

NATURE AND MAGNITUDE OF ARMED BANDITRY IN ZAMFARA STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD SECURITY

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Abstract

This paper investigated the evolving nature and escalating magnitude of armed banditry in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The study argues that excessive kinetic interventions have failed to address the underlying political economy of the conflict. It adopted the Greed and Grievance Theory, developed by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler between 2000 and 2002, as its theoretical framework, while a mixed research design was employed as the methodology. A total of 400 questionnaires were administered to respondents, while Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used for data collection. Qualitative data were content-analysed, while quantitative data were presented in charts and percentages. The analysis revealed that armed banditry manifested in the forms of cattle rustling (93.4%), night attacks (90.0%), land confiscation (85.5%), and the burning of farmlands (84.1%). It further revealed that incidents of armed banditry increased from 128 cases in 2018 to 1,031 cases in 2024, indicating an escalating magnitude. Additionally, about 71.7 per cent of respondents linked increasing food insecurity to the loss of farm produce, while 89.5 per cent agreed that hunger had become more widespread within their households. In view of these findings, the nature and magnitude of armed banditry reveal a significant escalation and sophistication in banditry operations since 2012 in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The study recommends that the Zamfara State Government should institute stiffer penalties for cattle rustling and kidnapping while implementing developmental programmes aimed at improving the living standards of the people. It further recommends that the Federal Government of Nigeria should strengthen relations with neighbouring countries such as Chad, Niger, and Benin to facilitate joint efforts against armed banditry for enhanced regional security, as well as procure advanced technological surveillance equipment, including drones, to improve border surveillance and management.

Keywords: Armed banditry, Burning of farmlands, Food Security, Kidnapping for ransom, Zamfara State.

1. Introduction

Armed banditry refers to organised criminal activity by non-state armed groups who engage in armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, rape and village raids among others for personal gains. It is a major threat to the sovereignty of many developing countries in South America especially in Mexico, Brazil and Columbia (Berkley, 2008). Cases of armed banditry also abound in Asia (India, Pakistan and Afghanistan) and Africa (Kenya, Sudan, Libya, Mali, Niger, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria) (Hassane & Malik, (2023). In Nigeria, armed banditry has emerged as one of the greatest threats to national security especially in North West Nigeria where it has claimed several lives. According to Ojo, (2023) between January 2021 and March 2022, armed banditry activities claimed 8,300 lives in North West Nigeria and these include 7 people in Jigawa, 1,917 in Kaduna, 1,416 in Katsina, 202 in Kebbi, 644 in Sokoto, and 4,114 in Zamfara. Obviously, this statistics highlights Zamfara State which was once heralded by a slogan as “Farming is our pride” as the worst affected by armed banditry in Nigeria. More disturbing is the imposition of taxes on farmers in some Zamfara State Local Government Areas (LGAs) by armed bandits before planting crops and before harvesting season. According to Premium Times report (2025), armed bandits leaders invited the village heads in Maru LGA for meeting and

ended up imposing levies ranging from N60 million to N100 million before they could cultivate or harvest their crops.

To address the scourge, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) through the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) has set up several military task force operations to degrade the activities of these non-state actors with limited success. Some of the operations include the Nigeria Army Operation *Habin Kunama* 1 and 2 and Operation *Puff Adder*, Nigerian Air Force Operation *Diran Mikiya* and the Joint Task Force (JTF) Operation Hadarin Daji (which has transformed to Operation *Fansan Yamma* [OPFY]). Despite these efforts, the activities of armed bandits have not abated thus, necessitating the need for this research on the nature and magnitude of armed banditry in Zamfara State, Nigeria.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Overview of Armed Banditry in North West Nigeria

The concept of armed banditry has been changing over time and it varies from continents to continents. In the Nineteenth Century, armed banditry activities in Asia, Europe and Americas are often viewed by the masses as freedom fighters whose purpose were to emancipate the masses from their oppressors as against the views of the ruling class who considered them as criminals (Warto, 1994, Imran *et al*, 2023). Furthermore, Imran *et al* (2023) stated that bandits like Chucho el Roto, Hrachio Bernel and Santanon were celebrated as heroes of Mexican Independence instead of being seen as criminals. In Africa, armed banditry has existed for ages among the societies and was characterised by wanton killings, kidnapping and armed robbery as evident in Kenya, Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Somalia (Lormotum, *et al*, (2024, Imran, *et al*, (2023).

