed militancy in Nigeria is continuously evolving, influenced by various internal and external factors (Agbiboa, 2013) Efforts to address these challenges involve a combination of military operations, socio-economic development initiatives, and dialogue with relevant stakeholders.

Banditry

International Crisis Group, (2020) refers banditry in Nigeria to a form of criminal violence characterized by armed groups or individuals engaging in acts such as kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, and cattle rustling. It has become a significant security challenge in the country, particularly in the northern regions (International Crisis Group, 2020). The context of banditry in Nigeria is multifaceted and stems from various underlying factors. One of the key drivers is the prevalent issue of poverty and socio-economic marginalization, especially in rural areas. Many of the regions affected by banditry suffer from high levels of poverty and limited access to basic services, education, and employment opportunities. These conditions according to Osaghae, (2020) create an environment where criminal activities like banditry can take root and attract disaffected individuals looking for economic gains.

Another contributing factor to banditry is the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (Osaghae, 2020). Nigeria has experienced an influx of illegal arms, making it easier for criminal elements to obtain weapons and carry out violent activities. These weapons often flow into the country through porous borders and weak controls, exacerbating the security situation (Campbell, 2011). Furthermore, the historical and cultural context plays a role in the rise of banditry. The herder-farmer conflict is a long-standing issue in Nigeria, with clashes between pastoralists and farmers over resources such as land and water. The competition for resources has escalated, leading to acts of violence and banditry in some cases. Banditry is also intertwined with political dynamics and sometimes has connections to political actors seeking to further their interests or settle scores. In some instances, political elites have been accused of providing support or protection to criminal elements for personal or political gain (Osaghae, 2020).

The context of banditry in Nigeria is further complicated by the presence of extremist groups like Boko Haram, which have also engaged in acts of banditry alongside their insurgency activities (Campbell, 2011). The nexus between different forms of criminality and extremism has further strained security efforts and compounded the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies.

The Immediate and Remote causes of Insurgency, Armed Militancy, and Banditry in Nigeria

Nigeria's formation as a colonial state disregarded precolonial political systems, sociocultural affinities, and economic relations, resulting in boundaries drawn without much consideration for the interests of the population (Oyewole, 2022). Unfortunately, the post-colonial state, encompassing federal, state, and local levels of government, has shown a lack of capability to adequately address the welfare and security needs of the people. This failure has led to various forms of resistance and violence, including banditry, terrorism, insurgency, militancy, and piracy across the country (Ogbonnaya, 2020). The emergence of Insurgency, Armed Militancy, and Banditry in Nigeria can be attributed to a combination of internal and external factors. Endemic poverty, ungoverned spaces, fragile security, drug abuse, and weak border control are among the internal background causes deeply rooted in the Nigerian socio-political landscape. Additionally, climate-induced migration and resource competition, informal security and jungle justice, ethno-communal and religious influences, state complicity, traditional rulers, weapon suppliers, informants, and bandits' negotiators, and illicit drug trade also contribute to the ongoing challenges

Endemic poverty

Meanwhile, as an indicator of the challenging human welfare, many parts of Nigeria are characterized by endemic poverty. Focusing on poverty, unemployment, education, standard of living, and healthcare, the United Nations Development Programme's report on Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) shows that five of the 10 states with endemic poverty in Nigeria are from the north-west. As the data in the Figure below reveals, the north-west has the highest intensity of poverty (45.0%), followed by the north-east (44.0%), which has been devastated by the Boko Haram insurgency. The north-central region emerged as third with 41.0%. The least is concentrated in the southern parts of Nigeria, which includes the southwest (38.0%), southeast (38.0%), and south–south (39.0%) geo-political zones (Ogbonnaya, 2020). Thus, poverty and armed banditry are inextricably linked. Consequently, the high level of poverty in Nigeria contributes to the emergence of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria and particulalrly in the poverty ridden regions of Nigeria. The poor human welfare in the region can be considered as a major source of frustration and aggression. Also, those that are involved in banditry and other armed resistance or criminal violence in the region could have embraced such way of live as a strategy to survive harsh condition of living.

