



State Monopoly of Violence and Banditry in North West Nigeria

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Abstract

The research investigated the relationship between the state's monopoly on violence and banditry in North West Nigeria. It does so in light of the ongoing banditry in the North West and the Nigerian state's apparent inability to protect its citizens and maintain territorial control through the legitimate use of force. The study utilised qualitative secondary data and was anchored in the undergoverned space thesis. The paper posited that the Nigerian government couldn't use its violent tools to maintain its monopoly on organised violence, leaving a governance gap that bandits could exploit. The results showed that banditry has been occurring in the North West since before Nigeria became a country. It is now taking advantage of poorly governed thick forests, social and economic issues, and ongoing conflicts. Bandits possess advanced weapons that they use against the state, which undermines the idea of a state monopoly on violence. These weapons enable them to kidnap people, steal cattle, raid communities, and engage in illegal mining, activities that only the state can do. It also shows that both the bandits and the Nigerian state control local people, as shown by tax payments. The Nigerian government should use the same approach to fighting banditry across the whole North West, and the Nigerian state should also make its presence felt throughout the territory by disbanding and demilitarising non-state actors, among other things.

Keywords: Bandit, Monopoly, Nigeria, Security, State

Introduction

There are different security threats in each of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. There is Boko Haram insurgency in the North East. In the North Central, there are ethnic and religious conflicts and conflicts between herdsmen and farmers. In the South-South, there are pipeline vandalism and secessionist groups. In the North West, there is banditry (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024). The conflict between herders and farmers in Zamfara state led to modern-day banditry (Aderayo et al., 2025; Aina et al., 2023). Banditry has spread from Zamfara state to the whole North West. This includes kidnapping, stealing cattle, raiding villages, and controlling land (Okoli et al., 2025). The forest that connects the Northwest states and the use of advanced weapons are two important factors in Northwest banditry, which is made worse by the government's lack of presence. Whenever bandits are confronted, forests help them change location.

Different scholars have examined banditry in Nigeria's northwest geopolitical zone from different points of view. Okoli and Ugwu (2019) and Rufus and Ogbe (2025) looked at what causes banditry and what makes it happen. Okoli and Aina (2024) looked into the link between drugs and banditry. Okoli et al. (2025) and Esamagu and Adeyika (2025) have also looked into the effects of banditry. Banditry resilience despite efforts made to curb it (Umaru & Sabo, 2021) has been examined from the lens of informants' role (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024). These and many other studies have done a lot to explain the problem of banditry in Nigeria, especially in the North West. But there hasn't been enough research on the state's monopoly on violence and banditry. This gap in literature marked the point of departure for this research. The study investigated the relationship between the monopoly of physical violence and banditry in North West Nigeria.

Methodology

We used a descriptive qualitative research design. The study focused on the northwest geopolitical zone, which includes the states of Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. Zamfara has been the birthplace of modern-day banditry in Nigeria. The study area is forested, and parts of the forest extend into other states and even into countries such as Niger Republic. The forest is poorly managed, which makes illegal mining and banditry easier. The area is largely composed of farmers and herders who grow crops and raise livestock. It is also underdeveloped, especially in Zamfara state, which is the centre of modern-day banditry. Data were sourced from journal articles, conference papers, and national and international dailies. We used thematic content analysis of secondary data.

Theoretical framework of analysis: Under-governed space thesis (UGS)

The under-governed space thesis is appropriated as the theoretical framework of analyses. According to the United States Department of Defence (2007), 'an ungoverned space is a place where the state cannot or will not extend control, effectively govern, or influence the local population, and where a provincial, local tribal or autonomous government partially or ineffectively governs due to inadequate governance capacity, insufficient political will, a legitimacy gap, and the presence of conflict or restrictive norms of behaviour'. In addition, Okoli (2021) defined 'ungoverned' as 'territory that is conquered, usurped, annexed or controlled by violent non-state actors'.

