EFFECTS OF MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND BANDITRY IN NORTH WESTERN NIGERIA

*CLEMENT ODIRI OBAGBINOKO (PhD); **OTEGA OKINONO (PhD); AND ***AUSTIN ONUOHA
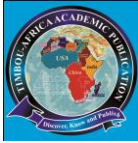
*Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State Nigeria. **Department of Sociology and Criminology, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State Nigeria. ***Institute for Peace, Conflict and Development Studies, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Since the inception of the extant democratic dispensation, Nigeria has been engulfed with incessant and intractable crisis of insurgency and armed conflict, particularly in North East Nigeria. Despite government initiatives to curb the rampaging insurgency, the problem of insecurity in Northern Nigeria has suddenly become hydra headed, with the insurgents expanding their scope of operation beyond north east and spreading to North West Nigeria. In the past few years, the problem has continued to spread to states in North Central Nigeria and North West Nigeria with Zamfara State as

Introduction

Endangered internal disputes have perhaps become an indelible image of post-independence Nigeria, serving as a microcosm of Africa's persistent disputes within it in the post-Cold War era (http://peacehistory-usfp.org/post-cold-war-era) The empirical proof is overwhelming that the country is besieged by a slew of internal conflicts, including ethno-communal disputes, sectarian violence, resource-based violence resulting from economic marginalization, identity-based conflicts resulting in partisan deprivation and social exclusion, electoral conflicts, and domestic terrorism, among others (Ajibefun and Olaniran, 2021; Ojo, 2015).

Recent security-threatening developments support this assertion when in 2006 and 2007 the World Bank classified Nigeria among the top 15 most vulnerable country in the world. The United States Bipartisan Centre also validated this rating in May 2011, when the country was named one of the world's most vulnerable states. This has led to doubt about the possibilities for peace, stability, and the continued survival of Nigeria as a whole in the light of its diverse nature and history. For Nigeria's economy to remain vibrant, a more formidable and affordable approach to conflict management has been advocated to extinguish the roaring flame of crises ravaging different parts of Nigeria, particularly the North-West region.

One curious element that is so associated with the study of conflict and violence is that of nomenclature (https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence).

This has found expression in Nigeria in no small measure. In the North-East for example, violence is described as baptized insurgency; in the

one of the worst hit. Interestingly, the crisis of insurgency has speedily metamorphosed into banditry and one of the measures taken by the government to tackle the menace was the deployment of the military. Thus, the paper assesses the implications and effectiveness of military involvement in curbing banditry in North West Nigeria. The paper also examines the implications of applying other alternative conflict resolution mechanism such as negotiation and mediation and finds that the military option remains a more effective and reliable alternative.

Keywords: Banditry, Anarcho-pacifism, Military intervention, North Western Nigeria, conflict management.

southeast it is tagged separatist or secessionist agitation, in the south-south it is called militancy, in the north-central it is referred to as farmer/herder conflict, in the North-West it is banditry and in the southwest it is ethnic nationalism or cultism. Whatever the nomenclature that may have been deployed to describe violent conflict in Nigeria, violent and armed conflict in Nigeria is assumed to have taken the form of a federal character and have led to wanton destruction of lives, farmlands and other means of livelihoods, disruption of social cohesion giving rise to mutual fear, suspicion and distrust among the various ethnic nationalities (http://peacehistory-usfp.org/post-cold-war-era).

Statement of Research Problem

Over the years, Nigeria seems to have acquired uncanny notoriety for its inability to resolve its internal conflicts. This has often accounted for the resurgence of separatist agitations such as the Biafra separatist movement over fifty years after the end of the Nigerian civil war. In the south-south Nigeria, barely fourteen years after President Yar'Adua proclaimed amnesty for the Niger Delta youth in 2009, the youths are rearing to go back to the trenches. In the south west, there was a separatist uprising led by one Sunday Igboho with support of some prominent Yoruba leaders agitating for a separate Yoruba nation.

