



Unpacking the Socio-Economic Consequences of Banditry and Kidnapping in North-West Nigeria, 2015–2025

*Zainab Sindigawo Mohammed (Ph.D.)

Research and Statistics Department, Nigeria Revenue Services (NRS), Abuja, Nigeria.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.22278814](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22278814)

Submission Date: 02 July 2026 | Published Date: 03 Sept. 2026

Abstract

This study examines the socio-economic consequences of banditry and kidnapping in North-West Nigeria between 2015 and 2025, a period marked by the region's transformation into one of the country's most volatile security theatres. Adopting an interpretivist, qualitative research philosophy, the study draws on secondary data from policy briefs, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed literature, analysed through thematic content analysis. Anchored in Frustration-Aggression Theory and Social Disorganization Theory, the paper traces the prevalence and evolution of banditry and kidnapping within national and regional contexts, interrogates their root causes, and unpacks their multidimensional socio-economic effects. Findings show that persistent insecurity has triggered the collapse of agricultural livelihoods, mass internal displacement, the erosion of communal trust, deepening household poverty from ransom payments, weak governance and security gaps, and a significant loss of human capital through school closures and the killing or displacement of teachers. Zamfara State emerges as a particularly instructive case, with government and independent data pointing to thousands of abductions and substantial ransom payments between 2020 and 2025. The study concludes that military and reactive security measures alone have proven insufficient, and recommends an integrated response combining agricultural livelihood restoration, support for displaced persons, household-level social protection, and expanded psychosocial support, alongside sustained governance reform to address the structural drivers of insecurity in North-West Nigeria.

Keywords: banditry; kidnapping; socio-economic impact; North-West Nigeria; Zamfara State; insecurity; human capital.

Introduction

Banditry and kidnapping, once localized threats, have evolved into a global security challenge that transcends national borders and grows in complexity and scale. Historically associated with conflict zones or politically motivated rebellions, these crimes have increasingly become a dominant form of organized violence, primarily driven by economic incentives (UNODC, 2021). Nations across different continents have witnessed the devastating impacts of these criminal enterprises, which not only inflict immense human suffering but also destabilize national economies, dismantle local trade networks, and trigger mass internal displacement (González & Rodríguez, 2016). Oyedekun (2025) revealed that the global kidnap-for-ransom industry generates billions of dollars annually. This is mirrored in the case of Nigeria: SBM Intelligence, as reported in BusinessDay, estimated that ₦2.56 billion - approximately \$1.75 million - was paid in ransom between July 2024 and June 2025. More strikingly, the National Bureau of Statistics' Crime Experience and Security Perception Report, 2024, as reported by The Cable, estimated that ₦2.2 trillion was paid as ransom nationally during the reference period, January to December 2024 (Ojewale & Osasona, 2024). This creates a powerful illicit economy that directly undermines state authority, particularly in regions where government presence is tenuous and institutional capacity is weak (Bello-Schünemann & Moyer, 2018).

As revealed globally, in Africa this phenomenon presents an equally alarming picture. Countries within the Sahel and Central Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic, and Somalia, have long grappled with armed groups involved in rural banditry, kidnapping, and cattle rustling. These criminal activities have severely hampered agricultural production, disrupted local economies, and forced entire communities to flee their homes

(OECD, 2020). In the DRC, armed militias routinely kidnap civilians for ransom, leading to food insecurity and poverty in rural provinces (Human Rights Watch, 2021). These patterns of violence have found strong roots in West Africa, where porous borders, weak institutions, and ethnic tensions have enabled armed groups to thrive. Countries like Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali have seen an increase in kidnapping incidents, often linked to bandit groups or extremist insurgents (ECOWAS, 2019).

Although the African continent as a whole suffers the effects of banditry and kidnapping, in Nigeria the problem has taken a particularly disturbing dimension. While no fully reliable source confirms a single first instance, some of the earliest identifiable phases of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria include pre-colonial and colonial-era abductions and ritual practices; post-colonial political kidnappings, such as the Umaru Dikko affair; the rise of Niger Delta militancy and increasingly routine ransom kidnappings through the 2000s; and, more recently, the spread of mass school abductions, exemplified by the 2014 Chibok abduction.

Today, Northern Nigeria, particularly the North-West, has become a hotspot for banditry and kidnapping. The rise of banditry in Northwest Nigeria has emerged as a significant threat to regional security, posing severe challenges to governance, public safety, and socio-economic stability (Rufus & Ogbe, 2024). The crimes are most intense in North-Western states such as Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto where criminal gangs operate from forested areas often beyond the reach of security forces (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). There is broad consensus among scholars that bandits are the various organized criminal groups operating mainly in Nigeria's North-West region. Driven primarily by economic imperatives, these criminal groups have, over the last decade, indiscriminately attacked rural communities, commuters, and security agencies in the region (Ojewale & Osasona, 2024). This reading is consistent with broader assessments of the phenomenon as, at its core, a governance and security-sector failure rather than a transient criminal anomaly (Ibrahim, 2021; Buhari, 2022). The socio-economic cost of this violence is immense: farmers abandon their lands out of fear of attack, schools shut down after mass abductions of students, and road transport is frequently disrupted by kidnappings along highways. Ransom payments have become a booming underground economy, fuelling further violence and undermining public confidence in government.

Zamfara State located in North Western Nigeria, shares boundaries with Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger and Kaduna States and is relatively close to Nigeria's international border with Niger Republic (FGN. 2025). Zamfara State was the most dangerous state in Nigeria in 2024, according to Nigeria Watch, with 19.52 fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants, primarily due to banditry (Nigerian Watch, 2024). European Union Agency for Asylum analysis based on publicly available ACLED data revealed that security incidents were recorded in all 14 LGAs of the state, with the highest number documented in Tsafe (145), followed by Gusau (91), Maru (82), Zurmi (68) and Kaura Namoda (66) (EUAA, 2025). EUAA further stated that, Zamfara communal militias were involved in the majority of incidents coded as violence against civilians. All these have made economic activities, particularly farming and petty trading, drastically declined in affected communities as residents flee to safer areas, driving rising unemployment and food insecurity. This study therefore examines the profound, multi-dimensional socio-economic consequences of persistent insecurity in North-West Nigeria, revealing how fragile institutions and porous borders intensify the threat.

