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SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF BANDITRY ON AGRO-PASTORAL COMMUNITIES IN ZAMFARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper assesses how the heavy weight of banditry has terrorised Zamfara agro-pastoral communities, with significant adverse effects on their socio-economic activities, ranging from emerging abductions of road commuters and mass student hostage-taking syndrome to illegal levies enforced on hapless farmers that disrupted the rural economy. The research used a multi-stage sampling procedure in selecting 217 respondents out of 1,466 displaced rural households. Multiple methods of primary data collection were employed, including structured questionnaires, observation, and open-ended interviews. Secondary data were drawn from credible sources, which include policy briefs and reports from the National Bureau of Statistics, SBM Intelligence reports, FAO, CISLAC, Human Rights Watch, and other official repositories. Data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis, with the Frustration–Aggression (FA) model as the theoretical framework. The results showed that the majority (76.5%) of the respondents were males aged 31–40 years. Also, 42.9% of the respondents were married, while 45.1% had an annual income between ₦451,000 and ₦501,000. Findings revealed that the socio-economic characteristics of Zamfara agro-pastoral communities have been seriously affected by the emergence of heightened insecurity, school closures, disruption of small businesses, and an oblivious kidnapping syndrome that led to the forced eviction of rural

Keywords: Agro-pastoral, Banditry, Communities, Kidnapping, Zamfara State.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

residents. To address these challenges, the study recommends prioritising interventions in banditry-ravaged communities through job creation, vocational skill training, and the provision of micro-credit to the youth, as well as the stationing of permanent security outfits in boarding schools and the creation of early warning systems in every community.

Introduction

The sudden swing of the emerging economic banditry prototype has recently bedevilled virtually all of Northern Nigeria. For more than a decade, banditry has been thrusting its ugly head in the North-West geo-political region, which led many Zamfara agro-pastoral communities into an unexpected security quagmire. Also, Karfe et al. (2025) trailed a historic lane to expose the linkages of banditry with activities that thrive only in security-fragile climes and politically compromised conditions aggravated by rebellion. However, a worrying equation has now surfaced in North-West Nigeria, manifesting as 'banditry', a generic term used for violence typically involving armed gangs of criminals on motorbikes indiscriminately assaulting villages, concomitant with the pillage of valuables (Hassan, cited in Abdullahi et al., 2024). In fact, existing data suggest that banditry acts in Nigeria have gradually changed into a dominant form of organised viciousness, primarily driven by covert economic incentives (Suleiman, 2023). The Northern Nigeria Coalition of Inter-Faith (2025) highlighted the devastating toll of banditry, unfolding genocide-like atrocities, and cited figures from Amnesty International and the National Human Rights Commission indicating that over 13,485 deaths were recorded as a result of banditry attacks between 2010 and 2023. It also mentioned that over 2,266 people were reported to have been killed in the first half of 2025.

Conversely, the North-West geo-political part of Nigeria encompasses seven states, namely: Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kebbi, Kaduna, Kano, and Jigawa. Five of these states, which are Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, and Kebbi, have been engulfed by the scourge of banditry. Of these five states, Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto have been the most critical (Osuigwe, 2025). Unfortunately, today, most parts of Zamfara rural areas have become safe havens that harbour multiple gangs of bandits, who use its ungoverned areas as theatres for criminal atrocities (Abdudulrashid et al., 2022). The deterioration of the security situation in Zamfara State has suddenly become a crisis whose frequency, scale, and complexity no longer belong to one state alone, but now define virtually the shared destiny of all states in North-Western Nigeria (Suleiman, 2025).