In Nigeria, armed banditry dates beyond colonial conquests. According to Jaafar, (2018) in late Twentieth Century, wayfarers and merchants travelling along local economic roads were usually attacked or ambushed by rural bandits who confiscate their goods and disappear into the bush. At other times the bandits would raid farming communities and villages with the intent of willfully killing and destroying their property. During such raids, the bandits would destroy virtually everything in their path, including valuables, farm produce among other things. This view was collaborated by the report of the International Crisis Group [ICG], (2020) which stated that North West Nigeria has a long history of banditry with the first recorded case occurring between western Hausa land and the Niger Republic border in 1901. It was an attack on a 12,000 strong camel train laden with assorted grains in which about 210 merchants were killed. Although banditry is as old as Nigeria, it has nevertheless gradually been transformed in nature and magnitude overtime from its rudimentary phase, as affirmed by the Jaafar's citation, to a more complex and complicated pattern of criminality (Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], 2015; Egwu 2016).

According to Bagu and Smith, (2017) the modern form of armed banditry in North West Nigeria began in 2011 with a different form (nature) from the traditional form based on the sophistication of their weaponry, planning of their operations and wanton destruction of lives and properties of their victims. Furthermore, armed bandits take advantage of growing insecurity, fear and cyclical attacks in North West Nigeria and indeed Zamfara State to loot villages, engage in highway robbery, and cattle rustling for personal gain thus, causing both farming and herding communities to suffer from their criminality (Bagu & Smith, 2017; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Okoro, (2023), also observed that armed banditry has socio-economic effect which varies within communities in the North West zone. He stressed that the structure of the society, the kinds of social controls and pattern of relationships could be responsible for the varied effect of armed bandits in the communities in Zamfara State. For instance, communities located near the forests areas are often worse hit than communities located afar off.

2.2 The Concept of the Armed Banditry

Armed banditry connotes the use of force or coercion to intimidate, rob or kill someone for selfish or political gains. According to Tamuno, (1991), armed banditry is the exercise of physical force to inflict injury or cause damage to a person or property. Similarly, Domenack (1978) cited in Okoro (2023) views banditry as the use of force whether overt or covert, in order to snatch something of value from individual or groups which they are not willing to give at their own freewill. Osagie (1995) captures the two views when he argued that all forms of banditry involves the use of force whether it is legitimate or illegitimate. In this context, the use of force is considered an essential element of banditry. It is important to note that when such force is applied by a bandit on a victim, which could be an individual or group of individual, it leads to murder, rape, arson among other forms of destruction. It also noteworthy that most activities of armed banditry occur in rural communities which are often located near forests or ungoverned areas.

2.3 The Concept of Food Security.

Food security is a subset of national security and has been subjected to various clarifications, based on certain national and geo-strategic context. The World Bank (2011) viewed food security as the ability of all the people to access enough food at all times for an active, healthy life. Similarly, the Food and Agriculture Organisation [FAO] (1996) viewed food security as a condition in which all individuals within a population have physical,

social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life. It involves the availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability of food at the individual, household, national, and global levels. Furthermore, in a joint publication, the FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], World's Food Programme [WFP] and World Health Organisation [WHO] (2020) highlighted that food security is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the availability, access, utilization, and stability of food for individuals, households, and communities. In summary, food security refers to a situation where all people have physical, social, and economic access to safe, sufficient, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences. It includes the ability to acquire food without compromising other essential needs and the resilience to withstand shocks and disruptions in the food system.

In Nigeria food security refers to the condition in which all individuals 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, both in the short term and long term (Ade & Adebayo, 2012). It encompasses four key dimensions which include availability, access, utilization, and stability of food. However, several factors such as armed banditry, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, attack on farmers and destruction of their farm products significantly affect Nigeria's ability to achieve food security.

