

The Nature and causes of Banditry in Nigeria; a study of Batsari Local Government area in Katsina state

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on findings of an empirical research conducted on the nature and causes of Banditry in Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the nature and causes of Banditry in Batsari Local Government Area of Katsina State. It gave answers to the questions of what are the causes of banditry? What is the nature of banditry in Batsari Local Government area? This study adopted the Marxian Political Economy in investigating the problem of banditry in Nigeria with a particular focus on Batsari local Government area of Katsina state. Using the survey research design, the study adopted the multi-stage cluster sampling technique and administered 200 questionnaires to known direct and indirect victims of banditry. Also, 12 key informants were interviewed, and the study also conducted two focus group discussions which involved a group of farmers and the other involved a group of pastoralists. The major findings showed that the causes of banditry in Batsari local government are the lack of basic social amenities, unemployment, and proliferation of small arms. Efforts by individuals, the community and the government have not yielded the desired results. Therefore, the study recommended that the government should provide basic amenities in Batsari, focus on providing employment especially for individuals in the rural areas which are largely agrarian to reduce poverty, encourage the security agents by providing them with modern weapons to combat crime.

1.0 Introduction

This paper is based on findings of an empirical research conducted on banditry in Nigeria. The paper is divided in five sections including the introductory section. The paper reports findings based on observations and data collected on the nature, causes and effects of banditry in Batsari Local Government Area, Katsina State, Nigeria.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2022) reports that there is an obvious increase in crime rate the world over. Countries and regions of the world are now contended with new trends of crimes that were hitherto not common in their societies. According to Henry (2022) Nigeria is currently caught in the web of crime dilemma; this is highlighted by the upsurge in both violent and non-violent crimes. Notable in this regard is the rising incident of banditry, which is manifested in armed robbery, assassination, random driven kidnapping, and cattle rustling and cybercrime.

The herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria were initially an issue of struggles for agricultural lands and water ponds between the pastoralists and farmers. These conflicts have been especially prominent in the middle Belt (North Central Nigeria) since the return of democracy in 1999. However, due to the growth in population, the impact of climate change and desertification, these conflicts become more frequent and widespread thus creating high insecurity especially in the Northern region. Cattle rustling and kidnapping further escalated the insecurity problem in the country (Bashir, 2021), from the sexual assault of women and girls, attacks on villages, kidnapping for ransom, to cattle rustling, amongst others. In more recent times Katsina and Zamfara States in the North-West have become the major hob of these acts of banditry and insecurity. Rampaging gangs of bandits have engaged in violent acts such as, attacking, abducting, killing, robbing villagers, travelers, engaging in cattle rustling. Although sometimes exaggerated or underestimated by some political actors, casualty figures are quite alarming (International Crisis Group, 2020). On April 11, 2019, the then Governor of Katsina State spoke of how bandits were taking over parts of the state, killing people and destroying properties with impunity (Samaila, 2019).

According to Samaila (2019) from April 2019, several operations by the Nigerian army special troops, such as Operation “Harbin Kunama”, operation “Dirinmikiya”, and “Operation Puff Adder” were carried out in the bid to tackle banditry in the Northwest. From June 2020 operations “sharindaji”, “hadarindaji”, “thunder strike” and “Habinkunama III” were also carried out (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). However, the problem only seems to be increasing. In other words, the security agencies seemed to be overwhelmed. In Batsari Local Government area of the state, over sixteen thousand people have been internally displaced (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2022). Despite the peace accord reached between the Governor of Katsina State and some of the bandits, leaders, and the amnesty deals; the attack on innocent citizens continues (Henry, 2022).

It is against this background that this study was designed to investigate into the nature and causes of banditry in Batsari local government area of Katsina state. Thus, the study was sets to find out answers to the following research questions;

1. What is the nature of Banditry in Batsari local government area of Katsina state?
2. What are the immediate and remote causes of banditry in Batsari local Government?
3. What are the strategies adopted by both the state and non-state actors to curb banditry in Batsari Local Government Area?

2.0 The following are the specific objectives

1. To determine the nature of Banditry in Batsari local government area of Katsina state.
2. To investigate into the causes of banditry in Batsari local government area of Katsina state.
3. To make recommendations based on the findings on 1 – 2 above.