Statement of the Problem

The extreme violence occasioned by non-state actors was found to be deeply situated

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

within a contour already marked by the accumulation of socio-economic and emerging security crises that had gained traction in exacerbating a myriad of untold hardship conditions, most especially in destroying the wellbeing and livelihoods of Zamfara agro-pastoralists (Suleiman, 2023). These persistent bouts of banditry have impoverished many rural residents and rendered their lives utterly unbearable, where rural households can no longer afford basic staples as a result of havoc wreaked by bandits that has jeopardised their agrarian lifestyle, and where many feel insecure in their ancestral homes (Suleiman, 2025). Unfortunately, the emerging fragile security threats have succeeded in crumbling the rural economy and have made small-scale trading unsustainable (Abdullahi, 2021).
However, from the aforementioned discussions, it appears that there is a dearth of research assessing the emergent banditry threats on the socio-economic characteristics of Zamfara agro-pastoral communities. Therefore, it is against this background that this paper focuses its attention on unearthing these socio-economic-related existential dynamics, with a view to suggesting recommendations to mitigate the emerging threats of economic banditry by bridging the conspicuous gap in the literature and proffering solutions to the following questions that constitute the thrust of this article:

1. What are the socio-economic characteristics of the affected household heads in the study area?
2. What are the emerging dynamics of the kidnapping-for-ransom epidemic in the study area?
3. What are the ways to mitigate the contemporary effects of banditry in the study area?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this paper is to assess the emerging security threats of banditry on Socio-economic Characteristics of Zamfara Agro-pastoral Communities. The specific objectives are to:

1. Describe the socio-economic characteristics of the affected households' heads in the study area.
2. Examine the emerging dynamics of kidnapping for ransom epidemic in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Zamfara State; Gusau is the capital city of Zamfara State. The state was established in 1996 by the then military administration of the late General Sani Abacha. Zamfara State was carved out of Sokoto State. It comprises fourteen (14) Local Government Areas, with a landmass of 38,418 sq. km. The state stretches between latitudes 10°21′ to 13°15′ N and longitude 6°20′ E. Zamfara State is bordered in the north by

the Niger Republic, in the south by Kaduna State, in the east by Katsina State, and in the west by Sokoto, Kebbi, and Niger States, respectively. Zamfara State is geographically located in the Sudan Savannah agro-ecological zone of Nigeria and has a projected population of 4,515,400 (NPC, 2020). Statistics have shown that more than 80% of the people living in Zamfara State are engaged in various forms of agricultural activities, ranging from crop production of millet, guinea corn, maize, rice, groundnut, cotton, tobacco, and beans to livestock and fish farming. The climate exhibits a definite pattern of wet and dry seasons. Tropical continental air mass predominates during the dry season, while harmattan lasts from December to February, and the wet season spans from June to mid-October. Rainfall distribution varies from 675 mm to 1,000 mm, with an average annual temperature of between 26 and 30 degrees centigrade (John, cited in Danbauchi et al., 2022). The issue of oblivious kidnapping-for-ransom syndrome is no longer an isolated crime, as victims' relatives have lost confidence in Nigerian security agencies; it has now boomed to become a fast-rising criminal economy that helps define Nigeria's conflict landscape (Sani and Muhammed, 2025).

