

Analysis of Government Response to Curb Banditry in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Banditry is a significant challenge faced by the government in Nigeria. The government has also employed several strategies to curb it. However, previous research has focused on the causes and effects of banditry in Nigeria, and there have been few or no studies on the government's response to curbing banditry in Nigeria. This study is unique as it uses primary data to analyze the government's strategies (including those of the federal and state governments) to curb banditry in Nigeria, and further identifies the challenges hindering the government from curbing banditry in Nigeria. The primary data was obtained through an in-depth interview with stakeholders, including the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN), also known as Amotekun, Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), and legislators in the National Assembly. The data collected was analyzed through descriptive content analysis. The findings of the study showed that both the federal and state governments had employed several strategies to curb banditry in Nigeria, including deploying security forces to insecure areas, increasing funding for the military to purchase hardware, training, and other logistics as well as the introduction of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) as a solution to the conflict between herders and farmers, the declaration of bandits as terrorist groups, the formation of a state security system and the ban on open grazing in some states. The study identified centralization of the security system, availability of ungoverned forest, and inadequate border security as the major challenges hindering the government from curbing banditry in Nigeria.

Keywords: *banditry, insecurity, security institution, government response*

تحليل استجابة الحكومة للحد من أنشطة العصابات المسلحة (قطاع الطرق) في نيجيريا

بول أ. إريبور⁽¹⁾أولو أوفيسو⁽²⁾

الملخص:

تمثل أعمال اللصوصية تحدياً كبيراً تواجهه الحكومة في نيجيريا. وقد اعتمدت الحكومة استراتيجيات متعددة للحد منها. ومع ذلك، ركزت الأبحاث السابقة على أسبابها وآثارها في نيجيريا، ولم تجر سوى دراسات قليلة أو معدومة حول استجابة الحكومة للحد منها. تتميز هذه الدراسة بأنها تستخدم بيانات أولية لتحليل استراتيجيات الحكومة (بما في ذلك استراتيجيات الحكومة الفيدرالية وحكومات الولايات) للحد من أعمال اللصوصية في نيجيريا، وتحدد التحديات التي تعيق الحكومة عن الحد منها. تم الحصول على البيانات الأولية من خلال مقابلة معمقة مع الجهات المعنية، بما في ذلك قوة الشرطة النيجيرية (NPF)، وشبكة أمن غرب نيجيريا (WNSN)، وفرقة العمل المدنية المشتركة (CJTF)، وجمعية مربي ماشية ميبتي الله النيجيرية (MACBAN)، وجمعية جميع المزارعين النيجيريين (AFAN)، والمشرعين في الجمعية الوطنية. وتم تحليل البيانات المجمعة من خلال تحليل المحتوى الوصفي. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن كلاً من الحكومة الفيدرالية وحكومات الولايات قد اعتمدت استراتيجيات متعددة للحد من قطاع الطرق في نيجيريا، بما في ذلك نشر قوات الأمن في المناطق غير الآمنة، وزيادة تمويل الجيش لشراء المعدات والتدريب والخدمات اللوجستية الأخرى، بالإضافة إلى تطبيق الخطة الوطنية لتطوير الثروة الحيوانية (NLTP) كحل للصراع بين الرعاة والمزارعين، وتصنيف قطاع الطرق كجماعات إرهابية، وتشكيل نظام أمن الدولة، وحظر الرعي المفتوح في بعض الولايات. وحددت الدراسة مركزية النظام الأمني، وتوافر الغابات غير الخاضعة للإدارة، وضعف أمن الحدود، كتحديات رئيسية تعيق الحكومة عن الحد من قطاع الطرق في نيجيريا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: قطاع الطرق، انعدام الأمن، المؤسسة الأمنية، استجابة الحكومة.

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The government exists to preserve peace, order, and security within its sovereign territory. Hobbes (1651) and Locke (1689) emphasized the position that the role of the government is to avert fear and insecurity and to provide an enabling environment for citizens to invest their energy in productive activities for the overall development of society. In this context, the government fails when it cannot manage internal security within its sovereign territory. Against this background is the occurrence of banditry in Nigeria.

