



ISSUE 2

**NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS AND
ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN WEST AFRICA**

Armed bandits in Nigeria



**GLOBAL
INITIATIVE**
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME



ACLED

JULY 2024

ISSUE 2

**NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS AND
ILLICIT ECONOMIES IN WEST AFRICA**

Armed bandits in Nigeria

JULY 2024



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to all interviewees who participated in the study, the research consultants who gathered data in Kaduna and Zamfara, and colleagues at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), especially Eleanor Beevor, Ladd Serwat, Christian Jaffe and Andrea Carboni for their contributions throughout the project. The authors would also like to thank Mark Shaw and Kars de Bruijne for their reviews, and to Murtala Rufa'i for his inputs.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Kingsley L Madueke is the Nigeria research coordinator with the Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa at the GI-TOC. He is also a lecturer at the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, University of Jos, Nigeria. He holds a PhD in political science from the University of Amsterdam.

Olajumoke (Jumo) Ayandele is the senior Nigeria advisor at ACLED and a visiting Assistant Professor of Practice at New York University's Center for Global Affairs. She holds a PhD in Global Affairs from Rutgers – The State University of New Jersey, an MPA in International Development Policy and Management, and a BA in Economics, both from New York University.

Lawan Danjuma Adamu is the northern Nigeria field coordinator with the Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa at the GI-TOC. He is the co-founder of the investigative journalism platform Dateline Nigeria and a former editor at the *Daily Trust*, a Nigerian newspaper.

Lucia Bird is the director of the Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa at the GI-TOC. Previously, she worked as legal and policy adviser to the Planning and Development Department of the Punjab government, Pakistan, and to the Ministry of Finance, Ghana.

© 2024 Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

© 2023 text and illustration: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means without permission in writing from
the Global Initiative.

Cover: *Supplied*

Please direct inquiries to:

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
Avenue de France 23
Geneva, CH-1202
Switzerland

www.globalinitiative.net

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)
361 Falls Rd. #501
Grafton, WI 53024
United States of America

www.acleddata.com

CONTENTS

Acronyms.....	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	5
Methodology.....	6
EVOLUTION OF ARMED BANDITRY IN NORTH WEST NIGERIA.....	8
The origins of banditry in Nigeria	9
Escalation and diffusion of armed banditry (2011–2018).....	9
Changing targets of bandit violence and diversification of revenue sources (2018–2024)	10
UNDERSTANDING THE ARMED BANDIT ECOSYSTEM IN NORTH WEST NIGERIA	17
Recruitment processes.....	18
Hierarchy and roles in armed bandit groups.....	19
Dynamics between distinct armed groups: Collaboration and contestation.....	21
Relationships between armed bandits and violent extremist organizations.....	21
Collaboration between bandits and violent extremist groups: Looking ahead.....	25
FINANCING AND RESOURCING	27
Cattle rustling	29
Kidnapping	29
Artisanal gold mining.....	32
Revenue generation on roads.....	34
Taxation of farmers, seizing of farms and forced labour.....	35
GOVERNANCE	37
Options for community responses: Peace pacts	39
CONCLUSION	40
Recommendations.....	41
Notes.....	43



ACRONYMS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
GI-TOC	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JAS	Jama'atu Ahlul Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihad
JNIM	Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin
LGA	Local government area



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

© Kola Sulaimon/AFP via Getty Images

This report explores the dynamics of armed banditry in North West Nigeria, aiming to unravel their evolution, structure and the illicit economies that bandit groups engage in for financing and resourcing, as well as their interactions with local communities and other non-state armed groups. Focusing on Nigeria's North West region, this report explores the internal dynamics of armed bandit groups,¹ as well as the ecosystem and landscapes within which they operate, identifying potential entry points for interventions. As concerns grow regarding potential alliances between some bandit groups and violent extremist organizations – namely Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Ansaru and Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad (JAS) – operating in North West, this report explores not only to what extent these alliances exist but what shapes their formation.

Nigeria's North West region, encompassing Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto, Jigawa and Zamfara states, has since 2011 witnessed a surge in armed bandit activities.² Reported civilian fatalities resulting from violence by armed bandits in North West between 2018 and 2023 surpassed those inflicted by JAS and ISWAP in Nigeria's North East region within the same period.³ Responses have largely consisted of military operations and local vigilante efforts. However, military operations' impact has been temporary and banditry persists. This necessitates a better understanding of why banditry is resilient: bandit group structure and engagement with illicit economies are key elements of this resilience.

The existing body of media and expert analyses pertaining to armed bandits in North West Nigeria has predominantly concentrated on the violence they inflict and its repercussions, with less focus on their structure, resourcing and financing mechanisms, and the physical and social environment within which they operate. This report aims to fill this gap, focusing on Zamfara and Kaduna – two major flashpoints of armed banditry in Nigeria's North West. This report engages with the ongoing debate around categorizing non-state armed groups and explores whether the bandits can be said to exercise any governance functions or operate as political, as well as criminal, actors.

Bandits' revenue-generating mechanisms have evolved since 2011. Cattle rustling, robbery, kidnap for ransom, gold mining and farming activities have all played central roles in armed bandit resourcing and strategic positioning. Across different communities in Kaduna and Zamfara, we identify three distinguishable but closely related ways that armed bandits engage with licit and illicit economies: targeted lethal attacks and robberies; imposition of levies; and control over supply chains. Regional variations in tactics exist, tailored to geography and terrain. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for devising effective counter-strategies tailored to specific contexts.

Drawing on ACLED data and field research in key hotspots in Birnin Gwari (Kaduna), Gusau and Maru (Zamfara), this report outlines the structures, internal dynamics, motivations, funding sources and strategies of armed bandit groups.

The report highlights six key findings:

- Armed bandit groups have a hierarchical structure, and the larger and more established ones have a clear division of roles and responsibilities. These hierarchies are often understated and not considered in formulating interventions and responses. However, this hierarchical structure does not preclude flexibility of membership, movement and action. This hierarchical yet fluid structure is an important factor shaping banditry's resilience.
- While there are many armed bandit groups operating under different leaders, groups are bound by strong ethnic affinity and shared grievances, resulting in high levels of cooperation between certain groups. This significantly increases their capacity for large-scale violence and enhances their resilience to military operations.
- Armed bandits move nimbly between distinct licit and illicit revenue streams; thus, seeking to block one revenue stream is of limited sustained benefit. With declining revenues from cattle rustling and kidnapping, armed bandits are consolidating their position as key players in farming and the artisanal gold mining industry, shifting from merely extorting miners to taking full control of the gold mines.

- Depending on the type of illicit economy and the level of influence they exert over it, armed bandits vary their engagements with illicit economies, shifting between attacks and robberies targeting actors in licit and illicit supply chains; imposition of levies; and assumption of control of part (or more rarely the entirety) of the supply chain. This variability in engagements with illicit economies renders a unidimensional response strategy inadequate.
- A bandit group's degree of influence over an area and the type of economy bandits are using for resource extraction contribute to shaping the level of violence against communities. Violence by bandits is higher when their influence is lower, and kidnapping and cattle rustling are characterized by greater violence than engagement in other revenue-generating activities.
- Armed bandits exhibit some behaviours that fall within definitions of 'governance', though profit and predation appear to be the primary motivations for their actions. The concept of governance is important for understanding bandits in the political/criminal spectrum.



INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, Nigeria's North West region has grappled with a proliferation of armed banditry, making it the current epicentre of violence in the country. In Zamfara and Kaduna states alone there have been over 4 758 reported fatalities between 2018 and 2023, surpassing killings by JAS and ISWAP in North East over the same period.⁴

The 'armed bandits' behind these violent activities constitute myriad groups operating under different gang leaders whose activities have included cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, artisanal gold mining, armed robberies, mass killings, rape and extensive destruction of crops, livestock and property.

Though generally understood through the analytical lens of criminal violence, the activities of armed bandits are a multifaceted security concern, with far-reaching implications for the economy and the politics of Nigeria's North West region. Moreover, banditry's intersections with long-standing conflicts between farming and pastoralist herder communities make a purely criminal violence framing too narrow. Further, while many armed bandits are motivated by economic gains, some bandits are moved by perceived injustices.⁵

Because of the ramifications of framing threats as 'criminal' rather than 'political' violence – effectively downplaying its importance and the threat it poses to the political system – analysts are increasingly challenging the conventional dichotomy between criminal and political violence, advocating for a

more integrated perspective that underscores the intricate connections between the two. It is increasingly recognized that organized crime has evolved into a significant political force in many countries, establishing resilient organizations, amassing substantial resources and leveraging violence effectively with implications for politics.⁶ Underlining the intersection between organized crime and politics, criminal gangs play a pivotal role in driving political violence.⁷ The armed bandits in Nigeria's North West are among such groups whose activities not only defy conventional criminal categorizations but also pose a direct challenge to the state's ability to maintain public security, impacting politics at the state and national levels.

This report builds the evidence base regarding how armed bandits engage in licit (predominantly farming and to a lesser extent transport service provision) and illicit economies (most importantly cattle rustling, kidnapping and artisanal gold mining – all illicit economies with strong links to instability).⁸ It maps relationships between different armed bandits and violent extremist groups, the impacts of bandit activities on local communities and explores whether bandits provide any forms of 'governance'. Apart from shedding light on the ecosystems of armed bandits and their engagements with illicit economies, this report zooms in on their financing and resourcing approaches to provide insights into pathways for disrupting them.

Methodology

This report is the second instalment in a series examining the central role of illicit economies within the broader spectrum of armed group governance, titled 'Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa.' This series is the result of collaboration between ACLED and the GI-TOC, arising from a growing recognition of the significant role illicit economies play in the strategies of armed groups across West Africa. This report draws on a broad array of primary and secondary sources. The research, which combines ACLED data with original field research, focuses on three local government areas

(LGAs) in North West Nigeria: Birnin Gwari in Kaduna State, and Gusau and Maru in Zamfara State. According to ACLED data, these LGAs have experienced the highest levels of violent activity across Nigeria's North West since 2022.

Though characterized by extreme levels of violence, these LGAs boast important differences. For example, while both armed bandits and violent extremist groups are present in Birnin Gwari and Maru, only armed bandits are known to operate in Gusau. Further, Gusau, the capital city of Zamfara,

enables insights into bandit activities in semi-urban terrains, contrasting to more rural geographies of Maru and Birnin Gwari.

Field research conducted between April and December 2023 included 45 interviews (21 in Birnin Gwari, 12 in Gusau and 12 in Maru). In Birnin Gwari, interviews were remotely conducted with residents of several communities, including Kuyello, Kwasakwa, Randagi, Tabanni, Kakangi, Damari, Kutemeshi, Birnin Gwari, Birnin Gwari and Birnin Gwari town. In Gusau, interviews were carried out in seven communities: Arahwa, Gidan Gobirawa, Babbar Doka, Bingi, Bozaya, Dandindin and Getso. In Maru, interviews took place in four distinct communities: Mada, Wonaka, Wanke and Katsira. Follow-up interviews were conducted remotely with interviewees in the

three LGAs. By focusing on these regions, there are elements relating to the spatial diffusion of banditry more widely across Nigerian territory that are not explored in detail – we seek to note where this is key, but recognize that this is a limitation of the approach.

Interviewees included local vigilante leaders, members of armed bandit groups, farmers, herders, miners, community leaders, residents, victims of organized crime, local government officials, academics, journalists and individuals involved in various illicit economies.

This was complemented by a comprehensive review of grey literature, academic publications, media sources and analysis of data from ACLED.

A close-up photograph of a person wearing a black balaclava and dark sunglasses, holding an assault rifle. The person's face is mostly obscured by the mask, with only their eyes visible through the eyeholes. The background is slightly out of focus, showing some greenery and a bright sky. The overall tone is serious and gritty.