2.4 Statement of the Research Problem

North West Nigeria is the most severely affected region by armed banditry and this has grave implications on food security and general wellbeing of the population (Ojo, 2023). Zamfara State is the epicenter of this crisis due to lingering feud between Hausa farmers and Fulani herders, illegal mining in parts of the state and destruction of the grazing routes among others (Malik, 2026). The current form of armed banditry began in 2011 as the usual form of herder-farmer clash but degenerated into cattle rustling, resource conflict, kidnapping for ransom, village and markets raids and systematic extortion (Ojo, *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, armed banditry has taken a terrifying magnitude, with thousands of deaths reported annually and numerous farmlands destroyed with widespread displacement of rural population. In 2023 alone, an estimated 223 villages were vacated and abandoned as a direct effect of armed banditry (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). This has led to abandoning of many farmlands and reduced agricultural productivity in Zamfara State, leading to increased food prices, heightened hunger, and deepened poverty. The once-thriving agrarian economy of the state has thus been transformed into a landscape of desolation, characterized by insecurity, displacement, and loss of livelihoods.

The core problem is that armed banditry has directly paralyzed the agricultural sector, which is the mainstay of the economy in Zamfara State. The nature of these attacks include the destruction of farm products, kidnapping of farmers for ransom, and seizure of farm lands which has created a climate of fear that limits access to farm lands. Consequently, vast stretches of agricultural land are abandoned, leading to a significant reduction in food production, storage disruption, and a surge in local food prices.

This has further be compounded by the complicity of local informants and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons which have allowed armed bandits to establish an illegal tax system by forcing farmers to pay levies before cultivating and harvesting their crops (Premium Times, 2025). Despite various government initiatives and military operations, the violence persists, thus, worsening the humanitarian crisis in the state, which is characterized by extreme hunger, child malnutrition, and the inability of farmers to support their families. This study therefore, seeks to examine the specific nature and extent of these banditry activities and analyse their effect on food availability and accessibility in Zamfara State.

2.5 Research Questions

- i. What is the nature and intensity of armed banditry in the affected communities of Zamfara?
- ii. How has the abandonment of farmland and cattle rustling influenced food production volumes in the state?
- iii. What is the relationship between banditry-related extortion (taxes/levies) and household income/food security?

2.6 Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the nature and magnitude of armed banditry in Zamfara State.
- ii. To analyze the effect of armed banditry on food security in Zamfara State, Nigeria.
- iii. To assess the consequences of banditry-related insecurity on food availability and access in rural households.

2.7 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study covers the period between 2015 and 2024. This timeframe was deliberately chosen because it coincides with the period when armed banditry escalated in Zamfara State and assumed widespread notoriety

across North West Nigeria. From 2015 onward, cases of village raids, cattle rustling, kidnappings, and large-scale displacement of farming communities increased drastically, undermining not only local livelihoods but also food security in the state and beyond.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Greed and Grievance theory which was developed by economists Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler between 2000 and 2002 through their work at the World Bank. The theory argues that conflicts are often driven by economic opportunities for predation rather than by ethnic or social grievances. The core concept of the theory is that it compares whether rebellions are caused by grievances such as injustice and inequality or greed such as the opportunity to capture resources like diamonds, gold or timber among others. The authors argued that greed such as economic opportunity is a better predator of conflict than political or social grievances. Their analysis further suggests that when rebels, have the opportunity to fund themselves through natural resources, they would more likely start a conflict and use narratives of grievance to gain support (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002).

The key critics of the Greed and Grievance theory are the David Keen, Christopher Cramer, William Easterly, Laurie Nathan, and Karen Ballentine. Collectively, the critics argue that the theory over simplifies complex wars or conflicts by setting up a false dichotomy between economic opportunity ("greed") and political/social injustices ("grievance"). Furthermore, they claimed that the theory over-relied on quantitative metrics with disregard for historical context and failure to acknowledge that greed and grievance often coexist. Despite these criticisms, the theory is still very relevant to the study of armed banditry and food security considering the root cause of the conflict which include herder-farmer struggle for land resources, Hausa-Fulani dichotomy, illicit trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and scramble for solid minerals in the state among others. In line with the view of Collier and Hoeffler (2002), the armed banditry which is a criminal adventure that manifests in the forms of cattle rustling, herder-farmer clashes and raids on farming communities is driven by greed and quest to climb the social ladder to affluence through a shortcut. This triggers off political/social injustices (grievance) that often leads reprisal action thus, aggravating the conflict.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed method research design involving a qualitative and quantitative research methods. The choice of the mixed methods design is justified by the complexity of the research problem which required both numerical data and narrative insights. The quantitative approach provides statistical analysis of the effect of armed banditry 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.