Figure 1. Mapping poverty rates at the sub-national level in Nigeria.

Source: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI)

Several ungoverned spaces

Also, the criminal activities of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria are made possible due to several ungoverned spaces that foster these criminal groups. States like Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Benue, Oyo and Kebbi are leading hotspots of armed banditry in Nigeria

(Ogbonnaya, 2020). After years of conflict and favorable land ownership laws for farmers over herders, herders turned to violent criminal lifestyles. They have since set up camps in Rugu Forest, in Zamfara State, mainly composed of Fulanis and Hausas. Dajin Rugu forest covers three states: Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna. Falgore forest in Kano State, which was upgraded to a game reserve in the 1960s, spread across three LGAs, including Doguwa, Sumaila, and Tundun Wada. Kuduru and Kamuku, Kuyambana, Sububu, and Burwaye forests are also some of the deadliest enclaves of armed banditry in the region. Although Kaduna houses a large portion of Kamuku forest, it further spreads along Niger, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, and Kebbi states (Daily Trust 2021). These ungoverned enclaves became the hidden territories for attacking nearby communities and travelers across Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Niger states. In 2019, Zamfara state was estimated to have more than 10,000 bandits across 40 camps (Tar, Usman and Yusuf 2021). The weakness of the institutional capacity of the federal and state government in forest management, and the declining role of local government authorities in managing local affairs, offer armed bandits the opportunities to emerge and utilize such ungoverned spaces for their capacity building and criminal activities (Tar, Usman and Yusuf 2021). Furthermore, armed bandits have exploited the ineffective and deteriorating security climate across Nigeria to perpetuate their agenda. Weak border management is also part of the challenges of Nigeria's security architecture. This has increased trans-Sahel human, weapons, and drugs trafficking as well as spillover effects of armed conflict in the region.

Climate-induced migration, displacement and resource competition

Besides, climate-induced migration, displacement and resource competition are prominent among the triggers of Insurgency, Armed Militancy, and Banditry in Nigeria. The conflict over natural resources, such as land, water and pastures between nomadic cattle herders and farmers, triggered by climate change, is one of the primary drivers of armed banditry. The land-use crisis between the farmers and pastoralists, which created a virulent dissonance between the two ethnic groups, was also a contributory factor (Barnett and Rufai 2021). The increasing population that triggered resource competition and ineffective land dispute resolution are the escalated discord in Nigeria (Osaghae and Rotimi 2005). These, among others, have triggered a series of farmer-herder conflicts in the numbers of regions.

The informal security and jungle justice

In addition, the informal security and jungle justice are also prominent among the factors that trigger insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria. In the wake of herder-farmer conflicts and criminal attacks that swept through the regions, for example, the Amotekun informal security outfits from the West mobilized to secure the communities across the West and in the North-west, the Hausa communities dominated by farmers mobilize themselves to form vigilante outfits known as "Yan sa kai" (volunteer guards) while other sub-regions created their own informal security/ vigilantes security outfits inform of self-help elemental security arrangements. These are considered an informal security architecture that continually filled the vacuum of state security. The tools used to combat insecurity are locally made guns, merchets, clubs, and traditional weapons. Such informal security outfits have resulted in extrajudicial killings, torture, unlawful arrests, and cattle confiscations. Thereby contributing to the problem rather than solution.