The post-World Trade Centre Attack literature posited that the existence and prevalence of ungoverned spaces within a state's territories had provided safe havens for criminal and subversive activities, often orchestrated by organised criminals and terrorist/insurgent groups (Rabasa et al., 2007). When a state fails to govern an area effectively, it creates room for competition between it and either criminal group(s) or another state. The competing area either resulted in an under-governed or ungoverned space.

An under-governed space thesis is suitable for disclosing the non-symbiotic relationship between the state monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and banditry. The effectiveness of the state monopoly of force deters bandits from competing with the central authority. Banditry escalation from the epicentre to other parts of Nigeria was made possible due to the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian state's monopoly of violence. Bukarti aptly asserted, "kidnappers operate primarily in the north-western and central parts of Nigeria, where there are vast mountainous forests that have been mismanaged for years and there are no access roads or government presence there" (Arvin, 2021).

State monopoly of violence: A literature survey

One of the vital elements of scientific knowledge is cumulative in nature. Scholars' states, goals, and experiences have shaped their interpretations. The phrase 'state monopoly of violence' (SMV) is rooted in the concept of the state itself. In other words, a legitimate state monopoly of physical violence, or, simply put, a monopoly of violence, is a product of trust between the state and citizens. SMV determines the survival of the state against internal non-state actors. In the words of Krahmann (2009, p. 2), "the norm or ideal of the state monopoly on violence prescribes that the state should be the only legitimate actor wielding force for purposes other than immediate self-defence."

The phrases 'monopoly of force', "organised violence", 'state monopoly of violence', and 'state monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force' are used interchangeably. Jakobi (2010, p. 3) defined monopoly of force as a unique privilege of the state, as it constrains the rights of citizens. It implied that no state deserves a SMV—citizens must consent to it by denying themselves the right to individual violence.

The hypothetical social contract theorists' state of nature and Thomas Hobbes's famous 'warres' explained why citizens give off their right. Krahmann (2009, p. 2) observes:

The modern norm of the state monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force dates back as far as the seventeenth century. Its origins can be found in the theory of the social contract according to which citizens' gives up their rights to employ force in return for protection by the state.

It should be noted that Hobbes did not use the phrase 'state monopoly of violence' throughout *Leviathan*. His account of *Leviathan* comprehends the thrust of state monopoly of violence'. Philips (n.d) observed that individual search for security can degenerate to contestant conflict as exhibited by the state of nature. Thomas Hobbes' remedy to constant conflict was conceived in the strong state which imposed order.

The phrase monopoly on the legitimate use of force is mostly credited to German sociologist Max Weber's work in 'Politics as a vocation' (Mcfate, 2011; Philips, n.d). The concept 'monopoly of force' was explicit in Weber's

conception of the state as “a human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Mcfate, 2011, p. 213). Sovereign states have been the primary actors in what became known as the modern state system (Philips, n.d). Jakobi (2010) assert that ‘the very definition of statehood, it holds the monopoly of force regarding a defined population in a defined area. The monopoly means that the state is responsible for enforcing regulations, and it is an effective monopoly of the state that can enforce the rules effectively’.

Civic and Miklaucic (2011) observed that 193 states members of the UN in 2010, no fewer than 20 and as many as 50 exercised sovereignty or SMV, in terms of legal recognition. The heart of the state monopoly of legitimate violence is the management of violence within the state and guaranteeing everyday safety and rights of a state’s citizens (Leander, 2002). Forgone is not far from the ideal state that the social contract theorists perceive to emerge in a contract. Krahmann (2009) observed that the definition of the state monopoly on the legitimate use of armed force contains:

1. The state determines who is permitted to use force, namely the democratic state and its agencies.
2. It also involves an agreement on what is considered a legitimate use of violence and on what basis, such as the outlawing of torture and the proportionality of force.
3. And under which circumstances and for what purposes state actors may employ force, including public security and national defence.

