

**AN ASSESSMENT OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES AND
ITS THREAT TO ROAD TRANSPORTATION IN
MAKURDI BENUE STATE (A CASE STUDY OF LAFIA -
MAKURDI HIGHWAY)**

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Abstract

The escalating waves of criminal activities involving motorists and other road users on highways is alarming resulting in many travelers losing lives and properties. This paper is aimed at assessing of criminal activities and its threat on road transportation along Lafia-Makurdi Highway, Benue State. The study utilised both primary and secondary data sources namely; structured questionnaire and other relevant materials such as Journals and records from Police Stations. The questionnaire was analysed using Microsoft Excel Package and the results presented in charts. The results indicated that the state is bedeviled with five major types of crime which are banditry, armed robbery, kidnapping, herdsmen attack, and cultism of which kidnapping predominate with 31% for the period between 2021 to 2024. Investigation revealed that the major hotspots are settlements along Lafia-Makurdi highway such as thick forests of Akanga, Yelwata, Ortese, Daudu where bandits and killer herdsmen kill and maim commuters. It was recommended that appropriate socioeconomic and security measures should be placed more on the problematic areas for proactive majors to minimise the incidences of the attacks. The Police and the Nigerian army should deploy drones to the hotspots of these criminal activities to fish out bandits terrorising this highway.

Keywords: Banditry, Highway, Herdsmen, Kidnapping, Police, Nigerian Army

Introduction

Road transportation is the life blood of any country's economy in Africa, Nigeria is no exception; Nigeria has a well-defined network of Federal Highways, into which numerous State and Municipal roads interlink to provide a basis for road transportation access throughout the country (Highway Manual 2013) Nigerian roads have become death traps to travelers because of the deplorable state and increase in crime such as banditry, armed-robbery, theft and other violent crimes, these result in injury, loss of human lives, loss of property and abduction Usman and Ogbole (2023). Travelling on the nation's highways of recent is like a journey through the valley of the shadow of death, and akin to walking on a mine field (Ugwuoke et al, 2020).

In recent history of Nigeria, no fewer than 133 highways across the six geo political zones in the country have been identified as major hotspots and flashpoints for banditry, kidnapping and allied criminal vices (Amaize and Dayo, 2019). The increase wave of attacks involves attacking motorists and road users on highways and kidnapping passengers on board; 197 people kidnapped in (May 2022 alone for instance) on highways, commuters are advised to avoid notorious roads and only travel by road when it's absolutely necessary (Nigeria Security Intelligence, 2022).

In recent time, there is no week that people do not have bad experiences on these major highways in the hands of suspected herdsmen, armed robbers, kidnappers or ritualists. Amaize and Dayo (2019). Loss of lives and valuables on Nigerian roads induced by crime and criminalities is on the increase and worrisome, Highway Armed Robbery incidents (HARIs) in Nigeria between 2009-2014 shows that Lagos-Ore-Benin highway ranked first, meaning there has been more robbery incidents along that route than the others Onatere-Ubrurhe (2016).

Criminal activities have gone beyond local or national discourse, as International communities keep given warning notifications about the insecurity of Nigerian public transport services. For instance, the Times International of London, (1985) commented on the alarming rate of criminal activities in Nigeria. While, the Travel Warning United States Department of Bureau of Consular Affairs also gives warning statements about the insecurity of public transport in the country, particularly for the foreigners. For example, travelers were warned to avoid night travel, and about poor modes of public transport and infrastructure and driving conditions (Onatere-Ubrurhe, 2015; Olukayode and Urhie, 2014; Okunola, 2009).

Banditry is an organised crime whereby criminals take arms and ammunition against defenceless people Babangida, (2021) these include kidnapping, armed-robbery, theft and other violent crimes. The victims of kidnapping and banditry undergo traumatic experience usually and are left with indelible mark that lasts for a life time and have to undergo Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which regrettably has a long-lasting consequence (Olaajo and Owoniyi, 2022).

Theoretical framework

To support this study, the social disorganisation theory of Clifford Shaw and Henry D 1942 was adopted and applied as its theoretical framework. (Adler, Mueller & Laufer 2022) stated that social disorganisation theory is a version of the cultural deviance theories, with emphasis on the emerging forms of crime environment. Following the emergence of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999, after a long period of military dictatorship, several socio-cultural dislocations occurred which resulted to a number of new sectors of criminality like herdsmen-farmers violence, kidnapping, terrorism, militancy and other violent crimes, particularly banditry, which has now taken Nigeria by storm. Poverty, ethnic and religious tensions have also spiraled thereby heating up the polity. Due to climate change and the resultant increase in competition for arable land that has often times led to serious manifestation of hostilities

and social friction among the two user-groups in many parts of Nigeria.