Statement of the Research Problem

Over the past decade, North-West Nigeria has witnessed an alarming rise in incidents of banditry and kidnapping, with devastating consequences for its socio-economic development. These security threats have not only led to significant loss of life and property but have also displaced thousands of residents, disrupted agricultural activities, hindered education, and strained local economies. The National Bureau of Statistics, in its 2023 report on internally displaced persons in Nigeria, found that of an IDP population of 1,134,828 persons across 251,082 displaced households, 1.6 percent cited banditry and kidnapping as their major source of displacement (NBS, 2024). Furthermore, the National Bureau of Statistics' Crime Experience and Security Perception Report, 2024, as reported by The Cable, indicated that Nigeria recorded a total of 2.23 million kidnapping incidents, with 63.5 percent occurring in the North-West geopolitical zone (Ojewale & Osasona, 2024). This persistent insecurity has particularly affected rural communities where farming and small-scale trading, the mainstay of local livelihoods, have become dangerous and unsustainable (International Crisis Group, 2021).

While national and state governments have implemented various security interventions, including deploying military and police forces to high-risk areas, these efforts have not yielded lasting results. Instead, violence has spread to previously safe zones, undermining economic stability and weakening social trust. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), the trauma from repeated attacks and abductions has left deep psychological scars on victims and community members, further affecting productivity and societal cohesion.

Existing literature on insecurity in Nigeria has largely focused on the Boko Haram insurgency, with comparatively limited attention paid to banditry and kidnapping, particularly in Zamfara State. Although some studies have examined the causes and patterns of these crimes (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019), there is insufficient empirical research on how this

insecurity specifically affects the socio-economic well-being of local populations over time, and a corresponding lack of longitudinal analysis capturing the trend and implications of these criminal activities from 2015 to 2025.

This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed examination of the socio-economic impact of banditry and kidnapping in North-West Nigeria over a ten-year period (2015–2025). It assesses not only the economic losses but also the broader effects on education, agriculture, social infrastructure, and livelihoods. By adopting a holistic, evidence-based approach, the study offers insights that can inform policy and community-level responses.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to unpack the socio-economic impact of banditry and kidnapping in North-West Nigeria between 2015 and 2025, by analyzing their prevalence, root causes, effects on development, and the effectiveness of existing interventions.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. explore the prevalence and trends of banditry and kidnapping in North-West Nigeria within a broader national and international context;
2. examine the socio-economic impact of banditry and kidnapping in North-West Nigeria;
3. identify and analyze the causes of banditry and kidnapping in North-West Nigeria; and
4. evaluate the conceptual frameworks relevant to the socio-economic implications of insecurity in Northern Nigeria.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study is geographically focused on North-West Nigeria, with particular emphasis on Zamfara State as an illustrative case, and covers the ten-year period between 2015 and 2025. It is conceptually limited to the socio-economic consequences of banditry and kidnapping, rather than their military, criminological, or international security dimensions, which fall outside its immediate scope. Methodologically, the study relies on secondary data drawn from institutional reports, government statistics, and peer-reviewed literature; it does not generate new primary or field data, and its conclusions are therefore bounded by the quality, consistency, and reporting periods of the sources reviewed. Given the fluid and often contested nature of casualty, displacement, and ransom figures in Nigeria's security reporting, the statistics cited throughout should be read as indicative of scale and trend rather than as precise counts.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to a growing but still fragmented body of literature on non-insurgent insecurity in Nigeria by offering an integrated, decade-long thematic account of the socio-economic consequences of banditry and kidnapping in the North-West, with particular emphasis on Zamfara State. Where much existing scholarship treats banditry primarily as a security or criminological problem, this study foregrounds its developmental dimensions - agriculture, education, human capital, gender, and household welfare - thereby broadening the analytical lens available to policymakers. The findings are expected to inform the design of security-sensitive development interventions by federal and state governments, humanitarian and donor agencies, and community-based organizations, while also providing an evidence base for future longitudinal and quantitative research on the economics of insecurity in Nigeria's North-West.

Methodology

This study is guided by an interpretivist research philosophy and is qualitative in nature. The interpretivist approach is suitable because the focus is on how these security challenges shape socio-economic realities in North-West Nigeria. By examining multiple perspectives from existing studies, reports, and policy documents, this philosophy helps capture the complexity of poverty, displacement, and livelihood collapse linked to insecurity.

Secondary data were drawn from credible institutions, including policy briefs and reports from the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), UNDP, FAO, International Crisis Group (ICG), and Human Rights Watch. Books and peer-reviewed journal articles offering historical and regional perspectives on the socio-economic impact of banditry and kidnapping were also consulted. These materials formed the evidence base for identifying key themes and drawing conclusions. Thematic content analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, gaps, and themes across the previously published works reviewed.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts both Frustration-Aggression Theory and Social Disorganization Theory, both of which are considered relevant to the phenomenon under study.

Frustration-Aggression Theory was originally proposed by Dollard et al. (1939) and further expanded by Leonard Berkowitz (1989). The theory argues that aggression is often the result of frustration caused by blocked goals or unmet needs. In the context of North-West Nigeria, rising unemployment, poverty, inequality, and limited access to basic services may generate frustrations that fuel violent crimes such as banditry and kidnapping. Many perpetrators are reportedly young men with limited education or economic opportunity, consistent with the idea that socio-economic

frustration can translate into aggression against others or society (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). This theory helps explain how structural socio-economic conditions such as neglect, corruption, and marginalization create fertile ground for violent acts, and provides insight into why areas with chronic poverty and weak governance tend to experience more security challenges. The Frustration-Aggression Theory is therefore relevant to analyzing how socio-economic factors escalate insecurity in Zamfara State and the wider North-West.

Social Disorganization Theory, developed by Shaw and McKay (1942), suggests that crime rates are higher in communities with weak social institutions, poor housing, economic deprivation, and low social cohesion. In Zamfara State, especially in rural and semi-urban areas affected by banditry, weakened community structures and a limited government presence have contributed to insecurity and lawlessness. The breakdown of traditional authority, inadequate policing, and distrust in the justice system provide an enabling environment for criminal networks to thrive (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Social Disorganization Theory therefore helps explain how environmental and institutional weaknesses contribute to the rise and persistence of banditry and kidnapping.

Thematic Review of Literature

The paper identifies relevant themes in line with its objectives, reviewed accordingly below.