The government's crucial role in preserving peace and security is called into question by banditry. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) emphasized that 'the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government' (Nigeria Constitution, 1999:14). Nigeria operates a tripartite system of government based on federal, state, and local. Therefore, the government's response to curbing banditry in Nigeria can essentially be discussed from the three levels of government operating in the country. However, the constitution reserved security powers and the use of force at the federal level to be exercised by the security agencies on behalf of the President (Nigeria Constitution, 1999:7).

Previous research has focused on the causes and effects of banditry in Nigeria as well as the prevalence of armed herders in rural areas (Shalangwa, 2013; Murtala, 2018; Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Irabor, 2022). However, there are few studies on government response to curb banditry in Nigeria. This study is unique as it uses primary data to analyze the strategies used by the governments (including federal and state) to curb banditry in Nigeria, and further identifies the challenges hindering the government from curbing banditry in Nigeria. This study consists of five sections. The first section deals with the background of the study, which introduces the study and identifies the problem with the research statement of the study. The second part is the literature review, which covers thematic issues related to the study. While the third part focuses on the theory underlying the study, the fourth part deals with the study's methodology. In the fifth part, the study's results were discussed before the final and sixth part of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Banditry in Nigeria: Features and Transformation

Banditry refers to the act of engaging in unlawful and violent activities for personal gain and to undermine established authority (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018; Irabor, 2022). Significant banditry incidents in Nigeria are evident in kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, and armed robbery (Freedom House, 2017; Conflict Armament Research, 2020; Irabor, 2022). In most cases, bandits attack travellers along highways and institutions of learning, including primary and secondary schools, for

kidnapping victims for ransom, such as in the case of Chibok girls in 2014, Dapchi girls in 2018, Bethel Baptist Secondary School in Kujuma, Chikun, among others (Abdullahi, 2019; Ogunnaike, 2024). Bandits also engage in illegal trafficking of goods, including drugs, weapons, and contraband, across borders or within the country (Shehu, Victor, Binta, 2017; Conflict Armament Research, 2020; Irabor, 2022).

A major shift in banditry in Nigeria is linked to the worsening of herder-farmer conflicts, leading to herder militancy (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018; Irabor, 2022). The problems of livestock encroaching on farmlands and damaging crops, lack of land for agriculture and pasture resources for feeding livestock, and cattle excretion in streams and canals led to fierce competition and strained relations between farmers and herders (Murtala, 2018; Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). While farmers and herders formed vigilante groups and militias to defend their rights, armed herders carried out more violent attacks and killed more people than the insurgent group Boko Haram (Conflict Armament Research, 2020; European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Irabor, 2022). The Freedom House (2017) reported that internal security in Nigeria deteriorated due to increasing herder-farmer conflict, causing more deaths than the Boko Haram insurgency. Furthermore, Conflict Armament Research (2020) found that herder-farmer conflict, kidnapping, and highway robbery were among the top bandit problems in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Government and Security Powers

Nigeria is a federal structure where three levels of government derive their powers from the constitution. The levels of government in Nigeria are federal, state, and local. The federal government comprises three arms such as the Executive (led by the President), the Legislature (led by the Senate President of the House of Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives), and the Judiciary (led by the Chief Judge of the Federation). At the state level, there are 36 state governors with similar federal government structures, such as the Executive (led by the Governors), a sub-national legislature led by the Speaker of the House of Assembly, and a judiciary directed by the State Chief Judge. Nonetheless, this division of government powers among the three levels of government, the federal government, exhibits more power and control than the state and local governments.

