

FACTORS AFFECTING ARMED BANDITRY AND FOOD SECURITY IN ZAMFARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Armed banditry in Zamfara State has evolved from a form of rural criminality into sophisticated organised armed criminal groups that threaten food security and national security. This study investigates the factors facilitating this escalation between 2015 and 2025. Employing a mixed-methods research approach, data were collected from 400 stakeholders across seven local government areas (LGAs) most affected by armed banditry in the state. The analysis utilised descriptive statistics, specifically mean scores and standard deviations, and the results were presented using bar charts. The findings identified poor border management (84.2%), the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) (79.0%), illegal mining (68.4%), competition over land resources (76.3%), and political factors (63.1%) as the primary drivers of armed banditry in Zamfara State. The study recommends the deployment of electronic surveillance systems and armed drones for border monitoring and the policing of ungoverned spaces. It further recommends the establishment of disarmament, demobilisation, and rehabilitation programmes to curb the proliferation of SALWs. In addition, proper regulation of mining activities in the state is advocated in order to deprive bandits of illicit sources of funding.

Keywords: Armed Banditry, Zamfara State, Internal Security, Proliferation of SALWs, Illegal Mining.

Introduction

Armed banditry in Zamfara State and indeed, the North-West Nigeria has become a major threat to national security because of the wanton loss of life and properties resulting from it. Attacks by armed bandits on farmers, destruction of farmlands, markets raids and cattle rustling have gravely impacted on food security in the state. According to Usman and Singh (2021), the security landscape of Northern Nigeria, particularly Zamfara State, has been redefined by the virulent emergence of armed banditry, a phenomenon that has transcended traditional rural crime to become a structured existential threat. Historically, Zamfara was celebrated as a peaceful agrarian hub; however, since 2012 the state has witnessed a catastrophic metamorphosis from agriculture to a theatre of kidnapping, cattle rustling, and mass killings (Ojewale, 2025; Usman & Bello, 2024). According to Abubakar (2023), the escalation of these activities is not a random occurrence but a product of systemic vulnerabilities within the Nigerian state's security architecture, exacerbated by the collapse of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms which hitherto existed and was very useful in resolving herders-farmers conflicts.

The persistence of this crisis between 2016 and 2025 suggests that the kinetic approach of the Nigerian military has only yielded fragmented and ephemeral success (Ibrahim, 2024; Ibrahim & Musa, 2024). Lawal and Chinedu (2023) argue that the "fire brigade" approach—characterized by reactive deployments after attacks have occurred—ignore the deep-seated structural facilitators that allow bandit groups to regroup, re-arm, and recruit with relative ease. Furthermore, Garba (2025) observes that the displacement of over 500,000 rural dwellers has created a "sovereignty gap," where bandits now exercise quasi-government powers, including the imposition of illegal "planting and harvest levies" and the administration of forest-based justice systems in the affected communities.

A critical dimension of this insecurity is the geographical advantage provided by the state's topography. The vast, unpoliced stretches of forests like the Rugu, Kamuku, and Kuyanbana forests provide a tactical shield against aerial surveillance and ground offensives (Tade, 2024; Yusuf & Ahmed, 2023). This threat from armed bandits is further complicated by the intersection of illicit artisanal gold mining and arms trafficking. As Mustapha (2023) posits, the "mining-banditry nexus" has transformed the state into a self-sustaining war economy where mineral wealth is directly

exchanged for Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) between the bandits and miners.

Despite various peace accords and amnesty attempts by successive administrations, the 2024–2025 period saw a 40 per cent increase in sophisticated ambush-style attacks on security convoys (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2025). This suggests that Armed banditry severely threatens agricultural productivity and food security in Zamfara State and the factors aiding banditry are not merely criminal but are rooted in a failed border control management and the proliferation of SALWs among others. This study, therefore, seeks to identify the factors that fuel the activities of armed banditry in Zamfara State with a view to making recommendations

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include:

1. To evaluate the proximate and structural determinants that fuel armed banditry in Zamfara State.
2. To determine how widespread poverty, youth unemployment and inequality drive vulnerable individuals into criminality in the state.
3. To assess border security and the proliferation of SALWs.
4. To analyse the effect of illegal mining on armed banditry in Zamfara State.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Armed Banditry

