

EXAMINING THE DRIVERS OF ARMED BANDITRY IN BORDER COMMUNITIES IN KATSINA STATE

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Abstract

This paper examined the drivers of armed banditry in border communities in Katsina State. A descriptive survey research design was adopted with mixed method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative data. The population of the study was 930,900 drawn from three LGAs: Jibia, Batsari and Safana. A sample of 384 respondents was selected using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) method and purposive sampling technique was used to select farmers who were affected by the armed banditry and internally displaced. The data were collected using structured questionnaires and In-depth Interviews (IDI) guide. The quantitative data collected was analyzed using mean and standard deviation, while a hybrid approach involving both thematic analysis and content analysis were adopted for the qualitative data gathered. The findings revealed that armed banditry is driven by a convergence of structural, institutional, environmental, and political factors, rather than a single causal variable. Poverty and unemployment were consistently identified as core drivers, reflecting widespread economic marginalization and limited livelihood opportunities in agrarian border communities. Finally, the study recommends strengthened family engagement, enhanced religious peace teachings, revitalization of traditional leadership roles, and integrated community-based peace education programmes.

Keywords: Armed Banditry, Border Communities, Trade, Drivers, Insecurity

Introduction

Insecurity in Nigeria, especially in the northern regions, has been a complex interplay of socio-economic grievances, weak governance, and a proliferation of small arms (Campbell, 2021). These conditions created vacuums and structural vulnerabilities that allowed criminal practices like banditry to take hold (Okoli and Abubakar, 2021). Over the years, these trends persisted as many rural areas remained underdeveloped, poorly governed, and inadequately secured, thereby sustaining conditions conducive to banditry. Armed banditry encompasses a range of violent criminal acts, including kidnapping, theft, armed assault, and destruction of property (Osasona, 2023).

Banditry has come to the fore with increased activities in the northwest region of the country, particularly in Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina states. Bandits are known with organized crime that includes kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle-rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources. Ojo, et al., (2023) argues that these armed groups engage in organized attacks that feature cattle-rustling, rape, looting, plundering, kidnapping and murder. Between 2018 and 2020, at least 4,900 deaths were caused by armed banditry, which also generated hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north-west. For instance, between January 6 and 8, 2022, armed bandits attacked several villages in Katsina State, killing more than 200 people and leaving 10,000 displaced. These, among other events have claimed several lives and caused significant economic destruction. Ojewale (2021) asserts that while it is difficult to determine the exact number of armed bandits in the north-west, it has been estimated that about 30,000 bandits

were associated with different gangs ranging from a few fighters to over 1,000 fighters operating in the region (Ojewale, 2021). The major reason why banditry grows is among other reason such areas are not generally entirely devoid of the government's control but are governed poorly and differently from larger communities.

Several factors were pointed out as causes of banditry in rural areas of Nigeria, especially in the northwest of the country. Banditry in northwestern Nigeria is caused by some social and existential factors that are true of both the region's interior and its borders. Among these problems, the lack of control over the region's hinterlands, forestlands, and borders stands out. Rural settlements are very spread out in the northwestern hinterlands. They are separated by rangelands and farmlands that are prone to violent conflicts (Ameh, 2015). They are also dotted with different kinds of forests, some of which have wetlands, rocks, and caves. In addition to being far away from each other, they are also far away from the places where local and state governments are run. The region's forests are large, rough, and dangerous. Most importantly, they are not policed nearly enough, which makes them a good place for all kinds of jungle crime. Because of this, violent crimes like banditry have grown and spread in these wooded places. Most attacks happen in remote villages near forested areas in the north-west, where there are not many police officers (Ameh, 2015). In the same way, banditry happens in large areas of forest reserves that are usually out of reach of Nigerian security workers. Most bandit activities happen in Northern Nigeria in state owned reserves like the Kamuku, Kiyambana, and Falgore forests. The forests are perfect places for criminals to hide from the police so they are not caught. Nigerian security forces don not seem to want to go into these forest areas because they are not very good at what they do, the locals help them out, they do not have good equipment, and they are not very motivated (Anka, 2017). The high unemployment rate in Nigeria is another thing that makes banditry more likely. In 2019, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) says that 23.1 percent of Nigerians are out of work, with 55.4 percent of them being young people. 77.7 percent of people in the Northwest are living in poverty (Bassey, 2016). These numbers keep going up a lot every year because Nigerian schools keep graduating groups of young people who thought they would get better jobs and chances after they graduated (Alao et al., 2015).