In September 2022, Nextier a firm known for the documentation and analysis of incidents of violent conflict in Nigeria released its report on *Nigeria's Security Situation*. The report was an 18 Month Report on Violent Clashes in Nigeria compiled from the *Nextier Violent Conflict Database* (January 2021-December 2021 and January 2022- June 2022). The report provides some useful insights into the state and status of banditry in North-West Nigeria. According to the report, out of 274 banditry incidents that took place in the North-West region between January and December 2021, about 1,782 deaths were recorded. For the same period, the document reported that Zamfara State alone with the second highest rate of banditry incidents of 62, recorded the highest deaths rate of 764 (http://peacehistory-usfp.org/post-cold-war-era). Between January and June 2022, there were about 200 banditry incidents that resulted in about 1,769 deaths. North-West had the highest death rate of 954 resulting from 144 banditry incidents. During the period under review, Zamfara State recorded the third largest banditry incidents totaling 32 resulting in 332 deaths
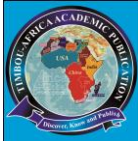
Nextier reported that in January 2022, the Government of Federal Republic of Nigeria declared two bandit groups operating in the North-West as terrorist organizations. The government also asserted that it was not getting the right kind of ammunitions to fight banditry, Later the Tucano Jets were delivered and deployed. Further, in responding to banditry, Zamfara State government directed its citizens to buy guns to protect themselves.

From the foregoing, the paper seeks to interrogate the probable reasons for the emergence and proliferation of banditry in Nigeria. Despite measures put in place by government to tackle the menace of banditry in Nigeria, the activities of banditry have continued to intensify (https://allafrica.com/stories/202109070411.html). What factors could be responsible for the proliferation of banditry and what are the possible reasons for the intensification of the activities of banditry in North West Nigeria in general and in Zamfara State in particular?

In an effort to tackle the incidence of banditry in Nigeria, the Nigerian government has deployed the military (https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/banditry-in-nigeria-insights-from-situational-action-and-situational-crime-prevention-theories). What is the net effect and the success rate of the military option?

Objectives of study
The general objective of this paper is to critically examine the effects of military involvement in conflict management on the activities of banditry in the North West state of Zamfara in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:
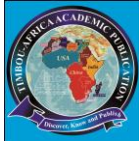   i.   Examine the major causes of banditry in North West Nigeria
    ii.   Review the net effects of the adoption of the military option in combating banditry in Nigeria and in North West Nigeria in particular.
    iii. Critically examine the impact of adopting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in tackling banditry in North West Nigeria.

Theoretical Review
The study is based on the *Anarcho-pacifism* theory of violence; a school of thought in anarchism which t rejects all forms of violence (https://www.un.org/en/un75/new-era-conflict-and-violence). Many anarchists believe that the state is at the epicenter of structural violence, prohibiting people from achieving their basic necessities and inciting violence as self-defense. (Ostergaard, 2016). *Anarcho-pacifism*, also known as anarchist pacifism or pacifist anarchism is a school of thought within anarchism.that advocates for the employment of peaceful, non-violent methods of resistance in the fight for social change (Ostergaard, 2016) *Anarcho-pacifism* opposes the tenets of violence since it is viewed as a system of power and hence opposed to core anarchist values such as a rejection of hierarchies and dominance.

With regard to violence, there appears to be significant conflicts between different strains of anarchist philosophy - anarchism can support or condemn it, and can be connected to both violent action and pacifism. For the purpose of this study, the anarchist is believed to be opposed to the realities of political violence - the violence of state authority and the destructiveness of using physical force as a revolutionary democratic weapon (Williams, 2017). All of the actors display ambivalence regarding violence in the context of political power (http://peacehistory-usfp.org/post-cold-war-era). Instead of viewing this ambiguity as a sign of contradiction or

abdication of moral judgment, we contend that it indicates a thorough understanding of the processes that result in violence in both oppressive and resisting politics.

As a result, this theory is relevant to this study since perpetrators of violence have their reasons to justify their actions. The Oxford English Online Dictionary describes a bandit as an armed thief, an outlaw. Nextier describes banditry as "organized criminal activities committed by Bandit Groups in North-West and North-central Nigeria (https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-security-situation-analysis-report-18-months-report-violent-conflicts-nigeria-nextier-violent-conflict-database-january-2021-december-2021-and-january-2022-june-2022).The Nigerian government officially declared two bandit groups (Yan Bindiga and Yan Ta'adda) operating in the North-West region as terrorist organizations. However, reports indicate that there are about a hundred bandit groups." Though helpful, the above leaves analysts with an obfuscation of the concept of banditry and its corollary. For instance, armed robbery is also organized crime just like kidnapping etc.

