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Banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria: exploring non-traditional approaches to enhance security reliability

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Abstract

This paper examines non-traditional approaches to enhancing security reliability in Nigeria, with a specific focus on combating banditry and kidnapping. The core objective was achieved through the analysis of secondary data sourced from national and international journals, relevant textbooks, and official government gazettes. This evaluative research employs conflict transformation theory and critical security studies theory as its theoretical framework. The study finds that non-traditional security approaches have significantly contributed to addressing banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, particularly through community engagement, socio-economic development, and conflict resolution. However, their effectiveness has been limited by challenges such as lack of coordination, resource constraints, and inadequate addressing of structural injustices. The paper recommends integrating task forces, investing in technology-driven solutions, supporting community-led peace-building initiatives that promote dialogue and reconciliation at the grassroots level, and implementing targeted socio-economic development programs to address the underlying drivers of banditry and kidnapping, including poverty, unemployment, and marginalization.

Keywords: Banditry; Kidnapping; Security; Non-traditional approaches

1. Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has faced a significant security challenge stemming from the proliferation of banditry and kidnapping incidents across various regions of the country. These criminal activities have not only threatened the safety and well-being of citizens but have also posed formidable challenges to the country's socio-economic development and stability. As traditional security measures have struggled to effectively address this multifaceted issue, there is a growing recognition of the need to explore non-traditional approaches to enhance security reliability in Nigeria (Abimbola, 2020; Ibraheem, 2021).

Banditry, characterized by armed criminal groups operating outside the bounds of the law, has become increasingly prevalent, particularly in the northwestern and north-central regions of the country. These groups often engage in cattle rustling, armed robbery, and other forms of criminality, exacerbating existing tensions and undermining community security (Ibraheem, 2021).

Similarly, the surge in kidnapping incidents has become a pervasive threat across Nigeria, with both high-profile individuals and ordinary citizens falling victim to ransom-driven kidnappings; criminal gangs, often operating in collusion with corrupt elements within society, target individuals for financial gain, leading to widespread fear and insecurity (Bawa, 2018).

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Despite concerted efforts by Nigerian security forces to combat banditry and kidnapping through conventional means such as law enforcement operations and military interventions, the effectiveness of these approaches has been limited. Challenges such as porous borders, inadequate intelligence gathering, and corruption within security institutions have hampered efforts to stem the tide of criminal activities (Okoli & Pereira, 2020).

Moreover, the reactive nature of traditional security responses has often led to short-term gains at the expense of sustainable solutions. Without addressing the underlying drivers of banditry and kidnapping, such as poverty, unemployment, and social marginalization, the root causes of insecurity remain largely unaddressed (Omeje, 2018).

There is a growing consensus among policymakers, academics, and practitioners on the need to explore non-traditional approaches to enhance security reliability in Nigeria. Non-traditional approaches encompass a broad range of strategies that go beyond purely kinetic or military responses and instead focus on addressing the root causes of insecurity through innovative and holistic interventions. These approaches may include community-based initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion and resilience, economic empowerment programs to alleviate poverty and create livelihood opportunities, as well as diplomatic efforts to address cross-border security challenges and regional cooperation (Udogie & Sumonye, 2013; Okoli & Pereira, 2020; UNDP, 2020; International Crisis Group (ICG), 2023).

Against this backdrop, this paper explores non-traditional approaches to enhance security reliability in Nigeria, with a specific focus on combating banditry and kidnapping by examining existing literature, case studies, and best practices from Nigeria and other relevant contexts.

1.1. Conceptual Clarification of Key Concepts/Literature Review

According to Sheptyakin, (2020) banditry refers to the practice of engaging in organized criminal activities, often involving robbery, extortion, and violence, typically carried out by a group of individuals known as bandits. Banditry can take various forms and may target individuals, businesses, or communities. It is often characterized by clandestine operations, where perpetrators exploit vulnerabilities in security systems to commit crimes and evade detection.

Global Initiative against Organized Crime, (2019) document further stressed that, Bandits operate outside the boundaries of the law, disregarding legal norms and social conventions. They may use force, intimidation, or coercion to achieve their objectives, including the theft of property, abduction of individuals for ransom, or disruption of public order. Banditry can occur in both rural and urban areas and may be fueled by factors such as poverty, inequality, political instability, and weak governance.