According to Tahir and Usman, (2026), armed banditry can be classified based on underlying factors. Among the factors are the 'intent' or 'motive'. This is evident in the herder-farmers conflict in Zamfara State which emanated as a result of grievances of herders who claimed to have lost their grazing routes and villages by irate actions of Hausa farmers in the state (Maduagwu & Abah, 2023; Ibrahim, & Musa, 2024; Ahmed & Bello, 2023). In other to achieve their motive the armed bandits attacked and destroyed farmlands, burnt down villages and rustled cattle which have been their practice in rural communities of Zamfara State since in 2011 and 2012. Another factor raised by the authors in their concept was 'social banditry' which is generally motivated by the intent to protest social inequality and to redistribute wealth within a locality. Social banditry is motivated by 'political' or 'economic' reasons which includes high level of youth unemployment and lack of quality education, poor governance and breakdown of quality community leadership due to corruption. These are manifest in Zamfara State where there is hardly any government presence in the rural areas where most armed bandits reside. This explains Maduagwu's view of 'rural versus urban bandits'. Rural bandits are those that operate in the rural areas where farming and other agricultural activities are done. The absence of government present in these rural areas gave birth to the phrase 'ungoverned areas'. Urban bandits are armed bandits that operate in cities and highways as highways bandits or robbers. The last group mentioned are the mercenary bandits or autonomous bandits. Mercenary armed banditry is perpetuated by auxiliaries or mercenaries working for a principal in a sort of principal-agent relationship (Tahir & Usman, 2026). These form of armed bandits thrive on a network of actors that are syndicated and coordinated.

2.2 The Concept of Food Security

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) views food security as a condition where all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. In essence food security is not about whether there is food somewhere but whether specific people in specific places can reliably access food that is safe and nutritious enough to support their wellbeing. In essence understanding food security requires looking beyond the question of whether food is produced. It requires examining who can access it, in what condition, and with what reliability (FAO, 2023). In Zamfara State, there is high level of food insecurity which is manifest in massive hunger and malnutrition. According to Mohammed (2026), the Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) treated 60,566 children for malnutrition in Zamfara State in 2025 which was caused by aggravated hunger and disease. This explains the level food insecurity in Zamfara State.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Frustration-Aggression Theory (FAT) and the Queer Ladder Theory (QLT).

2.5.1 The FAT was propounded by Dollard and Miler (1939) but the theory was expanded by Berkowitz (1989), who states that frustration creates an aversive, negative emotional state and that aggression only occurs if this state elicits negative feeling or angry thoughts, which trigger a fight-or-flight response. In summary, the theory posits that aggression is the result of blocking or frustrating a person's efforts to achieve a goal. In the context of Zamfara, the systemic neglect of rural populations and the collapse of the local agrarian economy have created a "frustrated" youth population (Abubakar, 2023; Yusuf and Ahmed, 2023). When legitimate means of livelihood are blocked, aggression—channeled through armed banditry—becomes a functional alternative.

2.5.2 The QLT was developed by Daniel Bell in 1964 to explain the rise of crime and deviance resulting from the failure of governments to provide legitimate avenues for self-actualisation. Bell (1964) describes how organised criminals exploit the QLT as a mechanism for economic advancement and social mobility. While Bell initially applied

the theory to the behavioral patterns of Italian migrants in the United States in relation to organised crime, it has since gained wider application in contemporary security studies. The theory posits that organised crime flourishes in environments where governmental capacity to enforce sanctions and deter criminal activity is weak, public corruption is widespread, and legitimate economic opportunities are limited (Terzungwa, 2026). When applied to the case of armed banditry and the proliferation of SALW in Zamfara State and Nigeria at large, the QLT explains how armed bandits acquire illicit weapons as a shortcut to wealth, influence, and social mobility. Individuals who resort to carrying arms often do so because they have lost confidence in their ability to achieve their aspirations through legitimate means. Consequently, illegal firearms become an alternative pathway for pursuing economic gains and asserting social relevance. In this context, organised crime thrives because illicit weapons empower non-state actors to engage in armed banditry, kidnapping, robbery and other forms of violent criminality that promise quick financial returns and upward mobility.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed method research design involving a qualitative and quantitative research methods. The quantitative approach provides statistical analysis of the factors that facilitate the activities of armed banditry and its effect on food security, while the qualitative approach looked into the experiences and perspective of affected communities. The study employed a sequential explanatory design where the quantitative data was collected and analysed first, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The quantitative approach involves surveys among farmers, herders and households while the qualitative approach involves follow up interviews using Key Informant Interviews (KII), In Dept Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with affected communities and community leaders. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data enables the study to achieve its objectives.