In extant literature Bankoff (1998) did a good job in tracing the origin and *modus operandi* of bandits in rural Philippines. He makes the point that bandits prefer to operate in areas that were inaccessible like mountains, swamps and foothills. He also made the point that bandits are armed and operated in rural settings. In his words,
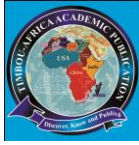
> *"In a cycle of murder, robbery, and rapine, bandits invaded the roads and waterways, ravaged fields and farms, plundered towns, pillaged churches, and set fire to dwellings". (p. 319).*

Bankoff argues that commentators have paid negligible attention to the environment in which banditry occurred. So, his work focuses on the relationship between landscape and crime. In summary, his description of banditry includes the following: they are armed, operate indiscriminately, are very violent, operate mainly in rural areas and areas not easily accessible to governmental authority and control. This raises the question of the issue of sovereignty and legitimacy since the primary role of government is the welfare and security of the citizens (http://peacehistory-usfp.org/post-cold-war-era). If a state claims an area as part of its territory and also extracts loyalty, tributes and taxes from the population and is unable or unwilling to secure the area, raises some doubts over its claim to sovereignty especially as it relates to non-state actors. It also raises the issue of legitimacy and capacity of the state.

In their edited volume (Kuna and Ibrahim 2015), focus their discussion on rural banditry and cattle rustling. They situate the phenomenon in and around the conflict amid farmers and herders. Many of their contributors also emphasize the ethnic content of banditry. Though, crime may differ from place to place and may be practiced by different people, no ethnic group has the exclusive franchise to any form of crime. Moreover, crime does not have an ethnic coloration.

From most of the literature on banditry, one can safely conclude, and there is a fair amount of consensus among commentators that banditry is a crime and those who perpetrate it are criminals (https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/banditry-in-nigeria-insights-from-situational-action-and-situational-crime-prevention-theories). And the response to crime is effective law enforcement and not military intervention because it confers on the criminals unwarranted legitimacy that leads to such initiatives as negotiation, amnesty etc.

Another aspect of literature that provides some insights into our understanding of banditry is in the causal relationship. In other words, it will be much easier to suggest and formulate effective

policy against banditry if the causes of banditry are known. A major argument in literature is that of 'ungoverned spaces hypothesis' (Onwuzuruigbo 2020; Ojo 2020; Bnakoff 1998; Ejiofor 2022; Tor et al 2021 etc.). The argument is a simple one. And it goes thus, because there are ungoverned places in Nigeria especially that are remote, where there is little or no government presence at all, this provides some kind of safe haven for bandits to operate. In other words, the presence of this kind of spaces in Nigeria, especially in the North-West provides the impetus for bandits to thrive. But the question that also comes to mind is why is there a high incidence of such crimes as armed robbery and kidnapping in urban areas where there is high level of government presence? For instance, how does one explain the invasion of the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) and the Kaduna Airport by the so-called bandits? (https://guardian.ng/news/gunmen-invade-nigerian-defence-academy-kill-two-officers-abduct-one).

 Even more disturbing was the attack by bandits on a Kaduna-bound train and the abduction of some its passengers at the outskirts of the city on March 28, 2022. It is therefore important to observe that the ungoverned space hypothesis, though persuasive does not provide a strong explanation for the growing incidence of banditry in Nigeria (https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/banditry-in-nigeria-insights-from-situational-action-and-situational-crime-prevention-theories). .

Objective One: An Analysis on the root causes of banditry in North West Nigeria and in Zamfara State
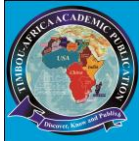
Banditry has become a common and unpalatable cynosure in almost all the states in North Western Nigeria notably among them are Sokoto, Kaduna and Zamfara states. However, for the purpose of this study, more emphasis will be on Zamfara State and we shall be looking at the root causes and possibly remote causes of banditry such as poverty, unemployment etc. in the North West Nigeria with copious reference to Zamfara State (https://infoguidenigeria.com).