Armed banditry in Katsina State, especially in border communities, has created a severe and multi-faceted humanitarian crisis, deeply impacting the lives and well-being of its residents. The challenges extend beyond direct violence to long-term disruptions of livelihoods, social services, and community stability. Thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes, becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within Katsina and in neighboring states or even crossing into Niger Republic (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2025). Katsina was home to nearly 109,000 IDPs, with 94% displaced between 2019 and 2020 alone. Many villages have been sacked or completely deserted as residents flee the constant threat of attacks, killings, and abductions (Amnesty International Nigeria, 2025). The few existing IDP camps are often inadequate, forcing many displaced persons to seek refuge with host communities or in informal settlements, straining resources and leading to overcrowding Agriculture and pastoralism, the mainstays of the state's economy, have been severely crippled.

Statement of the Problem

Armed banditry in border communities between Nigeria-Niger republic corridors in Katsina State has plunged many communities into a profound humanitarian crisis, leading to mass displacement. Thousands have been forced to abandon their homes and livelihoods, becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within Katsina and in neighboring states, or even crossing into Niger Republic (IOM, 2025). This forced-migration not only strains resources in host communities but also leaves behind deserted villages and uncultivated farmlands (Nigerian Society for Animal Production (NSAP) (2024). The violence has directly crippled the commercial activities, as local traders fear moving to local markets, resulting in significant drop trading. Similarly, the rampant incidences of cattle rustling have decimated the primary assets of pastoralist communities, pushing many into abject poverty and destitution (NSAP, 2024).

In addition, over 25,000 residents in Katsina State have been displaced, with many forced to abandon their farms, businesses, and ancestral homes, resulting in widespread disruption of agricultural and commercial activities (HumAngle Media, 2024). Banditry in northwestern Nigeria is caused by some social and existential factors that are true of both the region's interior and its borders. Among these problems, the lack of control over the region's hinterlands, forestlands, and borders stands out. Rural settlements are spread out in the northwestern hinterlands. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the drivers of armed banditry in border communities between Nigeria-Niger republic corridors, katsina state.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

What are the major drivers of armed banditry on boarder communities between Nigeria-Niger Republic corridors, Katsina State.

Objective of the Study

This study examined the drivers of armed banditry in border communities between Nigeria-Niger republic corridors, katsina state.

Literature Review

Armed Bandits

Armed Bandits have been identified with several names depending on the context within which they were placed. For instance, initially, bandits were considered primitive rebels and were also identified as bandits due to operational changes within social class relationships. Consequently, bandits were identified as members of a particular social class working antagonistically with another opposing class, especially elites. Bandits' identity and why they were designated terrorists in 2021 (Osasona, 2021) have equally been examined. However, from the contextualization of many scholars, there seemed to be more emphasis on the farmers-herdsmen conflict and other political and socioeconomic variables. Hence, multiple perspectives were developed while responding to questions bothering banditry in Nigeria's most affected regions- northwest and north-central (Okoli and Ogayi, 2018).

Drivers of Armed Banditry

Several factors are responsible for armed banditry in border communities between Nigeria-Niger republic corridors in katsina state, and they include:

Unemployment and poverty: Okolo (2010) states that it is no longer news that unemployment factor in Nigeria is very high leading to criminality. However, according to Nigeria Bureau of statistics unemployment rose to all time from 13% in 2015 to 33.3% in 2022. Nigeria is plagued with socioeconomic issues such as widespread corruption, pervasive unemployment, and cybercrime among youths. One prominent factor responsible for this is poverty. To be specific, a puzzling proportion of the Nigerian population lives in extreme poverty. Having recently overtaken India to be the poverty capital of the world, Nigeria has the highest number of poor people on the African continent. As reported by the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2021), 82.9 million (i.e., 40.1%) Nigerians live in severe poverty as of 2021, and 4 of every 10 Nigerians live on below \$360 annually. The implications of poverty in Nigeria have been extensive with effects on cyber-crime proliferation, unemployment, malnutrition, and hunger.