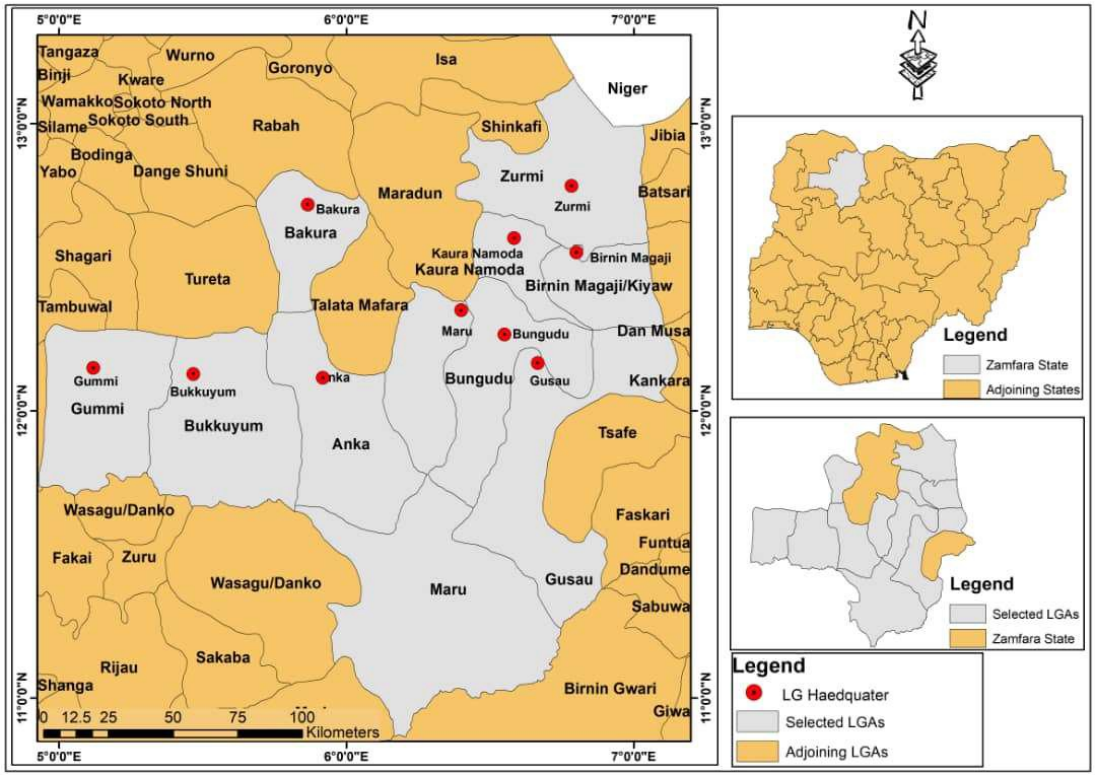
Frustration–Aggression Model

The Frustration–Aggression (F–A) theoretical paradigm was originally proposed by John Dollard et al. (1939) and further expanded by Leonard Berkowitz (1989). The theory argues that aggression is often a product of frustration caused by fruitless goals or unaccomplished desires. In the context of Zamfara State, rising unemployment, drug abuse, poverty, persistent intolerance, and social injustices may generate frustrations that fuel violent crimes such as banditry and kidnapping. Many perpetrators in Northern Nigeria are reportedly young men with limited education or economic opportunities, aligning with the idea that socio-economic frustration can result in aggression against others or society (Aghedo & Osumah, cited in Karfe et al., 2025). This theory helps to fathom how structural socio-economic conditions, such as neglect, corruption, and marginalisation, create a fertile breeding ground for violent acts. It also provides insight into why certain areas with chronic poverty, lack of education, and weak governance tend to experience greater security fragility. Thus, the Frustration–Aggression Theory is found relevant in analysing how socio-economic factors escalate insecurity in Zamfara and adjoining states.

Critique

The Frustration–Aggression Theory has been criticised for being too simplistic and psychological in its approach. Ted, cited in Karfe et al. (2025), argued that not all frustration leads to aggression; he therefore critiqued the theory for its inability to examine the F–A model from political, social, and cultural angles. Critics also note its

deficiency in ignoring the role of rational planning in crimes such as kidnapping, waylaying travellers en route, GSBV, and organised mass student kidnapping (Berkowitz, cited in Rufa'i, 2020).



Source: *Field Survey*, 2025.

Figure 1 Map of the Study Area. (Source: Drawn by the Department of Geography UDUS)

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

The sample frame for the study was constituted of 1,466 internally displaced household heads (target population) drawn from different Zamfara IDP camps and other affected displaced persons within the study area. This study was conducted in areas that were ravaged by emerging threats of banditry. Zamfara State is divided into three agricultural zones, namely: Northern Zone (Birnin Magaji, Kaura Namoda, Shinkafi, and Zurmi LGAs), Central Zone (Bungudu, Gusau, Maru, and Tsafe LGAs), and Western Zone (Anka, Kura, Bukkuyum, Gummi, Maradun, and Talata Mafara LGAs).

A multi-stage sampling procedure was used in the study. In the first stage, four (4) LGAs were purposively selected from ten (10) most affected LGAs out of the fourteen (14) LGAs of the state, namely: Maru, Shinkafi, Tsafe, and Zurmi LGAs, based on accessibility and concentration of IDPs. In the second stage, simple random sampling was used to select

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

two (2) districts each from the already selected LGAs. In the third stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select two (2) villages from each district already selected. In the fourth stage, a proportionate selection method was used in selecting 15% of 217 household heads out of the 1,466 target population as the sample size for the research.