EVOLUTION OF ARMED BANDITRY IN NORTH WEST NIGERIA

Photo: Sani Malumfashi/VOA

The origins of banditry in Nigeria

Armed banditry has a long history in North West Nigeria, with roots dating back to the pre-colonial era. In the 18th and 19th centuries and possibly much earlier, the North West was bisected by transnational trade routes that linked the region to markets in Ghana. The presence of armed bandits represented a significant threat to economic activities in the region. Armed bandits were closely associated with robbery along transnational trade routes connecting coastal West Africa to the Sahel and North Africa.⁹ In Zamfara, armed bandits were raiding herders and traders, constituting a major threat as far back as 1911.¹⁰ Further south, around Borgu, an area comprising parts of modern-day Niger state and the Republic of Benin, the scale of thefts disrupted trading routes, forcing traders to move to safer ones.¹¹ While bandit groups also engaged in cattle rustling, this was small-scale, involved limited violence and did not threaten livelihoods.¹²

Following the establishment of colonial rule in northern Nigeria in the early 20th century,¹³ the administration subdued armed banditry, which remained limited throughout the colonial period and initial post-independence period. However, in the decade following Nigeria's transition to a democratic system of governance in 1999, there was a surge in communal conflicts and farmer-herder clashes as a result of intense competition over scarce resources, including land.¹⁴ These conflicts were often met with heavy-handed responses and extrajudicial killings by state forces and vigilantes, resulting in a pervasive atmosphere of insecurity and devastation. Armed bandits emerged and flourished, particularly among the pastoralist Fulani community, who frequently bore the brunt of these heavy-handed responses with many of its members losing their cattle and livelihoods.¹⁵ Many of the aggrieved who lost their cattle, livelihoods and, in some cases, family members, turned to armed banditry as a means to regain their lost cattle and also protect themselves against further attacks.

Escalation and diffusion of armed banditry (2011–2018)

While armed banditry has a long history in North West Nigeria, it underwent a major transformation in 2011 from small-scale cattle theft and armed robbery to large-scale cattle rustling, kidnapping and lethal violence. Due to a multitude of factors, including banking sector reforms reducing the need for traders to travel with cash (thereby making armed robbery less lucrative), farmer-herder clashes and rising levels of unemployment, cattle rustling became an increasingly key source of financing and bandits started stealing growing numbers of cattle.¹⁶ As one vigilante leader who witnessed the evolution of armed bandits in Maru LGA noted: 'They started their activities from armed robbery, to block roads and snatched people's valuable items coming from markets ... Then, they had not started killing people.'¹⁷ This changed in 2011, with armed banditry playing an increasingly destabilizing role first in Maru and subsequently in Gusau.¹⁸

Attempts by vigilante groups, locally known as Yan Sakai (a Hausa word for volunteer groups), to halt a spate of rustling and robberies in Dansadai communities further escalated violence.¹⁹ The Yan Sakai, mostly drawn from Hausa communities, deployed a heavy-handed approach in seeking to quash the criminality, resorting to extra-judicial tactics, including the public killing of suspected bandits.²⁰

The 2013 murder of Alhaji Ishe, a respected Fulani leader from Zamfara, was a pivotal incident shaping the evolution of banditry. Ishe had advocated for the interests of Fulani pastoralists and played a crucial role in mediating disputes between Fulani and Hausa community members.²¹ Ishe's murder at the hands of Hausa vigilantes prompted many local Fulani individuals to vow retaliation for his death. Originally established for self-defence against Yan Sakai and state security forces, numerous Fulani vigilante groups evolved into heavily armed

bandit gangs, engaging in lucrative cattle rustling and perpetrating widespread violence. This transformation set in motion a vicious cycle of escalating violence: each instance of cattle rustling against the Hausa community triggered Yan Sakai attacks on Fulani settlements, leading to retaliatory reprisals and spiralling fatalities.²²

Between 2012 and 2013, both sides started abducting prominent community and vigilante leaders. This marked the beginning of a booming kidnapping-for-ransom economy. At first, the typical aim of abductions was to force a concession from the other side or negotiate the release of abducted members. However, as the bandits gained the upper hand in the protracted conflict, partly through the acquisition of sophisticated weapons, kidnapping became a central revenue-making venture alongside cattle rustling, with the former surpassing the latter as their primary activity in 2019.²³

Violent banditry spread across areas of Zamfara between 2011 and 2014. Across the state's regions, the evolution of banditry activities followed similar trajectories. For example, in both Wonaka and Mada, two communities²⁴ affected by the criminality in the outskirts of Gusau, the establishment of the groups in the areas adopted similar phases, as described by a vigilante commander in one of the villages:

They initially started stealing cows, sheep and goats. From there, they moved to blocking roads, attacking markets and snatching people's little belongings ... After they rustled more than 85% of the cows in this area, they changed to kidnapping. If they kidnapped people, their informants inside the community would inform them of the victims' level of wealth, so that they may know how to bargain for ransom.²⁵

Beginning in 2013, JAS and Ansaru, insurgent groups operating in the North East, started setting up bases in the North West, including in Maru and Birnin Gwari.²⁶ This occurred in the wake of state operations against insurgents embedded in urban areas of Maiduguri and subsequent military offensives on the enclaves of violent extremist groups in Nigeria's North East.

In 2014, armed banditry spread from Zamfara into the North West states of Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto and Kebbi as well as Niger and Kogi in North Central, taking advantage of a limited state security presence.²⁷ Across areas of northern Nigeria, cattle stocks started to become depleted due to the large-scale cattle rustling, which also prompted herders to relocate their herds to safer areas further south.²⁸ Faced with dwindling revenues from cattle, in 2016 bandits began increasingly relying on kidnapping for ransom as a central source of income.²⁹

As indicated in Figure 1 below, in Birnin Gwari bandit attacks – including large-scale cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom – rose sharply from 2015 onwards, becoming a major security issue.³⁰ Much of the growing violence was perpetrated by cross-regional operations launched by armed bandits based in Dansadau into Kaduna and Katsina states, a tactic that gained traction from around 2014.

A number of groups originally established in Zamfara, such as the group led by Dogo Gide – a prominent bandit leader –, continue to operate from numerous camps across different states, including Katsina, Kaduna and Niger.³¹ A senior government official in Kaduna explained that the size of Birnin Gwari (around 6 000 square kilometres) and its forested boundaries 'provides easy access to armed bandit groups from Zamfara, Katsina and Niger through the northern part of the community.'³²

Changing targets of bandit violence and diversification of revenue sources (2018–2024)

ACLED data indicates that in both Kaduna and Zamfara, violent incidents involving bandits peaked in 2021 and 2022, respectively, and then fell in both regions, with a particularly marked decline in 2023 (see Figures 2 and 3). While bandits remained the primary perpetrators of violence in both regions (85% of incidents of violence recorded in Kaduna and 93% in Zamfara), the distinct typologies of violent incidents show markedly different trends. Across both states recorded violence targeting civilians decreased in 2023, experiencing a decline since 2021 in Kaduna.

Clashes between bandits and state forces also decreased in 2023 in Kaduna, but increased in Zamfara. These trends are

not homogenous across the regions – with some communities experiencing patterns of violence that buck these trends – but they provide an important entry point into understanding the shifting strategies of bandit groups in the focus areas across this period.

The number of reported incidents of violence targeting civilians not only declined overall in 2023, but became a markedly smaller proportion of the recorded total of violent incidents perpetrated by bandits in both states (dropping from about 75% to 50% of incidents between 2019 and 2023 in Kaduna, for instance). Interviews with stakeholders across this region support

<p>18th–19th centuries and earlier</p> <p>North West Nigeria faces armed banditry threats along transnational trade routes, notably in Zamfara and Borgu areas</p> <p>Armed bandits steal goods and engage in small-scale cattle rustling, sparking low-level violence</p>	<p>Early 20th century</p> <p>Colonial rule in northern Nigeria leads to the suppression of armed banditry, which remains limited during the colonial and post-independence periods</p>
<p>1999–2011</p> <p>Transition from military rule to democratic system of governance</p> <p>Intensification of competition over scarce resources, including land for cattle grazing and farming</p> <p>Surge in communal conflicts and farmer–herder clashes</p> <p>Armed bandits emerge and flourish, particularly among the Fulani pastoralist community, involving small-scale cattle theft and armed robbery</p> <p>Many Fulani pastoralist herders lose their cattle and belongings in farmer–herder clashes</p>	<p>2011</p> <p>Transformation occurs, escalating to large-scale cattle rustling, kidnapping and lethal violence due to factors such as banking reforms, farmer–herder clashes and rising unemployment</p> <p>Vigilante groups, known as Yan Sakai, intensify efforts to quash criminal activity, resorting to extra-judicial tactics</p> <p>2012–2013</p> <p>Abductions of community and vigilante leaders begin, marking the onset of a kidnapping-for-ransom economy</p> <p>2013</p> <p>JAS and Ansaru, insurgent groups operating in North East, set up bases in North West</p>
<p>2014</p> <p>Armed banditry spreads from Zamfara into North West states such as Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger and Kogi, taking advantage of a limited state security presence</p>	<p>2016</p> <p>Cattle stocks begin to deplete due to large-scale cattle rustling, prompting herders to relocate their herds to safer areas further south</p> <p>Bandits increasingly rely on kidnapping for ransom as a central source of income</p>
<p>2019</p> <p>Kidnapping surpasses cattle rustling as the primary activity of armed bandits</p>	

FIGURE 1 Armed banditry transformation in northern Nigeria.

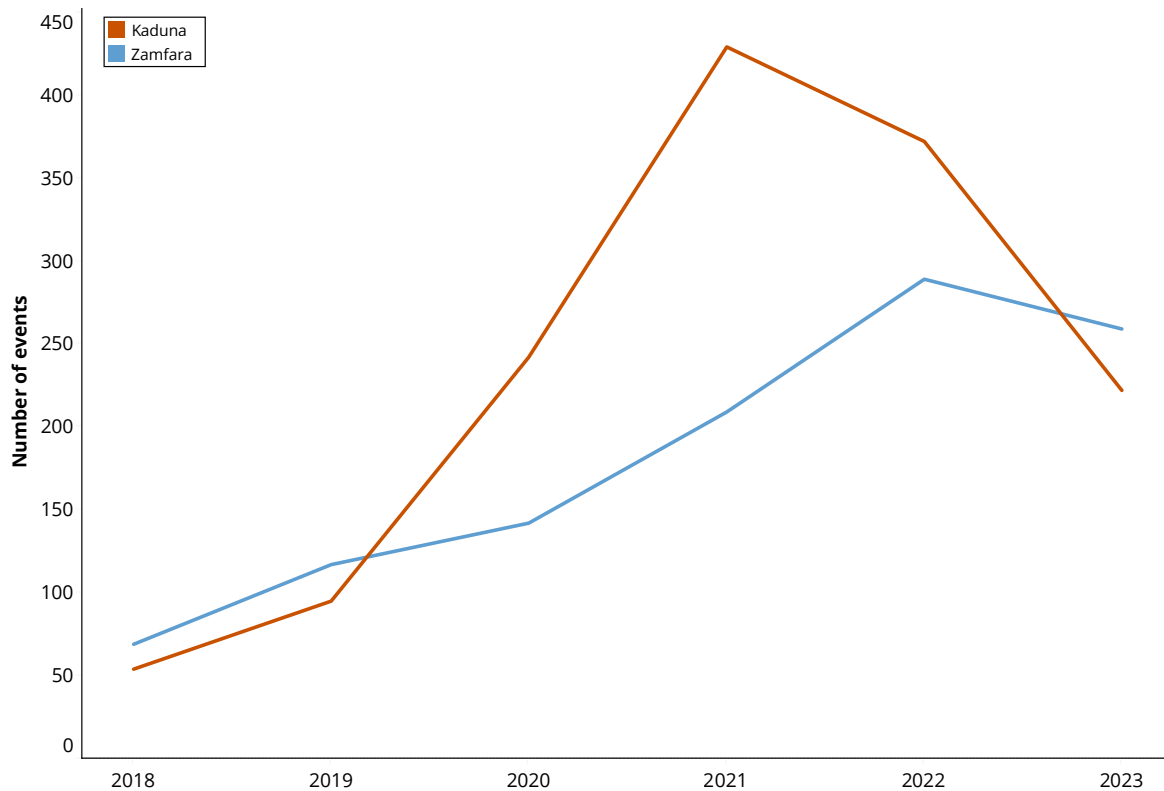


FIGURE 2 Incidents of armed violence involving bandits in Kaduna and Zamfara, 2018–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED

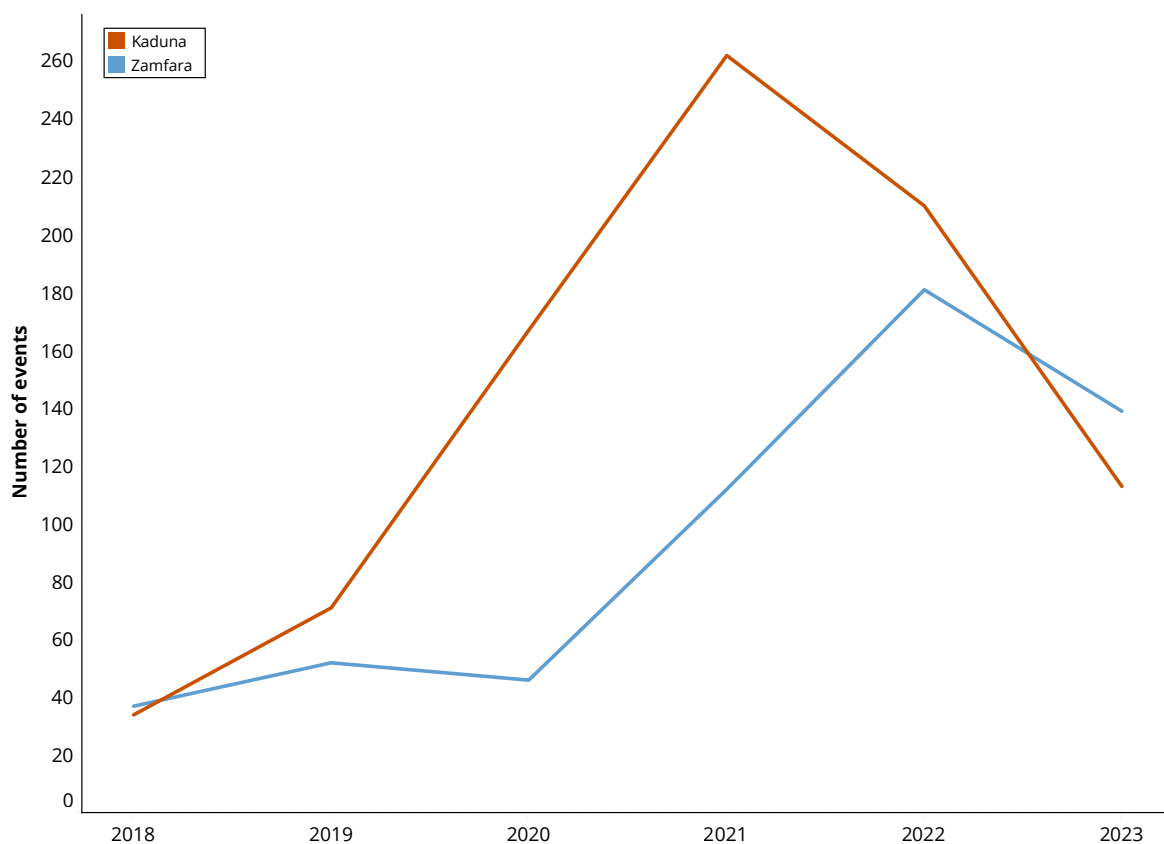


FIGURE 3 Armed bandit violence targeting civilians in Kaduna and Zamfara, 2018–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED

the perception of falling direct violence against civilians in 2023. Stakeholders cited how many roads that had become impassable due to high levels of attacks during 2021 and 2022 effectively reopened in 2023. Illustratively, the main road connecting Abuja and Kaduna was avoided by the vast majority of travellers between 2021 and 2022, who opted for the train on this popular route instead. Train tickets became such a coveted commodity that the anti-corruption agency investigated a racket that blossomed around purchasing tickets. Safety on this thoroughfare improved significantly in the first quarter of 2023, partly due to military deployments and checkpoints, and passenger transit returned.

The research indicates two primary, interlinked factors driving this decrease in violence against civilians over this period.

Firstly, bandits consolidated their influence in many areas of Kaduna and Zamfara – their historic strongholds. This is likely to have contributed to a decrease in violence directly targeting civilians, namely the types of violence against civilians tracked by the ACLED database, which consists of attacks, armed robberies and abductions. For example, since armed bandits consolidated control in Damari – a community with a population of about 10 000 residents in Birnin Gwari in early 2022, the area has seen a decrease in levels of violence recorded by ACLED. Currently, both armed bandits and residents of Damari oversee the extraction of gold from a mine situated 2 kilometres from the community (see below for further analysis of how this required cooperation over resource extraction also contributes to lower levels of violence).³³ This contrasts with areas where armed bandits have not consolidated control. For instance, in January 2024, armed bandits launched an attack on Madabanciya community in Bungudu – an LGA where bandits have not consolidated control in Zamfara. Further, during the same month, residents from 10 other communities in Bungudu reportedly evacuated their homes due to the looming threat of bandit attacks.³⁴

As we explore below, reduced levels of violence do not indicate a decrease in coercion of local communities, merely a shift in how violence – and the threat thereof – is leveraged by bandits to achieve their goals. This is in line with the broader literature on armed group behaviour, which tracks inverse correlations between levels of territorial influence and intensity of violence against local communities.³⁵

Secondly, bandits across both Kaduna and Zamfara have increasingly transitioned towards revenue collection mechanisms that require less violence and greater cooperation with local communities. Kidnapping, cattle rustling and looting incidents declined in both regions in 2023, as considered

in greater detail in the section on financing and resourcing below. These revenue extraction mechanisms are extremely violent against local communities – notably, the role of kidnapping and cattle rustling as ‘accelerant’ economies playing central roles in fuelling instability across West Africa has been underscored across GI-TOC research.³⁶

Instead, as revenue from kidnapping and cattle rustling dwindled, particularly since late 2022, bandit groups have increasingly relied on taxation of farming and artisanal gold mining as sources of revenue. These activities require greater cooperation with local communities and are underpinned by the threat of violence that, once established, does not always crystallize into physical violence.³⁷

Not only did the economies of the bandits draw revenue from change, but their mechanisms of revenue extraction also evolved over this period, transitioning towards less directly violent modes of rent collection. While bandits initially attacked gold miners, as they consolidated their influence over mining sites, they increasingly turned to taxation, or even to direct engagement in mining activities from 2022. This supports the analysis above tracking a correlation between the degree of bandit influence over territory and the levels of direct violence.

This shift from attacking to taxing miners has been one factor behind the sharp drop in violence observed in Birnin Gwari in 2023. The village of Old Birnin Gwari – a gold mining area in Kaduna state – had been a hotbed of violence between 2020 and 2022, when armed bandits reportedly operated under the command of a prominent bandit leader known as Yellow Jambros. Since 2023, however, incidents of violence have reduced as armed bandits consolidated their control and influence in the area. Bandit influence over Birnin Gwari remains extremely high, belying narratives suggesting that a drop in violence indicates a decrease in bandit operations in the area.

Military interventions, which increased over this period, often drive geographic displacement of bandit groups. Some bandit groups were displaced out of Zamfara and Kaduna to pursue revenue-generating opportunities as well as to avoid military interventions. Displacement appears to be typically (although not exclusively) temporary, however, with bandits returning to their original regions of operation and often meting out reprisal attacks. Consequently, geographic displacement from military operations was not highlighted as a key factor behind the medium-term decrease in violence in Kaduna and Zamfara over this period.

Further, armed bandits frequently relocate in pursuit of cattle to rustle, which has implications for the dynamics and spread of violence. For instance, reports indicate that around 2022, the cattle supply in Zamfara and Sokoto dwindled as herders moved their livestock to safer regions such as Kebbi. Following this migration, several bandit leaders reportedly relocated to Kebbi, where there were more opportunities for cattle rustling. Additionally, during this period, older bandit leaders were said to have moved due to intense competition and rivalry with younger, more ambitious counterparts.³⁸

While the increased clashes with the state may have decreased bandit capacity to engage in parallel attacks against civilians, the two factors outlined above – greater territorial influence and evolving revenue collection mechanisms – are believed to be the primary contributors to the overall drop in violence targeting civilians as recorded by ACLED over this period.

In parallel, clashes between bandits and state forces surged (see Figure 4). In Kaduna, clashes increased by over six times between 2019 and 2022, before declining sharply in 2023. In Zamfara, clashes between state forces and armed bandits increased by 19% over this period, peaking in 2023 (after a lull between 2020 and 2022).

Existing evidence indicates an increase in both bandits and state forces perpetrating attacks against the other party. Since 2022 there have been growing reports of bandits attacking military checkpoints, including the attack that left an unconfirmed number of soldiers and police officers dead in Birnin Gwari in January 2023;³⁹ an attack that left seven soldiers dead in Maru area of Zamfara in July 2023;⁴⁰ and a more recent attack on a military camp in Batsari area that forced soldiers and police to flee in early 2024.⁴¹ The rationale behind these attacks varies, likely including attempts to seize weapons and retaliatory moves, but certainly points to growing confidence by bandit groups in challenging state forces. Notably, direct attacks against state forces are typically perceived as ‘political’ rather than ‘criminal’ violence by security experts, reflecting the growing threat the bandit groups pose to the state in North West Nigeria.

However, the uptick in clashes between these parties appears largely driven by increased state interventions resulting from the geographic expansion of armed banditry since 2018. During this period, state forces intensified their use of air and drone strikes to support ground operations, particularly in rural communities bordering forests and neighbouring states (see Figure 5).⁴²

