

Impact of Armed Banditry on Rural Livelihoods in Kaduna State: A Political and Socio-Economic Analysis

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Abstract

Armed banditry has emerged as one of the most pressing security challenges affecting rural communities in Northern Nigeria, with Kaduna State recording rising incidents of violent attacks, displacement, and destroyed livelihoods. This study examines armed banditry and rural livelihoods in Kaduna State from a political and socio-economic perspective, anchored on Human Security Theory and Social Disorganization Theory. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with data collected through structured questionnaires administered to a sample of 399 respondents, drawn from a population of 150,000 using the Taro Yamane formula, of which 372 were correctly completed and analysed. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts and simple percentages). Findings show that armed banditry has significantly disrupted agricultural activities, reduced household income, and deepened food insecurity, while weak governance, unemployment, and poverty sustain its persistence. Communities have responded through migration, informal community policing, and livelihood diversification. The study recommends strengthening rural security through community-based policing and improved intelligence gathering, expanding economic empowerment programmes to address unemployment and poverty, and fostering collaboration among government, communities, and security agencies to protect rural livelihoods and restore stability in Kaduna State.

Keywords: banditry, rural livelihoods, political economy, governance, poverty.

1. Introduction

In recent years, armed banditry and rural insecurity have become major global concerns, particularly where governance structures are fragile and socio-economic inequalities persist. Non-state armed groups increasingly exploit weak institutions, unemployment, and marginalisation to build violent networks in rural territories, with contemporary violence often decentralised, economically motivated, and rooted in local grievances rather than ideology (Kaldor, 2023). Rural communities are disproportionately affected because of limited state presence

and weak infrastructure; horizontal inequalities and uneven development intensify their vulnerability, making them attractive targets for armed actors seeking territorial and economic control (Stewart, 2024), while economic stagnation and youth unemployment supply fertile recruitment grounds for criminal networks (Collier & Hoeffler, 2023).

Insecurity has also disrupted the global food system: conflict remains a leading driver of food insecurity, particularly where agriculture anchors local economies, and when farmers abandon

their land, production declines, prices rise, and poverty deepens (FAO, 2024), with effects that extend beyond immediate destruction to long-term human capital loss (Justino, 2023). Across West Africa, armed actors have exploited inter-communal tensions and economic hardship through cattle rustling, kidnapping, and village raids, leaving rural farmers and pastoralists to bear the brunt through displacement and food shortages (International Crisis Group, 2024) — a pattern that closely mirrors the trend now unfolding in Nigeria.

Nigeria has experienced one of the most alarming rises in rural banditry in Africa. Okoli and Ugwu (2023) describe banditry in North-West Nigeria as an organised violent enterprise involving kidnapping, cattle rustling, and extortion, while Mustapha (2024) links the crisis to youth unemployment, environmental degradation, and governance deficits. Banditry has reduced agricultural productivity and worsened food insecurity in affected states (Nwankpa, 2024), and reactive security responses without structural reform have failed to address its root causes (Ojo, 2023).

Kaduna State, particularly Birnin Gwari and its surrounding rural areas, has been heavily affected. Repeated attacks have forced farmers to abandon their fields, disrupted schooling, and weakened rural markets (Abdullahi, 2024), while communities increasingly rely on informal vigilante systems because of limited state protection (Yusuf, 2025). Rural households in the state largely depend on agriculture and related activities for survival, yet remain exposed to violent attacks, cattle rustling, kidnapping, and the destruction of farmland, disrupting farming cycles and forcing many residents to abandon their livelihoods. Despite government interventions and security operations, the problem persists, raising concerns about the effectiveness of existing strategies. This has produced far-

reaching socio-economic consequences — rising poverty, food insecurity, displacement, and unemployment — while eroding public trust in the state's ability to protect lives and property. As rural households lose access to land and markets, poverty deepens and social cohesion deteriorates. Against this backdrop, this study examines the impact of armed banditry on rural livelihoods in Kaduna State, situating the issue within its political and socio-economic dimensions.