Many times, the pastoralist settlements are usually destroyed, forcing the pastoralists to flee into the forests. This strategy has exacerbated the relationship between the farmers and the pastoralist while in many cases the pastoralists also formed militias to counter the farmers' informal security arrangements. Between 2014 and 2020, the formation of armed groups was portrayed as a form of self-defense and ethnic camaraderie, while some pastoralists were driven by economic motivation, thus escalating the violence (International Crisis Group 2020)

Ethno-communal and religion forces

In the other hand, ethno-communal and religion forces are also prominent among the triggers of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria. Nigerians tend to identify themselves based on primordiality, such as communal, ethnic and religious identities, rather than state-centric nationality (. Lewis and Michael 2020). In a study conducted in Nigeria by Lewis and Michael Bratton, more than half of Nigerians (48.2%) identified themselves with ethnic origins and 21% with religious affinities and since 1999, ethno-communal conflicts have heightened, and sometimes occurred as intercommunity, indigene-settler and herder-farmer conflicts across regions of Nigeria. A notable example is the protracted conflict between the ethnic minority groups of southern Kaduna, who are predominantly Christians, and the Hausa-Fulani, who are mostly Muslims. It is estimated that between 10,000 and 20,000 people have died due to the conflict (Hoffman 2017). These and other conflicts have created deep-sited hatred, which are sometimes channeled through formation and campaign of armed groups, such as communal, ethnic, or religious militias, and criminal or social bandits, to settle old-scores. These conflicts have also destroyed huge infrastructures and private properties and displaced numerous people or denied them sources of livelihood, leaving them to embrace armed resistance or criminal violence as means of surviving.

State Complicity

Also, the state complicity is a notable factor in insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria (ThisDay 2021). It is believed that some of the criminals were foreigners invited into Nigeria as political thugs and mercenaries by politicians, especially toward the 2015 general elections that brought Muhammadu Buhari to power and other political office holders. While these mercenaries and their local counterparts were instrumental to the emergence of many current political officeholders, (Blueprin, 2021) especially in the north, they were abandoned by politicians following the election and left with unfulfilled promises. These informed the grievances of the political mercenaries, which turned to armed bandits, as they are left to survive with the arms and ammunitions in their possession. These explain the lackluster approach of the government in dealing with the armed bandits (Ojo 2022). In relation to these, following bandit attack on train where several people were killed, injured, and kidnapped along the Abuja-Kaduna, the governor of Kaduna claimed that the government know where the bandit's camps are and their maps are visible; including their phone numbers and listen to their conversation sometimes. He further claimed that government know what the (terrorists/bandits) are planning with updated reports. But the problem is for the agencies to take action and waiting until they attack before respond, urging the Army to go after their enclaves to wipe them out (Premium Times 2022).

While although, such a claim has raised a mammoth of concerns about the state's recognition of the actors involved, the enclaves and locations of armed bandits, despite the necessary information and intelligence reports at the disposal of the state, the Nigerian security operatives appear to be unable to tame the spread of insecurity in the region. This raises the argument about whether such an insurgency can be considered state-sponsored terrorism. Meanwhile, some political leaders, particularly from the northern region of Nigeria, have claimed the group are not terrorists, just a mere business organisation engaging in kidnapping for ransom. The recent chutzpah attacks and killings launched on the hallowed throttlehold of Nigeria's defence institution in Kaduna raise a fundamental question, particularly whether the state backs this group. Several political commentators have argued that this group represents a terrorist organisation that enjoys the support of the state (Ojo 2022). Furthermore, as claimed by the governor of Kaduna state, the Nigerian Defense headquarter repudiated bombing of armed bandits' camps, which provides another perspective in understanding the political coloration of the conflict (The Punch 2022). Moreover, the refusal of the Muhammadu Buhari administration to publicly expose the sponsors of armed bandits and other terrorist groups provides a conducive climate for insinuating state involvement and collaboration with armed banditry.

Traditional Rulers, Weapon Suppliers, Informants, and Bandits' Negotiators, Illicit drugs

Another perspective includes the traditional rulers and citizens' complicities. Some highly placed traditional rulers were deposed due to their involvement in armed banditry, with some of the prominent local rulers often playing the important role of intelligence gathering for the armed bandits. A recent report claims that; some unpatriotic persons, including highly placed traditional rulers in the areas, were identified as helping the bandits with intelligence to perpetrate their nefarious actions or to compromise military operations (The Guardian 2019). Another is the case of two prominent individuals from Zamfara and Kaduna who attempted to smuggle weapons into the north-west using their connections in the Sahel region through porous Nigerian borders (The Guardian 2017). In addition to these prominent Nigerians, many middlemen and vendors were said to have also involved in the weapons transfer to forests inhabited by armed bandits (PRNigeria, 2020). In addition, it was reported that weapons suppliers receive more cash than field fighters. Moreover, the role of informants cannot be jettisoned. There were several instances of informants being arrested who disguised as community members so that they could assist the armed bandits with necessary information.