3.1.1 Target Population

The target population consists of the vulnerable rural farming and herding communities who are heavily affected by armed banditry in 7 LGAs of Zamfara State which include *Gasau, Maru, Shinkafi, Talata Mafara, Maradun, Anka* and *Zurmi*. According to available data from the National Population Commission (NPC), Zamfara State has an approximated population of 5,833,500 people (NPC: Population Projection, 2022). The target population for this study specifically includes: military commanders, heads of security agencies, farmers who have experienced loss of crops, livestock or farm infrastructure; households who have been displaced or affected by armed banditry, herders who have been displaced from their villages as well as community leaders and local government officials who have knowledge of the impact of armed banditry on food security. By focusing on this target population within the larger population of the Zamfara State, the research was able to gain a deeper understanding of the study.

3.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

3.2.1 Sample Size

The sample size for this study is 400. The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane Formula: $n = N/(1+Ne^2)$ where n is sample size; N is population size, 5,833,500 which is the estimated population of Zamfara State (NPC: Population Projection, 2022) and e is margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95 per cent. A detailed calculation of the sample size using Taro Yamani Formula is $n = N/(1+Ne^2)$

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N e^2} \quad 3.1$$

where n = size, N = population and e is the error margin.

But $N = 5,833,500$ $e = 5$ per cent = 0.05

Therefore, $n = \frac{5,833,500}{1+5,833,500 \times (0.05)^2}$

$$= \frac{5,833,500}{1+5,833,500 \times 0.0025}$$

$$= \frac{5,833,500}{14,584.75}$$

$$= \frac{5,833,500}{14,584.75}$$

$$= 399.97$$

$$= \text{Approximately } 400.$$

$$= \text{Approximately } 400.$$

$$= \text{Approximately } 400.$$

It has a confidence level of 95 per cent and error margin of 5 per cent. A total number of 400 well-structured questionnaires was randomly administered within the seven purposively selected LGAs.

3.3 Sampling Technique

The Study utilized random/convenience sampling and purposive/snowballing technique. These sampling techniques offer distinct operational advantages for studying sensitive and volatile areas of study like armed banditry and food security in Zamfara State. Random and convenience sampling enhance quantitative data collection across broad demographics, while purposive and snowballing techniques are vital for gathering qualitative insights from vulnerable communities.

3.4 Data Analysis

For quantitative data analysis the study utilised descriptive statistics to test if banditry significantly impacts agricultural production and food security in Zamfara State while thematic analysis was used to transcribe the interview into codes and identify recurring themes such as farmer-herder dynamics, “illegal taxation” and “abandonment of farmlands”.