Table 1: Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

S/N	Selected L.G.As From 10 most affected area	Districts Selected from LGAs of the study area	Villages Selected from the district of the study area	Estimated number of households sample frame	15% of selected households Sample size	No. of returned instruments
1	**Maru**	Dansadau	Ruwan -Tofa	280	42	38
			Babban- Doka			
		Dangulbi	Danmani	260	39	35
			Yargaladima			
2	**Shinkafi**	Badarawa	Mallamawa	182	27	27
			Bakin lamba			
		Mashema	Tungar-kahau	190	28	20
			Tungar-buzu			
3	**Tsafe**	Yankuzo	Zakuna	152	22	22
			Kunchin-kalgo			
		Yandoto	Kita	122	18	18
			Kizara			
4	**Zurmi**	Birnin-tsaba	Lugga	144	21	20
			Bara keji			
		Birane	Tsanu	136	20	16
			Tudun - bugaje			
Total	**4**	**8**	**16**	**1,466**	**217**	**196**

Source: *Reconnaissance Survey* (2025)

Method of Data Collection

Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. The former was collected with the aid of a structured questionnaire administered by the researcher with the assistance of trained enumerators. Secondary information was extracted from credible sources, which include, but are not limited to, policy briefs and reports from NBS, the International Crisis Group, and Human Rights Watch, alongside books and other official repositories. These materials provided a benchmark for thematic content analysis, which supports the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and gaps in the literature.

Method of Data Analysis

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

The analytical tools used to achieve objective one (socio-economic characteristics) of the respondents in the study were descriptive statistics (frequency count, percentage, and arithmetic mean). Thematic content analysis was used to analyse objectives two (2) and three (3). However, the identity and data generated from the relevant stakeholders were ethically promised to be concealed in order to safeguard personal sensitive information drawn from the respondents. Similarly, in the process of coding, the study congregated data from relevant sources, such as face-to-face interviews with repentant bandits, displaced persons (victims), security agents, and displaced persons in IDP camps; open coding was also used in breaking down data into smaller chunks and later assigning preliminary codes. The study also employed axial and selective coding methods in grouping similar codes into categories related to banditry or themes, and in identifying core themes that relate to other categories. Likewise, frequency of analysis, contextual significance, and stakeholders' perspectives were all considered in the identification of dominant themes. Lastly, the article used triangulation of multiple data sources to verify findings with stakeholders such as MACBAN, AFAN, and security agents, as well as peer debriefing with experts in the security domain, to ensure accuracy and validation of the research results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Some of the important socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in the survey were examined to establish the background information of the study, in order to determine the responses of sampled rural households in relation to their sex, age, household size, marital status, educational attainment, primary and secondary occupations, and income (₦) (Table 2).

Table 2: Distributions of the Respondents based on Socio-economic Characteristics (n=196)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Means
Sex			
Male	150	76.5	
Female	46	23.5	
Age (in years)			
21-30	49	25.0	
31-40	104	53.1	
41-50	36	18.4	
>50	07	3.6	**39.4**
Household Size			

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Means
<5	60	30.6	
6-10	70	35.7	
11-15	33	16.9	
16-20	20	10.2	
>20	13	6.6	**9**
Marrital Status			
Single	71	39.3	
Married	84	42.9	
Divorce	14	7.1	
Widow	16	8.2	
Saperated	05	2.6	
Educational attainment			
Non Education	36	2.6	
Qur"anic Education	126	64.3	
Adult Education	03	1.5	
Primary Education	25	12.8	
Secondary Education	06	3.1	
Primary Occupations			
Crop Production	108	60.2	
Livestock	06	3.1	
Trading	56	30.1	
Artisan	10	5.1	
Agro-pastoralism	05	2.6	
Secondary occupations			
Crop production	04	2.0	
livestock	75	38.3	
Trading	49	25.0	
Artisan	45	23.0	
Agro-Pastoralism	19	9.7	
Annual Income			
400,000-450,000	04	3.0	
451,000-501,000	88	44.9	
502,000-552,000	58	29.5	
553,000-603,000	41	20.9	
>603,000	03	1.5	**₦508,391.1**

Source: (*Field Survey*, 2025).