According to Civic and Miklaucic (2011) the way forward to ensure the legitimacy of the monopoly of force is to reform the security sector. Reform of the security sector is a step toward trust, though only time and experience will consolidate it. Security sector reform is defined as a process of assessment, review and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation led by national authority that has its goals the enhancement of effective and accountable security for the state and its people without discrimination and with full respect for human rights and the rule of law (United Nations, 2008). The overall objective of security system reforms is to create a secure environment conducive for development, poverty reduction and democracy.

Moreover, for the state that might have lost her monopoly, Mcfate (2011) mentions two tools for getting the monopoly of force. The first step in establishing a state’s monopoly of force is disbanding the competition. This means disarming, demobilising and reintegrating none state combatants safely into civic society and enabling them to earn livelihood through peaceful means instead of violence. The second stage demobilises and disbands the armed non-state groups, formally breaking up the command structure and marking their official entry into ‘civilian life’. In such light Dudouet (2011) emphasises the restoration of the state monopoly of force through the disarmament and demobilisation of non-state actors, which can only take place once they are confident that their own safety is guaranteed and that they will be able to effectively pursue their political goals through peaceful means in a legitimate and democratic security and political order.

Challenges of state monopoly of violence

The distinguishing characteristic of state sovereignty is organised violence. Although neither sovereignty nor SMV has ever been absolute, the current challenges to both appear greater than ever (Philips n.d.). The general explanation relies on the inability of the central state to broadcast its power throughout the territories that it nominally controls, and it views an extension of this power to the periphery as a natural by-product of political modernisation (Leander, 2004).

Various factors account for the ineffectiveness of the state to broadcast its suzerainty over her territory. Non-state violence actors threaten the state monopoly of force (Jakobi, 2010), creating an under-governed space. Civic and Miklaucic (2011, p. XVII) noted that “the threats emanating from these ‘under-governed’ spaces do not respect borders; they strike across borders, oceans and continents, often with impunity.”

Globalisation is one of the phenomena challenging Weber’s state monopoly of violence. According to Wulf (2007), globalisation, which is the ensuing erosion of the nation-state, is a fundamental challenge to the efficacy of the state-orientated monopoly of force in as much as globalisation leads to denationalisation and promotes the relocation of authority from the nation-state to supranational actors. Leander (2002) concluded that ‘globalisation is altering the nature and meaning of the state monopoly on legitimate violence’.

There is no clear difference between Wulf’s supranational actors and internationalised forces. The latter is delimited by the UN increasing intervention. The other element identified by Wulf is privatisation of force. Privatisation of force is a challenge to SMV, which is supposed to eliminate all competing forces. The police and military in many developing countries are no longer, or have never been, capable of guaranteeing law and order. Hence, private military and security companies are increasingly hired by governments, international organisations, businesses or individuals to carry out tasks previously undertaken by the armed forces and the police (Wulf, 2007).

Bandits and banditry in Northwest Nigeria: A discourse

Vande (n.d.) traced banditry etymologically from German legal practice that outlawed criminals' 'bannan', i.e., 'ban' in English, and Italian '*bantito*', which implied a banned person in English. From this assertion, Vande conceives banditry as an economically motivated type of organised crime committed by outlaws that involves threats or actual deployment of violence. Okoli and Ugwu (2019) further highlighted kidnapping, cattle rustling and village or market raids as activities of bandits, who refer to armed robbery and allied violent crime.

Aina et al. (2023) viewed bandits as organised criminal gangs motivated by economics. These criminal groups are seen involved in armed robbery, illegal gold mining and sexual violence. Aderayo et al. (2025) positioned corroborate Aina et al. (2023) conception by manifestation and motivation and further argued that bandits are premeditated criminal actors planned and executed for one's own benefit.

Contrary to the economic perspective, Okoli et al. (2025) presented social dimensions that involve elements of criminality and resistance. This perspective affirmed outlawing activities of the bandits by the state and further argued that the group(s)' activities are accepted by a subset of the population. In this sense, they are considered freedom fighters or defenders of a particular community. This perspective captures the evolution and difficulty of curbing banditry in the study area consonance with 'farmers as vigilantes' and 'herders as criminals syndrome'.