The focus of the study is on 7 LGAs of Zamfara State which include *Gasau, Maru, Tsafe, 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

3.3 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 $n = N/(1+Ne^2)$

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

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, $n = 5,833,500$

$$\begin{aligned}
 & 1+5,833,500 \times (0.05)^2 \\
 & = 5,833,500 \\
 & 1+5,833,500 \times 0.0025 \\
 = & \frac{5,833,500}{14,584.75} \\
 = & 399.97 \\
 = & \text{Approximately } 400
 \end{aligned}$$

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.

4. Results and Discussion

The nature of the current form of armed banditry in Zamfara State can be measured through the following incidents: burning of farmlands, cattle rustling and land confiscation, market attacks, kidnapping, imposed taxation, use of sophisticated weapons, highway attacks and night attacks. The magnitude of armed banditry on the other hand, can be assessed by the frequency and gravity of attacks by the armed bandits and the impact on food security in Zamfara State. The respondents view on these incidents are highlighted on Table 1.0 below.

Table 1:0 Respondents View on Nature and Magnitude of Armed Banditry and Food Security in Zamfara State

Statement	Rating and weight value						Total	Mean	SD
	SA(5)	A(4)	U(3)	D(2)	SD(1)				
Burning of farm land	200	120	20	25	15	1605	4.22	1.1	
	52.6%	31.5%	31.6%	6.6%	3.9%				
Cattle Rustling	255	100	10	10	5	1730	4.55	1.3	
	67.1%	26.3%	2.6%	2.6%	1.3%				
Land confiscation	205	120	25	20	10	1630	4.29	1.0	
	53.9%	31.6%	6.6%	5.3%	2.6%				
Attacks on Markets	255	90	15	15	5	1715	4.18	1.2	
	67.1%	23.7%	3.9%	3.9%	1.3%				
Kidnapping	265	90	10	10	5	1740	4.20	0.89	
	69.7%	23.7%	2.6%	2.6%	1.3%				
Imposed Taxation	215	100	25	25	15	1615	3.95	1.08	
	56.6%	26.3%	6.6%	6.6%	3.9%				
Use of Sophisticated Weapons	250	100	15	10	5	1720	4.15	0.94	
	65.8%	26.3%	3.9%	2.6%	1.3%				
Highway Attacks	235	105	20	15	5	1640	4.10	0.98	
	61.8%	27.6%	5.3%	3.9%	1.3%				
Night Attacks	232	110	12	18	8	1680	4.42	0.92	
	61.1%	28.9%	3.2%	4.7%	2.1%				

Significant mean of Nature and Magnitude of AB on food security in Zamfara State

Source: Field survey, 2024.

Table 1.0 indicates the results from the findings on the nature and magnitude of armed banditry and their impact on food security in Zamfara State. The calculated mean and standard deviation indicate that Cattle Rustling has the highest mean score of 4.55 suggesting that respondents strongly believe that Cattle Rustling which is a nature of armed banditry has severe consequence for the livestock farmers and traders in Zamfara State.