Ungoverned Spaces: In the North, crime thrives in remote locations where the presence of government is not registered such that there is little deterrence and abounding opportunities for criminal activity. Most of the Northwest communities or households are in some cases separated by, and interspersed with, forest areas. This renders them vulnerable to banditry. This situation is made worse by the absence of effective community policing mechanisms capable of addressing the hinterlands' peculiar security challenges. The state security machinery has so far failed to tackle the

scourge of banditry due to lack of political will, lack of collaborative efforts and operational challenges (Usman, et al., 2020).

Arms Proliferation in Exchange for Gold: The international dimension of foreigners exchanging arms for gold evolved many warlords in Zamfara and this further exacerbate the already precarious situation. This development has forced the hands of both state and federal government to evolve a platform of buying off the mined gold from the illegal artisanal miners rather than having it exchanged for arms which further raised the security level of the already fragile region, (Usman, et al., 2020).

Lack of Institutional Capacity Resulting to Government Failure: Fukuyama (2004) described this as the corrosion or breakdown of institutional infrastructures. The foundation of institutional framework in Nigeria is very shaky and have provoked a deterioration of state governance and democratic accountability, thus, paralyzing the existing set of constraints including the formal and legitimate rules vested in the hierarchy of social order. The rise in the rate of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria is linked to government failure especially between the windows of study, (Usman et al, 2020).

Proliferation of Arms and military Uniform: The proliferation of arms as a result of political patronage of miscreants, who were dumped after elections by the politicians, may indirectly encourage and enhance kidnapping. Some politicians normally employ idle youths as political thugs and provided them with arms and ammunitions during electioneering period. Therefore, after winning or losing election, as the case may be, the politicians abandon the youths and the next strategy by the youths is how to use the weapons or ammunitions in their possession to kidnap innocent citizens and the relatives of those they perceive are wealthy. More so, that some of the thugs use fake army uniform as a camouflage to deceive unsuspecting victims pretending as if they are real army officers before carrying out their notorious activities.

Weak Governance and Corruption: Weak state institutions, poor governance, and endemic corruption have significantly eroded public trust in the government's ability to maintain security and justice. These factors undermine the effectiveness of state institutions, erode public trust in the government, and create the conditions under which criminality can flourish. When state authority is absent or dysfunctional, non-state actors, including bandit groups, often step in to fill the power vacuum, frequently imposing their own rules and systems of control over rural communities. The absence of effective law enforcement and judicial mechanisms creates a vacuum often filled by bandits, who exploit this power gap to establish control over rural territories (Bello et al., 2022).

Proliferation of Small Arms and Border Porosity: The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs), coupled with Nigeria's porous borders, play a significant role in fueling armed banditry across the country. The widespread availability of illicit weapons has escalated the scale and intensity of violence, enabling bandit groups to conduct coordinated attacks, sustain criminal networks, and challenge the authority of state security forces. This situation is exacerbated by weak border management and insufficient surveillance across Nigeria's vast and often unmonitored frontier zones. According to Akinyetun and Bakare (2022), most weapons used by bandit groups in northern Nigeria are smuggled through the porous borders shared with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design with a mixed-method of data collection which combined both quantitative and qualitative data. The study focused on three (3) local governments in Katsina State, Nigeria. These include Jibia Local Government Area, Batsari Local Government Area, and Safana Local Government Area. These three local government Areas are the major hotspots where banditry activities are very high in the boarder communities between Nigeria and Niger Republic in Katsina State, Nigeria. the population of the study was 930,900 drawn from the three LGAs as follows: Jibia 299200, Batsari 326000 and Safana 305700. A sample of 384 respondents was selected using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling method and purposive sampling technique was used to select farmers who were affected by the armed banditry and those that were internally displaced. Using a

proportional representation, 123 respondents from Jibia were selected which constituted 32%, 134 respondents from Batsari were selected which constituted 35% and 127 respondents from Safana were represented which constituted 33% of the total sample size.

The data was systematically gathered through the administration of structured questionnaires and In-depth Interviews (IDI) guide. The quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Statistical tools such as percentages, frequency counts, mean, and standard deviation were employed. Decision rule applied was that any mean response greater than or equal to 2.5 was considered accepted or adjudged as 'agree,' while any mean response lower than 2.5 is rejected or adjudged as 'disagree.' On the other hand, a hybrid approach involving both thematic analysis and content analysis was adopted for the qualitative data gathered from In-depth Interviews (IDI).