Prevalence and Trends of Banditry and Kidnapping in the North-West within a Broader National and Regional Context

Banditry in Nigeria, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions, intensified after 2011. Research by Okoli and Ugwu (2019) documents how ungoverned forest zones, border porosity, and high youth unemployment enabled gangs to grow into territorial enclaves. ACLED data show over 2,600 civilian deaths in 2021 from bandit violence, with hundreds of thousands displaced across states such as Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Niger (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; ACLED, 2023). Kidnapping evolved into a systematic revenue stream: between 2011 and 2020, Nigerians paid at least ₦18 billion in ransoms (Aleyomi & Olajubu, 2024).

Livelihoods suffered dramatically. Faruk and Abdullahi (2022) document how, in Katsina State, agriculture, schooling, market activity, and food security collapsed in affected local government areas, alongside rising unemployment and poverty. Women, especially, bore disproportionate socio-economic costs in frontier local government areas (Abdulrasheed & Mumuni, 2024).

Zamfara was among the earliest and most severely affected states. In May 2024, armed men attacked Bilbis in Tsafe LGA and three villages in Birnin Magaji LGA, resulting in 20 deaths and seven injuries. Over 100 people were abducted for ransom (BAMF, May 2024). In December 2024, unidentified men raided Kakin Dawa village in the Maradun LGA, abducting over 50 women and children (BAMF, December 2024). The International Crisis Group also reported that in May 2025, an armed group killed four women and abducted 20 residents in Kaura Namoda LGA (ICG, 2025). Several factors explain this persistence. The large, forested, and remote terrain and porous borders of the North-West create safe havens, while bandit groups have developed strong loyalty networks with access to gold and cattle revenues that enable them to finance arms and operations (ACLED, 2023; Kleffman et al., 2024). Ransoms create powerful incentives: mass abductions yield large returns, schools are soft targets, and weak law enforcement enables continued profitability.

States have deployed security forces, formed local vigilante units, declared amnesties, banned motorcycles, and negotiated with bandit leaders. However, Mohammed (2025) criticizes Nigerian security responses as reactionary, fragmented, poorly funded, and undermined by corruption. Amnesty deals have often reintegrated bandits who subsequently returned to crime; anti-motorcycle bans disrupted rural transport but failed to restrict movement through bush paths. Economic and social root causes - youth unemployment, poverty, and land scarcity - remain largely unaddressed (Mbam et al., 2024).

Table 1: Prevalence and Trends of Banditry and Kidnapping in the North-West within a Broader National and Regional Context

Category	Key Evidence / Indicators	Source(s)
Drivers / Root Causes	Ungoverned forested terrain, porous state and international borders, and high youth unemployment, which allowed criminal gangs to develop into territorial enclaves.	Okoli & Ugwu (2019)
Banditry Dynamics	Escalation of banditry after 2011; over 2,600 civilian deaths recorded in 2021 alone, with hundreds of thousands displaced across Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Niger States.	ACLED (2023); Okoli & Ugwu (2019)
Socio-Economic	Kidnapping evolved into a systematic revenue stream; at least ₦18	Aleyomi & Olajubu

Category	Key Evidence / Indicators	Source(s)
Impacts	billion was paid in ransoms nationally between 2011 and 2020, with disproportionate costs borne by women in frontier local government areas.	(2024); Abdulrasheed & Mumuni (2024)
Responses & Challenges	State responses — security deployment, amnesty programmes, and motorcycle bans — have been criticised as reactionary, fragmented, and undermined by corruption, with unresolved youth unemployment, poverty, and land scarcity.	Mohammed (2025); Mbam et al. (2024)

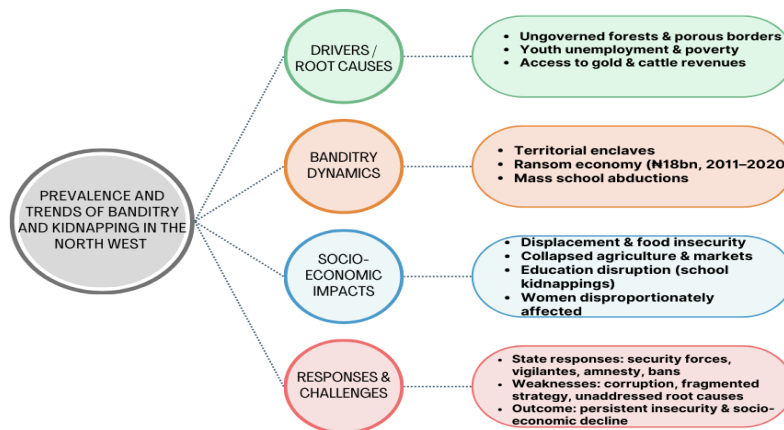


Figure 1. Prevalence and trends of banditry and kidnapping in the North-West within a broader national and regional context, categorized into drivers/root causes, banditry dynamics, socio-economic impacts, and responses & challenges.

Causes of Banditry and Kidnapping in North-West Nigeria

In recent years, scholars have consistently identified poverty, unemployment, economic hardship, and weak governance as key root causes of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria's North-West. Onabanjo and Kugbayi (2024) link poor governance and endemic poverty to the upsurge of armed banditry across rural Nigeria. Baduku (2024) likewise stresses that kidnapping in Nigeria is largely driven by socioeconomic deprivation and greed, with individuals motivated by material gain amid poverty and joblessness. This aligns with earlier evidence linking youth unemployment directly to rising crime rates in Nigeria, which identified unemployment among young people as one of the strongest predictors of criminal involvement, including violent crime (Adebayo, 2013). Together, these studies argue that without improved governance and expanded economic opportunity, banditry remains an economically rational activity for disenfranchised youth.

Abdussalam et al. (2022) document how banditry significantly disrupted rural livelihoods in Kaduna, halting weekly markets, displacing farmers, and curtailing access to social services - effects tied directly to pervasive poverty and unemployment. Yunusa and Saleh Dawakin Tofa's (2024) sociological investigation among 1,000 residents across affected communities found that drug abuse and peer influence correlate strongly with youth involvement in armed banditry (factor loadings of 0.92 and 0.91 respectively), while governance lapses, such as weakened traditional institutions, scored 0.79. A geospatial analysis of kidnapping in Igabi Local Government Area revealed a rising trend of about 44.3 additional kidnapping cases per year and identified the leading social causes as lack of education, religious and ethnic intolerance, poverty and unemployment, and infrastructural decay (Geospatial Analysis of Kidnapping in Igabi LGA, 2024). Together, this evidence provides a clear statistical link between poverty, governance failures, education gaps, and institutional vacuum on the one hand, and banditry in the North-West on the other.