The conflicting nature of banditry is manifested in scientific classification. Various categorisations of bandits exist in literature, like Aina et al. (2023) (social, rural-urban frontier and countryside) without a clear-defined unit of measurement. Okoli and Ugwu (2019) provided multiple models of classification, as captured in table 1.

Table 1: Types of Banditry

Type	typological index
Social Vs Political Vs Economic	Intent or motive
Rural Vs Urban	Location
Mercenary Vs autonomous	Agency and autonomy
Organized Vs Petty	Form and formation
Roving Vs stationary	Operational formation
Frontier Vs countryside	Location
Maritime Vs Coastal Vs mainland	Location

Source: adopted from Okoli and Ugwu, (2019)

Banditry in Nigeria predates colonial occupation and the subsequent political formation of Nigeria's state (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024; Umaru & Sabo, 2021). During this era, political communities curbed banditry by force (defensive and offensive). This was relatively easy because the inhabitants were united, their leaders enjoyed legitimacy, and the societies were homogeneous. During Nigeria's colonial rule, the security and political architecture shifted from what had existed before to the British pattern. Colonialism did not end banditry in Nigeria's northwest. One of the deadliest incidents was the 1901 attack that killed 210 merchants when over 12,000 camels laden with assorted grains were attacked between the western Hausa land and the Niger Republic border (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Umaru & Sabo, 2021). Despite a record of armed banditry during Nigeria's colonial epoch, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (2024) revealed that colonial administrations were able to subdue armed banditry.

Post-independence Nigerian states have shown a lack of political will to crush criminal gangs and resolve conflict, especially in the Fourth Republic. On this premise, Kleffmann et al. (2024) assert that contemporary banditry, code-named 'Kungiyar Gayu', was formed by Kundu and succeeded by Buharin Daji. Buharin Daji was responsible for the spread of banditry from the Zamfara epicentre (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024; Aderayo et al., 2025; Aina et al., 2023) to the entire hotspots in Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger and Kebbi states (Aderayo et al., 2025; Okoli & Aina, 2024; Omakoli et al., 2024). Some literature argued that contemporary banditry came to the limelight in 2010 (Adisa, 2025; Okoli & Aina, 2024; Okoli et al., 2025), while to Aina et al. (2023), ACLED (2024) and Esamagu and Adeyinka (2025), it was in 2011.

Despite lack of consensus, existing literature pointed to the emergence and escalation of banditry as the product of unresolved conflict between sedentary farmers and nomadic people. The farmers form a vigilante group (*yan sakai*) against the herders. *Yan Sakai* was armed without professional training (Omakoli et al. 2024). They witch-hunt their old foes and are involved in extrajudicial killing (Okoli & Aina, 2024; Rufa'i, n.d.). On the other hand, the nomadic armed, in turn, attacked communities for cattle rustling and reprisal attacks (Rufa'i, n.d.).

Similarly, porous borders and dense forests facilitated the trafficking of small arms and light weapons, exacerbated by weak law enforcement (Aderayo et al., 2025; Adisa, 2025). Consequently, cattle rustling was on the increase, and highway armed robbery became the order of the day (Kleffmann et al., 2024). A new banking policy made armed robbery less lucrative (ACLED, 2024). Hence, kidnapping of individuals, and later of schools, groups, and expatriates, became the order of the day (Aina et al., 2023; ACLED, 2024; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2021). Bandits were involved in illegal mining and in collecting taxes from illegal miners. The proliferation of banditry in the North West has a gender dimension, in which women serve as logistics, caring for kidnapped people and for sex (Aina et al., 2023; Kleffmann, 2024). Abdulkadir and Umar (2024) argue that banditry flourishes due to the role of informants. Informants serve critical functions in banditry and enjoy non-bandit identities in the community. To this end, national security threats associated with banditry account for the proscription of bandits as terrorists by the Nigerian state in 2021 (Okoli & Aina, 2024; Okoli et al., 2025).

