



## **Banditry and Rural Security Governance in North-West Nigeria: Implications for Nigeria's Internal Security Strategy**

**By**

**ZAINAB Adam Muhammad**

**Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Nigerian Defence  
Academy, Kaduna**

### **Abstract**

Banditry in North-West Nigeria has become a serious internal security challenge, affecting rural communities, highways, farms, schools and local economies. This paper examines how banditry interacts with rural security governance and what this means for Nigeria's internal security strategy. It adopts a qualitative desk-based design supported by descriptive secondary data from academic studies, policy reports, community evidence, kidnapping data and displacement records. The analysis shows that banditry is expressed through kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, village raids, road extortion, illegal taxation, farm seizure, forced labour and forest-based mobility. These activities are sustained by criminal revenue sources, weak rural protection, limited policing reach, poor coordination, fragile local governance and uneven community security arrangements. The paper also shows that current responses, including military operations, police deployments, vigilante support and local negotiations, may disrupt bandit activity but have not fully addressed the rural governance conditions that allow violence to persist. The implications include weakened state authority, pressure on military forces, threats to food security, displacement, educational disruption and the growth of organised crime. The paper argues for integrated rural security planning that connects policing, intelligence, local governance, community trust, victim support and livelihood recovery.

**Keywords:** Banditry, rural security governance, North-West Nigeria, internal security, strategic studies, community policing, national security.



## 1. Introduction

Banditry has become one of the most serious internal security challenges in North-West Nigeria, affecting rural communities, highways, farms and local economies. Recent studies describe armed banditry in the region as involving kidnapping, cattle rustling, murder, rape, looting and attacks on villages (Ojo et al., 2023; Osasona, 2023). UNIDIR's community-based study also shows that bandit groups operate largely as mobile, armed and forest-based units, with serious effects on safety, income, education and movement (Kleffmann et al., 2024). These conditions raise important questions about why existing rural security arrangements remain unable to protect affected communities.

Despite repeated military operations, police deployments and community-level responses, banditry continues to threaten rural security in North-West Nigeria today. Ojo et al. (2023) note that bandit enclaves in forests and under-governed spaces slow state response and expose civilians to kidnapping, cattle rustling and attacks. Tarasa et al. (2025) link the persistence of violence to state fragility, institutional failure and hybrid security arrangements. Aina (2025) further shows that affected sub-national states struggle to provide welfare and security because of limited institutional capacity. The problem, therefore, requires a focused inquiry into how rural security governance shapes Nigeria's internal security strategy and policy.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how banditry interacts with rural security governance in North-West Nigeria. It analyses how weak protection, criminal violence and institutional gaps affect Nigeria's internal security strategy and policy responses for vulnerable rural communities. Guided by the problem of persistent rural insecurity, this paper asks how banditry manifests across North-West Nigeria, what factors sustain it, how gaps in rural security governance shape community vulnerability and state response, and what these patterns imply for Nigeria's internal security strategy. It also considers policy options for improving rural protection, policing, intelligence coordination and local resilience against banditry violence.

This paper is significant because it links rural banditry to the wider problem of internal security planning in Nigeria. Aina (2025) shows that sub-national fragility weakens state capacity to provide welfare and security, while Osasona (2023) notes that banditry has become a severe



threat with legal and governance implications. By focusing on rural security governance, the paper contributes to debates on state authority, community safety, displacement, livelihoods and public trust in affected North-West communities within security and strategic studies scholarship.