3.0 Theoretical Perspective

The Marxian Political Economy Theoretical Perspective was adopted as a theoretical frame to guide the conduct of this study.

According to Audu (2017), the term Political Economy was first used by a French writer known as Montahirentian de Waterville in 1613. He used it in his description of Science of Wealth acquisition common to the state as well as the family. His analysis greatly influenced the emergence of Economics as a scientific discipline until Adam Smith's Political Economy which is regarded as the Classical Political Economy.

Furthermore, its usage was transferred from French to English Language as far back as 1667 with the Publication of James Staut Mill which is known as *Enquiries into the principles of political economy* (Audu, 2017). Over the years, political economy gained grounds, and with its prominence, different classifications also emerged; classical political economy, liberal political economy, and the Marxian political economy which is the adopted theoretical frame for this study.

The main concern of the Marxian political economy is, therefore, the production (economic) relations between people, the relationship of various social classes to political power and the interplay of politics and economy in the determination of power relations within the committee of nations.

The Marxian Political Economy paradigm argued that the socio-economic character of different societies in history is often characterized by specific mode of productions. In each of these epochs, like slavery, feudalism or capitalism, there existed different classes, the slaves vs. slave masters, the feudal lords vs. the serfs and then the Bourgeoisie vs. the Proletariat. Hence, the

Economy should not be conceived as neutral platform for exchange and cooperation, but rather, that which is characterized by class struggle and conflicts. It is this interplay between these social classes that results to crimes such as armed banditry. In other words, the acts of banditry in this context are products of the conflict of interests between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, (see Jugmann, 2022; Carolina and Bart, 2009).

From the Marxian point of view, classes interests differ, particularly for the owners and the non-owners of the means of production. The owners of the means of production want to maintain the hegemony as to their continuance of their relationship with non-owners. The laws that were created and enforced are to maintain the status-quo, as far as they are concerned. They argued further that all laws are made by the “haves” to maintain their ownership of the means of production.

The Marxian Political Economy Theoretical Perspective addresses the exploitation of the masses by the capitalists. Musa (2021) noted how the issue of proliferation of small arms and light weapons were caused by the Nigerian politicians who armed these young ones to prosecute their course to be elected. Elsewhere, Zumve (2024) notes thus:

“In Nigeria in their desperate urge to control and maintain political power and have access to the state coffers, the ruling class resort to the invention of thugs who engage in all forms of violent acts” (P. 82)

Hence, some of these bandits are individuals who feel they have been neglected by the society and politicians after they have helped them into political offices. This theory is very relevant to this work as banditry is a gang related activity; thus, the unit of analysis is classes and not individuals and collective interests are therefore determined within these classes and not at the individual level. However, this does not mean that the individual cannot make their choices.

In practical and specific terms, the political economy of the Nigerian state focuses especially on the relationship, between the state, politics, and economics. Every policy or political decisions have economic implications either directly or indirectly. Agriculture is the backbone and productive mechanism for food, livestock, and source for foreign exchange in Nigeria and more specifically, Batsari local government Area.

There is neglect of this sector, and even when there are good policies to ensure there is a boost in the agricultural sector, these benefits do not get to the intended population (Audu,2017). Furthermore, Audu (2017) noted that the government has several schemes to help farmers with modern farm equipment and fertilizers, however, these schemes end up benefitting the politicians and government officials who keep these items for themselves and later sell them. Very often, Forrest (1995) as cited by Audu (2017) argued that these schemes only provided avenues for

bureaucratic corruption. These ensure that farming and other agriculturally related activities cannot be done on a very large scale in Batsari as the locals cannot afford these items. Furthermore, there are no factories and industries in these areas to harness these agricultural produce and transform them into finished goods. The frustration from all these create unemployment and poverty and further lure most young men to crimes such as banditry.