Section 214 (1) of the 1999 constitution (as amended) provides a single police force for the country, and no other security institution is permitted to be established for the federation. Section 7(1), among other powers granted to the President, emphasized that the control and administration of the police and other security institutions fall under the federal government's exclusive jurisdiction. By these provisions, the President is empowered to appoint heads of security agencies and direct the operational use of force. While the same constitution grants the state governors executive powers over the state and makes them the chief security officer

of their state, it, however, prohibits them from interfering with the federal government powers in areas relating to the control of the security agencies and operational use of force at the state level (Nigerian Constitution, 1999). Thus, despite being members of the Nigeria Police Council, state governors only play an advisory role concerning security and the control of security forces in their state.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural Functional Theory

Structural functionalism is a major sociological research approach that became popularized by the work of Talcott Parsons, 'The Structure of Social Action' (1937), and adopted to political studies by Gabriel Almond, 'Comparative Political Systems' (1956). James Coleman and Bingham Powell are other scholars who contributed to developing the theory in political science. Central to the structural-functional theory is the assumption that every political system comprises social structures with interrelated parts that perform specific roles (manifest or latent) towards the survival of the political system to promote solidarity and stability (Almond, 1956). Almond (1956) contended that to understand a political system, it is necessary to appreciate not only the institutions (or structures) but also the functions performed by the institutions.

According to Almond (1956), structures are those provisions within the political system that perform functions that cannot be confused with each other. Structures include institutions such as governments (legislature, executive, and judiciary), security agencies, Civil Society organizations, election management bodies, and the mass media, among others. On the other hand, functions deal with consequences involving processes and patterns of actions, such that failure of one structure to perform its function leads to disorderliness of the political system (Almond, 1956; Almond, Plowell, & Strom, 2006). Functions are divided into input and output functions (Almond & Coleman, 1960). The input functions are performed by non-governmental institutions, and they include political socialization, political recruitment and communication, interest articulation, and interest aggregation. The government performs the output functions, including rulemaking, rule application, and rule adjudication (Almond and Coleman, 1960).

The output function is critical to this study, which signifies the role of the government and the security agents in curbing insecurity in Nigeria. The legislature performs the function of rule-making. In Nigeria, the National Assembly makes laws and exercises oversight functions for the country's security, peace, and order. The performance of this role is fundamental as the first stage of government actions in formulating security policies for the stability of the political system. The function of rule application involves the implementation of laws made by the legislature. The executive arm of government in Nigeria, including the President, Ministers, and

security agents, is responsible for executing security policies. The strategies, patterns, and modes of implementation employed in executing security policies are significant factors in the survival of the political system. The judicial arm of government in Nigeria is responsible for rule adjudication, which settles disputes, interprets the law, and punishes law offenders.

Since the structural functional theory is anchored on a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability, government policy, action or inaction, and the attitude of the security agents affect the security of life and property of the citizens. Structural functional theory not only sets out conditions that could enhance the system's survival but also identifies the related role sets that make up the structures that perform the functions by which the political system operates.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study relied on primary and secondary sources of data collection. Primary data was sourced through in-depth interviews from 24 key respondents purposively drawn from the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN), also referred to as Amotekun, Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN), All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN), and Legislators in the National Assembly. The rationale for selecting these respondents was based on their knowledge, experience, and role in security and crime management in Nigeria. The distribution of the respondents included four personnel each from the NPF, WNSN CJTF, MACBAN, AFAN, and Legislators in the National Assembly, totaling 12 respondents. Secondary data was sourced using textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, archives, government, and international organization publications and the Internet. Data collected were analyzed through descriptive content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of this study based on the study's objectives: to analyze the strategies employed by the governments (including the federal and State governments) to curb banditry in Nigeria.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES TO CURB BANDITRY IN NIGERIA

The constitution reserved security powers and the use of force at the federal level to be exercised by the security agencies on behalf of the President. Thus, the federal government has been very involved in deploying military operations against bandits and armed groups in the country.¹ Through federal government consent and directives, the Nigerian military has conducted a series of aggressive military actions such as 'Operations Safe Haven, Operation Lafiya Dole, Operation Crocodile Smile', etc., to combat banditry in the country.²

Sharing a similar line of thought, another respondent agreed that:

The government must protect the lives and property of the people. This was envisaged by the social contract theory that government exists to change the bad condition that existed in the state of nature, where might makes right. To enforce law and order, the government all over the world employs the security forces to carry out the duty on behalf of the government. The situation in Nigeria is more peculiar, where the President is much involved in the direct use of force.⁴

Another solution proposed by the Federal Government to curb banditry in Nigeria is to increase funding for the purchase of military equipment, training, and other logistics.⁵ The value and importance attached to the military budget arise from the priority it enjoys compared to other sectors of society, so that without adequate security, the economy, education, health, agriculture, and others remain vulnerable to instability.⁶ As the availability of weapons and hardware determines the extent to which a country's military will address insecurity, Nigeria's defense budget has also increased accordingly and is among the largest on the African continent (Adebayo, 2017; Alemika, 2019).

Table 1: Military Budget from 2010 to 2019

Year	Amount in Billion (\$)	Percentage in Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
2010	1.99	0.54%
2011	2.38	0.58%
2012	2.32	0.50%
2013	2.42	0.47%
2014	2.36	0.41%
2015	2.07	0.42%
2016	1.72	0.43%
2017	1.62	0.43%
2018	2.04	0.51%
2019	2.15	0.53%

Source: (Central Bank of Nigeria; and Library Congress Country Studies, 2019).

Information in Table 1 shows the budget of the Nigerian government devoted to military hardware from 2010 to 2019. Analysis from the table revealed that the military budget was increased from \$1.99 in 2010 to \$2.38 billion in 2011, representing 0.58% of the GDP. In the same vein, another increment in the military budget can be observed in 2013, with \$2.42 billion, signifying 0.47% of the GDP, against the previous year in 2012, with \$2.32 billion. This was also followed by an increase in 2015, put at \$2.07 billion, in contrast to the previous year, in 2014, put at

\$2.36. In 2016, the military budget increased from \$1.72 billion to \$2.15 billion in 2019. To this end, another respondent averred that:

The increased funding for the military is in line with the various security challenges facing the country, including Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, criminal gang violence in the North-West, herder-farmer conflict in the North-Central and separatist agitation in the South-East, which required improvement and modernization of weapons and ammunition, including recruitment and training of military personnel.⁸

The Federal Government also launched the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) in 2019 to find a lasting solution to the herder-farmer conflict as a major driver of banditry in Nigeria.⁹ The NLTP is a 10-year policy plan of the Federal Government for the modernization of the livestock industry through a livestock breeding centre for pastoralists to reduce free-range grazing of cattle.¹⁰ This policy aims to improve the health and production of livestock with modern facilities through the provision of breeding and infrastructure services for shepherds. Further espousing the policy of the NLTP, it was noted that:

It is out of place in our modern times to move livestock from one place to another in search of farmland. A better approach for the herders is livestock farming, where livestock are kept in one place and grazing resources are provided. This is what the NLTP is intended to target, in contrast to free-range cattle farming. The modality for the NLTP envisaged that the Federal Government, in collaboration with the State Government, would provide land to rear livestock and pasture reserves for feeding them and proper health surveillance to increase their production and dairy products.¹²

Sharing the same line of thought, it was noted that livestock farming has not received adequate attention from the government over time, leaving herders at the mercy of the whims and whims of the weather, necessitating an open grazing system for livestock and leading to conflicts between herders and farmers⁶. Launched in 2019, the NLTP is a 10-year program based on the provision of land, grazing resources, and water to promote livestock production and move livestock farming away from the traditional method of moving from one place to another in search of grazing land to redesign. In collaboration with state governments, which provide land and pasture reserves for the program, the federal government will provide facilities such as fencing of the site, health services to promote cattle and dairy production, and pasture and aquatic resources such as electricity and water.¹

The declaration of bandits as a terrorist group is another strategy of the federal government to curb banditry in Nigeria. Such a declaration is intended to enable the military to use heavy weapons against armed groups as terrorists. ² In the view of another respondent, it was noted that:

When dealing with a non-terrorist or insurgent group, rules of engagement apply worldwide based on the type of weapons used against them. To call the

bandits a terrorist group is to look at them from the perspective of their radical ideology. Although the bandits have not declared any specific ideology for any group, their criminal enterprise also required extreme violence from the government to treat them as a terrorist group, hence the need to declare them as a terrorist group.³

STATE GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES TO CURB BANDITRY IN NIGERIA

Although the 1999 Constitution (as amended) provided for security powers at the federal level and exercised by the President as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, the governors of most states have also implemented a security system to strengthen the operations of the formal security forces to curb banditry in the state¹¹. The provision of an informal security system by the state government was also espoused, thus:

In the major states of the federation, the informal security system was enforced by legislation of the House of Assembly that permitted the operation of the state security system. For example, the State Neighborhood Safety Corps was established by the Lagos State House of Representatives in 2016 to assist the police in curbing crime in a cosmopolitan state like Lagos, where the tendency towards crime is high due to the population of the state, which is not consistent with the understaffed police force¹.

Another response claimed that the military's inability to combat the Boko Haram insurgent group in the North East region led to the creation of the CJTF in 2013 in Borno State as a form of community security response against the activities of the insurgent group.⁴ The CJTF has contributed significantly to reducing insurgency in Borno State by providing intelligence and proactive support to the military and helping to identify Boko Haram members and inform the community⁵. In another aspect, the formation of the Western Nigeria Security Network (Amotekun) by the South West Governors was a response to the incessant cases of kidnapping, highway robbery, and herdsman-farmer conflicts in the region and to provide security assistance in the South West Region in terms of intelligence support to the police who do not understand the nooks and crannies of the community they are met to secure⁵.

Another strategy adopted by the state government to curb banditry is banning the open grazing of cattle in some states. Free-range grazing is a centuries-old practice of rearing cattle through free-range feeding in open fields. In most cases, herders are accused of allowing cattle grazing on farmland and defecation by cattle on waterways, causing conflicts between the Shepherds and farmers (Murtala, 2018; Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). Due to open grazing in cattle farming, conflicts between herders and farmers have increased significantly in Nigeria. Between 2015 and 2018, a report by the European Asylum Support Office (2018) found that about 3,641 people were killed and at least 300,000 people were displaced due to herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria. The Global Terrorism Index (2018) also confirmed that about

72% of deaths in Nigeria are due to violent conflicts involving armed herdsmen, surpassing the number of deaths caused by the insurgent group Boko Haram, which places armed herdsmen as the fourth deadliest armed group in the world. Given the clashes caused by open grazing, particularly between herders and farmers, most states in the federation, including Taraba, Benue, Rivers, Nasarawa, Ekiti, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, and others, have enacted a grazing protection law banning open grazing in the state⁹. One such example is Benue State's anti-grazing law enacted in 2017. The circumstances and processes that led to the Benue state anti-grazing law were explained thus:

Disturbed by the incessant attacks of armed herdsmen in the state, Benue state government sponsored a bill in the state House of Assembly to implement a law directed at prohibiting open grazing of cattle. The House of Assembly passed the bill, and assented to by the governor in 2017. Part of section 3 of the law aims to prevent damage to farm produce, farm settlements, and goods that can arise from free-range raising of cattle, safeguard the environment from debasement and contamination arising from free-range rearing of livestock and pasturing.⁸

In another response, the Ekiti state anti-grazing law was described as follows

: ...The Ekiti state anti-grazing law came into force in 2016 as a solution to the herders-farmers conflict state. The Ekiti anti-grazing law states in part that no individual is permitted to allow his/her livestock to feed on land in any part of the state which government has not earmarked for that purpose, no livestock is allowed to move or feed on grass in a field between 7 pm and 6 pm, any livestock ceased will be transfer to designated ranch...The law also demanded that payment estimated in cash should be paid by herders to farmers whose livestock had been found to destroy farmland. The Ekiti Anti-Grazing Enforcement Marshal was set up to enforce the implementation of this law.¹⁰