## **1.1 Literature Review**

### **Banditry and Rural Insecurity in Nigeria**

Recent literature treats banditry in Nigeria as a form of organised rural violence that has moved beyond isolated robbery into a major internal security concern. Ojo et al. (2023) describe the North-West crisis as involving kidnappings, killings, displacement, cattle rustling and disruption of socio-economic life, with consequences for both human and national security. Osasona (2023) similarly frames bandits as violent non-state actors involved in kidnap-for-ransom, armed robbery, cattle rustling, rape, pillage and attacks on farmers, traders and travellers. Aina (2025) adds that insecurity in the region is tied to armed bandits, jihadist groups and other organised criminal gangs, producing deaths, displacement and humanitarian pressure. The literature also cautions against reducing banditry to a single cause or identity. Ojo et al. (2023) argue that its drivers include under-governed spaces, weak administrative presence, resource competition, climate pressures and politicised conflict. Kleffmann et al. (2024) support this view by showing that affected communities perceive banditry through lived insecurity, mobility restrictions, fear and loss of livelihood, rather than through one simple label or as a challenge to public authority itself in daily rural life.

### **Cattle Rustling, Kidnapping, and Armed Violence in the North-West**

Studies on North-West Nigeria identify cattle rustling, kidnapping and armed violence as central expressions of banditry. Ojo et al. (2023) trace the contemporary rise of the crisis to cattle rustling networks, farmer-herder tensions, illegal resource competition and attacks on rural communities. Osasona (2023) describes banditry as a composite crime involving kidnap-for-ransom, armed robbery, sexual violence, pillage and attacks on farmers, traders and travellers. Recent evidence from SBM Morgen (2025) reinforces the importance of kidnapping as an organised economic activity, presenting it as a market shaped by abduction, ransom



demands, negotiation and violence. Ojo et al. (2023) similarly show that bandit groups draw income from kidnapping, cattle rustling, road extortion, illegal mining, taxation of farmers and forced labour. Kleffmann et al. (2024) add a community-level perspective, reporting that bandit groups are seen as mobile, armed and largely forest-based units using quick attacks on motorbikes. This literature shows that the violence is rural, economic and spatial. It targets people, livestock, roads, farms and settlements. It also affects routine livelihood systems, since farmers and herders can become victims, sources of ransom, or targets of coercion. The North-West is therefore discussed as a space where crime, conflict and weak protection overlap in ways that expose communities to repeated predation, fear and loss of social confidence across households, markets and transport routes in affected states.

### **Rural Security Governance and State Presence**

The literature on rural security governance links banditry to weak state presence and limited institutional capacity. Ojo et al. (2023) argue that bandits take advantage of under-governed spaces, forest enclaves and low administrative presence, making rapid state response difficult in affected communities. Aina (2025) shifts attention to sub-national fragility, arguing that state-level capacity, revenue constraints and weak welfare provision limit the ability of affected governments to prevent and respond to armed conflict. Tarasa et al. (2025) extend this argument by connecting banditry to state fragility, institutional failure and hybrid security arrangements in Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara. Their analysis suggests that weak formal institutions can create room for informal security structures and non-state authority. Kleffmann et al. (2024) also show that community experiences of banditry involve insecurity of movement, income, education and physical safety. Ojo et al. (2023) add that criminal control over roads, farms, mining areas and rural economies can become part of the banditry system. Taken together, the literature presents rural security governance as a problem of policing reach, legitimacy, local knowledge, administrative weakness and community trust in practice, especially where reporting channels remain unsafe during attacks and aftermaths.

### **Community Security Actors and Informal Policing**

Existing studies also examine informal policing and community security actors as responses to



banditry. Ojewale (2023) argues for plural policing models in North-West Nigeria, noting that state policing alone has struggled to address the spread and spatial pattern of armed banditry. His work identifies mainstream policing, hybrid policing, joint task force arrangements and state police as possible layers in a wider security architecture. Tarasa et al. (2025) show that hybrid governance has become entrenched where state forces, vigilantes and armed groups coexist, often weakening public trust and institutional clarity. Madueke et al. (2024) discuss community responses, vigilante mobilisation and local negotiations, but also show that such arrangements can be uneven and risky. Kleffmann et al. (2024) highlight the need to understand local perceptions because affected communities experience victimisation differently by gender, age and location. The literature therefore treats community actors as important but complicated. They may provide local intelligence and immediate protection, yet poor regulation, retaliation and political influence can turn informal policing into another source of insecurity when accountability is weak, and boundaries remain unclear in contested rural settings.