The causes of banditry in the Northwest are complex and interrelated. At its root, is the problem of environmental degradation caused by pressures of climate change and rapid population growth which has aggravated resource competition between predominantly Fulani herders and mostly Hausa farmers, both of whom have over time mobilised armed groups in the form of bandits for protection (https://www.google.com/url?sa=D&q=https://www.africaportal.org/documents/20036/violence-in-nigerias-north). Conflicts over land prompted both farmers and herders to form armed self-defence groups, fuelling a cycle of retaliatory violence that has taken on a communal dimension (https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/halting-deepening-turmoil-nigerias-north-west).

In the middle of a flourishing trade in small arms and light weapons, organised groups of criminals operating from ungoverned forest spaces have proliferated, engaging in armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom to extortion, and cattle rustling (https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/thisday/20200808/281655372422970).

Also, banditry and allied crimes in North Western Nigeria has been largely attributed to the social problem of poverty and unemployment (https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/banditry-in-nigeria-insights-from-situational-action-and-situational-crime-prevention-theories). This argument is corroborated by the claim of some bandits who were arrested in North western Nigeria. The
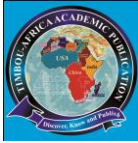
bandits in their confessional statements claimed that poverty and unemployment are their motivations for kidnapping for ransom, terrorism and the evil practices of dealing with human body parts for money rituals. The National Bureau of Statistics (https://businessday.ng/business-economy/article/nigeria-unemployment-hit-35-in-2021-agusto-co).   reported in 2021 that unemployment in Nigeria was about 33.3 per cent and still rising. Some argue that unemployment amongst Nigerian youths is almost double that amount. Some might argue that this problem was fuelled by global inflation, which can be linked to the negative effects of COVID-19 on the global economy, and more recently, the Russia-Ukraine war This claim is reinforced by the belief that corruption and inequality in the distribution of wealth and lack of formulation and implementation of better policies to create employment and other opportunities have contributed to the emergence   of   banditry   and   terrorism   in   the   country (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924).

The twin problem of unemployment and poverty has been linked to the allied problem of lack of education among those who perpetuate the crime of banditry (Umar and Joseph, 2019 @ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331844832_The_Relationship_between_Poverty_and_Unemployment_in_Niger_State). Student dropouts are a contributing factor to Nigerian terrorist groups and this problem has been exacerbated by the failure of government and parents to provide the compulsory minimum standard of education for those meant to be educated (Punch, 3rd June 2022).

Although the crime of banditry is attributable to social problems, it has been argued that banditry is a factor of the poor criminal justice system in Nigeria (https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/banditry-in-nigeria-insights-from-situational-action-and-situational-crime-prevention-theories/). It has been further argued that "the conflict in the northwest cannot be reduced to a factor or an actor,"…"the crisis is rooted in several overlapping economic, political and social problems and poor administration of justice". (http://peacehistory-usfp.org/post-cold-war-era). Corruption and ineptitude among the police and judicial officials have also been identified as reasons   for   taking   up   arms   by   the   bandits (https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/521768-unpunished-crimes-poverty-others-fuel-banditry-in-nigerias-northwest-report.html).

Other reports also identified the highhandedness of security operatives as a factor contributing to the violent crime, leading to an endemic killing spree and bloodshed. One former bandit once narrated that his father spent seven years chasing justice for his rustled cattle, detailing how justice was not achieved until the man died. "We became impoverished by judicial cases hence the decision to take up arms," the repentant bandit was quoted to have said (Adeyemi, 2022).