The proscription of bandits as terrorists has not ended banditry, as socio-economic conditions and government presence are worsening. Likewise, more young people were recruited (Aderayo et al., 2025). Some willingly formed bandit gangs, while others joined existing ones. In such cases, the motivation is economic. Another economic recruitment method is those who lost their livelihoods due to banditry, or otherwise ended up in banditry to earn a living (ACLED, 2024; Rufus & Ogbe, 2025).

Another means by which people were recruited was jungle justice, which Rufa'i (n.d.) described as legalized armed banditry. Yan Sakai, often considered a vigilante group aimed at protecting farming communities, was involved in brutality and the killing of suspects. ACLED (2024) cited the extrajudicial killing of Alhaji Ishe in 2013 and the nomadic use of the appeal to their kinsmen, 'yaro shiga kungiya ka kare gidan ku' (join the group and protect your family). Its effect is the militarisation of the population and mutual mistrust, which co-opted young people into banditry (ACLED, 2024; Kleffmann, 2024; Omakoli et al., 2024; Rufa'i, n.d.). Forceful recruitment into banditry is a sign of militarised life and the absence of governance. Male children of hostage communities are co-opted into banditry (ACLED, 2024; Okoli et al., 2025). The rationale is that the government is not there for them, and whenever the bandit mobilises them for an operation, they have to or be killed immediately. From mobilisation, they continue in the gang. Misunderstandings within usually result in division of the gang, and the availability of hired weapons sustains all gangs.

Nigerian state responses to banditry

The Nigerian state has an established coercive apparatus that enables it to respond to banditry. The coercive apparatus includes, among others, the Nigerian Armed Forces (the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Air Force), the Nigerian Police Force, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and the Department of State Services, all of which are found in the exclusive legislative list. The Nigerian state responded to banditry via kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. The kinetic approach includes numerous operations with different nomenclature, formed with the aim of curbing banditry (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024; Aderayo et al., 2025). Some of the operations include the armed forces, the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Air Force (e.g., Operation Sahel Sanity), while others include the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air Force and the Nigerian Police Force (e.g., Operation Puff Adar) (Aina et al., 2023).

Operation Hadirin Daji was launched on 10 May 2019 to tackle armed banditry, kidnapping, cattle rustling and other criminal activities (Aina et al. 2023). To ensure effective command and control, the operation was divided into 12 sectors across Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara and Kebbi states. Its activities secured the release of 344 abducted students from Government Science Secondary School Kantara in Katsina State on 17 December 2020. The Africa Defence Forum (2024) reported that the Nigerian Air Force component of Operation Hadirin Daji killed Kacchalla Halilu Sububu, a notorious bandit leader in Zamfara, along with 38 bandits on 12 September 2021. Aina et al. (2023) recorded the success of Operation Hadirin Daji from inception to 2022 as including the killing of about 568 bandits, the recovery of 706 firearms, the arrest of about 856 bandits and the rescue of more than one thousand kidnapped people.

Operation Sahel Sanity was launched in 2019, with areas of responsibility including Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara, Niger and Sokoto states. The operation was initiated to support Operation Sharan Dajiin in curbing banditry and related crime. The operation is championed by the Nigerian Army, Nigerian Air Force, Nigerian Police Force and the Department of State Service personnel. As of 2021, the operation had killed 220 bandits, rescued 642 kidnapped

victims, destroyed 197 bandits' hideouts, arrested 366 illegal miners, recovered 73 AK-47 rifles, one GPMG, 194 loaded guns, 5032 rounds of 7.62 mm special ammunition, 568 rounds of 7.62 NATO ammunition and 156 live cartridges (Sardauna, 2021).

Despite these successes and many more, counter-banditry in the northwest has been ineffective. The Nigerian Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Nigeria's security challenges, reporting on Tuesday, 17 March 2020, highlighted inadequate manpower, a dearth of military hardware, difficulty in procuring military hardware and porous borders. The Senate Committee report showed that the Nigerian state is aware of the counter-banditry obstacles. Aina et al.'s (2023) findings corroborated the Senate Committee report, adding inadequate funding, corruption and human rights abuses. Defensive Nigerian state counter-banditry aided the latter in relocating to other parts of the northwest (Kleffmann et al., 2024).