## **1.2 Gap in the Literature**

The reviewed literature provides valuable evidence on the evolution, forms and effects of banditry in North-West Nigeria. Ojo et al. (2023), Osasona (2023) and Aina (2025) explain its security, legal and governance dimensions, while Ojewale (2023) addresses policing models and Kleffmann et al. (2024) documents community experiences. Other recent sources discuss kidnapping economies, food security, displacement, military operations and institutional fragility. What remains underdeveloped is an integrated reading of these debates through rural security governance and internal security strategy. This paper therefore builds on existing scholarship by connecting bandit violence, community vulnerability, informal policing, state capacity and strategic planning. The gap is not the absence of research on banditry, but the need to relate that research more directly to rural protection and national security policy in Nigeria and implementation choices.

## **1.3 Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study adopts a qualitative desk-based research design supported by descriptive secondary



data. This design is appropriate because the paper examines documented patterns of banditry, rural governance gaps, community vulnerability and strategic implications without fieldwork. Cheong et al. (2023) note that secondary qualitative data can support social science inquiry where primary data collection is difficult, while Morgan (2022) presents document analysis as suitable for studying pre-existing texts and policy reports.

### **Sources of Data**

Data for the study are drawn from academic articles, policy reports, security reports, community-based evidence and open datasets. Core scholarly sources include Ojo et al. (2023), Osasona (2023), Aina (2025), Ojewale (2023), Tarasa et al. (2025), Aina et al. (2023), and Lamidi (2025). Policy and dataset materials include Kleffmann et al. (2024), SB Morgen (2025), Madueke et al. (2024), and IOM DTM data for displacement patterns in the North-Central and North-West zones. Together, these sources support analysis of violence, governance gaps, community impact, kidnapping, rural livelihoods and displacement evidence.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The data are analysed through thematic analysis and descriptive interpretation. Thematic analysis is suitable for identifying repeated patterns across documents and evidence sets, including trends of banditry, drivers of insecurity, rural security governance gaps, community security actors, government responses and internal security implications. Byrne (2022) explains reflexive thematic analysis as a structured qualitative approach, while Morgan (2022) links document analysis with careful selection, reading and interpretation of texts. Descriptive evidence is used cautiously, without claiming statistical causation from secondary data.

### **Study Area and Scope**

The study focuses on North-West Nigeria, especially Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kano and Jigawa. This scope follows Ojo et al. (2023), who identify the region's states, and Aina (2025), who discusses different levels of exposure across them. The paper covers rural banditry, kidnapping, cattle rustling, armed attacks, community insecurity, displacement, weak state presence and rural security governance. It does not examine all forms of insecurity



in Nigeria, conduct primary field interviews, or assess urban crime patterns nationally in detail.

## **1.4 Findings and Discussion**

### **Trends and Manifestations of Banditry in North-West Nigeria**

The evidence shows that banditry in North-West Nigeria has become a patterned form of rural predation rather than isolated criminal violence. Its main manifestations include kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, robbery, village raids, attacks on farmers and travellers, sexual violence, illegal levies, forced labour and control of rural routes (Ojo et al., 2023; Osasona, 2023; Madueke et al., 2024). UNIDIR's community evidence describes bandit groups as armed, mobile and largely forest-based units that often use motorbikes for quick attacks (Kleffmann et al., 2024).

The descriptive data make this pattern more visible. SB Morgen (2025) reports that between July 2024 and June 2025, at least 4,722 people were kidnapped in 997 incidents, with 762 deaths and ₦2.57 billion confirmed as ransom payments. This indicates that kidnapping has become a significant criminal economy. GI-TOC/ACLED evidence also shows that bandit targets have shifted from cattle and highway robbery towards kidnapping, mining-linked extraction, road extortion and taxation of farmers (Madueke et al., 2024). UNIDIR's survey adds that banditry affects income, schooling, mobility and family safety, with one in three respondents reporting weekly attacks in recent years (Kleffmann et al., 2024). These trends show a rural security crisis shaped by violence, fear, movement control and economic coercion. They also show why banditry should be examined through both event data and everyday community exposure across affected settlements. This matters for national strategy. It also prepares the basis for analysing the drivers sustaining the crisis locally.