Motivation for banditry is believed to be a conflation of social, economic and political factors. For example, information obtained from interview responses reveals that the drivers of banditry include a total exclusion of pastoralists in governance. "The government does not regulate the pastoralist subsector. Most of these herdsmen live in the bush with their animals completely ignorant of government functions, civic duties or any code of conduct required of them." endemic poverty- "our people are neglected by those they elected into various offices hence leaving them in abject poverty"; access to a resource- "Scarcity of resources and failure of government to equitably allocate such scarce resources among competing users"; its lucrative nature "the lucrative nature of the enterprise, and lack of capacity on the part of the government to deal with

bandits appropriately"; failure of conflict resolution mechanism- "failure of government to create appropriate conflicts resolution framework in order to manage the conflict between farmers and nomadic herdsmen effectively", conspiracy against the Nigerian state- "local and international conspiracy against Nigeria and its people"; "unemployment among youths"; inefficient policing system- "We have no single police officer in the village. Lack of security personnel in our village is one of the reasons". "There is no adequate intelligence gathering. The success of the security is dependent on timely and accurate information. Had it been we heard timely information, they would not have been able to ambush our patrol car and escape". "People no longer fear God; most of the people nowadays worship money and want to get rich at all cost" (https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/banditry-in-nigeria-insights-from-situational-action-and-situational-crime-prevention-theories/).

Rural banditry as it is sometimes referred to means armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder (Okoli, 2019@ https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/what-can-be-done-fight-rural-banditry-northern-nigeria). It is motivated by the quest for economic accumulation. The victims are individuals and communities with material valuables. The most common examples of rural banditry in Nigeria are armed robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling and village raids. Rural banditry in northwestern Nigeria also derives impetus from the poorly governed mining and small arms sector. Bandits have been drawn to the region by illicit and artisanal mining in states like Zamfara where bandits have been raiding mining sites for gold and cash. The federal government has recognised the apparent linkage between rural banditry and illicit mining. This is to the extent that Federal Government suspended all forms of mining in Zamfara State in early April of 2019.

Objective Two: The net effects of the adoption of the military option in combating banditry in Nigeria and in Zamfara State in particular.

Since banditry started ravaging Northern Nigeria at the inception of the Buhari administration, the Nigerian Government has applied several measures in tackling the scourge. One of the measures deployed by government to tackle banditry is militarism – the deployment of the Army (Nwangwu, 2022 @ https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12115-022-00782). It is also important to note that Section 217 (2c) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) provides that the military could be deployed to suppress insurrection and act in aid of civil authority (https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/nigerian-armed-forces-rules-of-engagement-code-of-conduct/).

The same section also states that the military may be involved in "subduing insurgency and acting in aid of civilian officials to restore order when identified as upon to do so by the President, but liable to such circumstances as can be established by an Act of the National Assembly." Furthermore, Section 305 of the same constitution, which deals with the proclamation of a state of emergency, used in conjunction with Section 217 provides another justification for recruiting the military into internal security operations. The section specifically states that the President may declare a state of emergency with the concurrence of the legislature in the following circumstances: when there is an actual breakdown of the law and the safety of the public in the federation or any part of it to the extent that extraordinary measures are required to restore security and peace; if there is a clear and present threat of a breakdown in public order or public
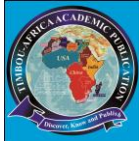
safety throughout the federation or any portion of it. Also, in accordance with the provision of Section 8 (1) of the Military Forces Act, the President is empowered to decide the operational utilization of the armed forces for the goal of preserving and safeguarding the security of the public and public order (Kanyip, 2015 @ https://jkanyip.wordpress.com/2015/08/08/proclamation-of-state-of-emergency-in-nigeria-a-constitutional-flaw/).
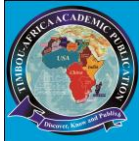
The deployment of the military to fight banditry in North West Nigeria became so evident when the Nigerian government initially increased the deployment of the military and police to the troubled zones. These deployments were under several code names such as "Operation Puff Adder," "Diran Mikiya," "Sharan Daji," "Hadarin Daji," "Thunder Strike," and "Exercise Harbin Kunama III." But these operations have produced mixed results. While the security forces have successfully pushed back bandit attacks, destroyed several hideouts, and killed or arrested hundreds of bandits, attacks have continued (https://allafrica.com/stories/202007230995.html).

To what extent then was the military used to combat banditry in Zamfara State? What are the effects of military intervention on the incidence of banditry in Zamfara State? Effects of any intervention could be positive or negative; they could also be intended and/or unintended. Effects could also be short, medium or long term. The intended effect of military involvement is either to de-escalate or totally terminate the conflict. However, this has not been achieved. Rather, what one sees is that banditry has become malignant and pervasive.