Within the arena of the political economy of the Nigerian state, the oil sector since the 1960s has attracted considerable attention, prominence, and dominance over and above other sectors since it was discovered. As periodic oil boom filled state coffers with windfall revenue in billions, it also accelerated the statist mentality that enhances the intensification of a centralized structure of incentives. The contribution of the oil and gas to the state revenue cannot be overemphasized. Revenue from the petroleum industry comprising of crude oil and gas export earning, petroleum profit tax, royalties, signature bonus, oil block leasing fees among others has witnessed steady growth over the years. However, the gap between the rich and the poor keeps getting wider as the Nigerian State over depend on oil persist. The government have failed to provide standard healthcare facilities, and construct good roads in the rural areas. There is epileptic power supply both in the urban and rural areas. Poor and below the standard schools with ill-equipped library and laboratories. Banditry then becomes the inevitable latent result from this interplay between the “rulers” and the “ruled”. Rather than a blessing to Nigerians, the over dependence on the oil to the detriment of the other sectors of the economy especially agriculture has become a curse to Nigerians (Elwerfilli and Benhin, 2018, P. 2).

4.0 Sample and sampling procedure

The primary respondents for this research are residents of Batsari Local Government Area in Katsina state. It is not possible for the study to involve all the residents of Batsari LGA in the study, therefore a sample is drawn.

To collect the quantitative data, this study adopted Multi-stage sampling procedure which involves sampling in successive stages, such that at each stage, selection is made using any of the known probability sampling technique. The use of multi-stage sampling technique is justified as it is usually used to include and represent specific groups of the research interest in different meaningful stages of the sampling and gives everyone a fair chance of being selected, thereby minimizing bias. Batsari local government has eleven wards; Abadau/Kagara, Kandawa, Karare, Yangaiya, Darini/Magaji/Ado, Madogora, Manawa, Yauyau/Manamawa, Wagini, Ruma, and Batsari town.

However, this study focused on Batsari town because the researcher could not access populations in the other ten (10) wards. As a result of the constant attacks by the bandits, these locations were

considered very unsafe for the researcher. Also, because of these constant attacks, most of the people in these other wards have migrated to Batsari town where they take refuge in the homes of relatives and internally displaced person's camps (IDPs).

The first stage involved the clustering of the wards into existing polling units. Batsari ward have twenty four (24) polling units, these polling units served as clusters for the study. The clusters are Biyaki-kwana, Day secondary school axis, GarinDutse (open space), GarinDutse (primary school), KaramarAsibiti/Dispensary, Katsalle, KwalbatiBabba, Kwarinfago, Leko, SaliHawaDakuna, Tsouwar Tasha, Tudun Modi, UngwanJibo, UngwanLawal, Ungwan Alkali, UngwanGwanda, UngwanHado, UngwanMagaji, UngwanMalami, UngwanSarki, Ungwan Soli, WatanGadiya and Yasore.

In the 2nd stage, simple random sampling was used to select eight (8) clusters from Batsari town, namely; GarinDutse (open space), Tsouwar Tasha, Tudun Modi, UngwanHado, UngwanMagaji, UngwanMalami, UngwanSarki, and Leko. The use of simple random techniques is informed by the fact that the 24 clusters are homogeneous and as a result, data obtained here can represent the entire population. Also, simple random sampling ensured that each of the clusters had an equal chance of being selected in the study. In this regards, lottery method was used; which involved writing the names of these 24 clusters on pieces of paper. Each piece of paper having the name of a particular cluster written in it, the papers were squeezed and then dropped into a bag and then thoroughly mixed. After this, one paper was picked at a time, and the researcher recorded the name of the cluster that was picked, the same procedure was used to select all other seven papers. The total of eight pieces of paper was picked and the names on each formed the clusters that were used for the study.

The final stage of the multi-stage cluster sampling involved the use of systematic sampling, from the eight (8) clusters; only houses with even numbers were selected. After the selection, respondents were drawn from each house (that is 1 respondent per household in order to avoid bias). A total of twenty five (25) respondents were drawn from each cluster, thereby making a total of two hundred (200) respondents. The sample size was considered goal-oriented, practical, economical and large enough to represent the population properly; the justification for the above was the accessibility of respondents who were direct victims of banditry. In addition, the questionnaire was administered indirectly where the researcher read the questions and took note of the response of the respondents. The choice of this method was due to the fact that most of the people in BatsariLocal government area are not literate and was not able to read and write.

To complement the quantitative data, the study employed the use of purposive sampling techniques to collect qualitative data. Hence, respondents were drawn based on if the researcher feels the individuals are having the necessary qualities needed for the study and also if they are

experts in a certain area. The use of purposive and expert sampling is justified because it ensured that the data collected was from the key informants who actually have knowledge about the topic which will help the researcher answer the research questions.