4 Results and discussions

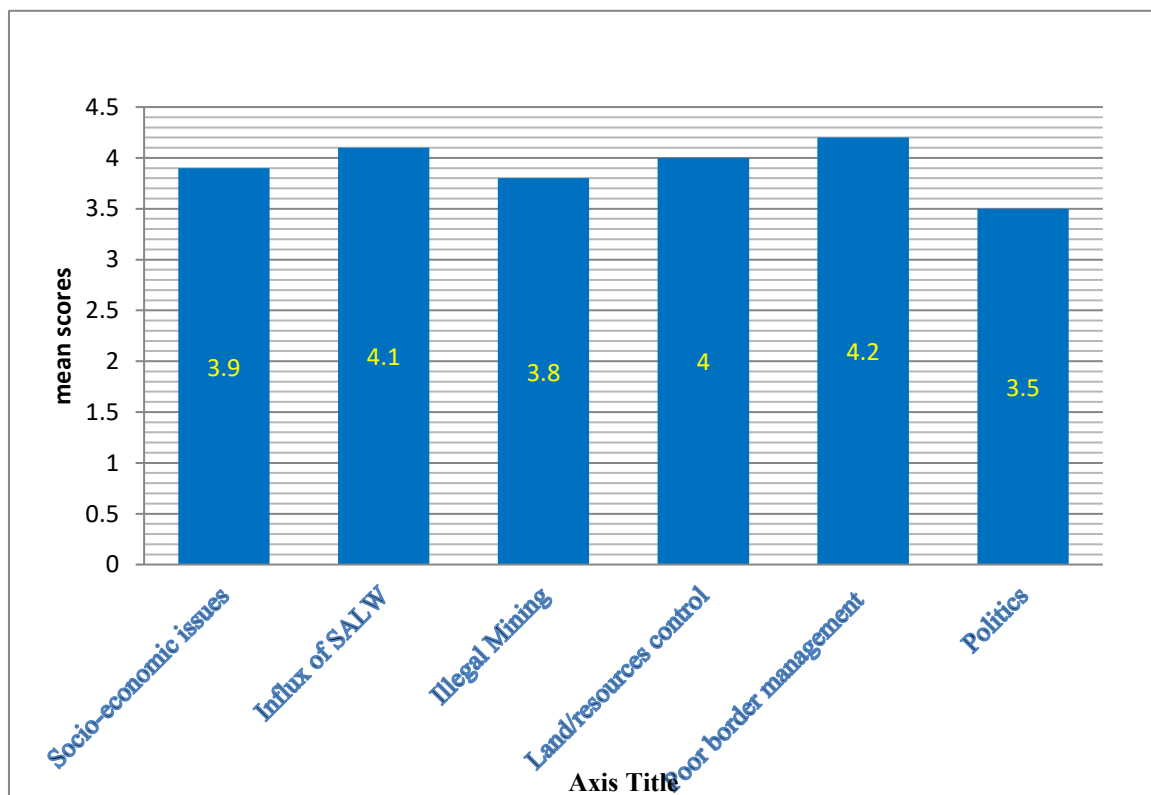
4.1 Which factors facilitate armed banditry in Zamfara State.

Armed banditry in Zamfara State is influenced by several factors some of which include socioeconomic, influx of SALWs, illegal mining activities, land/natural resource control, poor border management and politics. The respondents’ views on these factors are as shown in Table 1 below.

Table One: Response viewed on the factors that facilitate armed banditry in Zamfara

Statement	Rating and weight value					Total	Mean	SD
	SA(5)	A(4)	U(3)	D(2)	SD(1)			
Socioeconomic issues	150 39.5%	130 34.2%	50 13.2%	30 7.9%	20 5.3%	1500	3.9	0.9
Influx of SALW	180 47.4%	120 31.6%	40 10.5%	20 5.3%	20 5.3%	1560	4.1	0.8
Illegal mining	120 31.6%	140 36.8%	60 15.8%	30 7.9%	30 7.9%	1430	3.8	1.0
Land/resource control	160 42.1	130 34.2%	50 13.2%	20 5.3%	20 5.3%	1530	4.0	0.9
Poor border management	200 52.6%	120 31.6%	15 3.9%	30 7.9%	15 3.9%	1615	4.2	0.7
Politics	100 26.3%	140 36.8%	30 7.9%	70 18.4%	40 10.5%	1330	3.5	1.1

Significant mean of factors facilitating armed banditry in Zamfara State



Source: Field survey, 2024

Figure One: Bar Chart Representation of factors that aid armed banditry in Zamfara State.