From a different purview, Hobsbawm, (1975) viewed the concept of banditry from a historical perspective. According to him, banditry is often viewed as a phenomenon that has existed throughout human history, taking various forms in different contexts and periods. He examined banditry as a social and cultural phenomenon, exploring its origins, evolution, and impact on societies. Bandits are often portrayed as figures who challenge established authority and social order, sometimes garnering popular support or sympathy from marginalized communities.

From Bloch, (1975) perspective, banditry should be examined within the broader context of social organization, power dynamics, and cultural beliefs. For him, banditry is a form of social resistance, adaptation, or survival strategy adopted by individuals or groups in response to perceived injustices or inequalities within their society. They investigate the role of cultural norms, values, and rituals in shaping the identities and behaviors of bandits, as well as the ways in which banditry intersects with other social phenomena such as kinship, religion, and politics.

The second concept to be clarified in this paper which is synonymous with banditry activities is kidnapping. Kidnapping refers to the unlawful act of seizing, detaining, or transporting an individual against their will through force, coercion, deception, or abduction, often with the intention of demanding ransom, extracting concessions, exerting control, or committing another criminal act. It is a serious crime that violates the fundamental rights and freedoms of the victim, causing psychological trauma and emotional distress, as well as posing significant risks to their safety and well-being (Dressler, 2013; Siegel & Worrall, 2018).

From a psychological perspective, kidnapping is examined as a traumatic event that can have profound psychological effects on both victims and their families. Psychologists study the psychological impact of kidnapping, including feelings of fear, helplessness, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) experienced by victims. They also explore coping mechanisms, resilience factors, and therapeutic interventions to support victims in recovering from the trauma of abduction and readjusting to normal life (Fisher & Van den Hout, 2011).

Kidnapping can take various forms and occur in diverse contexts, including domestic disputes, organized crime, political conflicts, and terrorist activities. Perpetrators of kidnapping may include individuals, criminal organizations, extremist groups, or state actors, each with their motives and objectives. The dynamics of kidnapping can vary widely, depending on factors such as the identity and profile of the victim, the motivations of the perpetrators, the duration of the abduction, and the methods used to execute the crime. In some cases, kidnappings are meticulously planned operations targeting high-profile individuals or wealthy families, while in others, they may be opportunistic crimes committed for financial gain or as acts of retaliation or intimidation (Vriji & Winkel, 2018; McElroy & Ramos, 2018).

The issue of kidnapping presents formidable challenges to law enforcement and security agencies in Nigeria. Perpetrators typically operate covertly, which complicates efforts to track and apprehend them (Omeje, 2018). This submission raises critical questions about the effectiveness of our security apparatus and strategies in addressing this threat and ensuring reliability in Nigeria's security landscape. Before delving into these questions, it is essential to establish a clear understanding of the concept of security.

Security, in its broadest sense, refers to the state of being free from threats, risks, or dangers that may cause harm or damage to individuals, communities, institutions, or nations. It encompasses various dimensions, including physical safety, protection of assets, maintenance of order, and preservation of rights and freedoms. Security is a fundamental need and a prerequisite for the well-being, prosperity, and stability of societies, as it enables individuals to pursue their goals and aspirations without fear or undue risk (Balzacq, 2016; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P), 2020).

Alkire & Black (2004) defined the concept from the human security perspective as the protection of individuals from a broad range of threats that undermine their well-being, dignity, and rights. It emphasizes the importance of addressing not only traditional military threats but also non-traditional challenges such as poverty, disease, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses. On the contrary, Booth, (2007) challenge the traditional notions of security and highlight the social, political, economic, and environmental dimensions of insecurity. Security is viewed not only as protection from external threats but also as a product of power relations, inequalities, and injustices within societies and the global system. This perspective critiques militarized approaches to security and advocates for alternative strategies that address underlying structural injustices, promote human emancipation, and build peaceful and sustainable societies.

These various understandings of the concept of security offer different lenses through which security is conceptualized and understood, reflecting the diverse range of threats, interests, and values that shape debates on security at the international, human, and critical levels. Security in Nigeria encompasses a comprehensive array of measures and initiatives aimed at safeguarding individuals, communities, and the nation from threats such as banditry and kidnapping. Effective security management requires a holistic approach that integrates law enforcement, military, intelligence, community engagement, policy development, and international cooperation to address the root causes of insecurity and promote peace and stability.