Key informants interview and in-depth interview were conducted with twelve (12) knowledgeable/key informants purposively selected based on their age, long experience and involvement in security matters. These key informants consisted of a leader of the community vigilante group, a personnel of the Department of State Services (DSS), a leader of the farmer’s association, leader of the Network for justice (an NGO in Batsari town), a village head, a ward head, a police officer, one official of the National Union of Road Transport Workers;so as to get the experiences of the drivers that ply the network of highways in the communities, and four direct known victims of banditry.

Two separate Focus group discussions were held. One was comprised of seven farmers, while the other was comprised of six pastoralists who were all adult males. The FGD with the pastoralists were held in the classroom of Leko Primary School in Batsari town. However, the six pastoralists are internally displaced persons who found their way to Batsari ward from other troubled wards i.eWagini, Magaji and Manawa. On the other hand, the leader of the farmers’ association, citing the high level of insecurity insisted it was held within his compound.

5.0 Causes of Banditry

This section of the study is basically dedicated to finding the causes of banditry in Batsari local government area. In other to achieve this first objective of the study, the data obtained from the field via the use of the questionnaire, IDIs and FGDs will be presented and analyzed.

Table 5.1: Causes of Banditry

Causes of banditry	Strongly disagree		disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq.	%	Freq	%
Poor control of immigration from neighboring countries	22	11.6	24	12.7	43	22.8	100	52.9	189	100
Displacement due to unrest and civil wars in the neighboring countries.	62	32.9	17	9	21	11.1	89	47	189	100
Lack of basic amenities in Batsari	10	5.3	2	1	15	8	162	85.7	189	100
unemployment amongst	---	----	8	4.3	24	12.7	157	83	189	100

youths											
Moral decadence		29	15.4	37	19.6	34	18	89	47	189	100
Farmers/Fulani	herdsmen	30	15.9	39	20.6	45	23.9	75	39.6	189	100
clashes											
Harsh	economic	14	7.4	36	19	62	32.9	77	40.7	189	100
environment											
availability of small and light	weapons	2	1	21	11.1	23	12.1	143	75.8	189	100

Source; fieldwork 2022

The data above indicate that while 85.7% (162) of the respondents maintained that lack of social amenities is responsible for banditry, only 39.6% (75) were of the view that farmer-herders clashes were responsible for the phenomenon. Other causes are interwoven between these two extremes. The opinions from the IDIs and FGDs corroborate these; a Village head gives a good submission.

“I can never support what they are doing, but the truth of the matter is that the youths are frustrated. They hear of the billions that is stolen by these politicians everyday and yet cannot even provide the basic things we need (social amenities); as Nigerians we are not asking for too much....no good schools, no safe drinking water, bad roads everywhere, when you are sick most times you die at home because no good and affordable hospital, haba! Most of us are farmers who can’t afford fertilizers, or big machines (tractors, harvesters etc).....even for small pure water business, still no light, kai!

This means that lack of social amenities is the most potent factor responsible for banditry in Batsari LGA. In Batsari, social amenities such as good roads, especially roads to access their farmland are a problem. The issue of the lack of portable and safe-drinking water also persists in most areas. Recreational facilities for wellness activities and functional electricity remain a far cry. Furthermore, efficacious and sustainable healthcare, functional education etc form the fulcrum around which the quality of life revolves, and these are all lacking in Batsari. The implication is that the less amenities in the locality, the more the banditry activities, while the provision of social amenities will reduce banditry.

This view is further corroborated with the views from the IDIs, the IDI shows that the respondents do not totally agree that farmers and herders’ clashes are a cause of banditry in Batsari LGA. A Ward head notes; “I don’t think there is any relationship between the two. I am not saying there are no clashes between farmers and herders but that doesn’t cause banditry”. A Police officer when asked, noted

The main issues at times that leads to clashes between herders and farmers is land: the herders need it to graze while the famers need it to farm. So there is a clash of interest. The way banditry is caused by this is that overtime; issues of livestock theft came up. This led to village raids, attacks and counterattacks. So overtime, kidnapping set in, so there is a very strong link between the two. You now see how banditry comes in.