However, the importance of negotiators in armed banditry cannot be overstated. Negotiators for bandits have played a crucial part in several cases of kidnapping for ransom. For example, two prominent Islamic individuals are identified as negotiators who liaise between the families of the kidnapped citizens and the bandits. They play a vital role in negotiating the ransom to be paid by the families of abducted victims and acting as a link between the bandits' and the victims' families. This has been a standard operating procedure in Nigeria's illegal economy of armed banditry. Furthermore, the recent arrest of one of the bandits' negotiators, accused of illegally possessing incriminating documents such as military uniforms and a substantial amount of foreign currency, demonstrates the existence of such a criminal economy of kidnapping often perpetrated by armed

bandits. Some have grown extremely wealthy as a result of such illegal activity (The Guardian, 2022).

Meanwhile, among the most neglected factors is the use of hard drugs especially among the youth population. The nexus between drug abuse and criminality has become another dimension of security concern. It has been argued that the use of illicit drugs among the youth population fueled armed banditry in Nigeria. Popular hard drugs for armed bandits include tramadol, codeine, intravenous drugs, marijuana, Boska, hydro-caffeine, and Pentazocine (Vanguard Newspaper 2022). Therefore, the use of hard drugs is an enabler of criminal complicity with respect to armed banditry in the region (Daily Post, 2022).

Implications of Insurgency, Armed Militancy, and Banditry in Nigeria

Insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry has had negative implications on human and national dimensions of security in Nigeria generally. Notably, it is responsible for records of fatalities and loss of human freedom. Insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry attacks in Nigeria have resulted in the deaths of many civilians, especially in the rural communities, of which cases are largely underreported by the government, media and security agencies (UN, 2019). Accordingly, armed bandits killed 8,300 people, including seven in Jigawa, 1,917 in Kaduna, 1,416 in Katsina, 202 in Kebbi, 644 in Sokoto, and 4,114 in Zamfara between January 2013 and March 2022. Some other source shows that more than 3,600 people were kidnapped, 8,000 were killed, and 200,000 were displaced due to the crisis in Zamfara alone (UN High Commissioner for Refugees/National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and IDPs, "Joint Protection Assessment Mission to Northwest Nigeria, 25 July-4 August 2019). In addition, the region experienced over 1,000 kidnappings for ransom in 2021 (BBC, Zamfara state kidnapping 2021).These among others show the threats posed to lives and human freedom by armed banditry in the affected region.

Figure 2. Total fatalities from armed bandit conflicts in Northwest Nigeria, 2013-2022.
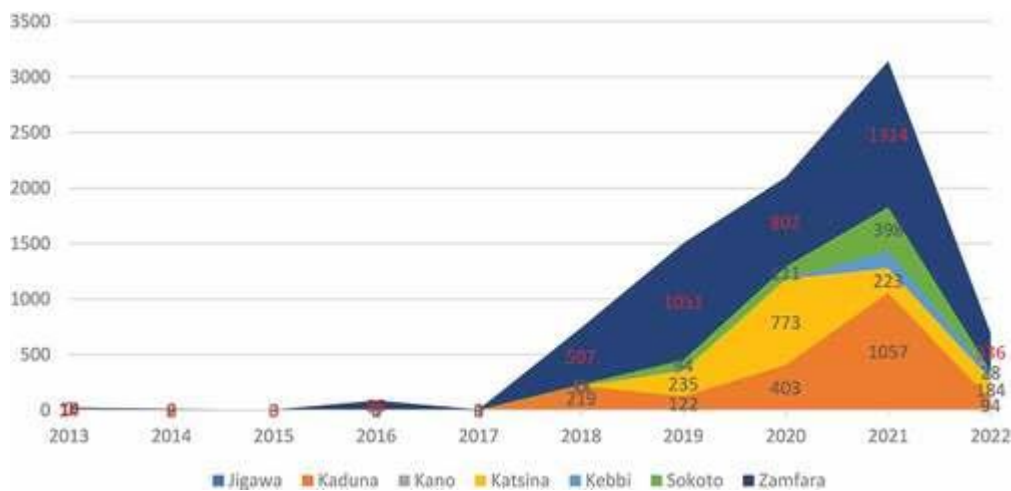
Adapted: John Sunday Ojo, Samuel Oyewole, Folahanmi Aina (2023). Forces of Terror: Armed Banditry and Insecurity in North-west Nigeria