Some scholars caution against overly simplistic causality. Wider structural factors, such as cross-border porosity and environmental degradation, also play enabling roles: porous borders facilitate arms smuggling and the movement of criminal groups, while desertification and farmer–herder conflict widen competition for scarce resources (Okorie et al., 2023; Erundu & Nwakanma, 2018; Garba, 2021). These elements suggest that even where poverty is addressed, geopolitical and ecological stressors may continue to sustain violence.

Despite heavy security deployment, many authors note that military and reactive strategies alone have had limited success, partly because they ignore root socioeconomic drivers. Nchom (2024) and Ojem et al. (2024) argue that heavy-handed tactics, applied without community engagement and development planning, help explain persistent insecurity in Zamfara State. This critique implies that unless banditry is addressed in conjunction with poverty reduction, education, infrastructure development, and inter-communal dialogue, arrests or the use of force will yield only short-lived results.

Nevertheless, proponents of the socioeconomic thesis argue that holistic interventions combining governance reform, youth employment, education, local dialogue, and poverty alleviation have shown promise. Onabanjo and Kugbayi (2024) urge that governance reform and poverty reduction be placed at the centre of national development and security policy. Some commentators, however, caution against reducing banditry solely to economic motives, arguing that heavy reliance on non-kinetic or dialogue-based approaches can appear “soft on crime” and delay urgent security responses, and that immediate military or police action remains necessary to protect lives and restore order in the near term.

The literature, on balance, supports a multi-causal model: in Zamfara State and North-West Nigeria, poverty, unemployment, education exclusion, weak governance, drug abuse, and peer influence function as primary drivers of youth participation in kidnapping and banditry, while cross-border dynamics and environmental stressors play enabling roles. Critiques of militarized approaches remind policymakers that only integrated socio-economic strategies are likely to generate durable peace.

Table 2: Causes of Banditry and Kidnapping in North-West Nigeria

Thematic Category	Summary of Evidence	Source(s)
Poverty & Unemployment	Widely identified as the primary driver, with material deprivation and joblessness pushing disenfranchised youth toward banditry as an economically rational activity.	Onabanjo & Kugbayi (2024); Baduku (2024); Adebayo (2013)
Weak Governance	Weakened traditional institutions and governance lapses score highly (factor loading 0.79) among correlates of youth involvement in armed banditry.	Yunusa & Saleh Dawakin Tofa (2024)
Education Exclusion	Lack of education is identified as a leading social correlate of kidnapping incidence at the local government level.	Geospatial Analysis of Kidnapping in Igabi LGA (2024)
Drug Abuse & Peer Influence	A survey of 1,000 residents found drug abuse and peer influence to be the strongest correlates of youth involvement in armed banditry (factor loadings of 0.92 and 0.91).	Yunusa & Saleh Dawakin Tofa (2024)
Cross-Border Porosity & Environmental Stress	Porous borders facilitate arms smuggling, while desertification and farmer–herder competition over shrinking land widen resource conflict and enable violence to persist even where poverty is addressed.	Okorie et al. (2023); Erundu & Nwakanma (2018); Garba (2021)
Limits of Militarised Response	Heavy-handed military and reactive tactics, applied without community engagement or development planning, have shown limited and often short-lived success.	Nchom (2024); Ojem et al. (2024)

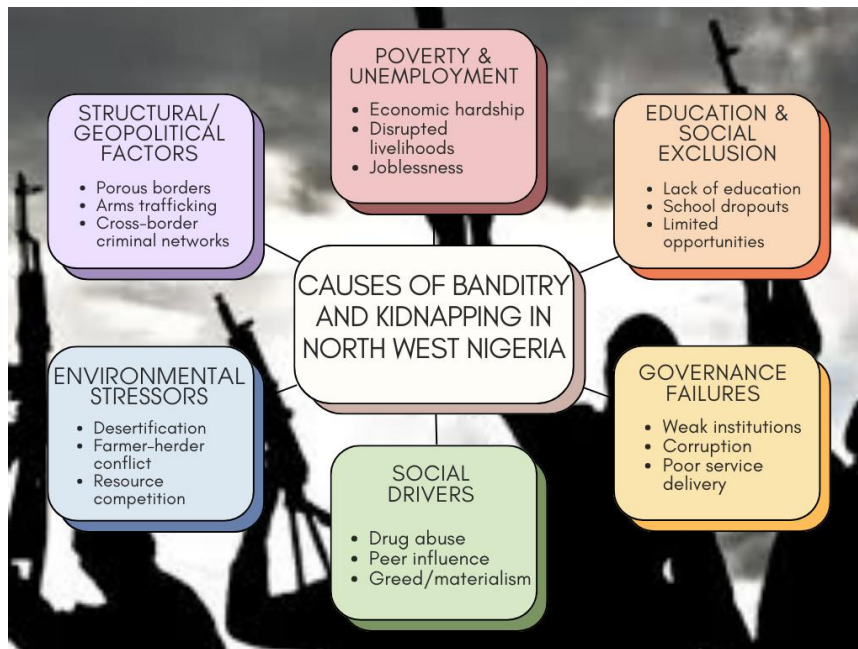


Figure 2. Visual presentation of the theme “Causes of Banditry and Kidnapping in North-West Nigeria,” categorized into six thematic sections.

Socio-Economic Impact of Banditry and Kidnapping in Zamfara State

Banditry and kidnapping inflict major economic damage. Researchers in Katsina-Ala report that commercial and agricultural activities are severely disrupted - markets shut down, farmers abandon their fields, and rural families migrate away, leading to widespread loss of income and declining food production (Usu et al., 2024). In Zamfara and neighbouring states, FAO-related data show food production fell by over 40 percent due to violence and cattle rustling, worsening food insecurity and diminishing livelihoods (Hendrix & Brinkman, 2020; FAO, 2022). Kidnapping also generates illicit revenue for perpetrators while draining victim families and communities: ransom payments deplete savings and divert funds away from investment, reducing agricultural output and discouraging investment more broadly (Sani & Mohammed, 2025). In Benue State, insecurity has led to statistically significant declines in crop and livestock output, with a 1 percent rise in insecurity correlating with 0.211 percent and 0.311 percent reductions in crop and livestock yields, respectively (Ijirshar et al., 2025).