Results:

Data presentation of the major drivers of armed banditry in border communities in Katsina State is presented in the table below.

Research Question 1: *What are the major drivers of armed banditry in border communities in Katsina State?*

Item	Jibia							Safana							sari						
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	S.E Mean	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	S.E Mean	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	S.E Mean
Poverty	0	0	4	21	75	4.71	0.05374	2	6	4	17	66	4.4632	0.10129	1	6	5	22	65	4.4545	0.09224
Porous borders	1	0	3	31	64	4.5859	0.06581	3	2	17	44	29	3.9895	0.09523	3	0	17	34	45	4.1919	0.0938
Local grievances	0	0	3	33	62	4.602	0.05569	1	7	25	34	28	3.8526	0.09923	2	1	9	34	53	4.3636	0.08549
Proliferation of arms	0	0	4	34	62	4.58	0.05717	4	14	16	26	34	3.766	0.12512	0	5	6	29	58	4.4286	0.08332
Corruption among security agencies	0	0	2	20	78	4.76	0.0474	4	9	8	8	69	4.3163	0.12101	2	3	11	17	66	4.4343	0.09541
Unemployment	0	0	2	33	65	4.63	0.05252	5	1	8	42	42	4.1735	0.10052	2	0	5	29	63	4.5253	0.07777
Weak security institutions	0	0	7	45	46	4.398	0.06279	0	10	23	37	28	3.8469	0.0966	0	10	11	35	44	4.13	0.09708
Collapse of traditional value system and institution	0	0	8	52	40	4.32	0.06176	1	15	22	25	37	3.82	0.11226	0	5	10	33	52	4.32	0.08514
Severe impacts of climate change	0	1	6	40	52	4.4444	0.06614	4	7	18	38	33	3.89	0.10721	3	1	7	48	41	4.23	0.08629
Bad governance	0	0	9	32	58	4.4949	0.06638	9	9	28	21	29	3.5417	0.12988	7	2	20	16	53	4.0816	0.1228
Politicization of banditry by elites	0	0	10	41	49	4.39	0.06651	7	6	26	27	33	3.7374	0.11977	2	0	21	28	49	4.22	0.09165
Banditry activities are rewarding	2	0	10	41	46	4.303	0.08179	8	8	8	24	52	4.04	0.12864	4	2	7	34	53	4.3	0.09796