*Table 1: Selected Kidnapping Indicators in Nigeria, July 2024 to June 2025 (Source: SB Morgen (2025))*

| Indicator                                 | Value                  |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Review period                             | July 2024 to June 2025 |
| Kidnapping incidents                      | 997                    |
| People kidnapped                          | 4,722                  |
| People killed during kidnapping incidents | 762                    |
| Ransom demanded                           | ₦48 billion            |
| Confirmed ransom paid                     | ₦2.57 billion          |
| Share of demanded ransom paid             | 5.35%                  |

### **Drivers of Banditry in North-West Nigeria**

The drivers of banditry are interacting pressures rather than isolated causes. Ojo et al. (2023) link the crisis to under-governed spaces, farmer-herder tensions, resource competition, weak administration and violent criminal networks. Aina (2025) adds that sub-national fragility weakens welfare delivery and security capacity, making affected states less able to prevent and respond to armed conflict. Tarasa et al. (2025) connect the persistence of violence to institutional failure, political incentives and hybrid security arrangements.

Economic incentives are central to this resilience. Madueke et al. (2024) identify cattle rustling, kidnapping, artisanal gold mining, road-based extortion, taxation of farmers, seizure of farms and forced labour as major financing and resourcing channels for armed bandits. These activities provide cash, livestock, labour, intelligence and coercive influence over rural economies. SB Morgen (2025) reinforces this point by showing the scale of ransom demands and confirmed payments in Nigeria's kidnapping market. The implication is that violence is tied to profit, and profit helps sustain violence.





Social and spatial conditions strengthen these drivers. UNIDIR's community evidence shows that affected residents experience banditry through fear, mobility restrictions, loss of livelihood and disrupted education (Kleffmann et al., 2024). Forest geography gives bandit groups space for concealment, movement and hostage keeping, while weak law enforcement reduces deterrence (Ojo et al., 2023; Madueke et al., 2024). Arms availability also increases attack capacity and lethality, especially where communities lack reliable protection (Kleffmann et al., 2024). Poverty and unemployment may increase recruitment vulnerability, but the crisis is sustained by criminal finance, armed mobility and limited state protection. A circular pattern follows: insecurity damages livelihoods, livelihood loss increases exposure to recruitment and extortion, and criminal groups exploit the weakness that follows. This cycle helps explain why repeated operations may reduce incidents temporarily without removing the economic and institutional conditions that allow bandit groups to recover.

*Table 2: Major Revenue Sources of Armed Bandit Groups in North-West Nigeria (Madueke et al. (2024), GI-TOC/ACLED)*

| Revenue source                            | Relevance to banditry                                            |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cattle rustling</b>                    | Provides livestock, cash value and rural coercive power          |
| <b>Kidnapping for ransom</b>              | Generates direct cash income and sustains armed networks         |
| <b>Artisanal gold mining</b>              | Links banditry to resource extraction and local economic control |
| <b>Road-based extortion</b>               | Allows armed groups to tax movement and transport corridors      |
| <b>Taxation of farmers</b>                | Extends bandit influence into farming communities                |
| <b>Seizure of farms and forced labour</b> | Turns violence into control over rural production                |



## Rural Security Governance Gaps

The findings indicate that rural security governance gaps are central to community vulnerability. In many affected areas, bandits exploit weak state presence, difficult terrain and limited police reach to attack villages, roads and farms before effective response arrives (Ojo et al., 2023). Aina (2025) shows that sub-national fragility reduces state capacity to provide welfare and security, while Tarasa et al. (2025) argue that institutional failure has allowed hybrid and informal security arrangements to become normalised.