Abdussalam et al. (2022) documented the suspension of weekly markets, abandonment of farms, and severe loss of rural income between 2016 and 2021, with regression analysis demonstrating that insecurity significantly stunted rural economic growth in the state. Media reports similarly confirm that fear of bandit attacks has caused widespread abandonment of farmland in Birnin Gwari, Giwa, and Chikun local government areas, disrupting food supply chains and raising food prices (Vanguard, 2023).

Studies also show that schools are regularly attacked, academic calendars suspended, and teachers and students displaced, undermining educational systems in affected states (Omuya, 2023). UNICEF warns that, following mass abductions including over 780 children in 2021, more than one million children may remain out of school due to insecurity (Africa at LSE, 2022). Women and girls suffer particularly acute harms: many are abducted, assaulted, or forced into exploitative situations when communities cannot pay bandit “levies,” and women’s livelihood sources - markets and farms - are frequently raided (Africa at LSE, 2022).

On one hand, scholars argue that root causes such as poverty, youth unemployment, drug abuse, and weak institutions and governance drive youth into banditry in Zamfara (Yunusa & Saleh Dawakin Tofa, 2024); indeed, the Zamfara State Governor has stated that over 85 percent of North-West residents are uneducated or financially excluded, a condition that fuels criminal recruitment (Sabi, 2024). On the other hand, critics caution against reducing banditry solely to economic motives, arguing that immediate military or police action remains necessary alongside any dialogue-based approach to protect lives and restore order.

The trauma of abduction and violence extends deeply into psychological wellbeing. A qualitative study of female undergraduates in Zamfara State who survived captivity found symptoms of PTSD, depression, anxiety, memory loss, poor concentration, social alienation, and stigma - all of which impeded reintegration and academic performance (Isma’il & Ibrahim, 2024). A broader survey of students across multiple states found that over 65 percent suffered concentration

problems and disruption to schoolwork, while 70 percent experienced heightened anxiety and fear, significantly undermining learning and motivation (Damilola & Omojemite, 2025).

Table 3: Socio-Economic Impact of Banditry and Kidnapping in Zamfara State

Impact Domain	Summary of Evidence	Source(s)
Agricultural & Economic Disruption	Markets shut down, farmers abandon fields, and rural households migrate away; food production in Zamfara and neighbouring states fell by over 40%, while in Benue State a 1% rise in insecurity correlates with 0.211% and 0.311% reductions in crop and livestock yields respectively.	Usu et al. (2024); FAO (2022); Ijirshar et al. (2025)
Educational Disruption	Schools are regularly attacked, academic calendars suspended, and teachers and students displaced; following mass abductions of over 780 children in 2021, more than one million children may remain out of school.	Omuya (2023); Africa at LSE (2022)
Gender-Specific Impacts	Women and girls are disproportionately affected — abducted, assaulted, or exploited when communities cannot pay bandit “levies,” and women-dominated markets and farms are frequently raided.	Africa at LSE (2022); Abdulrasheed & Mumuni (2024)
Psychological / Mental Health Impacts	Survivors of captivity report PTSD, depression, anxiety, memory loss and stigma; broader surveys found over 65% of students reported concentration problems and 70% reported heightened anxiety and fear.	Isma’il & Ibrahim (2024); Damilola & Omojemite (2025)
Governance & Household Burden	Over 85% of North-West residents are reported as uneducated or financially excluded, a condition linked to criminal recruitment; households resort to selling assets or high-interest borrowing to pay ransoms.	Sabiu (2024); Ajiboye et al. (2024)

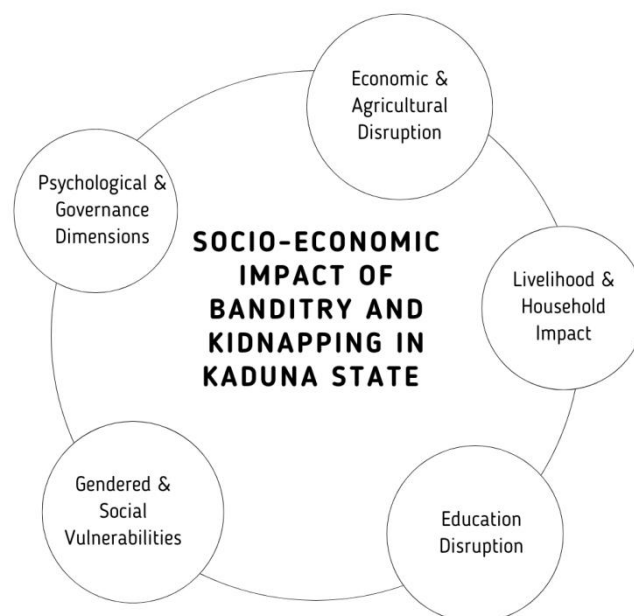


Figure 3. Socio-economic impact of banditry and kidnapping in Kaduna State, grouped into five thematic sections.

Interventions and Responses to Banditry and Kidnapping in Nigeria

Banditry and kidnapping have become persistent threats to security and development in Nigeria, prompting a range of interventions by government and non-government actors. Federal responses include military operations such as Operation Harbin Kunama, Operation Safe Haven, and Operation Puff Adder, deployed in affected northern states including Zamfara, Katsina, Niger, and Sokoto (ACLED, 2023). These operations aim to dismantle armed groups, restore public confidence, and secure rural communities. Additionally, the Nigerian Police Force has intensified intelligence gathering and deployed special tactical squads to flashpoints, while the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) supports community protection initiatives (CLEEN Foundation, 2021). At the policy level, the National Security Strategy (2019) emphasizes collaboration among security agencies, improved border surveillance, and addressing root causes such as poverty and unemployment.

Some states have implemented localized strategies. In Zamfara and Katsina, peace dialogues and amnesty programmes were initiated to disarm repentant bandits, although with mixed results due to a lack of coordination and trust (Okoli & Ugwu, 2020). Niger State has adopted a Community Policing model, empowering vigilante groups under a legal framework. Meanwhile, Borno and Yobe - though more commonly associated with insurgency - have adopted multi-sectoral responses involving youth empowerment and psychosocial support for victims of violence, helping to reduce community vulnerability (International Crisis Group, 2021). Despite these measures, operational challenges such as poor funding, weak intelligence networks, and corruption continue to limit the impact of interventions across the northern region.