Another strategy employed by the state governments to curb banditry in the state relates to negotiating and granting amnesty to the bandits in Katsina and Zamfara state.² The purpose of amnesty for the bandits was to de-militarise and reintegrate bandits into society without legal trial for the crime committed if they [bandits] show a repentant heart to willingly turn away from the act¹¹. Again, it was conceived that since the 2009 federal government amnesty programme to the Niger Delta militant can provide relative peace in the region, the same strategy could be adopted to provide solution to banditry in the North-west region.¹⁰ Although, both Governors [Katsina and Zamfara states] rescinded their decision for negotiating and granting amnesty to bandits as many repented bandits went back to continue in the act of banditry, the policy initially led to the withdrawal of some bandits from their hideout in the forest and submission of arms¹².

Challenges of the Government in Curbing Banditry in Nigeria

Notwithstanding the above strategies employed by both the federal and state governments, banditry has heightened insecurity in Nigeria. The following problems were challenges hindering governments from curbing banditry in Nigeria. First, it was agreed that the centralization of the security system may not give room for effective policing in the country.¹³ Revealing further on this position, it was averred that:

In a federal structure like Nigeria, adherence to decentralization of government powers and functions has been suggested as a method to cope with the diversities and heterogeneous nature of the people. Proponents of federalism, such as K. C Wheare and Livingston, recommended that each level of government should be independent and autonomous in powers, including security powers. However, what we have in Nigeria is a centralized security power conferred on the president, which makes the governor a camouflage security officer of their state. So, in terms of deployment of security operatives to conflict areas, the commissioner of police acts on the order of the president rather than the Governor of the state before anything can be done. Tell me who knows better about the security Governor who understands his people and the peculiarity of insecurity in the state.

Thus, despite being members of the Nigeria Police Council, state governors only play an advisory role concerning security and control of security forces in their state, which can be jettisoned by the President when making his decision¹⁵. Against the background of the control of security apparatus by the federal government, the state and local governments are placed at the mercy of the federal security agencies for the enforcement of laws and maintenance of order in the state.¹⁶

Another major challenge of the Nigerian government in curbing banditry in Nigeria is the availability of ungoverned forests and inadequate border security management. Ungoverned forests exist in territories where the government's ability to effectively govern and manage the forest is insufficient, creating an avenue to be used as retreat locations and safe havens by armed groups.¹⁷ The territory of a sovereign state covers the land areas, seas, mountains, forests, and every other natural feature within the environment of country. However, most of these natural features are not been managed and governed by the Nigerian government mainly because they do not produce huge funds like the oil industry.¹⁸ The government's neglect of the forest is seen from the perspective of low priority placed on forestry as not economically viable, very demanding, and costly to secure in terms of terrain, adequate manpower, and modern technology to efficiently patrol the big forest regions in the country.¹⁹ In the same vein, it was revealed that:

Nigeria is endowed with an abundant land area of forest environment, but the government poorly governs it, and the security operatives hardly see the need to include forest security as part of their areas of influence. Governance should not only be limited to public spaces and areas that can be accessible to people, but should also include the forest and other natural features in the country. However, forest and

forest reserve management in Nigeria has not been given much attention, resulting in them being used as enclaves by bandits to perpetrate their nefarious activities²⁰.

Inadequate border security management is another problem. It was believed that the inability of the Nigerian security operatives to effectively police and man the borders gave rise to the proliferation of SALW as well as irregular migration of rebels and militants from the Sahel.²¹ In the same vein, porous borders survive without adequate security operatives to man them, providing leeway for irregular movement of goods and people into the country. It was explained that Nigeria's border is not only too wide but is also not adequately manned²³. In reality, border separation in the Lake Chad areas occurs through the use of minor features and materials such as trees and empty containers, allowing illegal migrants and weapons from the region's countries to come into Nigeria.²⁴ In another opinion, Nigeria's land and oceanic boundaries are permeable and inadequately monitored, which has given rise to the proliferation of SALW and irregular movement of migrants and other transnational crimes.¹⁴ More so, the cultural and ethnic affinities between Nigeria and its neighbours in the Lake Chad region make cross-border crimes not only possible, but create an avenue for armed groups to engage in coordinated attacks and take refuge in neighbouring countries². In another response, the problem of porous borders in Nigeria is further compounded by the corrupt practices perpetrated by the security personnel at the border, which gives room for the free flow of arms and ammunition into the country.¹⁶ The Nigerian security personnel in charge of the borders, such as the NCS, Nigerian Army, and NPF, are guilty of collecting bribes from illegal migrants without proper checks of their belongings and luggage.⁹