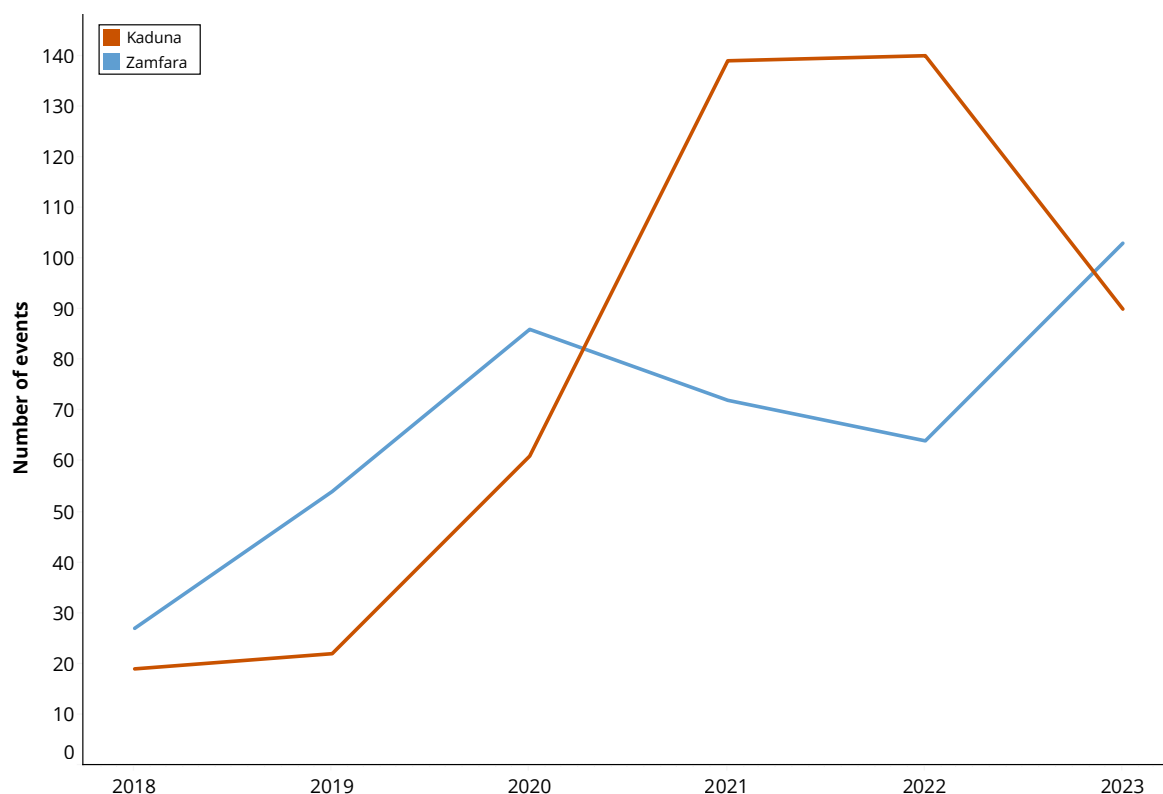
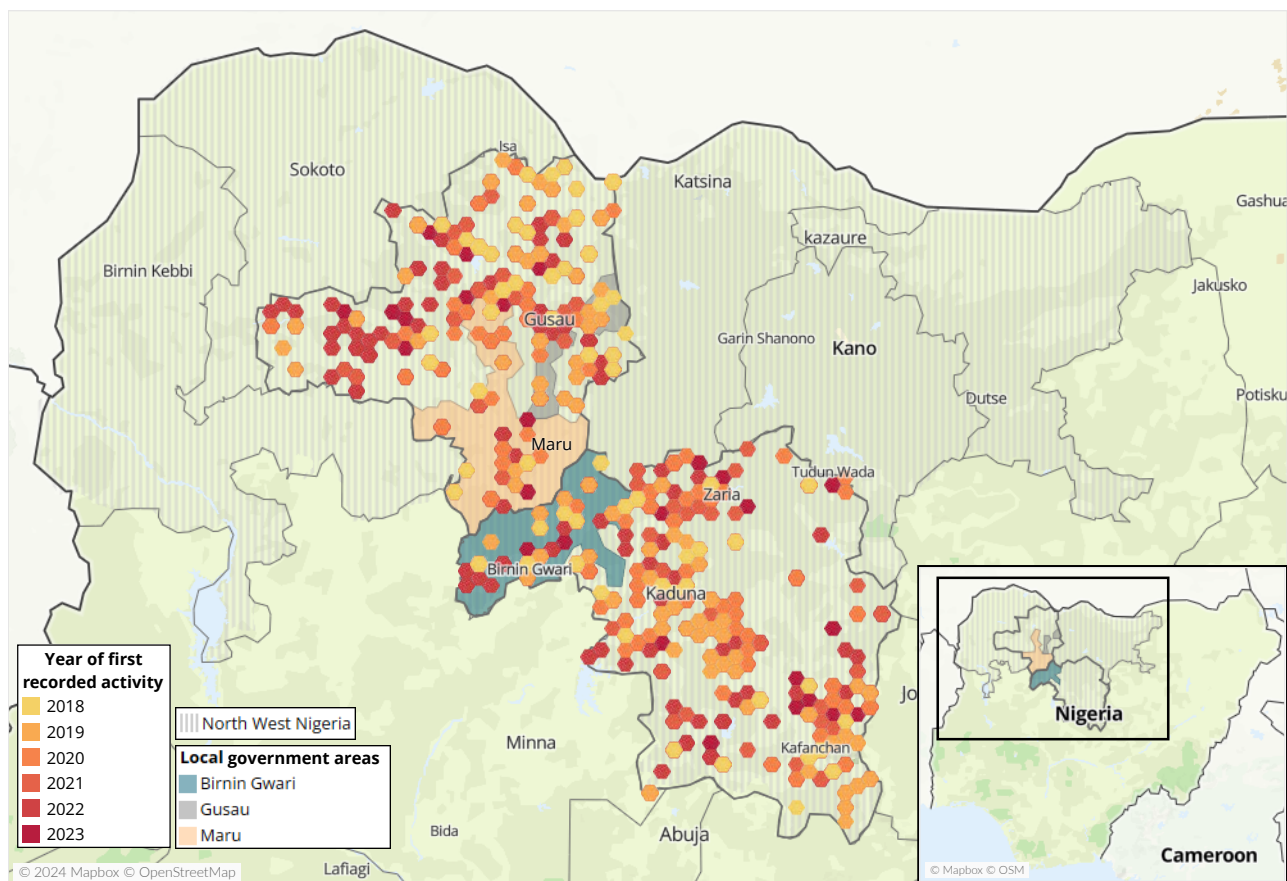


FIGURE 4 Clashes between armed bandits and state forces in Kaduna and Zamfara, 2018–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED



Air/drone strikes in Kaduna and Zamfara states

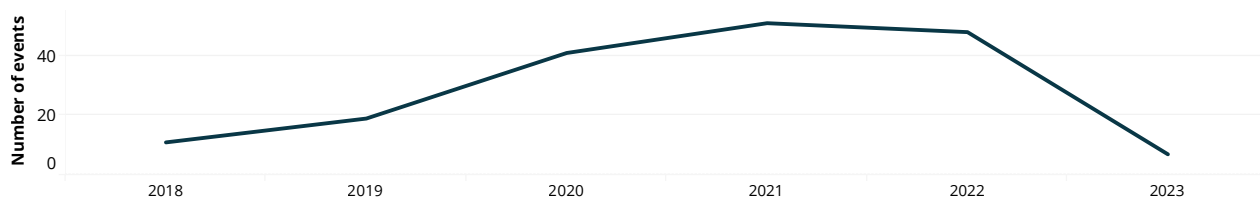


FIGURE 5 Spread and expansion of armed banditry in Kaduna and Zamfara, 2018–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED

This was also the result of government efforts to ensure a degree of stability in the run-up to the March 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections. The new administration pushed ahead with military operations in the wake of the elections to gain legitimacy and demonstrate the effectiveness of the Nigerian military – under new leadership – in battling armed banditry.⁴³ However, state forces are spread thin across the country, stretched between different conflict epicentres, contributing to the fluctuating operations across North West.

State attacks on bandit groups are typically broadly reactive: bandit attacks against civilians tend to trigger public outcry, which enhances pressure on the state to intervene – thus triggering military operations. As bandits increasingly evolved towards extracting revenues from communities through mechanisms beyond large-scale, eye-catching violence, this

may have also lessened pressure on the military to launch retaliatory military operations in some areas. Having said this, military interventions were, at the time of writing, peaking again in some parts of Zamfara.⁴⁴

Military operations have also been one factor shaping the growing geographic dispersion of bandit operations. In response to military operations, bandits repeatedly temporarily relocated to neighbouring states such as Sokoto, returning to Zamfara and Kaduna and resuming activities once the intensity of military operations subsides.⁴⁵ States beyond the areas traditionally affected by bandit violence, such as Kogi, have seen sharp year-on-year increases in violence perpetrated by bandits over this period. Tellingly, in 2023, violence in Kogi – where bandits have not yet consolidated their influence over territory – not only exceeded previous years but was

predominantly driven by violent incidents targeting civilians, again supporting this observed inverse correlation between bandit territorial influence and recorded incidents of violence targeting civilians. In neighbouring Niger state, where bandit groups are more established than in Kogi, violence trends against state forces and civilians are largely aligned with those in Zamfara and Kaduna.

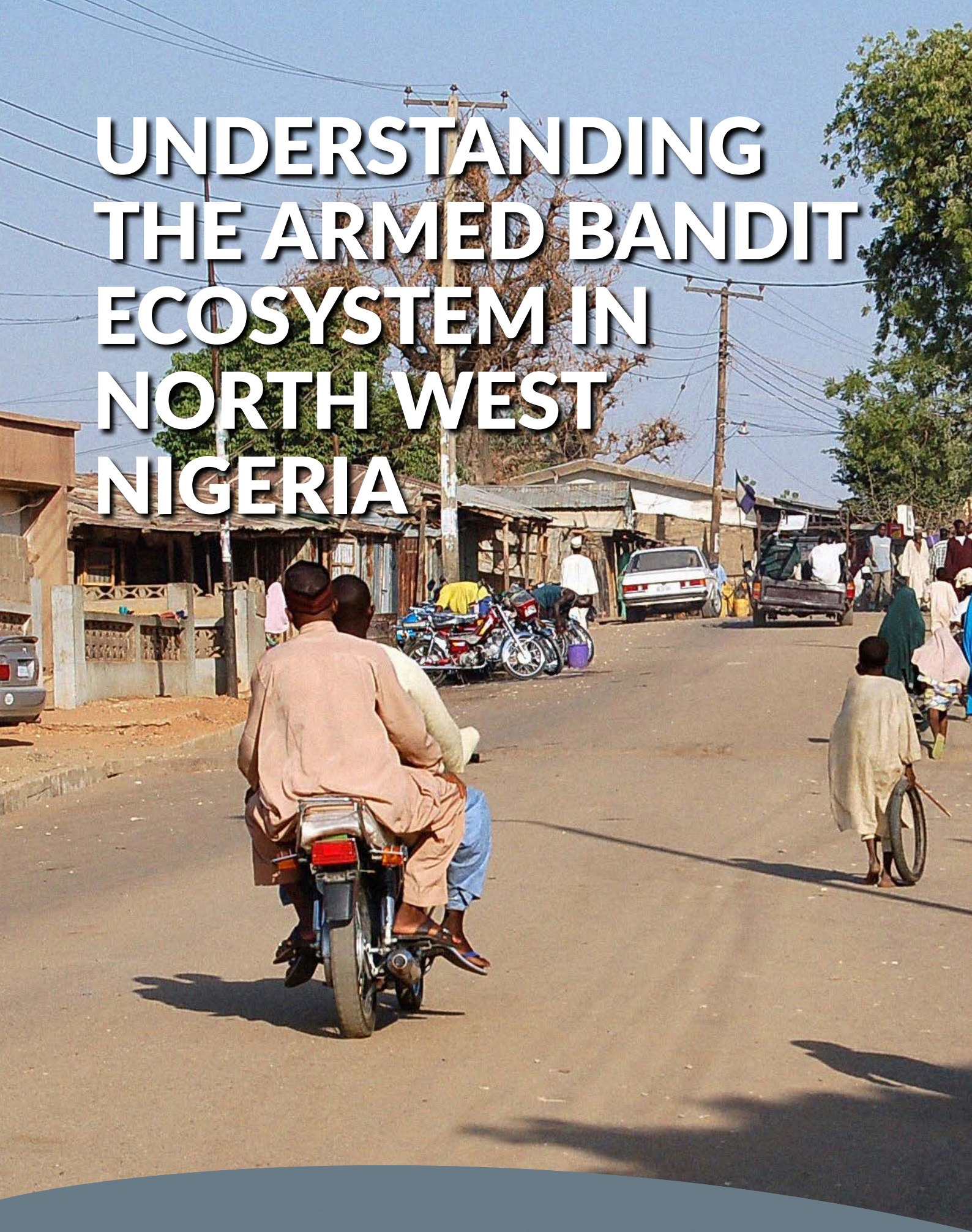
Throughout this period, armed bandits established and maintained strongholds in areas strategic for revenue collection, including along grazing routes, near mining sites, important road corridors, and in border communities and forests.⁴⁶ The geographic characteristics of different regions and their population density also shaped patterns of violence. For instance, in Birnin Gwari, which has significant forested terrain and is bisected by major road networks connecting the northern and southern parts of Nigeria, armed bandit groups increasingly control road networks linking the LGA with neighbouring Kaduna, Katsina, Benue and Niger states.⁴⁷ Bandits primarily target passengers on these routes, often abducting them and demanding ransoms. Victims are usually held in forested areas until these ransoms are paid. The exploitation of road infrastructure as a source of funding is a trend observed among armed groups elsewhere, including by JNIM in the Sahel and rebel groups in the Central African Republic.

Since February 2024, security forces have reportedly eliminated several bandit leaders. In a statement, the Nigerian

army announced the demise of Boderi Isyaku, the notorious bandit leader responsible for orchestrating numerous high-profile kidnappings. These include the abduction of students from Greenfield University in Kaduna on 20 April 2021 and students from the Federal Government College in Yauri, Kebbi, on 17 June 2021.⁴⁸ On 27 March, multiple news outlets reported the death of Dogo Gide due to gunshot wounds sustained during a confrontation with military forces.⁴⁹ However, a media investigation into the incident claimed that the bandit is still alive and was recently observed interacting with villagers in the Kizara community of Tsafe LGA in Zamfara.⁵⁰ It remains uncertain whether some bandit leaders were indeed killed, as verifying these claims is challenging while the dust has not settled.

In conclusion, while military operations may have contributed to an overall decrease in violence by bandit groups in Zamfara and Kaduna since 2023, it is likely that bandits' consolidation of influence over these regions and the evolution in their revenue extraction mechanisms played a larger role shaping trends in violence. Consequently, decreases in violence should not be interpreted as indications of lessened bandit operations or weakened groups – quite the opposite, bandit groups are increasingly able to extract revenue without perpetrating violence and increasingly in (often coerced) cooperation with local communities.