Material and Methods

The data used for this study were gathered mostly from the Nigerian Police from June 2023 to June 2025 respectively with 455 crimes committed and published in newspaper reports of the robbery occurrences and victims’ stories, which were compiled and analysed with Microsoft Excel.

Location and Size of the study area

Makurdi is located nearly South side to Lafia; the bearing degree from Lafia to Makurdi is 178 ° degree. Makurdi Benue State is located in Nigeria at the longitude of 8.54 and latitude of 7.73 while Lafia Nasarawa State is located at the longitude of 8.52 and latitude of 8.5. Figure 1. The total straight line distance between Lafia and Makurdi is **86 KM** (kilometers). The miles based distance from Lafia to Makurdi is 53.4 miles; this is a straight line distance and so most of the time the actual travel distance between Lafia and Makurdi may be higher or vary due to curvature of the road

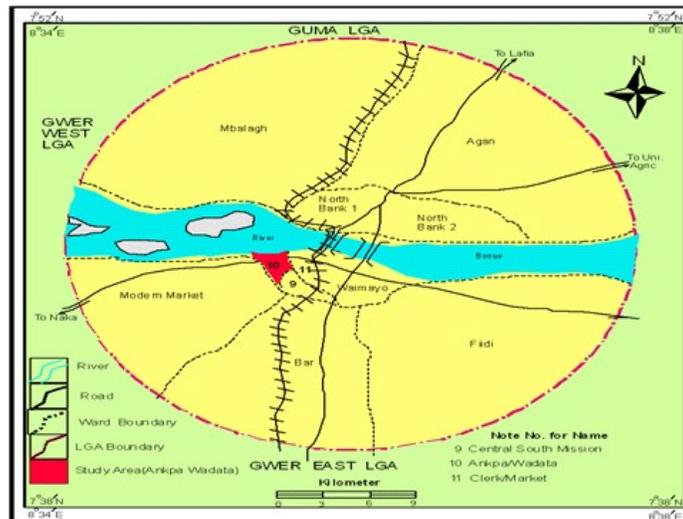


Figure 1; Map of Makurdi Benue State

Makurdi-Lafia Highway is a federal road and dual-carriage way under construction by China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC). Due to the nature of the road and construction activity there is heavy traffic there and men of the underworld or criminals always take advantage of the unsuspecting road users and perpetrate crime and the highway.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Type of insecurity Experience

It is obvious that the major type of crime experience in the study area is kidnapping with 31%, followed closely by herdsmen attacks (22%) and Armed robbery (19%) as a result resource conflict (Farmer-Herder) in most North central States eg Benue state figure 2

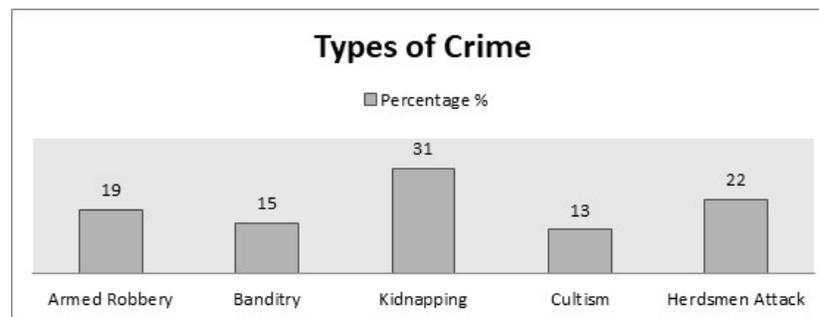
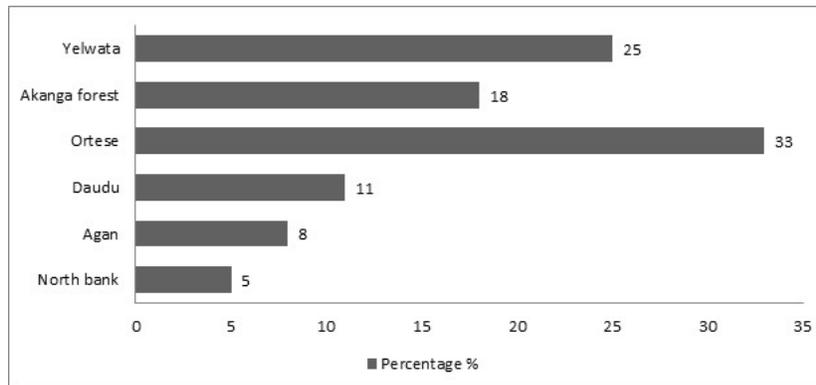