It is interesting to note that government recourse to the military option was due to the failure of negotiations and settlements between government and those behind banditry in North Western Nigeria (https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/banditry-in-nigeria-insights-from-situational-action-and-situational-crime-prevention-theories). . Thus, in 2018 government efforts turned to military aerial bombardment of occupied forests used as bandit strongholds. The effort was strengthened by the seizure of telecommunication services in parts of the north-west for several weeks in the last quarter of 2021. Seizing the network was meant to undermine the ability of the groups to communicate and receive information about military activities (Musa, 2022 https://theconversation.com/nigerias-banditry-why-5-government-strategies-have-failed-181208)

The military operation however did not weaken the nefarious activities of bandits. Rather, the crisis worsened and escalated the rate of civilian casualties which resulted from the military air raids in 2021 in several communities. The military intervention in the activities of bandits obviously lacked proper coordination; this is to the extent that aerial bombardments featured lack of support by ground troops and this undoubtedly undermined the military operations as bandits moved from one location to another to evade the aerial bombardments. Similarly, the shutting down of telecommunication services was not uniformly done across the north-west. Bandit groups could easily move elsewhere in search of where they could access telecommunication network. For example, in September 2021, the government cut communication lines in Zamfara, parts of Katsina and Sokoto States to weaken interaction with bandits and increase military crackdown. In the same period, government also procured and deployed Tucano Jets to aid its onslaught against bandits. In January 2021, 300 Nigerian Army Women Corps soldiers were deployed to various flash points (Musa, 2022 https://theconversation.com/nigerias-banditry-why-5-government-strategies-have-failed-181208)

In fighting banditry in the North West and in Zamfara State, the Nigerian security forces have utilized a variety of tactics over the years to combat banditry
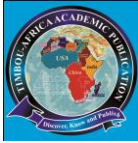
(https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924). Initially, the federal government embraced an aggressive approach by deploying police and military operations to the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto. While the security response has pushed back attacks, destroyed hideouts, killed and arrested hundreds of bandits, attacks have continued. In 2019, a peace deal was secured between the armed bandits and the governors of Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara. The deal encompassed disarmament, the release of kidnapped civilians, and pardoning for the bandits. Although the number of fatalities decreased from August to November due to reconciliation initiatives, attacks picked up again in 2020 (https://www.americansecurityproject.org/combating-banditry-in-northwest-nigeria).

It is however noteworthy that the federal government's current counter banditry effort, based on military reconnaissance and raids, is good and commendable, but it has failed to bring about the needed respite and solution, owing largely to the operational challenges arising from insufficient knowledge of the terrain. This makes the involvement of local vigilantes and community watch groups, who have a better knowledge of the terrain, more important. Meanwhile, the military option has been considered not only to be cost ineffective but also counterproductive (Okoli, 2019 @ (https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/what-can-be-done-fight-rural-banditry-northern-nigeria).

Objective Three: An Assessment and consequences of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in resolving the crisis of banditry in North West Nigeria and Zamfara state.

The failure of the military option led to the advocacy for alternative mechanism for the resolution of the conflict arising from the incidence of banditry in North Western Nigeria particularly in Zamfara State (Musa, 2022 https://theconversation.com/nigerias-banditry-why-5-government-strategies-have-failed-181208). At a point, strategy towards tackling the act of banditry in the North West became the major responsibility of the governments of the states mostly affected rather than that of the Federal Government (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924). One of the alternative mechanisms canvassed was peaceful negotiation with the bandits. Thus, in the early stage of banditry in 2016, some state governments leaned heavily on negotiation and settlement to end it. Consequently, states like Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto and Kaduna adopted different dialogue and settlement initiatives to end the killings, banditry and kidnappings. The state governments also resorted to the payment of money as compensation to identified leaders of bandits in return for peace. Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina states further offered an amnesty hinged on renouncing banditry and kidnapping, and the surrender of weapons (Musa, 2022 https://theconversation.com/nigerias-banditry-why-5-government-strategies-have-failed-181208)