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

Sex of the respondents

The study findings showed that the vast majority (76.5%) of the respondents were males, while the remaining 23.5% were females (Table 2). This implies that, in a patriarchal society, males dominate their female counterparts. In fact, the study findings align with prior expectations: first, the existence of gender imbalance; secondly, the cultural dynamics and gender norms of the people in the study area serve as barriers for women to participate more in outside-the-home activities; and thirdly, fear of the unknown, including intimidation, sexual violence, and other forms of open assaults, might deter women from engaging in outside activities. These implications render women more vulnerable to bandits' abductions. The study results corroborated the findings of FAO (2022), which aver that in the northern part of Nigeria, women mostly remain at home and engage in domestic household chores such as raising children, agricultural processing, value addition, and playing pivotal roles in many marketing functions.

Age of the respondents

Results in Table 2 indicated that the majority of the respondents (53.1%) fell within the age range of 31–40 years. These survey findings clearly established that the average age of sampled households falls within their youthful years of 31 to 40. This implies that the respondents were actively agile, able-bodied, and proactively within their economically productive ages. This result is in agreement with the findings of Rufai (2021), who reported that the active age of agro-pastoral communities ranged between 31 and 45 years. The study findings also concurred with earlier findings of Mikail et al. (2024), who affirmed that 18–45 years constitute the economically active age bracket expected to be self-motivating, inquisitive, and highly innovative.

Household size of the respondents

Data presented on household size showed that the majority (35.7%) of the respondents had 6–10 dependants in their households (Table 2). This implies that the average rural household in the study area consists of between 6 and 10 people. This may be attributed to the polygamous lifestyle practised in the study area or to the rapid increase in the number of widows and orphans resulting from the loss of breadwinners to incessant bandit attacks. It is also pertinent to note that people from conflict zones often gravitate towards relatives or community members for refuge. The implications of the findings buttress the fact that households with larger family sizes are more likely to be affected by banditry than those with smaller household sizes. This result supports the findings of Suleiman (2023), which revealed that 58% of agro-pastoral communities in Yobe State had household sizes of no fewer than 10 people.

Marital status of the respondents

From the findings obtained, Table 2 shows that most of the respondents (42.9%) were married, while 39.3% were single. This implies that marital status in the survey area is essential in shaping opinions and decision-making across different marital categories. The institution of marriage also plays a vital role in the lives of sampled agro-pastoral communities, as married individuals are often occupied with responsibilities of catering for their families and extended relations who seek refuge in their homes. The study corroborated earlier findings of Suleiman (2023), who reported that the majority of youths in rural areas marry earlier than their peers in urban areas and assume adult responsibilities much earlier, possibly due to the contributions rendered by married individuals to community building.

Educational attainment of the respondents

The results indicated that the majority (64.3%) of the respondents had Qur'anic education, while only a paltry 3.1% had attained secondary school education (Table 4.1). This clearly implies that a substantial proportion of the respondents lack formal education, perhaps owing to incessant banditry activities. This finding agrees with Karfe et al. (2025), who reported that North-Western Nigeria has recently come under significant threat due to an increased number of mass kidnappings of students from schools. They further described this as a gimmick astutely adopted by terrorist and bandit groups to engage in student kidnappings.

Primary occupation of the respondents

The study revealed that the majority (60.2%) of the sampled rural households considered crop production as an important platform for livelihoods. This implies that many people in the study area are actively engaged in crop production as their primary occupation, with livelihoods largely dependent on growing crops and other related agricultural value chains (Table 2). By implication, since the majority of those affected are predominantly farmers, the abandonment of crop production could lead to increased unemployment, push farmers into abject poverty, and cause food shortages in the study area. This finding agrees with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) (2025), which asserted that escalating insecurity in northern Nigeria is driving hunger to levels unseen in years, with about 35 million people now at risk of severe hunger as the 2026 lean season approaches.