The study is guided by three objectives: to assess the socio-economic impact of armed banditry on rural livelihoods in Kaduna State; to examine the influence of government failure and political decisions on the rise of armed banditry in Kaduna State; and to evaluate the strategies adopted by communities and government agencies in mitigating armed banditry and protecting rural livelihoods. Geographically, the study is limited to rural local government areas most affected by banditry, particularly Birnin Gwari and Zangon Kataf, which represent the typical experiences of communities facing repeated attacks, displacement, and disrupted economic activity.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Armed Banditry

Traditionally associated with isolated rural robbery and cattle rustling, armed banditry has evolved into a more organised, violent, and economically driven form of criminality in fragile states. Okoli and Ugwu (2023) define armed banditry in Nigeria as organised violent crime carried out by heavily armed groups engaged in kidnapping, cattle rustling, village raids, and extortion, operating systematically in areas of minimal state security presence. Mustapha (2024) similarly argues that banditry in Northern Nigeria is no longer spontaneous rural crime but a structured network sustained by illegal arms proliferation, local grievances, and

economic desperation, with coordinated attacks and ransom negotiations distinguishing it from earlier forms of rural theft. From a socio-economic perspective, banditry thrives amid youth unemployment, environmental degradation, and weak governance, offering marginalised individuals an alternative means of survival (Nwankpa, 2024), framing banditry as both a security and a development challenge. Its persistence is also political: governance failures, poor intelligence coordination, and limited rural policing create enabling conditions for bandit operations (Ojo, 2023), while inconsistent policy responses and reactive military deployments fail to address structural drivers (Abdullahi, 2024). Economically, bandit groups are primarily profit-driven, generating revenue through ransom, illegal mining, cattle rustling, and arms trafficking (Yusuf, 2025), and the proliferation of small arms across the Sahel has intensified the scale and lethality of their operations (International Crisis Group, 2024).

2.2 Rural Livelihood in Northern Nigeria

Rural livelihood refers to the means through which individuals and households in rural areas secure the necessities of life, comprising the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living (Scoones, 2025). Rural households rarely depend on a single income source; they diversify across crop farming, livestock rearing, seasonal migration, and petty trading to reduce risk, particularly where insecurity and economic instability prevail (Ellis, 2023). In Nigeria, rural livelihoods are deeply tied to agriculture, with a large proportion of rural households depending directly on crop cultivation and animal husbandry, making them especially vulnerable to armed violence (Nwankpa, 2024): when bandit attacks prevent farmers from accessing their fields, food production and household income decline

sharply. Livelihood security also extends beyond income to education, healthcare, and social participation (Sen, 2024), and is closely tied to land ownership and access to grazing routes, which armed banditry increasingly contests (Justino, 2023). In Kaduna State specifically, farming communities in Birnin Gwari and Giwa rely on seasonal crop cycles, and attacks during planting or harvesting seasons severely disrupt these cycles, resulting in food shortages and debt accumulation (Abdullahi, 2024). Because livelihood security is a core component of human security, the destruction of crops and livestock by armed banditry threatens both the economic survival and the personal safety of rural households (Yusuf, 2025).

2.3 Governance and Security Architecture in Northern Nigeria

Governance refers to the processes, institutions, and structures through which authority is exercised and public resources are managed, extending beyond government to include civil society and the private sector, and encompassing accountability, rule of law, and service delivery (Fukuyama, 2023). In fragile settings, weak governance — marked by poor institutional coordination, corruption, and limited rural security presence — is a decisive factor in whether insecurity escalates, as political and economic opportunities become monopolised by elites while marginalised groups lack access to formal participation (North, 2023). Effective security governance requires integrated intelligence gathering, community engagement, and preventive strategies rather than reactive military deployment alone (UNDP, 2024). Poor service delivery and limited economic opportunity for youth deepen resentment toward the state and create fertile ground for criminal recruitment (Sen, 2024; Collier, 2024), while eroded trust between citizens and security agencies weakens intelligence-sharing and preventive efforts

(Levi, 2024). In Nigeria, gaps in intelligence coordination, insufficient policing capacity, and uneven development sustain rural banditry despite repeated military operations (Okoli & Ugwu, 2023; Mustapha, 2024). In Kaduna State, delayed security response and limited law enforcement presence have reduced community confidence in state protection, encouraging reliance on informal vigilante groups that offer short-term protection but risk escalating violence (Abdullahi, 2024).