In Katsina State specifically, Governor Aminu Bello Masari declared that negotiating a peaceful agreement with the bandits was the best way to achieve lasting peace (https://ndlink.org/armed-banditry-continues-thrive-nigerias-north-west-region/)

The agreement involved disarmament, the release of kidnapped victims, and an amnesty for the bandits. In addition, the Senate received and deliberated on the Terrorism Prevention Bill which seeks to criminalise the payment of ransom for the release of kidnap victims. However, it is debatable whether the aforesaid measures are official or political but it is believed that the strategy adopted by the three North Western states recorded some success (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924). For example, members of

the Yansakai vigilante group brought their weapons into a government building as they surrendered more than five hundred guns to Zamfara Governor Bello Matawalle as part of a peace process, in Gusau, Zamfara, Nigeria, on December 3, 2019 (https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-security-situation-analysis-report-18-months-report-violent-conflicts-nigeria-nextier-violent-conflict-database-january-2021-december-2021-and-january-2022-june-2022)

In addition to the above and in an effort effort to de-escalate the activities of banditry in the North West Nigeria, some State governments like Zamfara decided, in 2020, to stop al forms of negotiation with bandits (https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/banditry-in-nigeria-insights-from-situational-action-and-situational-crime-prevention-theories). This strategy was also meant to discourage families of victims from paying ransom to bandits in exchange for their kidnapped family members. The intention was to make kidnapping for ransom less attractive and less lucrative. In furtherance to the foregoing, the Nigerian Senate considered passing the Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Bill 2021. The Bill was meant to criminalise payment of ransom as a felony punishable by 15 years in prison. But the bill attracted public criticism. Some government agencies rejected it and the government is said to have paid ransom (though it denies this) (Musa, 2022 https://theconversation.com/nigerias-banditry-why-5-government-strategies-have-failed-181208).

Another measure taken by the Federal Government to combat banditry in North West Nigeria was the banning of all mining related activities in Zamfara. This measure is obtained from the belief that the activities of banditry in North West Nigeria are closely linked to the activities of illegal miming in that region. Therefore, it is expected that with the banning of illegal mining, the spate of banditry in Zamfara State and in the North West would be de-escalated (Okoli, 2019@ https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/what-can-be-done-fight-rural-banditry-northern-nigeria).

A corollary of the above was a ruling of a Federal High Court which compelled the federal government to label and proscribe bandits as terrorist organisations. This was intended to ensure that the appropriate level of force, tactical and operational assets and resources were deployed against the groups. In essence, this should translate to tougher sanctions for the bandits, and the application of the Terrorism Prevention Act to penalize their informants and supporters. Although, this appears to be a legal weapon against banditry, it is more or less a euphemism of military strategy against banditry (Musa, 2022 https://theconversation.com/nigerias-banditry-why-5-government-strategies-have-failed-181208).

Following the logic of non-military involvement in the fight against banditry, a famous Islamic cleric, Sheik Ahmad Gumi, also initiated a peace mission aimed at reaching a consensus between the government of Nigeria and bandit leaders to end the bandit conflict (Musa, 2022). However, this singular effort by Gumi is with equivocation and so was not well received by the public. The Gumi peace initiative can hardly be regarded as government effort because Gumi is a non-state actor (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924). and so it is difficult to say whose interest he represented.

So far, we have been able to identify some of the root causes of banditry in North Western Nigeria; attempted to ascertain the effects of the deployment of military operations to combat banditry in the region and examined some alternative mechanisms for resolving the crisis of banditry in the North West and in Zamfara State of Nigeria. Two major categories of conflict management strategy have been examined so far and this seems to agree with Butler's four pronged approach to conflict
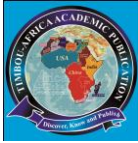
management. Butler's four major approaches to conflict management are: First is *threat-based*. This is the threat or actual use of force to dissuade the parties from engaging in the conflict (https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12115-022-00782-0).
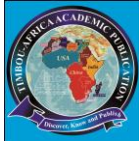
Second is *deterrence*. This could also take the form of the actual use of compulsion or threat of it to deter the parties. This also takes the form of labeling and proscribing of bandits operating in North West. Third is what Butler refers to as the *adjudicatory* approach. This refers to the application of legal or extra-legal means to manage and resolve conflict. And finally, is the *accommodationist*, mainly focusing on brokering some form of agreement between the parties (Butler, 2009). Butler's first and second approaches (i.e. the *threat-based* and the *deterrence*) are symmetrical to the option of the deployment of military and security operatives to combat banditry while the third and fourth approaches (i.e. the *adjudicatory* and *accommodationist* approaches) are asymmetrical to the non-military, the non-violent and alternative dispute management approach. Thus, the *adjudicatory* and *accommodationist* approaches are symmetrical to the *Anarcho-pacifism* theory adopted in this work.