The conflict has also ensued a humanitarian crisis where many people were displaced due to armed banditry. A joint evaluation by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons claimed that 210,354 people from 171 communities had been displaced in the north-west. Out of these, Zamfara accounted for 144,996, Sokoto had 35,941, and 29,417 were in Katsina (UNHCR, 2020). However, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported that 105,463 people were displaced in Sokoto state alone (UNHCR, 2020). The crisis is also estimated to have displaced over 210,000 people in north-west Nigeria as of March 2020, and generated 35,000 refugees that crossed the borders to places like Maradi in Niger Republic (UNHCR, 2020). Moreover, livelihoods of many have been affected, and their mounting concern on the relationship between the displaced people and host communities with their growing competition for scarce resources, such as water, land, and food. As a result of inadequate resources to cater for the displaced people, it was reported that the living conditions of the displaced people in Internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps are horrible, characterized by poor sanitation and health, shortage of food supply, and inadequate shelters (Zamfara Conflict-Analysis and Multisectoral Need Assessment 2019).

In addition, the effects of armed banditry on Nigeria's economy are devastating. In its report on the economic value of peace, the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) claimed that insecurity cost Nigeria 8% of its GDP ($132.59 billion) in 2021 (Thisdaylive 2022). Moreover, data from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) suggest that 26.95% of Nigeria's GDP has been affected by the disruption of agricultural-related activities (The Guardian 2021) Similarly, data from the Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria (MAN) claimed that in the half of 2020, there was a decline of 56.5% in local raw materials against the 64% recorded in the first half of 2019, revealing a 7.5% reduction over the period (The Guardian 2021). This is because of the high-risk business environment soiled by insecurity. These have had negative effects on poverty alleviation and standard of living of millions of Nigerians, as the cost of living is rising with inflation, while a growing number of people are losing their means of livelihood. Notably, farming and animal husbandry are the primary economic activities in Nigeria. Accordingly, cattle rustling, destruction of farmlands and rural communities, as well as killing and kidnapping of farmers, pastoralists and agricultural marketers have further worsened human poverty and inequality in the Nigeria.

Insurgency, Armed Militancy, and Banditry in Nigeria has further heightened food insecurity in the country. With several cases of attacks on farming communities, and attendant kidnapping for ransoms and the killing of farmers, many have abandoned their farmlands for safety. For instance, following a warning issued by armed bandits to farmers to stay away from their farms, about 26 farmers who failed to comply bandit directive were killed in Batsari LGA of Katsina state (Olapeju, and Adeniyi, 2021). Moreover, many farmers have also been kidnapped for ransom. Some regiona has also witnessed payment of levies to armed bandits by farmers as a precondition to access their farmlands. For instance, in Shiroro LGA, armed bandits demanded $1,100 as levies from the farmers to access their farms. It has been claimed that more than 5,884 farmlands covering more than 58,330 hectares have been abandoned in Katsina by the farmers due to insecurity ravaging the north-west (Premium Time 2021). Equally, pastoralists have endured several cases of cattle rustling in some region and between June 2017 and January 2018, it was reported about 1,000 Fulani herders and their families were murdered and two million cattle stolen across Nigeria (International Crisis Group 2018). These among other developments have affected agricultural

activities by farming communities and pastoralists, crippling their food production capacities, and leading to shortage of available, marketable, accessible, avoidable, and acceptable foods in the region and across the country.