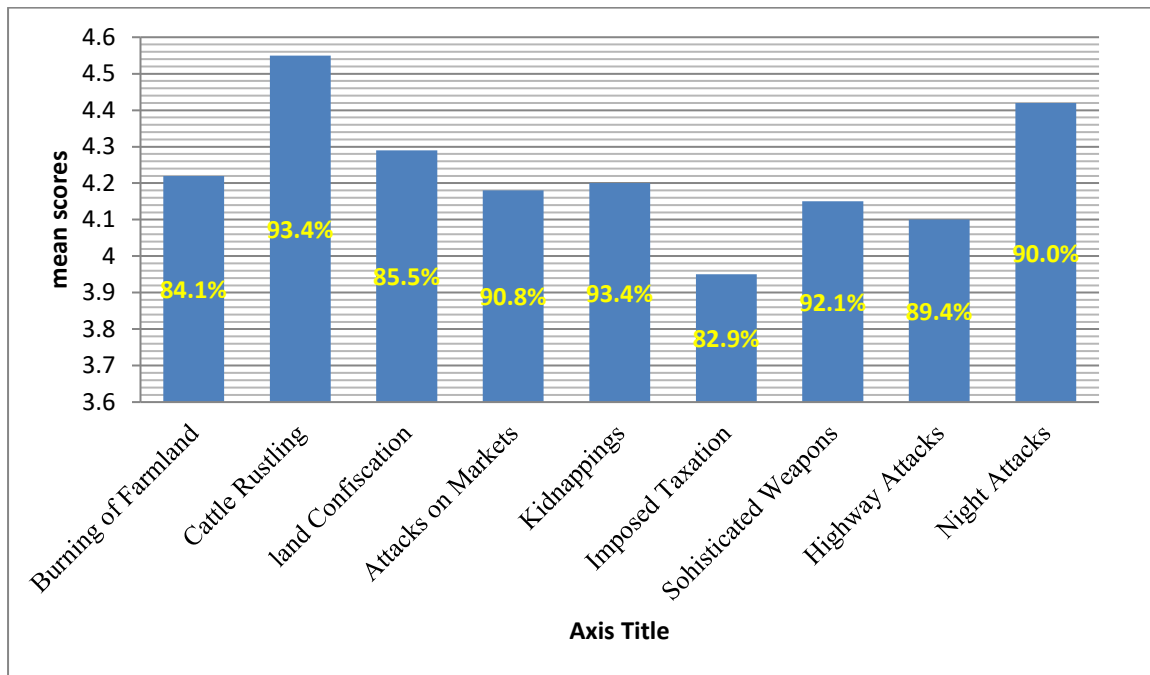


Figure 1.0: Bar Chart Representation of the Nature and Magnitude of AB in Zamfara State

4.1 Research Objective One: To examine the nature and magnitude of armed banditry in Zamfara State.

Above Bar Chart in Figure 1.0 visually represents the mean scores for each item. The longer bars indicate higher mean scores, suggesting stronger agreement among respondents on the various nature and forms of armed banditry in Zamfara State. The finding reveals that Cattle Rustling has the longest bar, indicating the strongest agreement while Imposed Taxation has a relatively shorter bar, but still indicates strong agreement. The bar chart provides a quick visual summary of the relative Nature and magnitude of armed banditry in Zamfara State. This was supported by a KII participant who stated that:

Increasing spate of cattle rustling has created fears in the minds of farmers, in such a way that some of them have either abandoned farming and migrated to safer locations where their farming activities would not be hindered” (Participant, Male, Birnin Magaji LGA, November 21, 2024).

According to another participant:

Cattle rustling began in Dansadau Emirate Council of Maru LGA in 2012 after the assassination of Alhaji Ishe by the *Yan Sakai* vigilante group leading to the reprisal attack by Fulani herders on Hausa farmers. Further attacks on Fulani men forced them to abandon their villages and migrate to nearby forests thus, resulting in the formation of armed bandits gangs. The aggrieved Fulani men resorted to armed attack on farmers and cattle rustling which the farmers use for crop cultivation. Attacks were not limited to farmers but also Fulani herders who do not support armed banditry activities which forced such herders to migrate to safer locations. The menace gradually spread to other LGAs and nearby states. Activities of cattle rustlers have greatly disrupted farming activities in the state and led to reduced food production.” (Participant, Male, Maru LGA, November 21, 2024).

According to another participant:

The devastating impact of cattle rustling on the economy and food security in Zamfara State was so grave that the Governor of Zamfara in 2023 closed down some weekly cattle markets in the state. Some of these markets include Mada Market in Gusau LGA, Danjibga Market in Tsafe LGA and Gusami Market in Birnin Magaji. This is because bandits sell the rustled cattle at very cheap rate to middle men who came from other states thus, impoverishing the real cattle owners and the economy of the state.” (Participant, Male, Zurumi LGA, November 21, 2024).

Another significant nature and magnitude of armed banditry is the attacks on people in the night hours with a high mean score of 4.42 indicating that respondents perceive a significant increase of attacks by AB at night hours. According to a participant,

Most of the attacks by armed bandits were carried out at night when the villagers were asleep and helpless. In most cases the farmers are killed in the presence of their wives and children, leaving them in shock for the rest of their lives (Participant, Male, Maru LGA, November 23, 2024).