These gaps are also practical. Communities require safe reporting channels, trusted local intelligence, rapid response and visible protection. UNIDIR's survey evidence shows that banditry affects physical safety, income-generating activities, education and mobility, meaning weak security governance is felt in daily life (Kleffmann et al., 2024). Madueke et al. (2024) further show that bandits can influence roads, farms, mining areas and local economies through extortion, levies and coercion. Such influence weakens public confidence in formal authority.

The IOM DTM data reinforce the scale of displacement linked to insecurity in North-West and North-Central Nigeria, although the figures should be read as displacement evidence rather than a direct count of banditry victims (IOM, 2025). For the North-West states captured in the dataset, IDP figures show large affected populations across Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara. This underlines the governance cost of failing to protect rural settlements before violence spreads. Rural security governance, therefore, must be assessed through protection capacity, coordination, legitimacy and the ability to prevent displacement before communities lose confidence in the state itself during crisis periods.



*Table 3: Displacement Evidence from IOM DTM North-Central and North-West MasterList Round 18, December 2025 IOM DTM North-Central and North-West MasterList Round 18, December 2025 ()*

| State          | Affected LGAs | IDP sites or host-community locations | IDP households | IDP individuals |
|----------------|---------------|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Kaduna</b>  | 22            | 284                                   | 19,778         | 115,466         |
| <b>Kano</b>    | 34            | 119                                   | 1,927          | 11,247          |
| <b>Katsina</b> | 34            | 394                                   | 28,915         | 206,071         |
| <b>Sokoto</b>  | 22            | 150                                   | 32,950         | 181,526         |
| <b>Zamfara</b> | 14            | 134                                   | 47,000         | 279,224         |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>126</b>    | <b>1,081</b>                          | <b>130,570</b> | <b>793,534</b>  |

**Note:** This table counts IDP-related records only and excludes returnee records. The “IDP sites or host-community locations” column is based on unique Site ID entries in the DTM dataset.

### **Role and Limitations of Community Security Actors**

Community security actors occupy an important but contested position in the response to banditry. Traditional rulers, vigilantes, hunters, local guards and youth groups often possess local knowledge that formal agencies may lack. Ojewale (2023) argues that plural policing is relevant because mainstream policing alone has struggled with the spatial spread of armed banditry. In practice, local actors can identify unfamiliar movements, provide early warning, support community defence and mediate local tensions.

Their limitations are equally important. Tarasa et al. (2025) warn that hybrid governance can weaken state legitimacy when state forces, vigilantes and armed groups coexist without clear accountability. UNIDIR’s evidence shows that vigilante mobilisation has sometimes produced harsh sanctions, ethnic suspicion, retaliatory mobilisation and wider community polarisation



(Kleffmann et al., 2024). Madueke et al. (2024) also describe local negotiations and community responses as uneven arrangements shaped by fear, coercion and survival. Community actors are therefore useful sources of intelligence and immediate protection, but they cannot replace formal institutions. Without training, supervision, legal limits and conflict-sensitive oversight, informal policing can reproduce insecurity, especially where revenge, political influence or weak accountability shape action. This makes regulation a clear security priority locally.

### **Assessment of Government Responses**

Government responses have combined military operations, police deployments, air campaigns, joint task force approaches, vigilante support, local negotiations and peace pacts. Aina et al. (2023) show that Operation Hadarin Daji is a major internal security operation against armed banditry, but conventional military methods face difficulty against mobile, unconventional armed groups. Oyewole et al. (2022) similarly examine air campaigns, showing that air power can disrupt bandit activity but cannot address the wider governance problem alone.

The assessment is therefore mixed. State responses can create short-term pressure, rescue opportunities and temporary relief for communities. Yet the evidence suggests that militarised response has not removed the economic and governance systems that sustain banditry. Madueke et al. (2024) show that bandits rely on kidnapping, cattle rustling, mining, road extortion and taxation of farmers, while SB Morgen (2025) shows that kidnapping remains financially significant. UNIDIR also notes that military campaigns may dislodge bandits temporarily, sometimes shifting violence to nearby areas rather than reducing it over the long term (Kleffmann et al., 2024). Peace pacts and local negotiations may reduce violence briefly, but they are often fragmented and state-specific (Madueke et al., 2024; Kleffmann et al., 2024). The core weakness is that operations are not consistently matched with policing, justice, livelihood recovery, arms control and accountable rural governance. Communities remain exposed when deployment gaps recur locally.