UNDERSTANDING THE ARMED BANDIT ECOSYSTEM IN NORTH WEST NIGERIA



The banditry landscape in the region is highly fragmented, with an estimated 80 to 120 distinct bandit gangs operating under different leaders.⁵¹ A vigilante who participated in operations against armed bandits in Wonaka community in Maru described the decentralized character of armed bandits:

[The groups] ... are conducting their operation independently. ... there are about 20 to 30 armed groups in this area. We fought with many of them, we know their

location, hideout and houses. They can be differentiated by their group's members.⁵²

While the exact number of armed bandits is not known, estimates indicate that there are between 20 000 and 30 000 armed bandits operating across Nigeria's North West region and some parts of the North Central belt. Almost one-third of armed bandits are estimated to be in Zamfara State,⁵³ and several thousand in Kaduna.⁵⁴ The larger armed bandit groups typically have multiple bases.

Recruitment processes

Originally, when armed banditry escalated in 2011, young Fulani men were recruited through appeals to their ethnic background. An exhortation, '*Yaro shiga kungiya ka kare gidan ku*' – join the group and protect your family – gained popularity among communities in Zamfara. At the time, the predominantly Hausa Yan Sakai vigilantes conducted indiscriminate retaliatory attacks against Fulani communities, so joining a bandit group was often portrayed as a means of protection.

Motivations for becoming involved in armed banditry vary depending on hierarchical position, age and economic status. Interviews with armed bandit leaders suggest that many take up armed banditry in order to accumulate wealth. However, it is key to underscore that many structured bandit groups took clear shape in a context of growing reprisal attacks by vigilantes. This is explicitly pointed to by some bandit leaders, including Dogo Gide, who claim that they resorted to armed banditry because they were unfairly targeted by state forces and local vigilantes, resulting in loss of properties, livelihoods and in some cases their family members.⁵⁵

A bandit interviewed for this report emphasized self-protection as a major factor in his decision to turn to banditry:

Well, I'm filled with the pain of what people are doing to our relatives and our families. My father was kidnapped and slaughtered by Yan Sakai in Bamamu, Tsafe. He was not a bandit or rustler; he was just a herder going to the market.

He had a good relationship with the Hausa community and the emirates. Even the empire of Tsafe was shocked and angry about this killing, yet they killed him and the emirate did nothing.

If you stay here unarmed, you will be gone by the next morning. Someone from anywhere can come and take away your life or your wife or children, but today they let you exist because they know you're armed. So to get money and feed our families, we farm and work hard. But arms are for protection.⁵⁶

Lower-level members primarily consist of young men, often teenagers or in their twenties, who are typically impoverished and unemployed. These individuals serve as foot soldiers, carrying out acts of kidnapping, cattle rustling and lethal violence. They are drawn to armed bandit groups for a multitude of reasons, including gaining access to weapons and protection, and seeking a means of livelihood.⁵⁷

Some individuals thus join banditry primarily for financial reasons. However, armed bandit groups in Birnin Gwari and Dansadau – a region that includes Maru – have since 2011 periodically resorted to forced recruitment of young Fulani men. Families unwilling to surrender their male children for recruitment faced a difficult choice: relocate to other states or risk losing their cattle to the gangs as retribution.

Consequently, numerous Fulani families opted to move out of Birnin Gwari and Dansadau.⁵⁸

Cattle theft plays a pivotal role in recruitment processes. Many pastoralist herders were recruited into armed banditry as a means to regain cattle they had lost. Young Fulani men from pastoralist communities joined the ranks of armed bandits to avoid losing their family cattle. Other bandits explained that they started their criminal career because of injustices they had suffered, and to protect themselves and their families:

Yes, sometimes you get money, but money is not the reason why we join the group. Money is not why people in these communities buy arms; some, I agree, are just criminals using the instability but for many of the people here, we have to be able to protect ourselves and our families against these Hausa communities and their abuses. ... Go and check how many Fulanis have been killed in moto parks, check points, market squares, even Friday mosques, nobody makes noise or cares about it. Last week, seven Fulanis were missing since they went to a Friday market in Magazu. At checkpoints, the vigilantes from Hausa communities will just fish them out and the drivers will move on. We will never hear about them again.⁵⁹

Overall, loss of livelihoods – largely linked to large-scale cattle-rustling – is an important driver of bandit recruitment, particularly for members of the Fulani community. One vigilante leader in Maru noted: 'The majority of Fulani wealth are cows owned since their forefathers. Today many of these cows were rustled and they became poorer, having nothing left to them. This kind of frustration made many of them join the groups to bring back rustled cows.'⁶⁰ Grievances and economic motivations thus intermingle in shaping recruitment drivers.

Further, unregulated vigilantism and extra-judicial killings have played a significant role in driving individuals to join armed bandit groups. Similarly, military operations resulting in indiscriminate killings have also contributed to driving communities to pick up arms and resort to armed banditry.⁶¹ More broadly, the perceived grievances expressed by some armed bandits underscore the crucial role that economic and political marginalization and exclusion, unresolved conflicts, weak institutional capacity and poor governance have played in entrenching a culture of self-help and driving vulnerable communities to join armed bandit groups or pick up arms in self-defence.⁶² In contrast, the recruitment of informants typically involves monetary incentives.

Hierarchy and roles in armed bandit groups

The structure of armed bandits warrants particular attention because it is complex and poorly understood, adding to their resilience. Their hierarchical structure does not preclude flexibility. Memberships are fluid, with individuals working under different armed bandit leaders at different times. Some bandit leaders coordinate multiple operational bases in different locations.

Bigger bandit groups (ranging between 1 000 and 2 000 members, in contrast to the smaller groups consisting of 30 men or fewer) have well-organized leadership structures, with clearly delineated roles for members in command positions.⁶³ Despite such hierarchies, there are instances of internal discord and clashes within groups.

As highlighted in Figure 6, the Kachalla has overall control over the group and strategic decision-making. Informants and other members of the group may advise on potential targets but the Kachalla has the final say on targets and operations – a decision that he does not reveal to anyone until they are well on their way and close to the target. This withholding of information on operations until the last minute has helped bandits keep potential government informants and rival groups in check while remaining intractable. The deputy is allowed to lead operations and make tactical decisions. He also usually succeeds the Kachalla if the latter dies.

Working directly under the deputy are the intelligence and logistics units, which handle intelligence gathering and the provision of supplies to the group, respectively. At the lower levels of the hierarchy, there are foot soldiers responsible for carrying out attacks and raids. At the lowest rung, separate units exist for cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, motor-bike riders and providing security at the camp, along with looking after kidnapped victims. While each of these units specializes in a particular illicit activity, they all participate in the extortion of farmers and miners, the collection of levies from communities and the enforcement of forced labour. Though members move between units to some extent, functions such as cattle rustling require specific expertise that not all members may possess.⁶⁴

Informants instead advise leaders on possible targets for robbery, kidnapping or cattle rustling and on the activities of security forces and vigilantes. Informants are typically embedded within the target communities rather than residing in camps in the forest with bandit groups. They are therefore hybrid actors that are crucial links between bandit groups and the communities they predate. While it is difficult to accurately sketch out the profile of informants, they typically collaborate with bandit groups in exchange for financial payment.

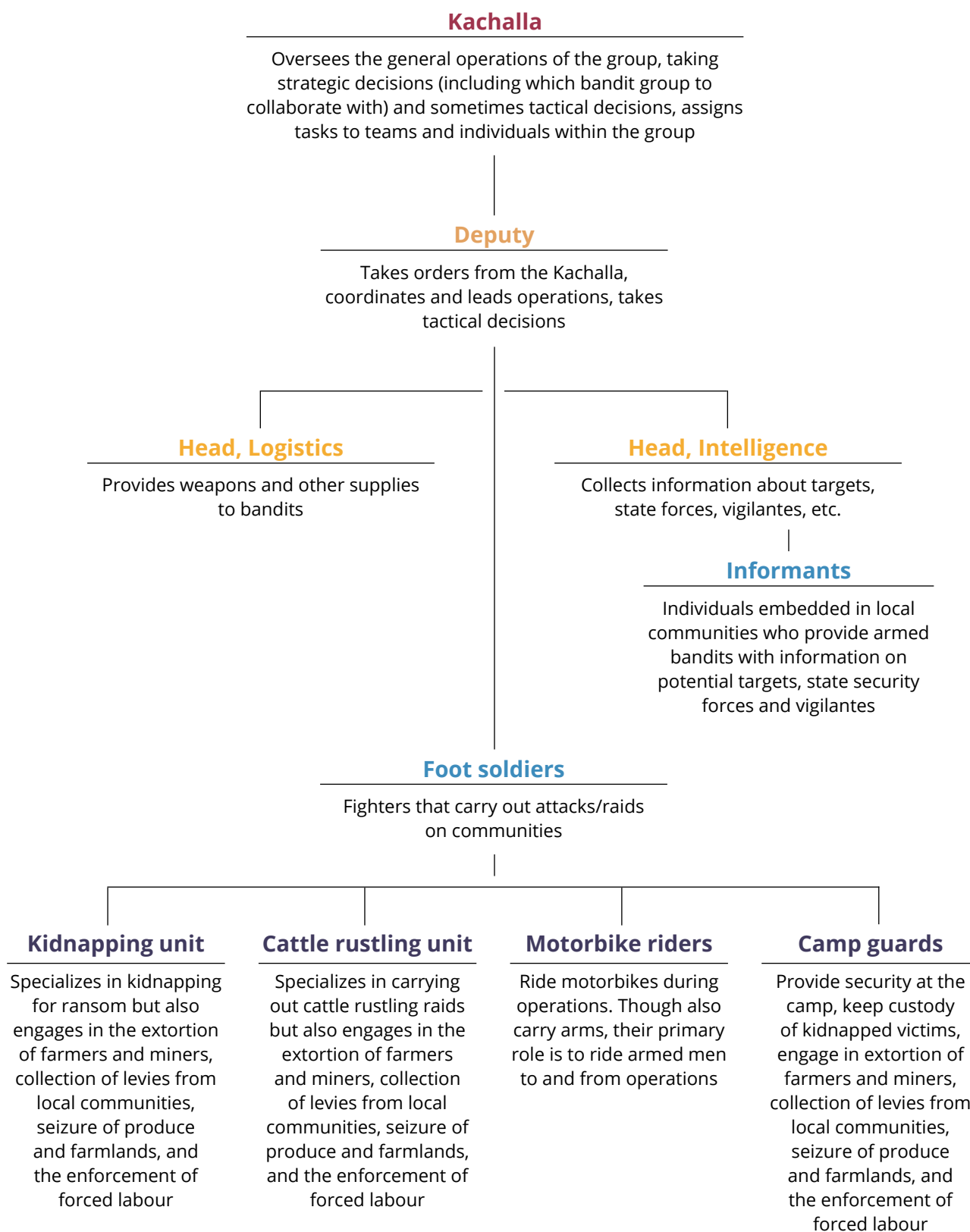


FIGURE 6 Organizational structure of armed bandit groups.

NOTE: This organogram depicts the hierarchy of positions, roles and responsibilities in larger armed bandit groups with 1 000 or more members. Interviews with members of armed bandit groups suggest that roles and responsibilities are not clearly delineated in smaller armed bandit groups and members have multiple and overlapping responsibilities.

SOURCE: Interviews with vigilantes and community leaders in areas affected by armed banditry in Zamfara and Kaduna, June to July 2023

Dynamics between distinct armed groups: Collaboration and contestation

Nigeria's North West banditry landscape is characterized by both fragmentation and strong cooperation between groups. This presents a major challenge to responses: while the fragmented nature makes it difficult for authorities and communities to engage them in dialogue, extensive cooperation enables groups to launch collaborative large-scale attacks against local communities as well as repel vigilantes and state security forces.⁶⁵ As has been described in other conflicts such as in Libya, a fragmented structure can be an advantage for non-state armed groups during combat but hinder peace negotiations.⁶⁶ In the case of bandits, their fragmented character belies a sense of camaraderie underpinned by shared grievances.

Armed bandit groups lack a central authority with thousands of members working under different gang leaders. Most existing analyses emphasize the fragmented nature of Nigeria's armed banditry, with a large number of armed groups engaging in parallel criminal activities and often competing over profits. Less discussed is the strong affinity that exists across different bandit groups, their shared grievances and shared ethnicity in some instances have contributed to a strong sense of camaraderie between different gang leaders, leading to a strong culture of cooperation.⁶⁷

Armed bandits emphasize this camaraderie and cooperation between groups as crucial for their survival. According to an armed bandit operating in central Zamfara, 'We support one another, if the military or vigilantes are coming against any group, everyone will support that group because your group might be the next to be targeted by the military and vigilantes.'⁶⁸ Similarly, another that operates across Zamfara and Kaduna stated, 'We collaborate to repel the attacks. Yes, we support each other to repel and stop military or vigilante attacks... we all have to stand and fight for our families. Otherwise, they will destroy our farms, homes, crops and everything.'⁶⁹ Mentorship is common in bandit groups, although intra-group, inter-generational conflicts are also frequent. Senior bandit members may seek approval from the bandit leader to establish a new group, with the groups remaining close after the separation – another factor

contributing to collaborative engagement.⁷⁰ Conversely, inter-generational conflict and the splintering of groups can also operate as a driver for geographic diffusion, as sub-groups move to find new territory.