A cursory look at the military and the non-military approaches indicates that both approaches have their limitations, strengths and weaknesses (https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/law3_final.pdf). However, the military option appears to be more preferable because it is generally believed that it is foolhardy and near impossible to negotiate with bandits because of the diffuse and diverse nature, structure, and leadership of banditry (Musa, 2022 https://theconversation.com/nigerias-banditry-why-5-government-strategies-have-failed-181208). Moreover, it is also believed that in the case of Nigeria, there is actually no basis for negotiation; nothing to negotiate since the bandits have not made any political or specific demand on the government (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924). Therefore, despite its shortcomings, the deployment of the military and security operatives is considered to be a more result oriented approach in the fight against banditry in North Western Nigeria (https://ndlink.org/armed-banditry-continues-thrive-nigerias-north-west-region/).

Moreover, an assessment of non-military options such as the legal and extra legal alternatives, seem to have recorded low success rate in the fight against banditry in North West Nigeria (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17419166.2023.2164924). The failure of these alternatives can be attributed to the prevalence of weak and impotent institutions of government (http://peacehistory-usfp.org/post-cold-war-era). For example, and as already mentioned above, there was the proposed Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Bill 2021 by the National Assembly; the banning of illegal mining in the North West and the seizure of telecommunication services in parts of the North-West for several weeks in the last quarter of 2021 to undermine the ability of bandits to communicate and receive information about military activities (Musa, 2022 https://theconversation.com/nigerias-banditry-why-5-government-strategies-have-failed-181208).

Conclusion

Combating banditry in Nigeria has been quite onerous and nightmarish to the Government. This is to the extent that government has always dithered over alternative and effective strategies to combat the scourge. It is important to note that the issue is not necessarily that of the choice of the strategy to be adopted by government (whether military of non-military), rather it is more
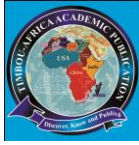
about identifying the root causes of banditry with the view to deploying the most effective remedial measures. However, government has not been able to effectively articulate its remedial measures to deal with banditry in North West Nigeria. But in an attempt to effectively tackle banditry in North West Nigeria, government should address the structural inequalities that drive people to violence, like poverty, unemployment, lack of education and opportunity, and government mistreatment.

Although, the deployment of military operatives to combat banditry in North West Nigeria appears to be the best option so far, however, for the military option to produce the desired results, the military should be well equipped, be structured to synergize with the police and be well trained in the area of anti-terrorism. The military should be trained to exhibit and uphold its professional ethics in order to avert the impending danger of paying too much attention to and politicizing the issue of banditry. Today, it has become evident and disturbing that the phenomenon of banditry has been so enmeshed in politics; bandits are now clothed in political toga, paid compensation, granted amnesty and they now engage in photo ops with governors and other political office holders. Politics has thus conferred legitimacy on an act which ordinarily is criminal. Banditry has been politicized and elevated from the status of a criminal activity to that of a political movement. Furthermore, for the military to achieve success in its fight against banditry, its capacity should be strengthened by recruiting more manpower into the military. Government should make effort to build trust with local communities vulnerable to attacks by bandits. Government should set up early warning and response systems and work with local vigilantes and community leaders of the troubled regions (https://ndlink.org/armed-banditry-continues-thrive-nigerias-north-west-region/) The military in particular should redirect its attention to controlling the trafficking in small arms and light weapons, specifically by patrolling porous national borders.

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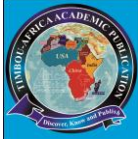
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