2.4 Human Security and Armed Banditry

Human security shifts the focus of security from the state to the individual, emphasising freedom from fear (protection from physical violence) and freedom from want (protection from deprivation and lack of access to food, healthcare, and education) (Sen, 2024). In Kaduna State, these dimensions are directly implicated by armed banditry. Personal security is compromised as repeated attacks on villages heighten fear and restrict movement (Kaldor, 2024). Economic security suffers as persistent violence reduces income, discourages investment, and destroys farmland and livestock, trapping households in cycles of poverty (Collier, 2024; Nwankpa, 2024). Food security is undermined as bandit attacks prevent crop cultivation and harvest, reducing food availability and raising prices (Barrett, 2023; FAO, 2024). Political security is weakened where state institutions fail to provide protection or justice, eroding public faith in government and pushing populations toward informal protection mechanisms (Fukuyama, 2023). Community security is also affected, as banditry fuels ethnic and communal tensions over land and grazing rights, weakening the traditional support networks rural communities rely on for collective coping (Asante, 2024). Taken together, these dimensions show that armed banditry

in Kaduna State is not merely a security incident but a multidimensional assault on the human security of rural populations.

2.5 Political Economy of Armed Banditry

The political economy of armed violence examines how economic, political, and social structures generate incentives for violence, treating armed groups as rational actors seeking profit, resources, or political leverage within a given governance context (Collier, 2024). Bandit groups exploit gaps in governance, weak law enforcement, and socio-economic inequality to control territory and resources; rural banditry in Northern Nigeria is therefore not only a law-enforcement problem but a symptom of structural inequities such as youth unemployment, land scarcity, and poverty (Mustapha, 2024). Armed actors sustain their operations through livestock theft, ransom payments, illegal mining, and extortion — rational adaptations where legitimate economic opportunities are limited (Reno, 2024) — while weak or corrupt institutions and poor coordination between federal and state security agencies allow banditry to thrive with minimal risk of punishment (Ojo, 2023). Cross-border arms trafficking and the porous borders of the Sahel further strengthen rural bandit networks, underscoring the regional dimensions of the problem (Thurston, 2023). In Kaduna State, bandits exploit weak local governance and limited economic opportunity by controlling access to farmlands, markets, and grazing routes, effectively integrating violence into the local economy (Abdullahi, 2024).

2.6 Empirical Review

Globally, armed violence has been shown to disrupt rural economies and threaten food security: in Colombia, organised criminal groups destroyed crops and displaced smallholder farmers, reducing household income and agricultural output (Orozco, 2023), while in Afghanistan,

violent conflict caused large-scale displacement and increased dependency on aid (Chandra & Singh, 2024). In the Sahel, armed raids destroyed farms and livestock and forced migration, intensifying poverty and food insecurity (Obasanjo, 2024), and in northern Mali, attacks on villages collapsed informal local markets and limited residents' income-generating opportunities (Adepoju, 2023). In Nigeria, bandit attacks in Zamfara State displaced thousands of rural households and led to abandoned farmlands and loss of livestock (Yusuf, 2025), while in Kaduna State, recurrent attacks in Birnin Gwari and Giwa disrupted seasonal farming, prevented children from attending school, and increased household dependency on external aid (Abdullahi, 2024).

On the drivers of banditry, economic deprivation, unemployment, and inequality feature prominently across contexts: in Mexico, youth from marginalised rural communities joined criminal networks because of a lack of formal employment (Valdez, 2023), while in Pakistan, poverty, limited land access, and inadequate state support facilitated recruitment into militant and bandit groups (Ahmed & Rahman, 2024). In Nigeria, high poverty rates, weak governance, and unemployment created conditions conducive to banditry (Nwankpa, 2024), and youth in Kaduna State with limited employment opportunities were found to be especially susceptible to recruitment (Mustapha, 2024), compounded by poor rural infrastructure and inequitable access to resources (Ojo, 2023).