These collaborative dynamics, alongside the flexibility of bandit group membership and configurations, are one factor underpinning the resilience of bandit groups in the face of state and community interventions. One of the main reasons why armed bandits are able to orchestrate large-scale lethal attacks – often killing dozens of casualties at a time – is because of their ability to collaborate. For example, in Kanoma in Maru LGA, two bandit leaders – Zakiru and Na-gala – are reported to frequently collaborate and engage in armed robbery and attacks against local communities. A farmer from this community emphasized that 'the relatively small size of an individual armed bandit group does not significantly impact their effectiveness, as they consistently engage in collaborative efforts with other groups to execute attacks'.⁷¹

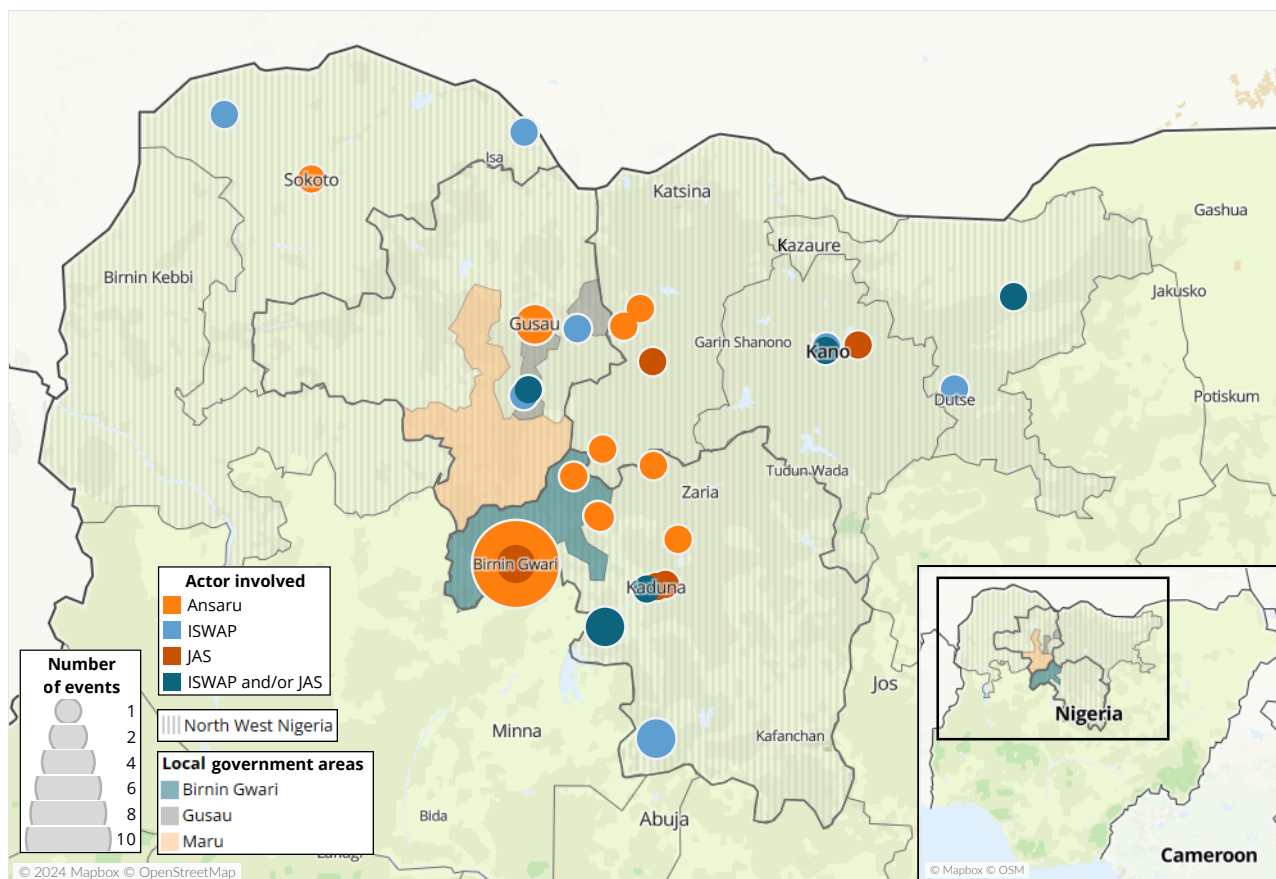
Despite these instances of cooperation, conflicts arise between bandit groups vying for control of specific communities, or over cattle distribution and ransom payments. There are also instances of groups launching retaliatory attacks on one another, including invasions of militia camps following assaults or cattle rustling incidents targeting their own group.⁷² According to one armed bandit, who identified the Kachalla of his group as 'Chiyaman', fights are common but short-lived: 'Yes, there have been fights even recently... there was a fight between us and Dogo Gide's men. It is normal to fight between several groups but we immediately make peace with each other...'⁷³

According to one bandit operating between Zamfara and Kaduna, the interactions between bandit groups vary between locations and seasonally: 'Mostly you will find the clashes happening during the dry seasons when they are in competition of resources or communities to attack and loot, but during the rainy seasons, you find less competition because most soldiers in the group travel and farm.'⁷⁴

Relationships between armed bandits and violent extremist organizations

Armed bandits are not the only non-state armed groups in the North West. From 2013, insurgent groups, to differing extents, started establishing camps in forests across Kaduna and

Zamfara and have gradually spread to neighbouring states (see Figure 7).



Events over time

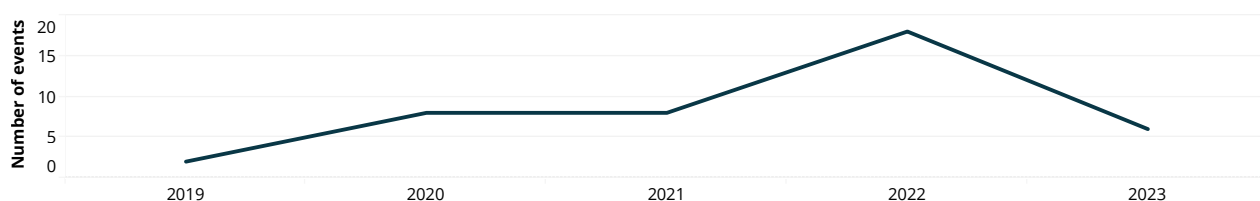


FIGURE 7 Conflict events linked to violent extremist groups in North West Nigeria, 2019–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED

Some elements of insurgent groups appear to have been supported by bandit groups in making the journey west.⁷⁵ Since 2021, increasingly overlapping areas of operations have enhanced opportunities for both collaboration and contestation between bandit and violent extremist groups (see Figure 8). Collaboration between armed bandits and insurgent groups differs from collaboration among armed bandit gangs due to ideological and structural differences – a point further elaborated on in this section.

Escalating state attacks have increasingly forced armed bandits and Ansaru, JAS and ISWAP to operate in closer proximity, establishing camps close to each other within shrinking geographies out of state reach. Reports from Zamfara indicate that Islamist militants have established training camps and

hideouts near Mutu village in Gusau and near Birnin Gwari forests.⁷⁶ In 2021, JAS reportedly relocated some of its bomb fabricators from the North East to Rijana, Igabi and Chikun areas of Kaduna, under the leadership of one of its top members, Bakura Buduma.⁷⁷ There is also a growing presence of ISWAP in Kogi and Niger in the North Central.⁷⁸ This emphasizes the growing opportunities for friction or partnership between insurgent and armed bandit factions, the latter of which can take the form of strategy, personnel and resource sharing.

Bandit groups either have limited interactions with violent extremist groups operating in similar areas,⁷⁹ seek to chase them out,⁸⁰ or have forged (sometimes temporary) alliances. All have been traced between distinct armed bandit groups and each of Ansaru, JAS and ISWAP.

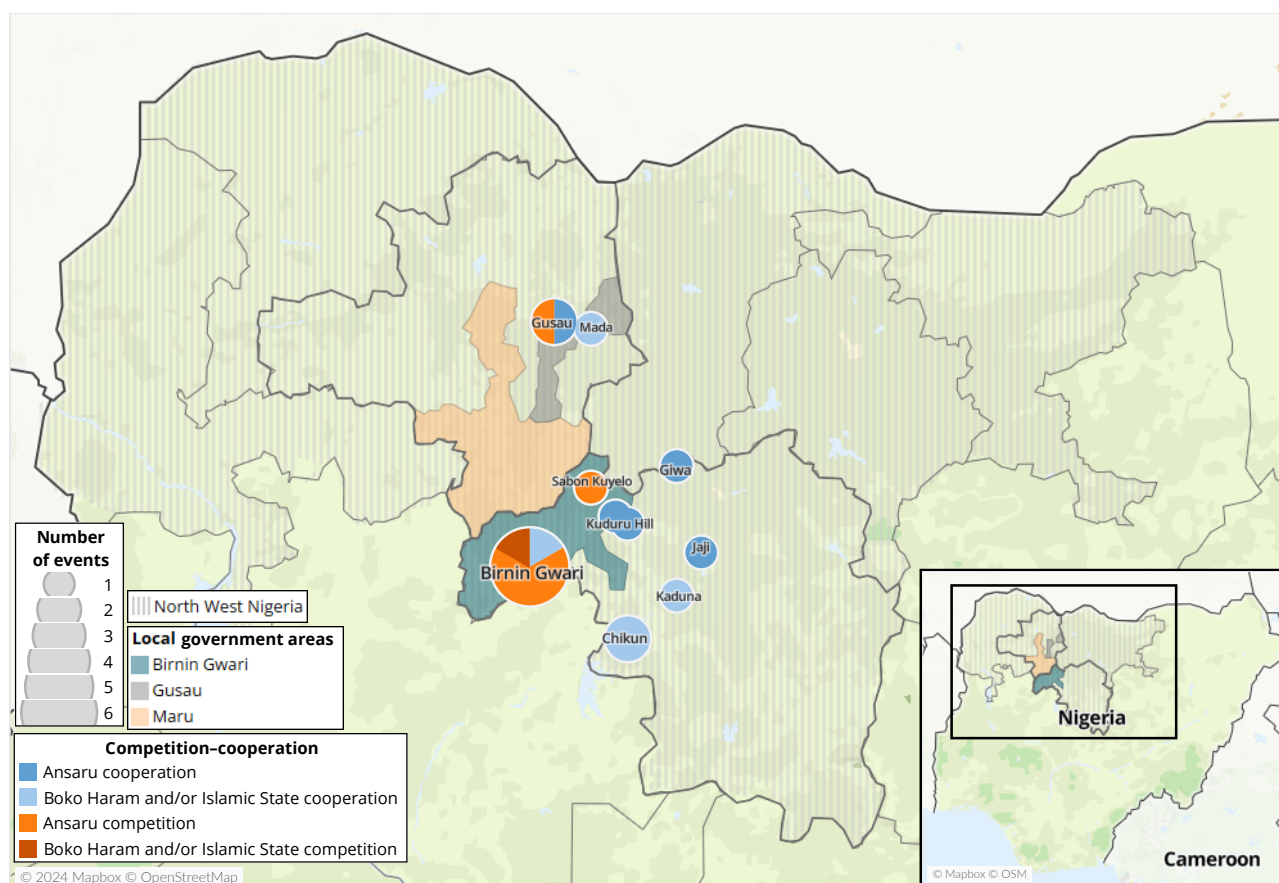


FIGURE 8 Interactions between armed bandits and violent extremist groups in Kaduna and Zamfara, 2020–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED

While this report analyzes the relationships between bandit groups and each violent extremist organization in turn, it is key to note that confidently attributing actions to a particular group is fraught with challenges. Individuals move between violent extremist organizations with a high degree of fluidity in Nigeria's North West, further complicating identification of specific sub-groups.