Zamfara State remains one of the worst-hit by banditry and kidnapping, especially in local government areas such as Tsafe, Birnin Magaji, Maradun and Kaura Namoda. The state government aided vigilantes carried out an offensive on bandits, including government airstrikes (Nigerian Tribune, 2025). Regarding Lakurawa activity, the government also reportedly carried out raids on communities and counter-operations in 2024 (Nigerian Watch, 2025). Sources also reported security operations at various times which resulted abduction victims being released (Daily Post, 2025). However, despite these efforts, attacks continue due to porous forest routes, inadequate coordination among security forces, and the absence of strong community engagement. Meaningful progress will require strengthened civilian-military cooperation and development-oriented strategies that address local grievances directly (ACLED, 2023; CLEEN Foundation, 2021).

Table 4: Interventions and Responses to Banditry and Kidnapping in Nigeria

Category	Summary of Interventions	Source(s)
Federal Security Operations	Operation Harbin Kunama, Operation Safe Haven, and Operation Puff Adder deployed across Zamfara, Katsina, Niger and Kaduna States to dismantle armed groups and restore public confidence; intensified intelligence gathering by the Nigeria Police Force and community-protection support from the NSCDC.	ACLED (2023); CLEEN Foundation (2021)
State-Level Initiatives	Peace dialogues and amnesty programmes in Zamfara and Katsina; Niger State's Community Policing model; the Kaduna State Security Operations Room; and Operation Forest Sanity, launched in 2022 to target forest hideouts bordering Kaduna, Katsina and Niger.	Okoli & Ugwu (2020); Kaduna State Government (2022)
Challenges & Limitations	Poor funding, weak intelligence networks, corruption, porous forest routes, and inadequate coordination among security forces continue to blunt the impact of these interventions.	ACLED (2023); Mohammed (2025)
Recommendations & Way Forward	Strengthening civilian-military cooperation and integrating development-oriented strategies that directly address local grievances, rather than relying on kinetic operations alone.	ACLED (2023); CLEEN Foundation (2021)

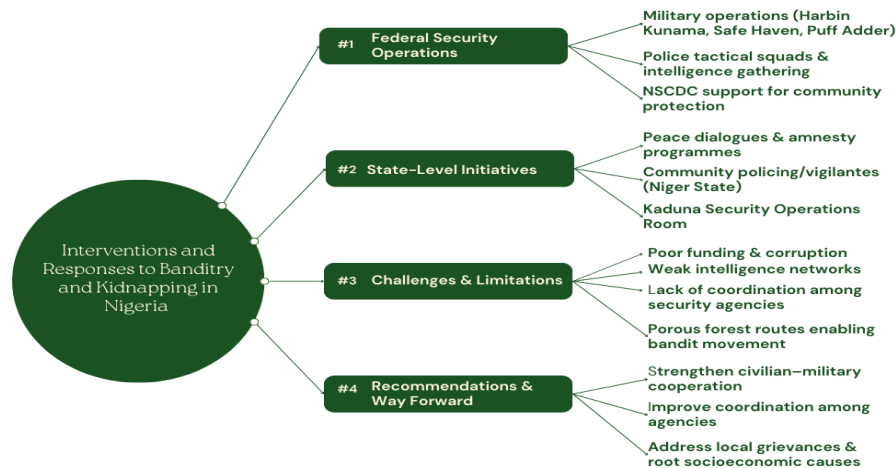


Figure 4. Interventions and responses to banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria, grouped into federal security operations, state-level initiatives, challenges & limitations, and recommendations & way forward.

Thematic Analysis of the Findings from the Literature Review

Theme 1: Agricultural Disruption and Livelihood Collapse

A major theme that emerges strongly from the literature is the severe disruption of agricultural activities and rural livelihoods. The North-West has witnessed a sharp decline in farming output due to persistent attacks by armed groups (Adetayo & Kingimi, 2024). Farmers are unable to access their lands for cultivation and harvest, and insecurity along roads has cut off markets for selling produce. These disruptions have led to higher food prices, increased rural poverty, and growing dependency on humanitarian assistance. The situation is not unique to Zamfara State, as similar patterns are observed in Sokoto and Katsina states, pointing to a regional collapse in agrarian productivity (FAO, 2022). The loss of access to grazing fields and trade routes has also significantly affected livestock farming, resulting in livelihood losses for herders and traders alike.

Theme 2: Internal Displacement and Urban Strain

Another important theme is forced displacement and the resulting social and economic strain on urban areas. Thousands of rural dwellers have fled their homes to escape attacks and kidnappings, contributing to rising populations in urban slums and informal settlements. Displacement often comes with the loss of property, farmland, and access to social services, placing an extra burden on receiving communities. The influx of displaced persons also overstretchers basic infrastructure and worsens unemployment, especially among youth previously engaged in farming or local businesses. This pattern of internal displacement contributes to urban insecurity, youth vulnerability, and increased social inequality (Kleffman et al., 2024).

Theme 3: Social Breakdown and Erosion of Communal Trust

The literature reveals that banditry has caused deep inter-communal tension, particularly between herders and farmers, and between local vigilante groups and suspected collaborators. The rise in kidnappings for ransom has bred widespread fear and distrust, affecting social cohesion (International Crisis Group, 2021). Many settlements, especially in rural Zamfara, have been abandoned due to repeated abductions (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Additionally, many families are forced to sell assets or incur debts to pay ransoms, worsening household poverty and inequality.

Theme 4: Household Poverty and Economic Burden

A closely related theme is the increasing financial pressure on households. Families of kidnap victims often resort to selling land, withdrawing children from school, or taking high-interest loans to pay ransoms. This not only deepens existing poverty but also reduces household resilience to future shocks. For low-income households, such sudden costs mean losing long-term assets and falling into chronic poverty (Ajiboye et al., 2024). Banditry also discourages both local and foreign investment in agriculture and rural industries, further undercutting efforts toward economic recovery and inclusive development (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Theme 5: Security Gaps and Weak Governance

An additional and crucial theme found across the literature is the failure of governance and the inadequacy of security responses. Many affected communities express frustration with delayed or absent state intervention. The inability of security forces to protect rural areas or respond promptly to attacks has eroded trust in government institutions. This

vacuum is sometimes filled by non-state actors, including vigilante groups and criminal networks, which further complicates the security landscape and sustains cycles of violence (International Crisis Group, 2021). Recent human-security assessments corroborate this picture, finding that rural banditry has eroded core dimensions of human security - food, health, community, and personal - well beyond its immediate physical toll (International Crisis Group, 2025). Weak institutional presence also limits efforts at reconstruction, reconciliation, and reintegration for displaced persons and affected communities (Mohammed, 2025).