## **1.5 Implications for Nigeria's Internal Security Strategy**

### **Weakening of State Authority**

Banditry weakens state authority when armed groups exercise practical control over movement, roads, farms, forests and local economic activity. Evidence from GI-TOC/ACLED shows that bandits extract value through road extortion, farmer taxation, farm seizure and forced labour, creating coercive authority in rural spaces (Madueke et al., 2024). Tarasa et al. (2025) link this to institutional failure and reduced trust in formal governance. For internal security strategy, the implication is clear: territorial control and citizen confidence cannot be restored by force alone in neglected rural communities and remote farming settlements today.

### **Overstretching of the Military**

The crisis also overstretches the military by drawing conventional forces into repeated internal security operations. Aina et al. (2023) show that Operation Hadarin Daji faces difficulty against mobile and unconventional armed groups, while Oyewole et al. (2022) note that air campaigns can disrupt bandit activity but cannot resolve local governance failures. This places the armed forces under continuous pressure and risks making military deployment a substitute for rural policing, justice delivery and preventive local security in practice across affected states.

### **Threat to Food Security and Rural Livelihoods**

Banditry threatens food security by disrupting farming, livestock movement, markets and rural income. Lamidi (2025) argues that insecurity has harmed rural food production because farmers are kidnapped, displaced or killed by non-state actors. Madueke et al. (2024) show that bandits tax farmers, seize farms and use forced labour, while Ojo et al. (2023) link cattle rustling and attacks to wider socio-economic disruption. The IOM DTM evidence on displaced households in North-West states reinforces the pressure placed on rural livelihoods (IOM, 2025). Internal security strategy must therefore treat food systems as part of protection planning, not as a separate development concern for affected farming settlements and rural market access across communities.



### **Internal Displacement and Humanitarian Pressure**

Internal displacement turns banditry into a humanitarian and governance problem. Section 4 shows, using IOM DTM data, that IDP evidence across Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara reflects large-scale movement from unsafe communities (IOM, 2025). Okoli et al. (2025) connect banditry to threat-induced migration, displacement and captive population conditions in northern Nigeria. For internal security planning, displacement means that security failure creates new burdens for host communities, relief systems, schools, local markets and state legitimacy in receiving areas, especially when return remains unsafe for households during prolonged insecurity and fear.

### **Threat to Education and Human Development**

Banditry also threatens education and human development by restricting movement, increasing family fear and disrupting routine schooling. UNIDIR's community evidence shows that banditry affects education and mobility in surveyed North-West communities (Kleffmann et al., 2024). Ojo et al. (2023) link armed banditry to displacement and socio-economic disruption, which can weaken children's learning conditions. The strategic implication is that school protection, safe movement and community confidence must be treated as internal security concerns, especially in rural areas exposed to repeated attacks.

### **Expansion of Organised Crime**

The evidence also points to an expanding organised crime economy. Table 1 shows that kidnapping produced large ransom demands and confirmed payments within one year, while Table 2 shows revenue sources including cattle rustling, kidnapping, mining, road extortion, farmer taxation, farm seizure and forced labour (SB Morgen, 2025; Madueke et al., 2024). Osasona (2023) frames bandits as violent non-state criminal groups involved in kidnap-for-ransom, robbery, cattle rustling and sexual violence. This criminal economy threatens internal security because it finances weapons, recruitment, mobility and coercive rural authority across vulnerable communities and weakens formal law enforcement in remote and poorly policed areas.