The factors considered in Table One include social economic issues (poverty, unemployment etc), influx SALW and its proliferation, illegal mining, land/resource control, poor border control/management and politics/governance. The data generated from respondents and plotted in bar charts in Figure One indicates that Poor Border Management is the most significant factor that contributes to armed banditry in the state with a high mean score of 4.2 (84.2%) and a standard deviation of 0.7. Others are the Influx of SALW with mean value of 4.1, land/natural resources with mean value of 4.0, socioeconomic factors like poverty and unemployment with mean value of 3.9 and illegal mining with mean value of 3.8 which indicate strong agreement that all these are the driving forces that aid armed banditry activities in Zamfara State. Even politics with a mean value of 3.5 is a significant factor that influences armed banditry in Zamfara State. Above values are corroborated by the SPSS values in Table 4.6 thus, indicating strong agreement between the tools of analysis.

Table Two: Sample SPSS Output on Factors Facilitating Armed Banditry in Zamfara State

Factors	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. deviation
Socio-economic issues	280	73.7%	3.9	0.9
Influx of SALW	300	78.9%	4.1	0.8
Illegal mining	260	68.4%	3.8	1.0
Land/Natural resources control	290	76.3%	4.0	0.9
Poor border management	300	84.42%	4.2	0.7
Politics	240	63.2%	3.5	1.1

The impact of socioeconomic factors on armed banditry and food security Zamfara State was corroborated by a KII who stated that, “the level of illiteracy and poverty in Zamfara State are alarming and these make the citizens vulnerable to armed banditry recruitment” (Personal Communication with a participant, Male, 25 October, 2024). Another KII, participant further stated that,

some of the repentant members of armed bandits revealed that unemployment and poverty pushed them to join armed banditry. This has made socio-economic status of people a factor for consideration in combating armed bandits in the Zamfara State for enhanced food security in Nigeria (Personal Communication with a participant, Male, October 20, 2024)

This implies that poor socio-economic status of people could make them easy recruits by bandits in Zamfara State.

On the aspect of poor border management (porous border) with a mean value of 4.2 (84.2%), Abdul (2020) identified that the border in the Northern West Nigeria with Niger Republic cover about 216,065sq km, out of which, only 500 sq km is manned leaving 215,055 km left porous. Gombe (2021) further agrees by observing that border communities in Nigeria and Niger Republic share ethno-religious and cultural affinities. He further stated that most porous border crossing points are in very difficult geographical terrains which make monitoring and detection very difficult for security agencies. Consequently, armed bandits have exploited about 90 per cent of the unmanned land border crossings leading to large scale criminality which undermines national security and indeed food security in Nigeria, particularly in the Zamfara State. Also, Offem and Ichoku (2015) identified porous border as a key factor responsible for the high prevalence of armed banditry in NW zone. Additionally, they pointed out high level of negligence on the part of security agencies as a contributory factor to porous and inadequately manned border. An adequately controlled border would reduce crime and this was corroborated by a KII participant who stated,

The joint border patrol in 2021 arrested over 200 members of armed bandits that illegally crossed the Zamfara State border route. This led to a decline in the rate of insecurity perpetrated by the armed bandits within the borders of the Zamfara State from 75 per cent in 2018 to about 40 per cent in 2021 towards enhanced food security in Nigeria (Personal Communication with a participant, Male, November 21, 2024) .

Despite the success in the arrest of armed bandits, border management in Zamfara State has remained ineffective. Accordingly, another KII, noted that “porous and inadequately manned border often result in transnational crimes and illegal trafficking in humans, drugs and weapons.” (Personal Communication with a participant, Male, November 22, 2024). He further stated that unsecured borders have continued to be exploited by the armed bandits to move across borders, set up camps and enclaves in the forest used as a haven to launch attacks against the populace thus, hampering their ability to farm with dire implications on food security.

Another major factor influencing armed banditry in the state is influx of SALW with a high mean value of 4.1 and standard deviation of 0.8 suggesting that poor monitoring of SALW significantly contributes to armed banditry in Zamfara State thus undermining food security. This resonates with Rosenge and Adeniyi (2020) who states that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons through the porous borders is a threat to peace and security of Zamfara

State and indeed, Nigeria. This is supported an IDI, from Taratsi, a border town between Zamfara State and Niger Republic, who stated that “armed bandits move around the village unchecked with their sophisticated rifles hanging on their shoulders” (IDI, Community Leader, Taratsi in Shinkafi LGA). He informed the researcher that such sophisticated weapons must have been brought in through porous borders. He also noted that there could be an alliance between local bandits in Nigeria and their counterparts in Niger Republic and part of such alliance could include outright purchase or hiring of weapons for operations. This assertion was corroborated by the FGD,

they unanimously agreed that the weapons used by bandits to attack their homes and kill their husbands were sophisticated and must have gotten into the hands of bandits through porous borders thus, giving credence to the proliferation of SALW in Zamfara State and indeed the NW zone (FGD, Community Stakeholders, Shinkafi LGA, 25 October, 2024).