Ansaru

After being expelled from Maiduguri in 2013, Ansaru (in a similar pattern to JAS, its splinter group) established itself in forests and remote areas with limited state presence. While JAS tried to seize and establish control in rural parts of the North East, where state presence was limited, only later enhancing its presence in North West, Ansaru quickly moved west. By 2014, Ansaru was already moving into Birnin Gwari and later spread to other areas, including Dansadau in Zamfara. Ansaru was severely weakened in North West from 2014 to 2016; the composition of the 'Ansaru' group that experienced

a resurgence since 2019 was substantially different from its original iteration, leading some analysts to argue that it should be treated as a distinct group to its original faction.⁸¹

Unlike in the North East, where JAS used violence to gain control over communities, Ansaru arrived in North West with an expansionist agenda – similar to JNIM's – seeking to build popularity and legitimacy among local communities. Ansaru elements sought to incentivize communities to join them, with the aim of converting the largely Muslim population of North West to their version of Islam. While the group did gain some degree of acceptance around Kwasa-Kwasa and Old Kuyello, they were resisted by some communities such as Damari.⁸²

In what appears to be a further step to enhance community support, Ansaru often (although not consistently) seemed to align its revenue extraction activities closely with community perceptions of legitimacy, contributing to communities' more positive perceptions of Ansaru members than of armed bandits. For example, a youth leader in Birnin Gwari noted:

Ansaru group is not involved in cattle rustling or kidnapping for ransom. They do not engage in extortion from villagers. Instead, their activities focus on mining resources, farming and the collection of *zakat* [a certain proportion of wealth required to be donated by Muslims to charity as an Islamic obligation].⁸³

As part of their efforts to gain community legitimacy, Ansaru positioned themselves as security providers to communities against bandit attacks, in some cases bringing them into conflict with bandit groups. For example, on 13 July 2022, armed bandits attacked Damari – a small town in eastern Birnin Gwari. Some Ansaru members who were there preaching to locals responded with superior fire, forcing the bandits to retreat. The armed bandits killed two locals, but the locals believed many more would have been killed if not for the intervention by Ansaru, reportedly leading to increased support.⁸⁴

Ansaru militants have also reportedly engaged in clashes with armed bandits in some parts of Gusau, culminating in the demise of one bandit leader, and Ansaru seizing weapons and motorcycles from the losing bandit group. Attacks against bandits featured widely in Ansaru-claimed incidents until mid-2022.⁸⁵ One community leader noted that ‘bandits usually avoid engaging in gunfights with the Ansaru militants, so they tend to stay clear of communities where the militants are based. As a result, most communities under the control of Ansaru are relatively peaceful.’⁸⁶

While clashes have been common between Ansaru and bandit groups, there have also been examples of collaboration. The famous bandit kingpin Dogo Gide was believed to be close to Ansaru members, with some accounts linking him to influencing the group’s relocation to Dansadai in 2017. Ansaru made attempts to recruit residents of Dandalla and Babbar Doka, villages in the Dansadai area, but had little success.

Dogo Gide’s group and Ansaru conducted joint mass abductions, including the kidnapping of over 100 students of Federal Government College Yauri in June 2021.⁸⁷ However, collaboration between the groups was short-lived: Ansaru fell out with Gide in 2023 reportedly after Mallam Abba – an Ansaru leader who received 200 million naira from Dogo Gide to supply him with arms – failed to do so. This debacle reportedly led to several clashes between Ansaru and Dogo Gide’s group in 2023.⁸⁸ Some locals also attributed the fall-out to the execution by Ansaru members of two of Gide’s group members accused of committing rape in Dansadua but we could not confirm the date or the specific location of this incident.⁸⁹

However, there was a marked shift in Ansaru’s *modus operandi* from 2022. Local conflicts and the volatile landscape of the North West increasingly made it difficult for the group to establish the popular base that it had initially intended in areas such as Birnin Gwari. After enduring a significant setback from a combined assault by multiple bandit groups in July 2022, followed by military offensives in the subsequent weeks, Ansaru chose to deviate from its original strategy. Rather than sticking to its initial plan, the group decided to forge alliances with powerful bandit leaders in its operational zone, even those it had previously opposed. This strategic shift, along with reported collaborations with ISWAP in various incidents, suggests that Ansaru is prioritizing survival and growth over its earlier insurgency ambitions, potentially compromising its ideological integrity.⁹⁰

JAS

As outlined above, JAS has typically used more coercive practices to garner support among communities, arguably more in line with bandit approaches. Reflecting this, JAS reportedly preached less against the violence perpetrated by bandits than the other violence extremist groups operating in North West.⁹¹ JAS elements have had a longstanding presence in areas of North West, particularly Kano.

Since 2015, a group known locally as Darul Salam, led by a man known as ‘Sadiku’ who was reportedly close to former-JAS leader Shekau, has been operating in parts of North West, with presence concentrated in Niger state. While the name ‘Darul Salam’ was taken from a pre-existing non-violent group called ‘Darul Islam’,⁹² the group led by Sadiku has been reported in the literature to have been closely affiliated to JAS and behind a number of incidents of cattle rustling and kidnapping, reportedly sometimes in collaboration with bandit groups.⁹³ This second iteration of ‘Darul Salam’ may have played a role in facilitating the development of the relationships between JAS and bandit groups, which appeared strengthened in the wake of the turbulence triggered by JAS-leader Shekau’s death in 2020.⁹⁴ Darul Salam was not cited as a key player in Zamfara and Katsina by stakeholders interviewed for this report – who instead very clearly identified JAS operations – perhaps unsurprising as the Darul Salam group continues to operate predominantly in Niger, Kaduna and Nasarawa.⁹⁵

In Birnin Gwari, residents have linked armed bandits with JAS because some bandits – especially Dogo Gide’s group – wear long robes and chant *Allahu Akbar* (God is most great) the same way that violent extremist groups such as JAS and Ansaru do during attacks.⁹⁶ Communities in Kaduna also

report instances of cooperation between JAS militants and armed bandits, who had established hideouts within and around Birnin Gwari's forests, though distinguishing between different violent extremist groups by local communities is fraught with challenges.⁹⁷

Like in the case of Ansaru, there have also been cases of collaboration between bandit groups and JAS in the context of mass abductions. On 11 December 2020, bandit leader Auwalun Daudawa, working with several other armed bandit groups, kidnapped 300 schoolchildren in Kankara in Katsina. The bandit groups handed the responsibility of negotiating the ransom and release of the school children over to JAS. Abubakar Shekau, then leader of JAS, claimed responsibility for the kidnapping in a video. According to media reports, an undisclosed amount of money was paid as ransom before the children were released, though the government denied this.⁹⁸

However, clashes between JAS and bandit groups also abound. Illustratively, on 16 July 2022, a group of armed bandits ambushed members of JAS near a community controlled by the extremists in Birnin Gwari, leading to the death of 17 JAS members.⁹⁹

ISWAP

More recently, starting around 2020 and escalating after the death of Shekau in 2021, ISWAP has also expanded from North East to North West. Since then, the group is reported to have established its presence in Kuyanbana forest in Zamfara and launched several attacks in other parts of the region, including an attack on a military base in Sokoto on 26 September 2021 and vandalization of electrical power installations in Katsina.¹⁰⁰ Part of the drivers behind ISWAP's westerly movement may be to enhance coordination with Islamic State Sahel Province cells operating in Niger Republic, reflecting the group's close ties with the global Islamic State ecosystem.¹⁰¹

While interactions between armed bandits and Ansaru – and to a lesser extent JAS – are well documented, there is less evidence regarding ISWAP's engagements with bandit groups. Like JAS and Ansaru, ISWAP targets government forces and installations as well as all non-Muslims. Unlike JAS, however, ISWAP maintains a strong stance against attacking Muslim populations. Armed bandits target civilians of all ethnicities and religions – a stark difference in approach, which may pose an obstacle to collaboration. As far as its doctrines go, Ansaru also disavows violence against Muslim populations but this has not always been the case in practice.¹⁰²

Collaboration between bandits and violent extremist groups: Looking ahead

Among the three violent extremist groups gaining traction in North West, JAS, Ansaru and ISWAP, the doctrinal stance of JAS is arguably more inclined to accommodate collaboration with armed bandits compared to the other two. This is because of the ideological differences discussed above, which permit greater violence towards civilians.¹⁰³

However, as detailed above, Ansaru has cooperated with armed bandits on a number of occasions, potentially indicating flexibility in adhering to their doctrinal principles. Many Ansaru members were part of a wing that specialized in kidnapping for ransom previously run by JAS – one of the main revenue sources of armed bandits.¹⁰⁴ This may contribute to opportunities for alignment and collaboration in abductions between bandits and Ansaru. While ideology likely plays a role, practical considerations – the sharing of skills, contacts and equipment – are also likely to shape relationships established.

As violent extremist groups become more established in North West and state responses drive groups to establish camps in a smaller area, instances of both conflict and

collaboration between groups are likely to increase. Both scenarios present distinct challenges. Competition and conflicts between violent extremist groups and armed bandits are likely to further destabilize communities, swelling casualties as locals are caught in the crossfire. On the other hand, precedent suggests that cooperation could mean better organized, more large-scale, attacks. While details regarding the spate of mass abductions in the North West in March 2024 remain scarce, these could indicate a resurgence in large-scale attacks, potentially in part underpinned through such collaborations.¹⁰⁵

Importantly, local conflicts and the unpredictable dynamics of the North West significantly influence the dynamics between armed bandits and violent extremist groups, as seen in the case of Ansaru. In such contexts, extremist groups may find themselves compelled to compromise their ideological principles in favour of practical strategies, such as aligning with and cooperating with armed bandits, who currently hold a stronger position in the region.

PROFILE OF A BANDIT LEADER: DOGO GIDE

Dogo Gide ranks among the most powerful bandit group leaders, as assessed by the number of members and weapons in the group he controls and the violence they unleash. While some media reports suggest his demise from gunshot wounds in March 2024, this is shrouded in uncertainty as other sources claim he remains alive.¹⁰⁶ Dogo Gide is believed to command over a thousand armed bandits¹⁰⁷ and has been responsible for organizing kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, rapes and attacks on communities in North West and North Central, in states including Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna and Niger. Dogo Gide's men are camped across forests within the regions, including Kuyanbana, Sububu and Kamuku.

Dogo Gide was born in Niger State in North Central, over 40 years ago. Although originally a native of Maru LGA, where banditry started in Zamfara in 2011, his links to armed bandits were not known until 2018, when he killed his former bandit leader – the notorious Buharin Daji – and took control of his Zamfara-based group.¹⁰⁸

He exerts significant influence over some areas in which his group operates. For example, he has (to unclear levels of success) reportedly banned other bandit groups from attacking certain communities around Kuyambana forest in Dansadau, believed to be his home area.¹⁰⁹

The first contact between Dogo Gide and Ansaru emerged in 2017, as the former reportedly invited Ansaru to set up a base in Dansadau area of Zamfara. Although Dogo Gide does not claim to belong to any extremist group, locals have

linked him to imposing a ban on the sale of alcohol and illicit drugs in areas under his influence in Zamfara.¹¹⁰

Dogo Gide's profile rose sharply in 2019, when he started organizing high-profile kidnapping attacks outside Zamfara. This escalated to mass abductions in 2021: Allegedly, Dogo Gide, in collaboration with Ansaru, masterminded the abduction of over 100 school students of Federal Government College Yauri, Kebbi State, in June 2021; 121 students of Bethel Baptist School in Kaduna in July; and the abduction of at least 60 passengers and the killing of eight others on a Kaduna-bound train.¹¹¹ Apart from millions of naira reportedly paid, Gide was also said to have used the victims to bargain for the release of his incarcerated men.¹¹²

Dogo Gide's group is believed to be well-armed with sophisticated weapons, including anti-aircraft guns.¹¹³ In August 2023, his men claimed responsibility for shooting down a military helicopter in Niger state,¹¹⁴ killing at least two dozen individuals.¹¹⁵ The Nigerian military reported that the helicopter had crashed, rather than been downed in an attack. It is not the first time that bandits bring down military aircraft. In 2021, the Nigeria Air Force linked bandits in Zamfara to the shooting down of a fighter jet.¹¹⁶

Since 2019, several media have reported the killing of Dogo Gide through military action or internal conflicts – most recently in March 2024. Those reports have turned out to be inaccurate, as the bandit kingpin has continued to operate on communities in northern Nigeria.