On mitigation, community policing combined with agricultural rehabilitation improved rural resilience in Colombia (Orozco, 2023), while reconstruction of infrastructure and local security engagement reduced the vulnerability of Afghan villages to recurring violence (Chandra & Singh, 2024). In the Sahel, early warning systems, community-

supervised local militias, and livelihood restoration reduced displacement and protected rural incomes (Obasanjo, 2024). Within Nigeria, strengthening rural security apparatus, improving intelligence gathering, and engaging communities in surveillance have been recommended (Yusuf, 2025), alongside government-led provision of farming inputs and support for displaced families (Abdullahi, 2024), and vocational training and youth empowerment to reduce the pool of recruits for bandit groups (Mustapha, 2024). Despite these insights, most existing studies focus on broad regional contexts or on qualitative accounts of violence, with limited empirical evidence quantitatively linking socio-economic drivers, security responses, and rural livelihood outcomes specifically to Kaduna State. This study addresses that gap.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Social Disorganization Theory and Human Security Theory.

Social Disorganization Theory, propounded by Shaw and McKay (1942), holds that crime and deviant behaviour are concentrated in communities where social institutions — family, schools, religious bodies, and local associations — are too weak to regulate the conduct of members and enforce shared values. Such communities are typically characterised by poverty, high population turnover, and weak collective supervision, conditions that create room for criminal networks to emerge and persist. Applied to this study, the theory explains how weak governance structures, unemployment, and eroded social institutions in rural Kaduna State create the disorganisation that allows armed banditry to take root and persist.

Human Security Theory, which emerged from the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report, redefines security around the

protection of individuals rather than states alone, emphasising freedom from fear and freedom from want. The theory holds that a state cannot be considered secure while its citizens face physical violence, poverty, or deprivation (UNDP, 1994). Applied to this study, Human Security Theory frames the impact of armed banditry not only as a threat to physical safety but as an assault on the economic, food, and social security of rural households in Kaduna State, providing the lens through which the study interprets its findings on livelihood disruption.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the impact of armed banditry on rural livelihoods in Kaduna State, using a quantitative approach in which structured questionnaires were administered to respondents and the resulting data analysed statistically. The population of the study comprised rural households and community members in the areas most affected by banditry — including Birnin Gwari, Giwa, and Chikun — estimated at 150,000 persons (Kaduna State Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Using the Taro Yamane

Table 1: Effect of Armed Banditry on Rural Livelihoods (N = 372)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Loss of crops and farmlands	48.4	32.3	10.8	5.4	3.2
Livestock theft and reduced household income	51.1	29.6	9.4	6.7	3.2
Disruption of farming and economic activities	47	33.6	8.1	6.7	4.6

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Findings show that armed banditry substantially disrupts rural livelihoods in Kaduna State. A large majority of respondents (80.7%) agreed that bandit attacks lead to loss of crops and farmlands, a similar proportion (80.7%) reported that livestock theft reduces household income, and 80.6% agreed that farming and other economic activities are disrupted by insecurity. These results confirm that bandits target both crop production and animal husbandry simultaneously,

(1967) formula, $n = N \div [1 + N(e)^2]$, with a population of 150,000 and a margin of error of 5%, a sample size of 399 respondents was derived. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed: local government areas most affected by banditry were purposively selected, after which simple random sampling was used to select respondents within communities, giving every adult household member an equal chance of selection. Structured questionnaires were administered directly to respondents by trained research assistants familiar with the local communities, who explained the purpose of the study and guided respondents through the questions to ensure reliable and systematic responses. Of the 399 questionnaires administered, 372 were correctly completed and retrieved, representing a 93.2% response rate, and formed the basis for analysis. Data were analysed using descriptive statistical tools, namely frequency counts and simple percentages.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Effect of Armed Banditry on Rural Livelihoods

weakening the two pillars of rural household income at once. The findings align with Abdullahi (2024) and Yusuf (2025), who found that armed banditry in northern Nigeria drives agricultural collapse and displacement, confirming that rural livelihoods in Kaduna State remain highly fragile and dependent on stable security conditions.

4.2 Armed Banditry Led to Food Insecurity

Table 2: Armed Banditry Led to Food Insecurity (N = 372)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Armed banditry causes food insecurity	43	37.6	3.4	6.7	3.2

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The data show that 80.6% of respondents agreed that armed banditry causes food

insecurity in their communities. This finding reinforces the pattern observed in Table 1: as farming activities are disrupted and productive assets are lost, food

consistent with FAO (2024) and Barrett (2023), who link conflict-induced agricultural disruption directly to reduced food availability and rising prices.