Another important factor identified for influencing armed banditry and food security in Zamfara State is illegal mining with a mean value of 3.8 and a standard deviation of 0.1. Illegal mining can facilitate armed banditry by turning the conflict into a resource conflict which is more complex and difficult to resolve. This result was supported by most of the key informants that were interviewed. According to one of the KII, “gold mining in Damari as at January 2024 are controlled by the armed bandits and residents of the community. The bandits and the locals oversee the extraction of gold from a mine situated 2 kilometres from the community” (Personal Communication a participant, Male, October 13, 2024). He added that mining activities are still under the control of illegal miners or armed bandits thus, making it easy for unemployed youths to be easily recruited to armed bandits. He cited example of armed banditry attack on Madabanciya community in Bungudu in January 2024 with a view to taking control of the mining site and consolidating control of the area. According to another KII participant,

the ban on illegal mining has decreased accessibility of gold and has increased demand and cost of gold. This has made illegal gold mining activity to be a very lucrative business, in such a way that most of the out of school and unemployed youth’s readily get recruited into armed banditry to sustain their mining activities (Personal Communication with a participant, Zamfara State Ministry of Solid Mineral (ZSMSM) November 13, 2024),

This implies that illegal mining activities have direct implication on the activities of armed banditry in Zamfara State.

Poor management of land resources (destruction of grazing routes) with mean score of 4.0 and standard deviation (0.9) was also identified as an important factor influencing armed banditry and food security in the state. This result shows that poor management of natural and land resources like grazing routes and farmlands are strong factors that could aid armed banditry in Zamfara State and undermine food security in Nigeria. According to a KII participant, “farmers and pastoralists have lingering issues over land resources in the state and these have contributed to the menace of armed banditry in the state” (Personal Communication with a participant, Male, October 25, 2024). This was also supported by another KII participant, who stated that “the region often faces violent competition over limited land and water resources among various groups” (KII participant, Bungudu Community, November 10, 2024). Additionally, he noted that the situation has further exacerbated farmers-pastoralists conflicts that degenerated into the emergence of many armed bandits in the region. It is apparent that the government needs to effectively take charge of land resources to deter criminals in line with the Human Needs Theory towards addressing the emergence of armed bandits for enhanced food security in Zamfara State and indeed Nigeria. Thus, control of natural resources is a factor to be considered in finding solution to the activities of armed bandits in the Zamfara State for enhanced food security in Nigeria.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The results in objectives 1, 2 and 3 showed indicates clearly that porous borders, socioeconomic issues (unemployment, poverty and malnutrition), proliferation of SALW and illegal mining among others are key factors that aid armed banditry with negative implications on food security in Zamfara State. The results revealed that all the items in table 1 were found to be responsible for increase in the activities of armed banditry in Zamfara State with mean scores greater than 3.0 for all the items, indicating a strong agreement from respondents. The mean with the highest value of 4.5 is poor border management suggesting that poor border management is the most significant factor that aid armed banditry in Zamfara State. The poor border management results in porous borders through which foreign bandits penetrate into the country to perpetrate their crimes. This finding is in line with the study of Fawole, & Ozkan, (2017) who stated that border communities share ethno-religious and cultural affinities. He further stated that most porous border crossing points are in very difficult geographical terrains which make monitoring and detection very difficult for security agencies. Consequently, armed bandits have exploited about 90 per cent of the unmanned land border crossings leading to large scale criminality which undermines national security and indeed food security in Nigeria, particularly in the Zamfara State. In the same vein, Abdul (2020) identified border in the Northern West Nigeria with Niger Republic cover about 216,065km sq km. Out of this number, only 500 sq km is manned while the remaining 215,055 km are left porous. Also, Offem and Ichoku (2015); Haruna, (2024) identified porous

border as a key factor responsible for the high prevalence of armed banditry in North West zone. Additionally, they pointed out high level of negligence on the part of security agencies as a contributory factor to porous and inadequately manned border.