## **Need for Integrated Internal Security Planning**

These implications show the need for integrated internal security planning. Military pressure may disrupt armed groups, but the evidence suggests that banditry survives through criminal finance, weak rural governance, community fear and poor protection systems (Aina et al., 2023; Madueke et al., 2024; Kleffmann et al., 2024). Ojewale (2023) supports plural policing, while Tarasa et al. (2025) warn that hybrid security arrangements can weaken legitimacy when accountability is unclear. A strategy must connect rural policing, intelligence, military support, local governance, arms control, justice, livelihood recovery, victim support and community trust. This is not yet a recommendation list. It is the strategic lesson from the findings: Nigeria's internal security approach must move from reactive deployment towards coordinated rural protection. Without that shift, bandit groups may continue to exploit gaps between state force, local authority and community vulnerability. Strategic planning must treat displacement, education and livelihoods as security indicators within planning assessments.

### **1.6 Policy Recommendations**

#### **Strengthen Rural Policing**

Rural policing should be strengthened through permanent police posts, mobile patrols, motorcycles, communication equipment and quicker response systems in vulnerable settlements. This should be tied to community trust, since weak policing reach allows bandits to exploit forests, roads and farms (Ojo et al., 2023; Madueke et al., 2024). A plural policing approach can support formal policing, but the police should remain the accountable lead institution at local level (Ojewale, 2023).

#### **Improve Intelligence Sharing**

Intelligence sharing should be improved through safe reporting channels linking communities, traditional authorities, local governments, police, military and other security agencies. UNIDIR's evidence shows that communities understand local victimisation patterns and bandit movement, making their knowledge vital for early warning (Kleffmann et al., 2024).



Information systems should protect informants, reduce response delays and support coordinated operations rather than fragmented reactions after attacks (Aina et al., 2023; Madueke et al., 2024).

### **Regulate Vigilante and Community Security Groups**

Vigilante groups, hunters and local guards should be registered, trained, supervised and placed under clear legal authority. Community actors can support local intelligence and immediate protection, but weak regulation can deepen abuse, retaliation and mistrust (Ojewale, 2023; Kleffmann et al., 2024). Tarasa et al. (2025) warn that hybrid security arrangements may erode legitimacy when accountability is unclear. Regulation should therefore prevent ethnic profiling, political capture and uncontrolled armed mobilisation while preserving useful community knowledge for local protection and response systems.

### **Improve Border and Arms Control**

Border and arms control should be treated as a core part of counter-banditry strategy. Armed mobility, weapons access and cross-border criminal linkages increase the reach of bandit groups (Kleffmann et al., 2024; Madueke et al., 2024). Security agencies should improve arms tracing, border monitoring, inter-state coordination and cooperation with neighbouring countries. This would help disrupt supply routes, reduce attack capacity and limit the movement of armed groups across rural frontiers.

### **Secure Forests and Rural Corridors**

Forests, grazing routes, rural roads, mining areas and farming corridors should be mapped and monitored more consistently. Ojo et al. (2023) and Madueke et al. (2024) show that bandits exploit difficult terrain, forest enclaves and rural economic spaces. Security operations should therefore combine patrols, local intelligence, geospatial mapping and community reporting. The aim should be to reduce bandit mobility and protect farmers, travellers and isolated settlements more effectively every day.

### **Strengthen Local Government Security Roles**

Local governments should have clearer roles in early warning, emergency response, victim





support, community reporting and coordination with traditional authorities. Aina (2025) links insecurity to weak sub-national capacity, while Tarasa et al. (2025) connects banditry to institutional failure. Local government structures should therefore support rural service delivery, community liaison and recovery planning. They should not replace police or military roles, but should strengthen local trust and provide the administrative link between citizens and security agencies in affected rural settlements today.

### **Support Victims and Rebuild Rural Livelihoods**

Victim support should be treated as part of internal security recovery. Displaced persons, affected farmers, women, children and families of victims need livelihood assistance, schooling continuity, psychosocial support and safe return planning where conditions allow. IOM DTM evidence shows displacement pressure in affected North-West states, while Lamidi (2025) links banditry to rural food insecurity. Recovery should rebuild farms, markets and confidence, reducing the vulnerability that bandits exploit (Kleffmann et al., 2024) during prolonged rural insecurity and livelihood collapse across communities.