Having established a clear understanding of the concept of security, let us now proceed to clarifying the non-traditional or non-kinetic approaches to ensuring security reliability in Nigeria. According to Omeje, (2018) the non-traditional security approach involves addressing security challenges through means other than direct military force or traditional law enforcement measures. Instead, it emphasizes a holistic and multi-dimensional approach that addresses the root causes of insecurity, builds resilience within communities, and promotes sustainable peace and development. This approach recognizes that security threats such as banditry and kidnapping often stem from complex socio-economic, political, and cultural factors, and therefore require comprehensive and nuanced responses.

Banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria are often driven by socio-economic inequalities, poverty, and lack of opportunities, particularly in marginalized communities. The approach can play a crucial role in complementing traditional security measures by addressing underlying drivers and vulnerabilities and also offer a holistic and proactive framework for addressing the complex challenges of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted, reviewed, and applied the conflict transformation theory as well as the critical security studies to the phenomenon under discourse

Conflict transformation theory emerged in the field of peace and conflict studies as a response to the limitations of traditional conflict resolution approaches. Developed primarily by Lederach, (1995) and Galtung, (1996); the theory

seeks to address the underlying causes of conflict and promote long-term structural change, rather than simply resolving immediate disputes. It draws on insights from various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, and political science, to understand the complex dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding processes.

The central argument of conflict transformation theory is that conflicts are not inherently negative but rather natural and inevitable aspects of social interaction. Conflict transformation emphasizes the need to engage with conflicts constructively, transforming them into opportunities for positive change and growth. It also emphasizes the importance of understanding the underlying structural, systemic, and root causes of conflict, including factors such as inequality, injustice, discrimination, and marginalization (Babawale, 2009).

Unlike traditional conflict resolution approaches, which focus on managing or containing conflicts, conflict transformation advocates for a proactive and comprehensive approach that addresses the underlying drivers of conflict and promotes sustainable peace and social justice; emphasizing the importance of building and nurturing positive relationships between conflicting parties, fostering empathy, trust, and mutual understanding recognizing that sustainable peacebuilding requires long-term commitment and investment, encompassing not only immediate ceasefire agreements but also structural reforms, reconciliation processes, and efforts to address root causes of conflict (Babawale, 2009; Cilliers & Schunemann, 2013).

While conflict transformation theory offers valuable insights into the complexities of conflict dynamics and peacebuilding processes, it has also faced criticism and skepticism from various quarters; critics argue that conflict transformation theory's emphasis on long-term structural change and relationship-building may be difficult to implement in practice, particularly in contexts of ongoing violence and instability where immediate action is needed. The theory was also criticised for neglecting the political economy dimensions of conflict, such as the role of power asymmetries, resource competition, and external interventions, which can significantly shape conflict dynamics. There are also concerns that conflict transformation approaches may be co-opted or instrumentalized by powerful actors for their own interests, leading to superficial or tokenistic peacebuilding efforts that fail to address underlying injustices and inequalities (Ramsbothan, Woodhouse & Miall, 2016).

Despite these fundamental criticisms leveled against this theory, the conflict transformation theory is applicable and relevant to the phenomenon under discourse as it offers valuable insights and approaches for addressing the underlying drivers of violence and insecurity. First, the theory encourages a deeper understanding of the socio-economic, political, and historical factors driving banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, such as poverty, inequality, ethnic tensions, and governance failures. Rather than solely relying on reactive security measures, conflict transformation theory suggests proactive interventions aimed at addressing root causes and building sustainable peace that involves initiatives such as community-based dialogue, economic development programmes, and efforts to promote social cohesion and inclusion.

Furthermore, conflict transformation theory highlights the importance of building trust and fostering positive relationships between communities, government authorities, and other stakeholders. In the context of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, this could involve dialogue and reconciliation processes aimed at addressing grievances and building social cohesion. The theory also emphasizes the need for sustained and comprehensive peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria by addressing immediate security concerns and also implementing structural reforms, promoting good governance, and addressing socio-economic inequalities to prevent the recurrence of violence and insecurity.