Another major factor influencing armed banditry in the state is the influx of SALW with a high mean value of 4.1, suggesting that poor monitoring of SALW significantly contributes to armed banditry in Zamfara State thus undermining food security. The proliferation of SALW also makes illicit weapons available for vulnerable and unemployed youths who easily gets recruited to armed banditry in line with QLT thus, by passing the normal process of hard labour to climb to opulence. This resonates with some scholars who agree that small arms and light weapons are major threats to peace and security in Nigeria (Rosenge and Adeniyi, 2020; Ibrahim & Usman, 2023; Okafor, 2025). The result further showed that land resource control with mean score of 4.0 is also a factor that influences armed banditry activities in Zamfara State. Indicating that natural resources in the state attract armed banditry activities. The finding is in agreement with Madubuegwu and Abah (2023) who states that the control of the gold reserve have intensified the existence and formation of armed groups in Zamfara State. He concluded that these activities have led to wide displacement of person in the study area thereby leading to a humanitarian crisis for the residents in these local government areas. The findings also collaborated the findings of ACLED (2024), which stressed that the armed banditry desired to control land activities have led to widespread displacement, loss of lives, and destruction of property, creating an environment of fear and uncertainty that hampers economic activities and undermines social cohesion.

Furthermore, the finding showed that socioeconomic issues with a mean score of 3.95 is another factor that had made armed banditry activities linger for a long period in Zamfara State. This is in tandem with view of some scholars who found out that armed groups or individuals who engage in acts of violence, exhortation, and theft, often target vulnerable population in remote or marginalised areas where governance is weak, law enforcement is ineffective, and socio-economic disparities are pronounced (Ibrahim & Musa, 2024; Obi, 2021; Ojo, (2020). This creates a fertile ground for criminal exploitation and violence.

The mean score for illegal mining is 3.7, suggesting that the activities of illegal miners contribute reasonably to armed banditry in Zamfara State. The findings showed that there is a strong collaboration between bandits and illegal miners where bandits provide security for illegal miners and the illegal miners in turn provide funds to the bandits. The finding is in line with the study of Ahmed and Bello, (2023) who discovered that armed groups often provide protection for illegal mining operations, fostering symbiotic relationship with miners. In return, miners pay a share of their earnings or allow armed bandit groups to control the trade entirely. These findings are also in agreement with the work of ACLED (2024); Ahmed and Bello, (2023); Adekoya, (2024), who opined that in 2020, armed bandit groups in Zamfara generated over US \$200,000 from illegal mining, thus funding weapon purchases, and logistical support and by 2021, this revenue increased to over US \$500,000, thus, enabling the procurement of more sophisticated arms from Libya and other Sahelian countries.

5, Conclusion

The study establishes that armed banditry in Zamfara State is sustained by a combination of socio-economic factors, the influx of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs), illegal mining, competition over land and resources, and political influences, with devastating impacts on food security. Unless the Nigerian state takes decisive steps to address the identified factors, strengthens its presence in rural areas, tightens control over illegal mining, and ensures stricter control of border regions, armed banditry may continue to fester in the state, with dire consequences for food security in Zamfara State and indeed Nigeria.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings, it is recommended that:

- a. The Federal Government should introduce electronic surveillance using armed surveillance drones to cover the porous border between Chad and Niger Republic. Such surveillance should also cover major forests like the Rugu and Kuyanbana forests in real-time.
- b. The Federal Government should direct the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development strictly regulate all mining sites in Zamfara to starve bandits of illicit funds from illegal mining.
- c. The Federal Government should establish a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme for both local citizens and armed bandits to sensitize them to surrender SALWs to ZSCSALW in Gusau.
- d. The Zamfara State government should establish a "Whistleblower Protection and Reward Scheme" to incentivize locals to expose bandit collaborators, thereby breaking the internal intelligence link.

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