Secondary occupation of the respondents

Findings on secondary occupation showed that most respondents (38.3%) were engaged in animal husbandry as a supplementary means of income generation, while only 4.1%

combined agriculture with pastoralism (Table 2). This implies that households in the study area have additional sources of income. By implication, keeping livestock may attract cattle rustlers and place livestock owners among the targets of bandits. These findings support Osuigwe (2025), who reported that banditry has significantly disrupted agricultural activities, the main source of livelihood for many people in northern Nigeria. The results also agree with Faruk and Abdullahi (2022), who stated that banditry has impacted agricultural business, market activities, increased unemployment and poverty, and led to the collapse of food security in affected local government areas of Katsina State.

Annual income of the respondents (₦)

Findings in Table 2 showed that most (45.1%) of the respondents had an annual income within ₦451,000–₦501,000, while only 1.5% belonged to the category earning above ₦603,000 per annum. This implies that the fragile socio-economic status of many respondents may be attributed to the negative effects of the banditry crisis on agricultural practices. The survey findings are in consonance with Suleiman (2023), who reported that disruption of agricultural activities contributes to food insecurity, worsens poverty in affected regions, stalls economic development, and exacerbates inequality.

EMERGING DYNAMICS OF ZAMFARA BANDITRY

The socio-economic cost of extreme violence occasioned by non-state actors has immensely impacted the wellbeing of Zamfara's rural residents. Farmers have abandoned their lands due to fear of attacks, people have been forced to abandon their ancestral homes, schools have been shut down following mass abductions of students, and road transport is frequently disrupted by kidnappings along highways. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2024), a nation with an estimated population of 230 million should not be in a state where about 5,000 bandits threaten its security and stability. Osuigwe (2025) reported that ransom payments have recently become a booming underground economy, undermining public confidence.

According to the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) and Transparency International (TI) Nigeria (2025), Nigeria lost about ₦2.2 trillion to kidnapping for ransom between May 2023 and April 2024, a figure believed to exceed the country's entire 2024 defence budget. The SDG 16th Report of 26 September, themed *"Leaving No One Behind: Anti-Corruption, Right to Information, and Justice for All,"* was unveiled at a side event of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. Speaking at the launch, CISLAC's Executive Director and Head of Transparency International Nigeria, Comrade Auwal Ibrahim Musa (Rafsanjani), warned that Nigeria is "trapped in a dangerous cycle of corruption, weak institutions, and worsening insecurity" that threatens its chances of

meeting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. One of the most alarming findings in the report is the scale and frequency of kidnapping for ransom, which has become commercialised. Between May 2023 and April 2024 alone, over 2.23 million kidnapping incidents were recorded in Nigeria (Suleiman, 2025). NBS intelligence (2025) also reported that abductions in Nigeria have become unchecked criminal activities, with kidnappers collecting at least ₦2.57 billion in ransom between July 2024 and June 2025.

Escalation of attacks on soft targets and vulnerable communities

Persistent bandit attacks on villages and ransom-seeking abductions have fostered the growth of a criminal economy across seven states in North-Western Nigeria. These activities have become highly lucrative, attracting actors ranging from local career criminals to international syndicates (Osuigwe, 2025). For more than a decade, rural women and children in Zamfara have navigated a labyrinth of crises rooted in farmer–herder conflicts that evolved into widespread instability and survival struggles (Sani and Muhammed, 2025). Bandits often kidnap women to intimidate spouses into paying ransom or subject them to sexual violence (Suleiman, 2023). The lives of many rural women in Zamfara unfold between fear and frustration, characterised by persistent fear of abduction, poverty, and dysfunctional governance (James et al., 2023). Africa at LSE (2022) further buttressed that women and girls are particularly vulnerable, as many are abducted, raped, or forced into exploitative situations when communities refuse to pay levies, and women's livelihood sources such as markets and farms are frequently raided.