Another challenge of the government in curbing banditry in Nigeria is elite conspiracy. This perspective speaks to the involvement of some powerful individuals who are benefiting from the spoils of insecurity, thereby frustrating government efforts towards ensuring security in the country. This benefit can be in the form of mercenaries to be used against opponents during elections, or siphoning of funds allocated for the procurement of weapons and intervention welfare for the internally displaced Persons (IDPs) affected by insecurity.¹³ Explicating further on the use of thugs and armed gangs as ready-made mercenaries by some political elites, it was averred that the organization of elections in Nigeria is to a great extent characterized by vicious contest through the use of armed gangs by desperate politicians to disrupt elections, kill, or abduct perceived opponents.¹⁵ Since elites' divisiveness accounts for their competing interests, the deployment of mercenaries to murder and intimidate opposing party members during elections is unavoidable in Nigerian politics¹⁶. It was emphasized that insecurity festered in Nigeria because politicians patronized criminals during elections to intimidate political opponents in their quest to gain political power at all costs.

Conclusion

Analysis from the study revealed that both the federal and state governments have employed several strategies to curb banditry in Nigeria, including deploying security forces to insecure areas, increasing funding for the military to purchase hardware, training and other logistics as well as the introduction of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) as a solution to the conflict between herders and farmers, the declaration of bandits as terrorist groups, the formation of a state security system and the ban on open grazing in some states. Notwithstanding the above strategies employed by both the federal and state governments, the occurrence of banditry has heightened insecurity in Nigeria. Findings from the study showed that centralization of the security system, availability of ungoverned forest, and inadequate border security are the challenges hindering the government from curbing banditry in Nigeria.

Endnote

1. Anonymous. Is a member of the Nigeria Police Force. He was interviewed on 15/08/2024.

2. Anonymous. Is a member of the Nigeria Police Force. He was on 5/08/2024.

3. Anonymous. Is a member of the *Amotekun* security network. He was interviewed on 09/09/2024.

4. Anonymous. Is a member of the *Amotekun* security network. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 08/09/2024.

5. Anonymous. Is a member of the Civilian Joint Task Force. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 02/09/2024.

6. Anonymous. Is a member of the Civilian Joint Task Force. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 03/09/2024.

7. Anonymous. Is a member of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 03/07/2024.

8. Anonymous. Is a member of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 04/07/2024.

9. Anonymous. Is a member of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 01/09/2024.

10. Anonymous. Is a member of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 04/08/2024.

11. Anonymous. Is a Legislators. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 01/07/2024.

12. Anonymous. Is a Legislators. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 01/10/2024.

13. Anonymous. Is a member of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 01/11/2024.

14. Anonymous. Is a member of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 01/11/2024.

15. Anonymous. Is a member of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 01/09/2024.

16. Anonymous. Is a member of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 01/09/2024.

17. Anonymous. Is a member of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 03/07/2024.

18. Anonymous. Is a member of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 04/07/2024.

19. Anonymous. Is a member of the Civilian Joint Task Force. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 02/09/2024.

20. Anonymous. Is a member of the Civilian Joint Task Force. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 03/09/2024.

21. Anonymous. Is a member of the Nigeria Police Force. He was interviewed on 15/08/2024.

22. Anonymous. Is a member of the Nigeria Police Force. He was on 5/08/2024.

23. Anonymous. Is a member of the *Amotekun* security network. He was interviewed on 09/09/2024.

24. Anonymous. Is a member of the *Amotekun* security network. The researcher conducted this interview with him on 08/09/2024.

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