Theme 6: Loss of Human Capital - Education and Workforce

Education is central to a country's human capital development, as it empowers the population to participate actively in economic and civic life. Investment in education is therefore as crucial to nation-building as any other developmental strategy, since it strengthens human capital and promotes economic growth, improved welfare, and better livelihoods. This is another theme found consistently across the literature.

Nigeria has suffered a significant setback in its education sector and in its efforts to develop its vast human capital potential, owing to the resurgence of security concerns, including insurgency, armed banditry, and abduction, among others. The Nigerian government at various levels is estimated to have spent hundreds of billions of naira on national security over the preceding five years, though widely varying figures make a precise total difficult to establish (Ajiboye et al., 2024). According to recent estimates, more than 2,295 teachers were killed and another 19,000 displaced in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States. Banditry, therefore, remains a critical impediment to the human capital development process in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study recommends that restoring agricultural livelihoods be treated as a top priority. Many farming and herding communities have lost access to their land and markets (FAO, 2022). Government and humanitarian agencies should work together to provide security escorts during planting and harvest seasons, while also supporting farmers with improved seedlings, tools, and livestock-restocking programmes. This will not only improve food security but also reduce rural poverty.

Second, support for displaced persons is urgent. Displacement has worsened urban poverty and stretched public services. Providing housing, access to schools, healthcare, and vocational training for displaced families can ease pressure on host communities and help young people rebuild their lives.

Third, tackling household poverty caused by ransom payments requires stronger social safety nets. Micro-credit schemes, livelihood grants, and social protection programmes can help families recover lost assets and avoid long-term debt traps.

Fourth, attention must be given to the hidden crisis of mental health. Expanding psychosocial support through community health centres and mobile clinics will help survivors and families cope with trauma and restore productivity.

Fifth, governance and security-sector reform should accompany all of the above: strengthening civilian-military cooperation, improving the funding and coordination of intelligence networks, and integrating community-level dialogue into state and federal security strategy, so that kinetic responses are matched by sustained investment in the socio-economic conditions that sustain banditry and kidnapping in the North-West.

Conclusion

In summary, banditry and kidnapping have caused serious socio-economic damage in Zamfara State and, more broadly, across North-West Nigeria. Farming and herding activities have collapsed, pushing many households into poverty and food insecurity (UNDP, 2024; FAO, 2022). Displacement has strained urban services and worsened unemployment, especially among youth (UNDP, 2024). Families are further impoverished by ransom payments, often losing long-term assets (International Crisis Group, 2021). Beyond the economic toll, trauma and fear continue to weaken social ties and productivity, while the loss of teachers and the closure of schools erode the region's longer-term human capital base. Addressing these challenges requires urgent, coordinated action to restore livelihoods, strengthen governance, and support affected communities to rebuild resilience.

References

1. Abdulrasheed, A., & Mumuni, N. A. (2024). Impact of armed banditry and kidnapping on rural women livelihood in North-Western Nigeria. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 17(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ajpas.v17i1.22>
2. Abdussalam, A. A., Olayiwola, R. A., & Akinniyi-Duyile, P. F. (2022). Impact of banditry on rural development in Kaduna State (2016–2021). *NIU Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.58709/niujs.v8i2.1486>
3. ACLED. (2024). Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project: Nigeria mid-year update. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. <https://acleddata.com>

4. Adebayo, A. A. (2013). Youth unemployment and crime in Nigeria: A nexus and implications for national development. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 5(8), 350–357.
<https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA12.049>
5. Adetayo, O., & Kingimi, A. (2024, March 21). Nigerian farmers abandon farms after attacks, sending food prices higher. Reuters.
6. Africa at LSE. (2022). Banditry's impacts on women and children in Nigeria needs a policy response. Africa at LSE Blog, London School of Economics and Political Science.
7. Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2024). Confronting Nigeria's Kaduna crisis. Africa Center Spotlight Report.
8. Aghedo, I., & Osumah, O. (2012). The political economy of terrorism in Nigeria. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 6(4–5), 4–20.
9. Aleyomi, M. B., & Olajubu, A. (2024). Kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. In J. S. Omotola & S. Oyewole (Eds.), *The political economy of kidnapping and insecurity in Nigeria* (pp. 135–150). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-47168-1_8
10. Amnesty International. (2024, March). Nigeria: Authorities must secure release of abducted Kuriga schoolchildren. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/nigeria-kuriga-school-abductions/>
11. Baduku, A. S. (2024). Kidnapping in Nigeria: Challenges and mitigation strategies. *Gusau Journal of Sociology*.
12. Bello-Schünemann, J., & Moyer, J. D. (2018). Structural pressures and political instability: Trajectories for sub-Saharan Africa. Institute for Security Studies.
13. BAMF (2024). Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes (KW20/2024), 13 May 2024, p. 4
14. BAMF (2024). Germany, BAMF, Briefing Notes (KW51/2024), 16 December 2024, p. 6
15. Berkowitz, L. (1989). Frustration-aggression hypothesis: Examination and reformulation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 106(1), 59–73.
16. Buhari, A. S. (2022). Understanding banditry in Northwest Nigeria: A security and governance perspective. *Journal of African Security Studies*, 13(1), 45–59.
17. CLEEN Foundation. (2021). Security sector accountability in Nigeria. <https://cleen.org>
18. Damilola, M., & Omojemite, O. (2025, January 30). Assessing the impact of kidnapping and banditry on students' academic performance in Nigeria: Implications for education and security policies. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 4(1).
19. Dollard, J., Doob, L. W., Miller, N. E., Mowrer, O. H., & Sears, R. R. (1939). *Frustration and aggression*. Yale University Press.
20. ECOWAS. (2019). Annual report on peace and security in West Africa. Economic Community of West African States.
21. EUAA (2025). COI Report – Nigeria: Security Situation. 2.3.7. Zamfara State. dip-aws.euaa.europa.eu
22. EUAA (2025), EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Africa, data covering 1 January 2024 to 31 August 2025, as of 10 September 2025. dip-aws.euaa.europa.eu
23. Erundu, C. I., & Nwakanma, E. (2018). New dimensions of the farmers and herdsmen crisis in Nigeria and the implications for development. *African Research Review*, 12(4), 16–27.
24. FAO. (2022). Food security report: Northern Nigeria crisis intensifies. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
25. Faruk, B. U., & Abdullahi, M. M. (2022). The impact of armed banditry and kidnapping on socio-economic activities: A case study of selected LGAs in Katsina State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Review*.
26. Federal Government of Nigeria (2025). Nigeria, NIPC, Nigerian State - States, Zamfara
27. Garba, D. (2021). Armed banditry in North West borderlands and the need for deeper Nigeria–Niger Republic bilateral security relations. *Journal of Conflict Resolution and Social Issues*, 2(1), 35–49.
28. Hendrix, C., & Brinkman, H. (2020). Conflict, food insecurity, and climate adaptation. *Journal of Peace Research*.
29. Human Rights Watch. (2021). DRC: Armed groups committing mass abuses. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/10/19/drc-armed-groups-committing-mass-abuses>
30. Ibrahim, J. (2021). Banditry in Nigeria: Explaining the phenomenon in the North-West. *Centre for Democracy and Development Policy Brief*, 4(1), 1–12.
31. Ijirshar, V. U., Udaah, I. I., Mile, B. N., Vershima, J. S., & Adaudu, A. (2025, June 2). Effect of insecurity on agricultural output in Benue State, Nigeria. *arXiv*.
32. International Crisis Group. (2021). Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling back the mayhem. <https://www.crisisgroup.org>
33. International Crisis Group (2025). Crisis Watch – Nigeria: January 2024 – August 2025.
34. Isma'il, A., & Ibrahim, H. B. (2024). Psychological impact of kidnapping on social reintegration and academic pursuits of female undergraduates in Zamfara State. *Academic Journal of Psychology and Counseling*, 6(1).
35. Kleffman, J., Ramachandran, S., Cohen, N., O'Neil, S., Bukar, M., Batault, F., & Broeckoven, K. V. (2024). Banditry violence in Nigeria's North West: Insights from affected communities (MEAC Findings Report 36). UNIDIR.