An IDI participant from Zurmi LGA informed the researcher that cattle rustling was not limited to Hausa farmers but also to Fulani herdsmen who did not support the activities of armed bandits. According to him, Some Fulani herdsmen who opposed armed banditry activities have been gravely affected by armed banditry activities. There was a case of a very rich Fulani man with over 1000 cattle who lost all to armed bandits thus, forcing him to live from grace to grass. For fear of armed banditry attacks, some of them have relocated to other states which are considered safer zones (Participant, Male, Zurumi LGA, Zamfara State, October 13, 2024).

4.2 Objective Two: To analyse the Effect of Armed banditry on Food Security in Zamfara State, Nigeria.

The data on Figure 1.0 indicates that land confiscation has the highest mean of 4.29, followed by the burning of farmlands with a mean of 4.22 while Kidnapping has a mean of 4.2 and highway attacks 4.15. Others are imposition of taxes has a mean of 3.95, use of sophisticated weapons 4.15, and imposed Taxation on farmers 3.95 with the indicated mean values. These results revealed that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the nature of armed banditry in Zamfara State manifests in the form of burning of farmlands, kidnapping, using of sophisticated weapons and imposition of taxes among others. The mean values obtained from respondents indicate that they contribute significantly to menace of armed banditry with negative effect on food security in Zamfara State.

According to a participant in Maradum LGA:

Zamfara State use to have a flourishing livestock markets which made its citizens rich. Unfortunately, that lucrative livestock markets are lost as over 85 per cent of the livestock in the state are now in the hands of armed bandits while the true owners have either been killed or managed to escape to safer states (Participant, Male, Maradum LGA, Zamfara State, October 13, 2024).

Another participant with stakeholder in Anka LGA stated that,

Most Hausa farmers no longer keep cattle due to armed banditry attacks. Most of their cattle were rustled by armed bandits who blocked all their access to farmlands and these have greatly affected agricultural production in Zamfara State (Participant, Male, Anka LGA, Zamfara State, October 13, 2024).

This view was corroborated by the FGD held in Gusau LGA on November 24, 2024. The group agreed that most of the attacks by armed bandits in Gusau LGA were carried out at night. The reason according the FGD was because the armed bandits probably wanted to achieve surprise and ensure security agencies do not catch up with them.

Land Confiscation also, showed a high mean score of 4.27 suggesting that majority of the respondents believed that land confiscation and violation of established grazing routes are part of the root causes of armed banditry in Zamfara State. This is supported by all the respondents. According to an IDI participant:

Land confiscation is one of the root causes of armed banditry in Zamfara State. The Hausa farmers have for a long time, encroached into the grazing routes, mapped out for cattle grazing in the state perhaps because the grazing routes have very fertile soil. This has been a source of conflict between farmers and herders for so long. Furthermore, Hausa youths attacked and destroyed most of the Fulani villages across the LGAs in 2018 at the peak of the conflict (Participant, Male, Maru LGA, November 21, 2024).

Another IDI participant corroborated this assertion when he stated:

Zamfara State has historically been inhabited by various ethnic groups, which includes, Hausa, Fulani, Zabarma, Kamuku, Kambari among others. Customarily, land in Zamfara State was held in common by communities, with usage rights allocated to individuals and groups. However, with the advent of modern and mechanized farming, land ownership became more formalized and

contentious. The expansion of agriculture has also led to conflicts over land use, as herders and farmers compete over same land instigating conflicts more especially when either of them intrudes into each other's space. In most cases, government policies, such as the allocation of land for agricultural and grazing purposes, have contributed to the conflicts. Unfortunately, government efforts to meddle into the cattle herders and farmers conflict have not yielded positive results thus the lingering menace of armed banditry in the state. As at 2024, there were more than 223 villages destroyed by armed banditry (Participant, Male, Maru LGA, November 21, 2024).

Gleaning from the above, it is obvious that land confiscation and violation of established grazing routes are part of the root causes of armed banditry in Zamfara State with grave impact on food security. To address this menace, there would be the need to either re-establish the grazing routes or introduce ranching system for livestock grazing. There would also be the need to reconstruct some of the destroyed villages of both the Hausa and Fulani men in the state to enable the affected indigenes to heal and pave way for reconstruction.

4.3 Objective Three: To assess the consequences of banditry-related insecurity on food availability and access in rural households.