In addition to the above, the effects of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria also extend to education, with a series of attacks recorded against schools, students, and teachers. Data from the NST database show that no fewer than seven bandit attacks targeted schools in north-western states of Katsina, Kaduna and Zamfara, from where 519 students and staff were abducted between 2019 and 2021(NST 2021). However, there are indications that the record of cases and victims are not exhaustive. In December 2020, for instance, more than 300 students were kidnapped by armed bandits at the Government Boys Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina State (CBC 2021). Subsequently, armed bandits attacked and abducted 317 female students at Government Girls Secondary School Jangebe, Zamfara State; and 39 students at Federal College of Forestry Mechanization; with 29 students and three non-teaching staffs of Greenfield University in Kaduna state. Since December 2020, it was reported that armed bandits have attacked education targets and kidnapped more than 700 for ransom (Dakuku 2021). At different points in time, therefore, schools have been closed due to the threat of armed bandits in seven states, including Sokoto, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Zamfara (Premium Times 2021). These have severe implications for intergenerational human capacity development, as armed banditry has reduced school enrollment and increased out-of-school children in Nigeria particularly across the affected regions. As evident in Figure below, north-west has 3.49 million out of school children, north east 2,illion, north central 1.3million, south east around 700, 000 south 1.2 million and south west about 1.4 million out of school children. These children can become set of new recruits into the criminal and resistant groups, thus recycling membership and fighters, which will ensure the crisis is protracted and insecurity endure (Blueprint 2021)

Figure 3. Out of school children by geopolitical zones in Nigeria.
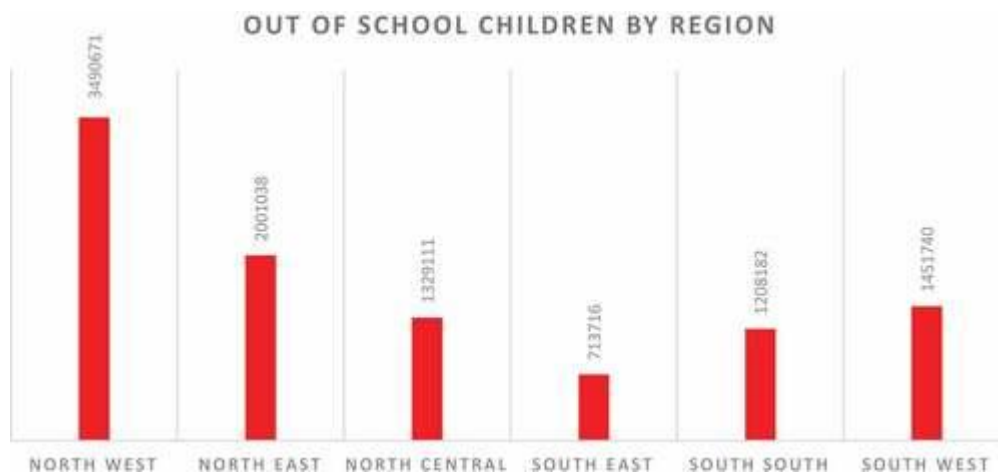
Source: Adapted from Premium Times, 2021