Another counter-banditry approach adopted was deterrence. The federal government and Kano State sought to deter bandits in Falgore Forest. Since 2012, Falgore Forest has been known as a safe haven for terrorists, bandits and other criminals. In 2017, the process of converting Falgore Forest into a military training ground was initiated (Ibrahim, 2017). The groundbreaking conversion ceremony took place on 27 February 2020. The aim was to reclaim the forest from bandits and other non-state actors. As a military training ground, it includes cadets from the Nigerian Defence Academy and recruits from the Depot Nigerian Army, Zaria (Vande, n.d.). The success of this approach is reflected in Ganduje's call for the conversion of forests occupied by bandits into military ground (Olokor, 2025).

The federal government has also adopted non-kinetic counter-banditry measures (Aina et al., 2023). Non-kinetic measures deployed include bans on gold mining (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024) and the cutting of communication networks in Zamfara (Kleffmann, 2024). The latter, among others, was aimed at disrupting communication and enhancing the kinetic approach. The former targeted foreign elements involved in illegal mining and banditry (Aderago et al., 2025) and sought to cut general bandits' sources of finance. Forests where illegal mining takes place are under governance that hinders the effective banning of illegal mining.

On the other hand, the federal government's kinetic approach has failed, and the politicisation of banditry account for Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara States' negotiations with bandits (ACLEDA, 2024; Aderayo et al., 2025; Aina et al., 2023). In 2016, Zamfara State reached a peace agreement with Buharin Daji, under which he returned stolen cows and a few weapons in exchange for cash. In October 2019, Katsina State granted amnesty to bandits, under which the latter released 70 captives and two AK-47 rifles, and the former promised to rehabilitate and reintegrate them (Mohammed, 2025).

Peace negotiations with bandits have brought short-term peace, as in Zamfara State in 2010 with Buharin Daji. This agreement was challenging because bandits lack substantive leadership (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024). Amnesty was not properly and uniformly coordinated across the entire northwest (Aina et al., 2023). Bandits enter into peace agreements with communities or states and continue launching attacks in other parts of the northwest. In some instances, locals were hired to pose as bandits during peace meetings due to the politicisation of banditry (Ismail, 2025). Hiring individuals during peace dialogue with bandits raises questions about the initiators' integrity and sincerity in mitigating banditry in the geopolitical zone.

Territorial competition: Interrogating the Nigerian state and bandits

The notion of a modern state system rests on the need to guarantee the safety of all lives and property. Such a system is established through full governance across the entire territory, which curbs elements of citizens' violence against one another. Krahmann (2009) posits that the state defines who can use force. The Nigerian authority is aware of unregulated vigilante activity in the North West. Their ongoing activities affirm that the state has permitted their existence.

However, unregulated vigilantes lack the professional training of other coercive state apparatus counterparts (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024), which contributes to their tendency to act outside the law and engage in violent practices, leading to a cycle of lawlessness and undermining the rule of law in the region. They have empowered themselves as police and judiciary without differentiating a suspect from a convicted person. Abdulkadir and Umar (2024) observed that criminals operate freely under the guise of vigilantism. Due to unregulated vigilantes, people pick up arms against one another (ACLEDA, 2024), which Rufa'i (n.d.) described as 'legalized bandits'. This situation escalates and complicates banditry in the northwest.

The use of force by “legalized bandits” without any authority whatsoever also undermines the principle of justifiable force (Krahmann, 2009). There is no clear distinction between actual bandits and vigilantes that ought to mitigate banditry, as both groups often operate outside the law and can contribute to the cycle of violence and insecurity in the region. At an earlier stage, the Nigerian state showed little or no concern over banditry (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024). A kinetic response was mobilised when banditry challenged and overwhelmed Nigeria's security system and sovereignty (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024; Vande, n.d.). The situation is complicated by a lack of political will to fight banditry, the politicisation of banditry, and saboteurs.