The consequences of armed banditry attacks in Zamfara State are the loss of most of its farmlands, grazing lands and livestock to bandits' control thus making them to live at the mercy of the bandits. According to an IDI participant,

Armed bandits usually attack our homes, kidnap young men and women and take them to their farms for forced labour where they work for days without pay. Despite these, they still impose levies on us before we cultivation and harvest season. Those that object to these directive are either shot or slaughtered to put fears on others (Participant, Male, Maru LGA, November 21, 2024).

Another IDI participant added that:

Armed bandits and cattle rustlers usually attack villages near their camp and burn their farmlands to compel them to either pay levy before crop harvest or to express their anger that the local farmers were cooperating with security agencies instead of them, the armed bandits (Participant, Male, Maru LGA, November 21, 2024).

According to another participant:

Persistent attacks, destruction of farms and imposition of levies on farmers in Zamfara State led to displacement of significant number of farmers and agricultural workers. It has also restricted many farmers to the cultivation of small portions of lands within the fringes of their villages. This has reduced the total area of farmlands hitherto cultivated in the State by about 40 per cent with negative impact on food security in the state. (Participant, Male, Tsafe LGA, November 21, 2024).

This view was corroborated by a FGD held at the Maru LGA on 27 November, 2024 where the group agreed that "armed bandits use sophisticated weapons for their attacks. They further agreed that the drop in agricultural production were due to high levy on farmers, burning down of farmlands when levies are paid, kidnapping of farmers for ransom and sometimes they mount road blocks to attack farmers whose farms are far away from the village."

The consequence of this is perpetual fear in the minds of local citizens and forced loyalty of the citizens to armed bandits instead of the Federal Government security agencies and this has contributed to the lingering menace of armed banditry in Zamfara State and indeed the North West Nigeria with negative impact on food security. The standard deviation values in the findings reveal the amount of dispersion in respondent's responses. The relatively low standard deviation of around 0.80 – 0.90 suggest that respondents responses were closely clustered around the mean and indicating strong consensus among respondents while moderate variability in response for items with standard deviations around 0.95-1.03, indicate some divergence in opinions of respondents on the nature and magnitude of armed banditry on food security in Zamfara State.

4.4 Findings

The findings from Table 1.0 highlighted the mean score of the nature and magnitude of armed banditry in Zamfara State. It was noted that armed banditry has been on the rise since its inception in 2011/2012. The result of the findings showed that the nature of armed banditry consists of Cattle Rustling with a high mean of 4.18, Land Confiscation 4.03, burning down of farmland 3.99, Kidnapping for ransom 3.97, and levying of farmers 3.82. The values indicate that Cattle Rustling which is a nature of armed banditry is one of the major threat bedeviling Zamfara State and indeed Nigeria. Next is land confiscation with a mean value of 4.03 indicating that is part of the root causes of armed banditry in Zamfara State. According to the report by the Armed Conflict Location and

Event Data Project (ACLED) in Figure 2.0, armed banditry incidents were relatively sporadic from 124 incidents in 2018 and drastically rose to 1,031 incidents in 2024 indicating a growing trend of violence and instability in the state.