Roadblocks and kidnapping of people en route

Kidnapping for ransom has taken centre stage in the rising wave of crimes involving roadblocks and restricted movement between LGAs. Previously more prevalent in southern and western Nigeria, kidnapping has gradually become a national epidemic (Campbell, cited in Epron, 2020). It has evolved into a business venture, with allegations of involvement of political elites, religious clergy, uniformed personnel, and other conflict merchants driven by greed (Suleiman, 2023). Human Rights Watch (2021) affirmed that kidnapping has evolved into a systematic revenue stream, with Nigerians paying at least ₦18 billion in ransoms between 2011 and 2020. These findings align with Sani and Muhammed (2025), who noted that ransom payments drain families and communities, divert funds from investment, reduce agricultural output, and discourage development. Criminal tactics have shifted towards highway blockades, waylaying commuters, and the use of SALWs and modern communication tools (ICG, cited in Suleiman, 2025). Historically, such practices trace back to the late 1980s and early 1990s, locally termed *Gungume* or *kwanta-kwanta* in Hausa parlance (Suleiman, 2023).

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Prof. A.I. Mteiye [MALAWI]

Mass student abduction and hostage-taking syndrome

The increasing rate of mass student abductions across northern Nigeria has created a persistent humanitarian emergency. Over the past decade, banditry and kidnapping have posed serious threats to lives, property, and livelihoods in North-Western states, resulting in fear, displacement, and severe socio-economic disruptions (Karfe et al., 2025). UNICEF (2023) reported that the North-West is the most affected region, with 15.23 million people impacted. Common drivers include weak governance, poverty, unemployment, proliferation of small arms, and lucrative ransom markets (Osuigwe, 2025). Studies indicate that schools are increasingly targeted, academic calendars disrupted, and teachers and students displaced, undermining education systems (Omuya, 2023).

SBM Intelligence reported that kidnapping syndicates demanded an estimated ₦48 billion in ransom within a 12-month period, although only a fraction was paid, highlighting the evolution of abduction into a profit-driven enterprise amid weak governance and vast unpoliced spaces (Daily Trust, 2025). Mikail et al. (2025) noted that many schools have been destroyed, preventing students from attending school due to fear of abduction or death.

Notable cases include the April 2021 Greenfield University abduction and the July 2021 Bethel Baptist Secondary School kidnapping, underscoring the boldness and ransom-driven motives of bandit groups (Karfe et al., 2025). Amnesty International (2025) described mass student abductions as a shocking indictment of authorities' failure to protect citizens. Between 2013 and 2025, North-Western Nigeria recorded seventeen mass abduction incidents, with varying frequency across years (Timeline, 2025).

Table 3: Timeline showing students abduction in Northwestern Nigeria (2013 to 2025)

S/N	Name of Targeted School(s)	Location (LGA)	State(s)	Date, Month & Year of Abduction	Number of Students Abducted	Number of people Killed
1	GSS Mamudo	Potiskum	Yobe	6/7/2013	42 kidnapped	42 killed
2	FGC Buni Yadi	Bunu yadi	Yobe	24/2/2014	59 kidnapped	59 killed
3	GGSS Chibok	Chibok	Borno	14/4/2014	276 Girls kidnapped	-
4	GGSTC Dapchi	Dapchi	Yobe	19/2/2018	110 Girls kidnapped	
5	GSSS Kankara	Kankara	Katsina	11/12/2020	344 Boys kidnapped	-
6	GSC Kagara	Rafi	Niger	17/2/2021	27 kidnapped	-
7	GGJSS Jangebe	Maru	Zamfara	26/2/2021	279 Girls kidnapped	-
8	FCFM Afaka	Igabi	Kaduna	11/3/2021	39 kidnapped	-
9	Greenfield University	Kasarami	Kaduna	20/4/2021	20 kidnapped	(5 killed)
10	Nuhu Bamalli Poly.	Zaria	Kaduna	11/6/2021	Several kidnapped	(1 killed)
11	Bethel Baptist H. Sch.	Damishi	Kaduna	5/7/2021	121 kidnapped	-
12	Tegina Islamiyya Sch.	Rafi	Niger	30/5/2021	Over 100 kidnapped	-
13	FGC Birnin-Yauri	Yauri	Kebbi	17/7/2021	94 kidnapped	(1 killed)