36. Mbam, N. M., Jacob, U. H., & Amiara, S. (2024). Kidnapping and banditry: A critique of the Nigerian security, 1999–2022. *Southeast Political Science Review*, 9(1).
37. Mohammed, I. (2025). Why bandit amnesties are failing in Nigeria's northwest. *The New Humanitarian*.
38. NBS. (2024). Report on internally displaced persons in Nigeria, 2023. National Bureau of Statistics.
39. Nchom, D. (2024). Cross-border migration, banditry and the challenges of development in Nigeria. *Discover Global Society*.
40. Nigerian Tribune (2025). Jubilation as Shinkafi Volunteer Forces kill bandit commander, Danbokolo in Zamfara. 30 June 2025
41. Nigerian Tribune (2025). Zamfara: Troops kill two bandits, recover weapons. 12 December 2024
42. Nigerian Watch, (2024). Fourteenth Report on violence in Nigeria. 2024, 2025, p. 9
43. Nigerian Watch, (2024). Fourteenth Report on violence in Nigeria. 2024, 2025, p. 12
44. OECD. (2020). Conflict and fragility in West Africa. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
45. Ojem, T. O., et al. (2024). Socioeconomic dimensions of cattle rustling and kidnapping in Southern Kaduna. *Discover Global Society*.
46. Ojewale, O., & Osasona, T. (2024). Questioning NBS data on kidnapping: ₦2.2 trillion in ransom payments. *The Cable*.
47. Okoli, A. C., & Ugwu, A. C. (2019). Of marauders and brigands: Scoping the threat of rural banditry in Nigeria's northwest. *African Security Review*, 28(4), 295–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2019.1568350>
48. Okoli, A. C., & Ugwu, I. U. (2020). Banditry and humanitarian crises in Nigeria: Issues and perspectives. *African Security Review*, 29(3), 280–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2020.1761620>
49. Okorie, A., et al. (2023). Weak border management and banditry in the Northwest region, Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Applied Science*.
50. Omuya, M. S. (2023, December 30). Effect of armed banditry and insecurity on Nigeria's educational system. *Lapai Journal of Humanities*.
51. Onabanjo, A. A., & Kugbayi, O. (2024). Armed banditry and challenges of national development: Is Nigeria's governance system failing? *Institutiones Administrationis*.
52. Oyedokun, T. (2025). Kidnap-for-ransom industry cost Nigeria ₦2.56bn in one year — Report. *BusinessDay*.
53. Rufus, A. I., & Ogbe, E. B. (2024). The Rise of Banditry in Northwest Nigeria: Examining the Security Implications and Pathways to Stability. *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 3(1), 22–35. Retrieved from <http://journals.fukashere.edu.ng/index.php/kjpir/article/view/399>
54. Sabiu, M. (2024, February 5). Poverty, unemployment cause of banditry, kidnapping in North West — Kaduna Gov. *Tribune Online*.
55. Sani, I. U., & Mohammed, H. H. (2025). Economics of kidnapping and livelihoods in Zamfara State. *FUDMA Journal of Humanities, Social Science and Creative Arts*, 1(AHBSI), 53–60. [https://doi.org/10.70882/fujohssaca.2025.v1\(AHBSI\).7](https://doi.org/10.70882/fujohssaca.2025.v1(AHBSI).7)
56. Shaw, C. R., & McKay, H. D. (1942). *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*. University of Chicago Press.
57. UNDP. (2024). Human development report 2023/2024: Breaking the gridlock — Reimagining cooperation in a polarized world. United Nations Development Programme.
58. UNODC. (2021). Global report on crime trends 2021. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
59. Usu, F. P., Gbede, C. J., Aka, W. M., Aernyi, M., & Daagu, D.-T. S. (2024). Impact of kidnapping and banditry on economic activities in Katsina-Ala, Benue State. *International Journal of Management, Social Sciences, Peace and Conflict Studies*.
60. Vanguard. (2023, April 12). Terrorism: Hunger looms as farmers abandon farmlands in Kaduna. *Vanguard News*.
61. Yunusa, A., & Saleh Dawakin Tofa, B. (2024). A purview of the causes of youth involvement in armed banditry in Kaduna State (2012–2022). *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 14(8).

CITATION

Mohammed, Z. S. (2026). Unpacking the Socio-Economic Consequences of Banditry and Kidnapping in North-West Nigeria, 2015–2025. *Global Journal of Research in Education & Literature*, 6(5), 1–13.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22278814>