Finally, insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria has further undermined Nigeria's fragile national security. Bandit attacks on government entities, military bases, police stations, public office holders and their families, and host of citizens in the region have created a mammoth challenge for the state authorities. The crisis has driven people southward, where influx of Fulani herders has further triggered resource-related conflicts between the immigrant or settlers and the host communities in the north-central and from south-west to the south-east. This development has exacerbated the challenges of Nigeria's national security and overstretched the military and other security agencies. As of 2018/2019, Nigeria maintained one-third of its military strength for counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations in the north-east, and further mobilized about 6% against insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria (Oyewole 2021). However, inadequate resources, personnel, responses and performance of the security forces against armed bandits in north-west and the spillover effect in the north-central and the southern parts of Nigeria have also encouraged the rise of jungle justice, mob violence and subversive armed and unarmed radical groups as well as establishment of regional security outfits and attendant political division. Accordingly, secessionist advocates of Oduduwa Republic emerged, even as the governments of South-Western State created Amotekun in response to influx of pastoralists from the north and the attendant crisis in region (Vanguard, 2020). Their counterparts in the south-east equally created Ebube-Agbu as a regional security outfit for the same reason (The Guardian 2021). This is a development that can create major political unrest, disintegration and security threat in the country.

Addressing the Drivers of Insurgency, Armed Militancy, and Banditry in Nigeria

Addressing the drivers of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry is crucial for promoting national integration and enhancing security in Nigeria (Ogbonnaya, 2020). Adopting a multifaceted approach that encompasses various aspects is necessary to effectively tackle these challenges. First and foremost, socio-economic development plays a pivotal role in addressing the underlying causes of violence. By investing in education, job creation, and poverty reduction programs, the government can provide opportunities for the marginalized and disadvantaged segments of the population, thus reducing the appeal of joining extremist or criminal groups.

Secondly, political inclusivity is essential for fostering a sense of belonging among all citizens. Ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives are represented in governance can help prevent feelings of marginalization and promote a more cohesive society. Building a participatory and accountable political system can help address grievances and prevent radicalization. Conflict resolution mechanisms are also necessary to address longstanding grievances and disputes that contribute to violence. Engaging in dialogue and reconciliation processes can provide an avenue for addressing historical injustices and promoting social cohesion.

Furthermore, law enforcement efforts are crucial in tackling insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry. Enhancing security measures, such as intelligence gathering, surveillance, and counter-terrorism operations, is vital in disrupting the activities of insurgent groups, armed militias, and criminal bands. Border control is another critical aspect of enhancing security. Tightening border security can help prevent the influx of arms and illegal activities across national borders, reducing the capabilities of these violent groups. Additionally, disarmament initiatives are essential to reduce the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which often fuel conflicts and exacerbate violence. By comprehensively addressing these underlying factors, Nigeria can foster a more

inclusive and united society. By promoting peace and unity, the nation can ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens, ultimately contributing to the overall stability and development of the country (Ogbonnaya, 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the drivers of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry in Nigeria and their significant implications on national integration and security. The findings highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of the challenges facing the country in maintaining peace and stability. The research has identified several key factors contributing to the emergence and perpetuation of violent activities in Nigeria. Socio-economic disparities, lack of political will, religious and ethnic tensions, corruption, and the easy availability of small arms and light weapons have all played pivotal roles in fueling these conflicts. By examining these drivers through secondary data archival records, the study has deepened our understanding of the root causes of these troubling issues. Crucially, this study emphasizes that addressing the drivers of insurgency, armed militancy, and banditry is imperative for promoting national integration and enhancing security in Nigeria. To achieve these goals, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach is recommended. This includes efforts in socio-economic development to bridge the gaps between different segments of society and promote inclusivity. Additionally, fostering political inclusivity and investing in conflict resolution mechanisms are essential for mitigating tensions and promoting unity.

Law enforcement and security measures are also crucial components of the proposed approach. Strengthening intelligence gathering capabilities, bolstering border control measures, and implementing disarmament initiatives will be vital in disrupting the operations of insurgent groups, armed militias, and criminal bands. The study underscores the significance of concerted efforts on various fronts to create a safer and more harmonious Nigeria. By addressing the underlying factors identified in this research, Nigeria can work towards building a society that values inclusiveness, peace, and unity. Ultimately, such measures will enhance the safety and well-being of all its citizens, fostering a brighter and more promising future for the nation. The recommendations made in this study can serve as a roadmap for policymakers and stakeholders in their pursuit of a more secure and cohesive Nigeria.

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