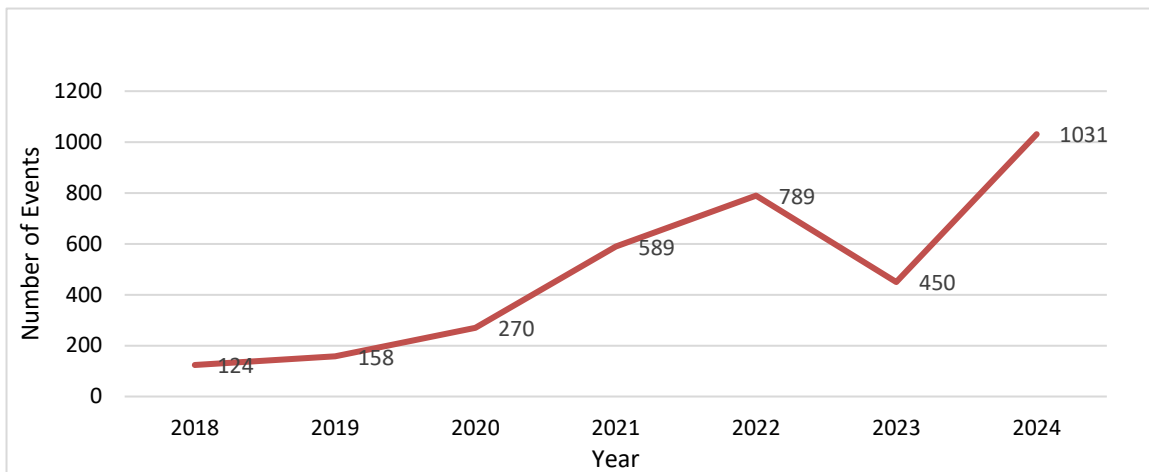


Figure 2.0: ACLED Data on the Magnitude of Armed Banditry between 2018 and 2024

This was supported by Ojewale (2024), who stated that between, 2010 and May 2023, an estimated 13, 485 deaths have been attributed to banditry across Nigeria, with Zamfara State, accounting for a significant portion of these fatalities. He further state that the impact of their actions has been devastating, with a staggering 1,087,875 individuals in rural communities displaced as at December, 2022. As a result, the FGN formally declared bandits as terrorist in November 2021. This designation meant tougher sanctions under the amended Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022 which provides measures for detection, prevention, combating and prohibition of terrorism (National Counter Terrorism Centre, 2024). From the foregoing the nature and magnitude of AB were majorly through cattle rustling, night attacks and land confiscation, attacks on market places and kidnapping. Others are by the use of sophisticated weapons, highway Attacks and through the imposition of levies or taxes on farmers. It was also found that armed banditry has significantly affected food security in Zamfara State and Nigeria at Large by reducing agricultural production because armed bandits attack farmlands and villages which lead to abandoned farms and reduced crop yields and food shortages. Armed bandits also, destroy livestock through cattle rustling and attacks on livestock thus, leading to loss of income for farmers and reduced access to meat and dairy products. Furthermore, armed bandits disrupt market activity leading to economic instability and reduced access to food and other essential goods. Additionally, armed bandits impose taxes and levies on farmers and herders before they can gain access to their farmland and these result in loss of tax income that affects internally generated revenues for the state.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study reveals a significant relationship between armed banditry and food security in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The prevalence of armed banditry is associated with food insecurity, which triggers hunger, malnutrition, and increased poverty due to persistent attacks on farmers and the destruction of farmlands and crops. Furthermore, armed banditry contributes to food scarcity and rising food prices. Responses from participants revealed that armed banditry is perpetrated mainly by indigenes of the state and, in some cases, by foreigners who are aided by local collaborators. The bandits operate with sophisticated weapons, and the attacks are usually carried out at night. The activities of armed banditry in Zamfara State have intensified due to the porous borders between Nigeria and Niger, as well as between Nigeria and Chad.

Another way in which armed banditry has negatively affected food security in Zamfara State and Nigeria is reflected in the high rate of cattle rustling in the state, which led to the closure of some cattle markets in 2023. Many herders have lost their livestock and have been forced to abandon their communities for fear of being killed or kidnapped by armed bandits. This has disrupted livestock markets and impoverished many pastoralists in the state. In addition, levies and other forms of illegal taxation imposed on farmers and herders by armed bandits before they can access their farms for cultivation or harvest their crops have severely affected food security in the state. This situation has also resulted in a decline in tax revenue meant for the state as internally generated revenue,

thereby affecting economic growth and stability. Consequently, armed banditry has negatively affected the well-being of the citizenry, with devastating consequences for food security in the state.

5.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Zamfara State Government should:
 - i. Institute a more severe penalty for cattle rustling and kidnapping in Zamfara State.
 - ii. Institute developmental programmes to improve the living standards of the people.
2. The Federal Government of Nigeria should:
 - i. Strengthen relations with neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger and Benin for a joint effort against armed banditry for enhanced security in troubled regions.
 - ii. Procure advanced technological and surveillance equipment (drones and hot air balloons) for enhanced border surveillance and management.
 - iii. Support to the seven states of the NW zone to form a collective security outfit to combat armed banditry in line with the Collective Security theory.
 - iv. Establish a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programme which will incorporate the CCSALW for the disarmament and demobilisation of armed banditry in Zamfara State.
 - v. To direct NCC to sanction any mobile communication agency whose number was used by kidnappers for ransom demand.

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