S/N	Name of Targeted School(s)	Location (LGA)	State(s)	Date, Month & Year of Abduction	Number of Students Abducted	Number of people Killed
14	Fed. University Gusau	Gusau	Zamfara	22/9/2023	35 kidnapped	-
15	L. Pri & Sec Sch. Kuriga	Chikun	Kaduna	7/3/2024	287 kidnapped	-
16	GGCSS Maga	D/wasagu	Kebbi	17/11/2025	25 Girls kidnapped	(1 killed)
17	St. Mary Catholic School	Agwara	Niger	21/11/ 2025	Over 300 kidnapped	-

Source: Authors' Compilation (2025)

Emerging covert players / conflict merchants

North-Western Nigeria, where Zamfara State is geographically located, is confronted on multiple fronts by covert actors fuelling banditry. The roles of informants, logistics carriers, arms suppliers, political elites, and pharmaceutical companies cannot be underestimated (Karfe et al., 2025). Allegations suggest that some elites exploit armed groups for political purposes, granting criminals relative freedom and immunity (Suleiman, 2023; Osuigwe, 2025). Suleiman (2023) further noted that media politicisation and selective outrage embolden criminal groups and undermine security efforts.

Illicit taxes enforced on rural residents

Bandits have imposed levies on rural residents across Zamfara LGAs, often with strict deadlines and threats of invasion (Suleiman, 2025). SBM Intelligence reported that Nigerians paid at least $18.34 million to kidnappers between 2011 and 2020. Between May 2023 and April 2024, NBS estimated that affected households paid ₦2.2 trillion in ransom, despite a government ban on ransom payments in 2022. Omuya (2023) reported that farmers in Zamfara paid between ₦70,000 and ₦100,000 in levies to access farmland, often exceeding the value of crops produced.

WAY FORWARD TO MITIGATE CONTEMPORARY BANDITRY

Collective regional security actions

The creation of a regional joint security platform across North-West and North-Central states, with an integrated security framework, would enable joint operations, shared intelligence, and a unified command structure to combat banditry and safeguard inter-state highways (NSGF, 2025).

Creating a harmonised intelligence fusion centre

The establishment of permanent intelligence fusion units covering human intelligence, signals intelligence, aerial surveillance, and inter-state early warning systems would strengthen coordination, facilitate rapid response, and enhance intelligence sharing among security agencies (NSGF, 2025).

Adoption of unified policies on negotiation and amnesty

A unified regional zero-tolerance policy on ransom payment and unsanctioned amnesty should be adopted. Harmonised border operations, collaborative school protection frameworks, and joint advocacy for increased federal deployment of special forces and enhanced resource allocation are critical to addressing the scale and frequency of insecurity in the region (NSGF, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The article concludes that the emerging vicious cycle of banditry has become an existential threat to Zamfara agro-pastoral communities. As an epicentre of national challenge, Zamfara State has now been seen as a symbol of governmental weakness, where bandits have turned ungoverned spaces into kinetic zones. This has forced rural residents to bear the heavy weight of violence that not only reflects Zamfara's direct realities, but also its broader strategic implications for regional stability in terms of food security, community resilience, escalating killings, and disruption of the educational sector through an oblivious student abduction syndrome. These developments have hampered farming occupations, facilitated the displacement of thousands of citizens, transformed rural conflict into perpetual intimidation to national sovereignty, and caused devastating socio-economic dislocation, concomitant with humanitarian costs to Zamfara and adjoining regional states.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government should enforce a legal framework to mandate the use of mobile business transactions (cashless policy) in order to reduce the payment of ransom in physical paper currencies.
- Government should prioritise socio-economic interventions through job creation, vocational skill training, and the provision of micro-credit to young people.
- Provision of humanitarian support to displaced persons.
- Stationing a permanent rapid response security outpost at every boarding school and creating a community early warning system.
- Synchronised air and land kinetic operations should be conducted silently, without making any announcement to the public media outlets or social platforms.
- Establishment of strong cooperation between local authorities, security agencies, and adjoining regional states.

- Northern states must be at the forefront in taking responsibilities to root out banditry and support initiatives aimed at restoring confidence in constitutional authority.
- Strengthening border patrols to curtail the smuggling of illegal arms and ammunition.

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There is no conflict of interest whatsoever among the authors of this research.

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