Source: Researcher's Field Survey 2025

Key: All mean values are above 2.5 threshold

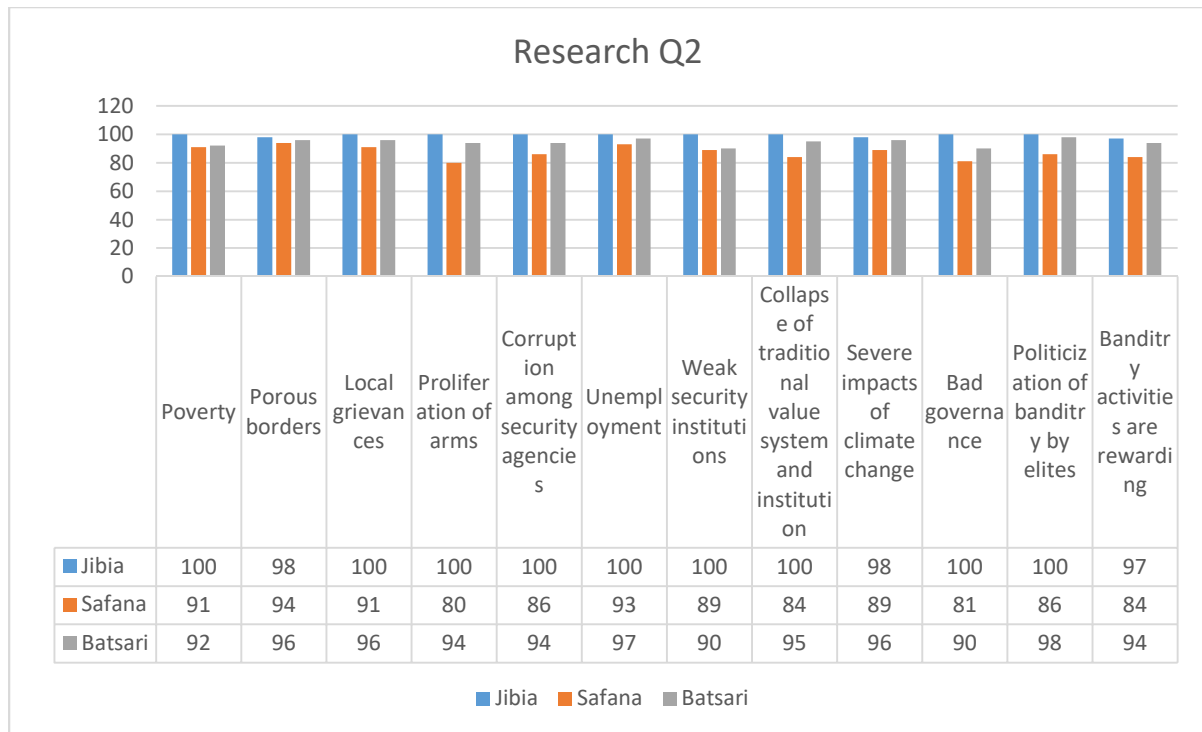


Fig.1: Bar chart illustration of the drivers of armed banditry attacks on border communities of Kasina state: Jibia, Batsari, and Safana LGAs.

On the drivers of armed banditry in the study areas, this study identifies both structural and proximate causes of banditry, with notable variation across communities. Poverty emerges as a unanimously recognized driver across all three communities Jibia:, Safana , and Batsari; suggesting widespread belief that economic deprivation fuels recruitment into banditry. Corruption among security agencies scored exceptionally high - Jibia, Batsari, Safana , indicating deep mistrust in state security apparatus and suggesting that corruption enables banditry because of compromised law enforcement.

The data suggests communities view banditry partly as economically motivated crime born from lack of legitimate opportunities. Porous borders also received strong affirmation (Jibia, Batsari, and Safana) revealing concerns about cross-border movement of arms, bandits, and stolen goods between Nigeria and Niger Republic. Proliferation of arms and weak security institutions also scored high across the three communities, indicating institutional failures in weapons control and security provision.

That "banditry activities are highly rewarding" returned moderately high average scores of 4.04-4.30 in the boarder Local Government Areas in Katsina State, suggesting communities recognize the rational economic considerations armed bandits make when legitimate alternatives are absent. From the results, it was also found from the result that "Climate change impacts" and "collapse of traditional value systems" point to deeper socio-environmental transformations. Climate change heightens resource competition, creating tensions which bandits exploit.

The lower scores for "politicization of banditry by elites" in Safana compared to Jibia and Batsari may reflect different local political dynamics or awareness levels.

Interviews conducted further conform to the findings on the drivers of banditry. A Farmer in Jibia (Male, 60): stated that "Bandits have sophisticated weapons and the army are apparently in the

know of that, hence when the army comes, the bandits disappear into the forest, and nothing happens. The bandits know the forest better.” This narrative supports the quantitative finding on weak security institutions and proliferation of arms.

The voices of IDPs, farmers, and traders revealed that banditry is more than a security problem, it is a symptom of a profound socio-economic and governance crisis. The drivers of banditry are not isolated factors but links in a vicious, self-reinforcing chain.

Discussions of Findings

Drivers of Armed Banditry in Border Communities between Nigeria – Niger Republic Corridors, Katsina State

The findings reveal a convergence of structural, institutional, and socio-political drivers underpinning armed banditry in the border communities of Jibia, Safana, and Batsari in Katsina State. Overall, respondents across the three LGAs expressed high levels of agreement that banditry is not the product of a single cause, but rather the outcome of mutually reinforcing vulnerabilities.

Poverty and unemployment emerged as the most consistent and strongly endorsed drivers across all three communities. This finding supports that structural violence and relative deprivation perspectives, which posit that persistent economic exclusion and livelihood insecurity create fertile ground for criminal violence (Gurr, 1970; Sen, 2008). In agrarian border communities where livelihoods depend heavily on farming and pastoralism, economic shocks intensify youth vulnerability to recruitment into bandit networks (Okoli & Agada, 2014; World Bank, 2020).