Figure 2; Types of crime

Spatial pattern of Criminal Activities on Makurdi- Lafia Highway

This shows an uneven distribution pattern of criminal activities in the state. Investigation reveals that major hotspots and location prone to cases of kidnappings by killer herdsmen are Ortese 33%, Yelwata 22% and Akanga Forest 18% figure 3; this can be corroborated by several recent security based on researches and some major newspaper commentaries which have classified this highway as high risk zone.



The newspaper reports which include Vanguard News 28 Oct 2023 include -Three persons reportedly killed by suspected armed herdsmen in an ambush on the busy Makurdi-Lafia road around Ortese in Guma Local. On Friday the following day in the morning the armed herdsmen attacked Makurdi-Lafia road near the NYSC farm and shot three persons. "Two of the victims died on the spot but the third person who sustained serious injuries survived and he was rushed to the hospital for treatment at the Benue State University Teaching Hospital, BSUTH.

The Cable 11 Aug 2023 – aggrieved villagers on Friday reportedly blocked the Makurdi-Lafia highway to protest the killing of three persons by suspected gunmen in Ortese, Benue State.

Daily Post Nigeria 25 Jan 2024 – The Police in Benue State have arraigned nine suspected criminals before a Makurdi upper area court for blocking robbing motorists and passengers of their belongings on the Makurdi-Lafia road.

Blueprint Newspapers Limited 10th May 2024 reported that Police arrest 13 suspected kidnappers on Makurdi-Lafia highway areas of Rukubi, Gandu, Kadarko and Agyaragu

Channels Television 27 Apr 2021 – Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the Abagana camp have blocked the Makurdi-Lafia Federal Highway protesting the recent killings of additional two persons by armed herdsmen.

Crimefightersng.com 23rd Jul 2021 – Gunmen attacked a compound *located* at Gidan Sule Village along *Lafia- Makurdi Road*, Nasarawa State killing 5 locals, on Wednesday and shooting sporadically.

securenigeria365.com,-Benue State Governor, Samuel Ortom has condemned in strong terms the attack on passengers by some hoodlums near Yelwata, along the ever-busy *Lafia - Makurdi*.

Daily Post Nigeria 12 Jun 2020 - *police* kill seven suspected armed robbers along *Lafia-Makurdi road* who were dressed in military camouflage and *police* uniforms. These reports are capable of casting a dark shadow on the integrity and ability of the government in protecting its citizens and foreigners living and crisscrossing the nation's highways.

Recommendation

1. It can clearly be seen that pattern of the criminal activities on Lafia-Makurdi road is uneven there is need for formation of GIS departments police stations to aid crime analysis, patrol teams should be equipped with GPS devices for rapid response to distress calls and flexibility in jurisdictional policing.
2. Proactive policing is necessary shortly after the original crimes to prevent incidences of repeated crime, cases should be adopted for the study area given the nature of the area as basically residential. The community policing, vigilantes and private security outfit as stakeholders should be encouraged and enlightened on the strategies and vital role they can play and, in an attempt, to curb crime in the area.
3. A facial recognition system (FRS) deployed in the video surveillance system at Entry and exit points at transport terminals and a GPS tracking devices for taxis and the Installation of Acoustic Emission (AE) Sensors at strategic hotspots to detect and time stand the gunshots sound and an integrated emergency buttons or panic alarms in taxis and Drones to fish out bandits terrorising these highways.

4. Crime Prevention Through Social Development (CPSD) this is expected to address the fundamental causes of crime which seems to treat unemployment, corruption, poor family ties, lack of community integration, poverty and negative peer influence among others.

Conclusion

It can clearly be seen that the pattern of the criminal activities in the state is uneven and the road within the problematic areas are clearly visible. Each type of insecurity need to separately studied and dealt with differently. Hence, the activities of these criminal elements in the state can largely be controlled if government at all levels provides more security personnel in the insecurity prone areas and roads. The security architecture in the state should be expanded to incorporate people within the volatile area in tackling the menace. This will go a long way in providing impromptu information to security agencies for proper action.

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