Banditry in the study area has exposed the Nigerian authority's incapacity to govern its citizens (Umaru & Sabo, 2021) or, as Okoli and Ugwu (2019) described it, the Nigerian state's incapacity, indifference, or unwillingness to control banditry. The status quo in the North West has been propelled by the fragility of the Nigerian state; weak security agencies and ungoverned spaces exacerbate the security situation (Rufus & Ogbe, 2025). Contemporary warfare between bandits and the Nigerian state has led many Nigerians to doubt the state's capacity to protect them (Esamagu & Adeyinka, 2025). Omakoli et al. (2024) posited that the Nigerian state seems to have lost the battle against the rising activities of bandits in the North West.

The Nigerian state's quest for territorial integrity has given rise to territorial competition with banditry. Contemporary states own and control territorial resources. The Nigerian state exercises its extractive function by regulating resource extraction. The government uses the revenues generated from such extraction to improve the lives of all citizens. Contemporary gold mining in the North West is largely outside the Nigerian government's control. Involvement in gold mining is at the discretion of the bandits (Aderayo et al., 2025). Based on this premise, illegal mining is associated with banditry, and foreigners play a critical intermediary role. Illegal gold mining suggests the existence of a black market and foreign elements. The actual role of foreigners and their identity in illegal mining and banditry remains unknown in the extended literature. Omakoli et al. (2024) concluded that allegations persist that foreigners are involved in gold mining and banditry in the North West.

The state uses tax revenues contributed by citizens to fulfil their responsibilities. Bandits in the Northwest have changed the narrative, in which citizens pay a dual tax and show loyalty to both the state and the bandits. Okoli and Aina (2024) observed that bandits established a rule of underworld governance, forcing people to pay protection fees for life and for farm protection. Although bandits engage in illegal gold mining, they also tax other miners and farmers (ACLEDA, 2024; Kleffmann et al., 2024).

consonance with the 2009 presidential amnesty programme, other tiers of government in the federating system initiated peace dialogue with bandits (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2021). Silence from the federal government, responsible for all the security agencies, was interpreted as support for the peace agreement. In contrast to the Niger Delta amnesty, where militants surrendered their weapons, bandits attended peace meetings armed and left without relinquishing their firearms (Abdulkadir & Umar, 2024; Kleffmann et al., 2024; Aderayo et al., 2025). This effectively legitimised bandits' weaponisation. Furthermore, such agreements offer bandits monetary and other benefits that strengthen their resilience at the detriment of their victims, who receive nothing from the state, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence and insecurity in the affected communities.

Conclusion

Banditry in the focal area predates Nigeria as a sovereign political community. It resurfaced in independent Nigeria and has become more threatening in the Fourth Republic due to poor governance, porous borders, the availability of firearms, and unresolved conflict. The socio-economic conditions, the politicisation of security, and the general security architecture are exploited by bandits. The study argues that the Nigerian state's inability to use its coercive apparatus to establish and sustain its monopoly of violence created a vacuum that bandits have filled, and that the latter is a challenge to the former. Negotiations with bandits have further eroded the Nigerian state's monopoly on violence. Security and governance have declined in the North West under the Nigerian state and in the presence of bandits. Local populations are most affected. They pay taxes to the Nigerian state and to the bandits. They follow the instructions of the Nigerian state and the bandits.

Recommendations

The local population doubts the capacity and willingness of the state to protect them. Hence, the following recommendations:

1. Nigerian states should adopt a uniform and simultaneous kinetic counter-banditry approach.
2. Nigerian states should establish its presence in the entire territory;
3. Security and development should be top priorities of the Nigerian government and depoliticised;
4. Conflict should be resolved before escalation by the security agencies, judiciary and stakeholders;
5. Researchers should interrogate peace dialogue with bandits.

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