The second theory adopted, reviewed and applied to this chapter is the Critical Security Studies. The Critical security studies (CSS) emerged as a response to traditional security studies' narrow focus on state-centric approaches and military solutions to security challenges. Rooted in critical theory and informed by disciplines such as sociology, political science, and international relations, CSS seeks to deconstruct dominant narratives of security, challenge power structures, and broaden the scope of security analysis to include non-traditional threats and marginalized voices (Buzan, Waever & Wilde, 1998; Booth, 2007).

CSS contends that security is not solely about protecting states from external threats but is deeply intertwined with power relations, inequalities, and social injustices. It critiques traditional security discourses for reinforcing hierarchies and marginalizing certain groups based on race, class, gender, and other identity markers. CSS also emphasizes the role of language, discourse, and rhetoric in constructing security threats and examines how issues are framed as security concerns by political elites to legitimize exceptional measures and consolidate power. Exponents of CSS analyze the processes of securitization and desecuritization, questioning the boundaries of what is deemed "security" and who gets to define it (Waever, 1995).

Furthermore, unlike traditional security studies, which focus primarily on state actors and military threats, CSS expands the scope of security analysis to include non-state actors, transnational issues, and non-traditional threats such as economic inequality, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses. CSS examines how these issues intersect with security dynamics and shape people's lived experiences of insecurity. It further advocates for an emancipatory politics that challenges dominant power structures and seeks to empower marginalized communities. It highlights the importance of participatory decision-making, social justice, and human rights in achieving genuine security for all (Onuoha, 2012).

Like other theories, critical security studies have faced several criticisms, including; critics of CSS question the feasibility of implementing CSS-inspired policies in real-world contexts, especially in situations of ongoing conflict or crisis. Some others contend that CSS places too much emphasis on discourse analysis and language, neglecting material factors and tangible security threats. They contend that while discursive analysis is important, it should be complemented by empirical research and policy-oriented approaches. The theory has also been accused of having a normative bias towards certain political agendas, such as pacifism, global governance, or anti-imperialism. Critics argue that this bias can undermine the objectivity and neutrality of security analysis, leading to ideological debates rather than empirical inquiry (Krause & Williams, 1997).

In spite of the criticisms raised against the CSS; it fills the gap of the role of power asymmetries, social inequalities, and marginalization in driving banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, critiquing the state's failure to address underlying grievances and structural injustices, which contribute to feelings of alienation and resort to violence among marginalized communities. Again, CSS reveal how banditry and kidnapping are framed as security threats by political elites in Nigeria and the implications of such securitization for civil liberties, human rights, and rule of law. It questions the securitization of these issues and calls for alternative approaches that prioritize dialogue, reconciliation, and community engagement over militarized responses.

CSS therefore expands understandings of security beyond traditional state-centric approaches to include non-state actors involved in banditry and kidnapping, as well as non-traditional threats such as socio-economic inequality, corruption, and governance failures. It emphasizes the need for holistic, multi-dimensional responses that address the root causes of insecurity and promote social justice; and also advocates for an emancipatory politics that empowers communities affected by banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria to participate in decision-making processes, seek accountability from state authorities, and address underlying grievances. It calls for policies that prioritize human security, community resilience, and inclusive governance to achieve sustainable peace and stability.

3. Review of Empirical Studies

Nigeria has faced significant challenges with banditry and kidnapping, particularly in the northern and central regions of the country. These criminal activities have led to loss of lives, displacement of communities, and economic disruption. In response, findings from most studies have shown that, various non-traditional security approaches have been deployed to address the root causes of these challenges and mitigate their impacts.

Findings from Onuoha, (2012) studies emphasized community engagement and empowerment as key strategies for combating banditry and kidnapping. Initiatives such as community policing, neighborhood watch programmes and conflict resolution mechanisms are some of the specific community engagement and empowerment strategies that have been deployed and implemented by Nigeria security agencies aim to build trust between communities and security forces, enhance local resilience, and enable communities to play an active role in preventing and responding to security threats. Further findings from Onuoha's (2012) studies, shows that while community engagement initiatives have shown promise in some areas, their effectiveness has been limited by challenges such as lack of resources, inadequate training, and mistrust between communities and security forces. In some cases, communities are reluctant to cooperate due to fear of reprisals from criminal groups or perceived ineffectiveness of security agencies.