Closely related to economic deprivation is the perception that banditry is materially rewarding, with high mean scores across the LGAs. This aligns with rational choice and criminal economy frameworks, which argue that where illicit activities offer higher and more predictable returns than lawful livelihoods, violence becomes a rational survival strategy (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Lacher, 2020). The entrenchment of cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, and arms trafficking have transformed banditry into a lucrative informal economy.

Porous borders and the proliferation of small arms were also identified as critical enablers, especially that the communities have proximity to international and inter-state transit routes. This reinforce existing evidence that weak border governance facilitates the movement of fighters, weapons, and illicit goods across Nigeria’s northwestern frontiers (Small Arms Survey, 2018; UNODC, 2021). The Sahelian arms glut following the Libyan crisis has further exacerbated local conflict dynamics (McGregor, 2017). In-depth Interviews conducted further conform to the findings on the drivers of banditry. A Farmer in Jibia (Male, 60): stated that "Bandits have sophisticated weapons and the army are apparently in the know of that, hence when the army comes, the bandits disappear into the forest, and nothing happens. The bandits know the forest better.” This narrative supports the quantitative finding on weak security institutions and proliferation of arms.

The findings further underscored the salience of corruption among security agencies and weak security institutions, which recorded some of the highest mean scores. This reflects widespread community perceptions that security failures are not merely capacity-related but are also driven by compromised integrity and collusion with criminal actors. Similar studies argue that corruption erodes public trust, undermines intelligence sharing, and creates operational loopholes that armed groups exploit (Aning & Abdallah, 2013; Transparency International, 2022).

Local grievances and the collapse of traditional value systems and institutions were also strongly emphasized. The erosion of customary conflict-resolution mechanisms and traditional authority structures has reduced communal capacity to manage farmer–herder disputes and intergroup tensions, allowing grievances to escalate into organized violence. This corroborates the social disorganization thesis, which links the breakdown of informal social control to increased criminality (Shaw & McKay, 1942; Mustapha, 2019).

Environmental stressors, especially the severe impacts of climate change, recorded high mean scores across the LGAs. Respondents associated desertification, shrinking grazing lands, and resource scarcity with heightened competition and conflict. This finding aligns with the eco-violence and climate–security literature, which identifies climate-induced livelihood pressures as threat multipliers that intensify existing socio-economic and security fragilities in the Sahel and northern Nigeria (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Ide et al., 2021).

Bad governance and the politicization of banditry were widely acknowledged, though with some variation across communities. The relatively lower means in Safana suggest differences in local political dynamics, yet the overall pattern confirms arguments that elite manipulation, selective enforcement, and the instrumentalization of armed groups for political ends contribute to the persistence of violence (Kalyvas, 2006; International Crisis Group, 2020).

In sum, the findings demonstrated that armed banditry in boarder communities between Nigeria and Niger Republic corridors, Katsina State is driven by complex interaction of poverty, unemployment, lucrative criminal economies, weak and corrupt security institutions, porous borders, environmental stress, and governance failures. These results are consistent with broader empirical and theoretical literature on insecurity in fragile societies.

Conclusion

The study concluded that armed banditry is driven by a convergence of mutually reinforcing factors. Poverty, unemployment, and the collapse of rural livelihoods provide a recruitment base, while the perceived profitability of banditry sustains participation. These structural drivers are amplified by porous borders, the proliferation of small arms, corruption within security institutions, weak state presence, and environmental stress linked to climate change. The erosion of traditional institutions and local conflict-resolution mechanisms has further reduced communities' capacity to manage grievances, allowing violence to escalate and normalize.

Recommendations

- i. The newly established Forest Guards by the Federal Government should be properly deployed, equipped and strengthened to effectively guard the forests and the ungoverned spaces in the Country.
- ii. Nigeria and Niger Republic should establish a Multi-National Joint Boarder Protection Force (MNJBPF). The MNJBPF should be professionally trained, properly equipped, and strictly regulated to ensure effective boarder security, which would have a multiple impact on many drivers of banditry including arms proliferations.
- iii. Government should prioritize investment in rural infrastructure and agricultural value chains through improved rural roads, storage facilities, irrigation systems, and processing centers which can help farmers reduce post-harvest losses and increase the profitability of agricultural activities and consequently reduced poverty and unemployment, even in challenging environments.

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