4.3 Causes of Armed Banditry

Table 3: Causes of Armed Banditry (N = 372)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Poverty as a driver of armed banditry	53.8	32.3	8.1	4	1.9
Lack of education and vulnerability to banditry	45.7	34.9	10.8	5.4	3.2
Weak governance and persistence of banditry	56.5	29.6	6.7	4	3.2
Unemployment as a factor in armed banditry	55.1	30.9	8.1	3.2	2.7
Social disorganization and emergence of bandit groups	48.4	32.3	10.8	5.4	3.2

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results identify weak governance (86.1%) and unemployment (86.0%) as the most strongly endorsed drivers of banditry, followed closely by poverty (86.1%), lack of education (80.6%), and social disorganisation (80.7%). These findings confirm that armed banditry in Kaduna State is sustained less by ideology than by structural failure — a convergence of institutional weakness and socio-economic

exclusion. They align with Mustapha (2024), Ojo (2023), and Nwankpa (2024), who identify poverty, unemployment, and weak governance as major structural drivers of insecurity in northern Nigeria, and lend empirical support to Social Disorganization Theory, which holds that crime flourishes where social institutions are too weak to regulate behaviour.

4.4 Measures towards Mitigating Armed Banditry

Table 4: Measures towards Mitigating Armed Banditry (N = 372)

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Community policing reduces banditry	51.1	32.3	9.4	4	3.2
Livelihood support programs improve recovery	47	34.9	10.8	5.4	1.9
Youth empowerment reduces bandit recruitment	53.8	29.6	8.1	5.4	3.2
Improved governance and security response	56.5	28.2	8.1	4	3.2
Security awareness campaigns improve resilience	48.4	33.6	10.8	5.4	1.9

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Respondents expressed strong support for both security-based and developmental interventions. Improved governance and security response recorded the highest endorsement (84.7%), followed by community policing and youth

empowerment (83.4% each), security awareness campaigns (82.0%), and livelihood support programmes (81.9%). These findings suggest that rural communities in Kaduna State do not view security responses and socio-economic

interventions as competing strategies but as complementary elements of a single solution — a view consistent with the study's Human Security framing, which holds that protecting rural livelihoods requires addressing both physical safety and economic wellbeing simultaneously.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

Overall, the findings show that armed banditry in Kaduna State is simultaneously a security crisis and a development crisis. It has severely disrupted agricultural production, reduced household income, and deepened food insecurity (Tables 1 and 2), while its persistence is sustained by poverty, unemployment, and weak governance rather than by any coherent political ideology (Table 3). At the same time, communities strongly endorse an integrated response combining stronger governance and security presence with community policing, youth empowerment, and livelihood restoration (Table 4). This pattern supports the study's Human Security theoretical framing: rural livelihoods in Kaduna State cannot be secured through military deployment alone but require parallel investment in the socio-economic conditions — employment, education, and institutional trust — that Social Disorganization Theory identifies as the foundation of stable, self-regulating communities.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, armed banditry has become a major threat to rural livelihoods in Kaduna State. Its persistence has significantly undermined agricultural productivity, household income, and food security, thereby deepening rural poverty and vulnerability. The study concludes that armed banditry is not merely a security challenge but a socio-economic and

developmental problem rooted in poverty, unemployment, weak governance, and social disintegration, and that addressing it requires a holistic approach combining security interventions with socio-economic development strategies.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since weak governance and inadequate security presence emerged as the strongest drivers of banditry, government should intensify rural security through the deployment of well-equipped personnel and the establishment of community-based security structures to safeguard lives, protect farmlands, and restore disrupted economic activities.
2. Since poverty and unemployment were found to be major drivers of banditry, government should expand economic empowerment programmes — including vocational training, agricultural support, and youth employment schemes — to address the socio-economic conditions that sustain recruitment into bandit groups.
3. Since respondents strongly endorsed community policing and youth empowerment as effective mitigation measures, existing security strategies should be strengthened through improved coordination between security agencies and local communities, alongside sustained investment in livelihood restoration for households displaced or impoverished by banditry.
4. Given the demonstrated link between weak governance and the persistence of banditry, government should adopt more transparent and accountable governance practices, with improved policy implementation and inclusive decision-making that addresses the root causes of insecurity in rural Kaduna State.

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