Aborisade, (2019) studies examined the effectiveness of the Non-traditional security approaches implemented by Nigeria security agencies that focused on addressing the socio-economic root causes of banditry and kidnapping through development programmes, job creation initiatives, and poverty alleviation schemes; providing alternative livelihoods and economic opportunities, aimed at reducing the incentives for individuals to engage in criminal activities. Findings from his studies also shows that, though, the socio-economic development programmes which have the potential to address underlying grievances and vulnerabilities has been limited by implementation challenges such as corruption, mismanagement, and lack of coordination between government agencies.

The International Crisis Group, (2020) report advocate for dialogue and conflict resolution mechanisms as means of addressing inter-communal tensions and grievances that fuel banditry and kidnapping. And facilitating dialogue between conflicting parties and addressing underlying grievances can prevent escalation of violence and promote peaceful coexistence. While dialogue and conflict resolution efforts have led to localized ceasefires and peace agreements in some areas, their broader impact on reducing banditry and kidnapping has been limited. Challenges such as lack of inclusivity, uneven power dynamics, and competing interests among stakeholders have hindered the effectiveness of these initiatives in addressing root causes of conflict and achieving lasting peace.

One of the key critiques of non-traditional security approaches to combating banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria is the lack of a coordinated strategy. Initiatives often operate in isolation, without sufficient coordination between government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities have been hindered by limited resources and capacity, both in terms of funding and human resources. Many initiatives suffer from inadequate funding, staffing shortages, and lack of technical expertise, which impede their ability to implement programs effectively and sustainably (Obi, 2017; Omeje, 2018).

Furthermore, Burstein, (2020) asserted that, while non-traditional security approaches recognize the importance of addressing underlying structural injustices such as poverty, inequality, and governance failures, their efforts in this regard have often been insufficient. Development programmes and conflict resolution mechanisms have failed to adequately address deep-rooted socio-economic and political grievances, perpetuating cycles of violence and insecurity. Okoli & Pereira, (2020) also added that, Non-traditional security approaches face resistance from criminal elements involved in banditry and kidnapping, who seek to undermine efforts aimed at disrupting their activities. Criminal networks may intimidate communities, target security personnel, and exploit weaknesses in governance structures to perpetuate violence and maintain their control over illicit activities.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Non-traditional security approaches have made important contributions to addressing the challenges of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, particularly in terms of community engagement, socio-economic development, and conflict resolution. However, their effectiveness has been limited by various challenges, including lack of coordination, resource constraints, inadequate addressing of structural injustices, and resistance from criminal elements.

Building on the preceding analysis, this paper puts forward the following innovative solutions to bolster security reliability in Nigeria:

Establishment of integrated task forces that comprised representatives from government agencies, law enforcement, civil society organizations, and local communities. These task forces should operate collaboratively to develop and implement comprehensive security strategies that address the root causes of banditry and kidnapping. By fostering coordination and cooperation among diverse stakeholders, these task forces can leverage their respective strengths and resources to enhance security effectiveness.

Nigeria's security agencies with the support from Federal Government should invest in technology-driven solutions such as digital surveillance systems, geospatial intelligence, and data analytics to enhance situational awareness and intelligence gathering. Advanced technologies can help identify hotspots of criminal activity, track movements of criminal networks, and facilitate rapid response by security forces. Additionally, mobile applications and communication platforms can empower citizens to report suspicious activities and seek assistance in real-time, enhancing community participation in security efforts.

Federal, State and Local Government, support community-led peacebuilding initiatives that promote dialogue, reconciliation, and conflict resolution at the grassroots level. Provide training and capacity-building support to community leaders, mediators, and local peace committees to facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties and address underlying grievances. By empowering communities to resolve disputes peacefully and build social cohesion, these initiatives can prevent escalation of violence and reduce the appeal of criminality.

There is a serious need for the Federal Government to implement targeted socio-economic development programmes aimed at addressing the underlying drivers of banditry and kidnapping, such as poverty, unemployment, and marginalization. Invest in education, skills training, job creation, and infrastructure development in vulnerable communities to provide alternative livelihoods and economic opportunities. These programmes can reduce the incentives for individuals to engage in criminal activities.

Establishment of community-centered intelligence gathering mechanisms that should involve local communities as active partners in identifying and reporting security threats. Train community members to recognize suspicious activities, gather actionable intelligence, and collaborate with law enforcement agencies in intelligence sharing; these initiatives can enhance early warning capabilities and facilitate targeted interventions to prevent banditry and kidnapping incidents.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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