### **1.7 Conclusion**

This paper has argued that banditry in North-West Nigeria should be understood as a rural security governance problem with direct implications for Nigeria's internal security strategy. The evidence shows that kidnapping, cattle rustling, illegal taxation, farm seizure, forced labour and forest-based mobility have turned rural insecurity into a system of coercive economic control. This weakens state authority, exposes communities, disrupts livelihoods and places pressure on military forces that are repeatedly drawn into internal security duties.

The paper also shows that community security actors matter, but their role must be carefully regulated. Vigilantes, hunters and local guards may support intelligence and local defence, yet weak oversight can produce retaliation, abuse and mistrust. The deeper lesson is that reactive force alone cannot resolve a crisis sustained by criminal finance, weak policing, poor coordination and limited rural governance.

Nigeria's internal security strategy must therefore connect rural policing, intelligence sharing,



accountable community security, arms control, local government capacity, victim support and livelihood recovery. Banditry will remain difficult to contain if communities continue to experience the state mainly after attacks have occurred. A stronger strategy should protect rural life before violence spreads, rebuild confidence where authority has weakened and treat farms, schools, roads and displaced households as central indicators of national security. This is the strategic value of approaching banditry through rural security governance analysis.

## References

- Aina, F. (2025). Political economy of sub-national fragility and armed conflict in Northwest Nigeria. *African Identities*, 23(3), 616-633.
- Aina, F., Ojo, J. S., & Oyewole, S. (2023). Shock and awe: Military response to armed banditry and the prospects of internal security operations in Northwest Nigeria. *African Security Review*.
- Byrne, D. (2022). A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis. *Quality & Quantity*, 56, 1391-1412.
- Cheong, H., Lyons, A., Houghton, R., & Majumdar, A. (2023). Secondary qualitative research methodology using online data within the context of social sciences. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 1-19.
- International Organization for Migration. (2025). *DTM North-Central and North-West Nigeria MasterList Round 18, December 2025*.
- Kleffmann, J., Ramachandran, S., Cohen, N., O'Neil, S., Bukar, M., Batault, F., & Van Broeckhoven, K. (2024). *Banditry violence in Nigeria's North West: Insights from affected communities*. UNIDIR.
- Lamidi, K. O. (2025). Banditry and its implications on food security in Northwest Nigeria: A reflection on the roles of the state. *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies*, 5(2), 196-213.
- Madueke, K. L., Ayandele, O., Adamu, L. D., & Bird, L. (2024). *Armed bandits in Nigeria*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and ACLED.



Morgan, H. (2022). Conducting a qualitative document analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(1), 64-77.

Ojo, J. S., Oyewole, S., & Aina, F. (2023). Forces of terror: Armed banditry and insecurity in North-West Nigeria. *Democracy and Security*.

Ojewale, O. (2023). Theorising and illustrating plural policing models in countering armed banditry as hybrid terrorism in northwest Nigeria. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1), 2174486.

Okoli, A. C., Aina, F., & Onuoha, F. C. (2025). Banditry and “captive population syndrome” in northern Nigeria. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 18(1), 1-17.

Osasona, T. (2023). The question of definition: Armed banditry in Nigeria’s North-West in the context of international humanitarian law. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 105(923), 735-749.

Oyewole, S., Aina, F., & Ojo, J. S. (2022). Wings over flies: Air campaigns against armed banditry in North-West Nigeria. *The RUSI Journal*, 167(4-5), 92-103.

SB Morgen. (2025). *Locust business: The economics of Nigeria’s kidnap industry, A 2025 update*.

Tarasa, A. S., Musa, A., & Jelani, H. Y. (2025). Banditry and security governance in Northwest Nigeria: State fragility and institutional failure. *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 9(8), 15-27.