The opinion from the FGD with the farmers also shows that there is a link between herders and pastoralists clashes and what we know as banditry today in Batsari. A farmer expressed his view on this, he said “our people (farmers) complain that the herders destroy their crops when they allow their flock to graze on it, while the herders also complain of stolen livestock. Because of this, at times there is attack from both sides”.

From the above, we can deduce that, the issue of banditry and herders and farmer’s clashes should be seen as different. However, as seen above, this at times could lead to banditry when it translates to village raids, kidnapping for ransom, livestock rustling and armed robbery.

The data above also indicates that 83% (157) of the respondents were of the opinion that unemployment is responsible for banditry in Batsari LGA. The researcher could not access any repentant Bandit as the security agents are trying to keep their identity unknown citing ‘security reasons’. However, the opinion of a DSS personnel, during an IDI corroborates this; he said:

During interrogations, some of them have said it was very difficult to sustain themselves because of lack of job, not to talk of their family. Some even said they joined when all their livestock was stolen by this people (bandits). This is after they tried their best to see if they could get something legal but to no avail. A particular young man said he and his friends joined with the intention of raising just enough to care for themselves and their family and that the intention was never to hurt anyone.

The problem of unemployment cannot be overemphasized, not only is it a reason why people go into banditry, but banditry, like the case above, also ensures that several persons become jobless and are left with no option but to pick up weapons as well.

Furthermore, a Police Officer also agreed with the other respondents, he quipped;

These things are very clear for all to see (laughs). When you go outside now you will see them, yes! So many young men who really have no job. Yes! They are absolutely jobless. Yet they eat, they need clothes, they need shelter, *haba!* In fact, some even have wives and children to feed. So when they hear that a young man like them received millions as ransom money, what do you think they will do? You know the answer.

This indicates that, if the government makes efforts to curb the problem of unemployment, then they would have made a giant stride in reducing the problem of banditry to a minimal level.

The data above also indicates that 75.8% (143) of the respondents maintained that one of the most potent causes of banditry in Batsari is availability of weapons. On this, the views from the IDIs and FGDs corroborates. On how the availability of weapons causes banditry, the leader of the Network for Justice noted;

‘When someone is poor because he doesn’t have a job, and then the weapons are readily available, what do you expect? My brother, the truth of the matter is this; this issue of banditry may not be resolved for a long time if we do not address the problem of who the supplier of these weapons is’.

A police officer noted;

‘I think the definition of who a bandit is would not be complete if they do not make use of weapons. These boys are heavily armed. From the investigations we have made, they even have sponsors who supply them these weapons and then get a return from each ransom received. We were able to neutralize many who were armed to the teeth, and we also arrested some too.’

The implication of the above is that the problem of banditry becomes difficult to handle because of the proliferation of arm. It is the availability of these weapons that is the driving force; if this aspect can be checked then banditry would be curtailed. However, the menace of banditry is on the rise because the bandits can now withstand the firing power of the Nigerian security agents.

5.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

The study revealed that the immediate cause of banditry in Batsari LGA is lack of basic amenities, unemployment amongst youths, and ready availability of small arms and light weapons. Other remote causes are harsh economic environment, unchecked migration, and endemic poverty.

Banditry leads to instability; negatively affecting a community both socially and economically. Furthermore, it hinders development as well as undermining democratic governance and food insecurity. In the light of these realities, the following recommendations are suggested in order to squarely address the menace of banditry;

2. Nigeria government should provide basic amenities and strategize to create meaningful employment for the youths; especially those living in rural areas that has been neglected. These largely agrarian communities should be provided with jobs to reduce the poverty level.

3. There should be Programmes which are aimed at practically addressing the endemic poverty in the North and the country in general. Where such programmes exist already, a proper structure should be there to ensure that those who such interventions are meant for and need such interventions get it.
4. To address the international dimension to the onslaught, government need to deploy more security agents in the borders calculated to be easily accessible to bandits who migrate from other countries and intensify security therein. This is not new as countries like Greece, Hungary, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Spain, North Korea and even the United States have Special Forces to address illegal migration and to intensify security in troubled Zones.
5. Proactive measure should be put in place to tackle banditry both tactically and institutionally- the military must be strengthened in terms of manpower, training, and military hardware.

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