FINANCING AND RESOURCING

Armed bandits draw rents from various licit and illicit economies. In Kaduna and Zamfara, armed bandits generate revenue streams from five main sources: cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, artisanal gold mining, extracting rents from road users – either as extortion or in the provision of transport services – and taxation of farmers, seizing of farms and forced labour.

Though armed bandits are opportunistic in their involvement in different illicit economies, certain bandit leaders are associated with specific illicit activities. For example, in Birnin Gwari,

Dogo Gide is associated with illicit gold mining, cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom. In the same region, Yellow Janbros is only associated with the last two illicit activities.¹¹⁷

In recent years, armed bandits have flexibly moved between sources of financing and between three types of engagement with illicit economies: targeted attacks and robberies directed at the supply chain; imposition of levies on market participants; and the assumption of control over parts or the entirety of the supply chain of specific commodities such as artisanal gold or cattle (*Figure 9*).

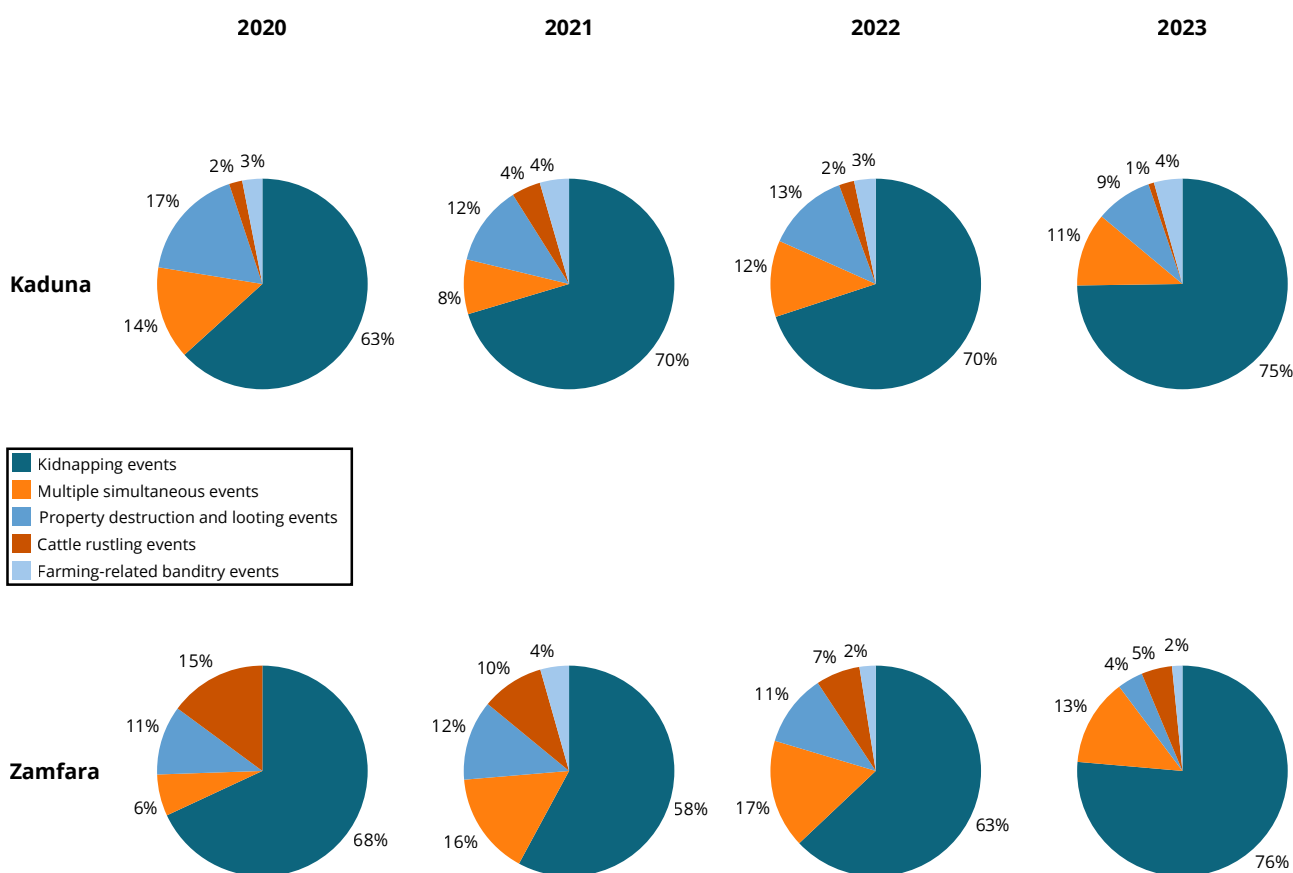


FIGURE 9 Recorded violence from banditry-related activities.

SOURCE: ACLED

Further, although we do not explore bandit arms supplies in depth, there is an identifiable trend of larger armed bandit groups stockpiling arms and leasing these to smaller groups

for their operations. Payment for these leased weapons is in the form of cash or rustled cattle.¹¹⁸

Cattle rustling

Between 2011 and 2019, livestock markets served as a crucial source of financing for armed bandit groups operating in Zamfara and Kaduna. Groups extracted most revenue through rustling and reselling cattle heads, with thefts ranging from a few to several hundred heads of cattle in a single incident. However, bandits also gained revenue by imposing levies on herders, purportedly in exchange for protection from theft, although such protection was limited given that other bandit groups would still steal the cattle. Partly reflecting the lack of security provided, herders have generally perceived the imposition of levies negatively.¹¹⁹

Since 2019, the profitability of cattle rustling and feasibility of exerting levies has diminished due to the depletion of herds through rustling and the relocation of livestock owners to safer areas. Simultaneously, a reluctance among buyers to purchase cattle known to be stolen led to a decline in prices in North West since 2016.¹²⁰

In Birnin Gwari and Maru, decreased occurrences of cattle rustling appear to loosely align with increased incidents of kidnapping, indicative of how armed bandits opportunistically switch from one illicit source of financing to another. In Gusau, where cattle rustling levels were generally low, likely due to its predominantly urban nature, there have been relatively higher levels of kidnapping incidents.

Since late 2023, incidents of cattle rustling between distinct armed bandit groups have been escalating and operating as a growing driver of violence in the form of clashes between groups. The scale of cattle rustling targeting communities by armed bandit groups has meant that bandits are now currently the largest cattle owners in North West and have limited non-bandit targets to steal from.¹²¹ As herds have moved out of Zamfara and Katsina, some bandit groups have moved with them, driving violence in neighbouring states. However, many remained within the regions of focus, instead switching their revenue-generating activities.

Kidnapping

Confronted with a sustained decline in revenue from cattle rustling, armed bandit groups increasingly shifted their focus to kidnapping for ransom since 2019, recognizing it as a more lucrative activity that became the primary source of income for many of these groups.¹²²

A youth leader in Kuyello in Birnin Gwari described this shift:

Initially, the bandits were primarily engaged in cattle rustling, but they gradually transitioned into kidnappings ... but armed bandits do not engage in cattle rustling anymore because there are no more cattle available for rustling in most of the villages in Birnin Gwari.¹²³

Kidnapping in Nigeria is countrywide, affecting every region and involving different criminal actors. However, as Figure 10 below indicates, North West is the worst affected. While different actors engage in kidnapping in other parts of the country, such as JAS and ISWAP in the North East and cult groups in South South, armed bandits have orchestrated more kidnappings in North West and North Central than all the other actors combined.

Between 2019 and 2022, the peak of the North West kidnapping industry's profitability, kidnapping incidents predominantly targeted affluent farmers and businessmen, resulting in bandits collecting millions of naira in ransom payments. However, the pool of potential targets for kidnappers diminished. Many farmers and businessmen – repeatedly targeted multiple times by bandit groups – either depleted their wealth through repeated ransom payments, fled their locations, or lost their lives for failing to meet ransom demands. In the period from 2019 to 2020, a consistent flow of villagers in Zamfara and Kaduna paid transporters up to NGN350 000 (over US\$800) to facilitate their relocation away from their communities, mainly towards the capital cities of these states.¹²⁴

In both Zamfara and Kaduna, individuals, companies and elements of the Nigerian state have paid ransoms to armed bandits. Since 2019, kidnapping has remained a major – although diminished – source of financing for armed bandits.¹²⁵

Kidnapping trends show variations across Birnin Gwari, Gusau and Maru. In Birnin Gwari, kidnapping incidents

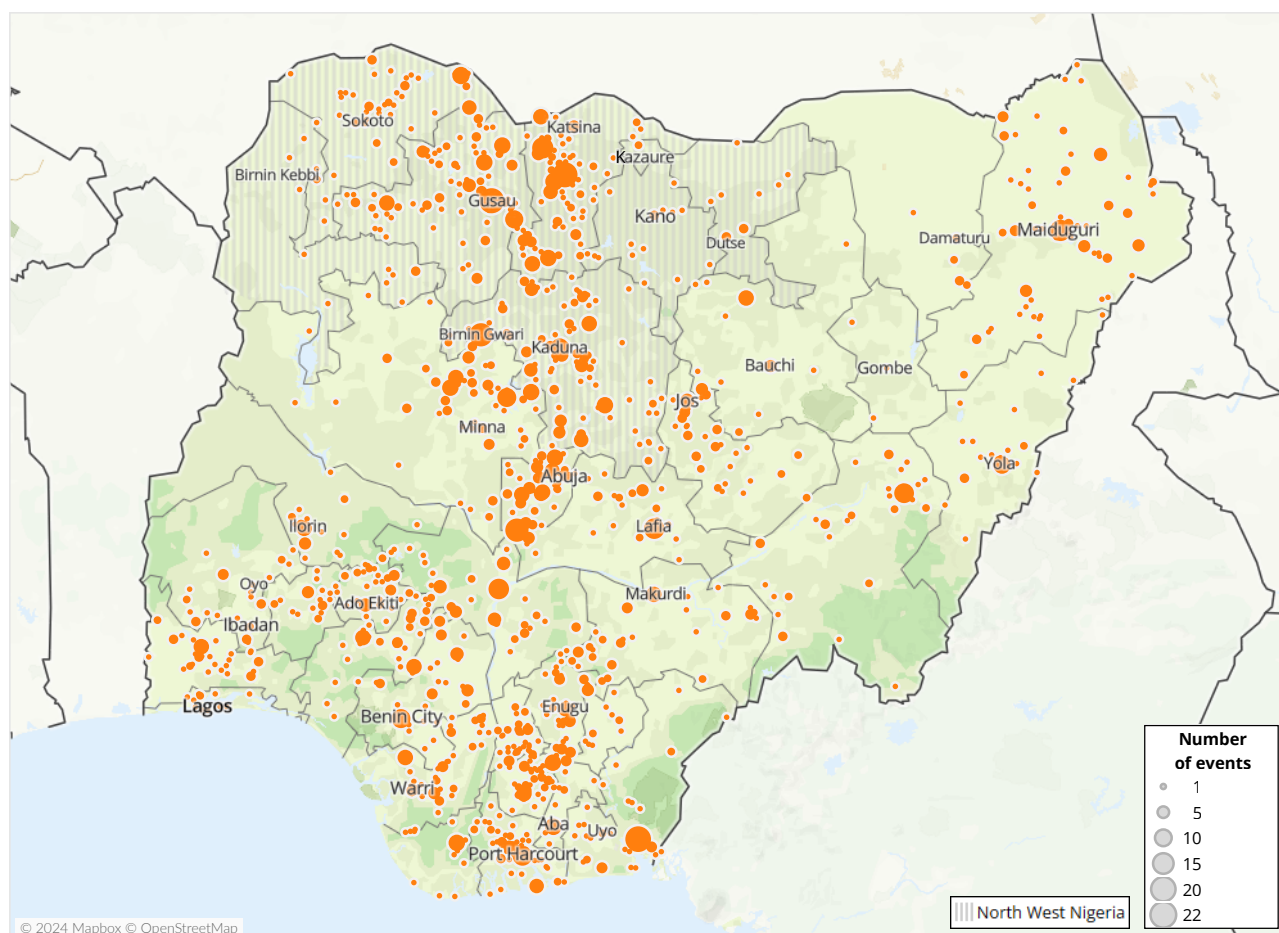


FIGURE 10 Abductions in Nigeria, 2020–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED

escalated in 2021, while in Gusau, incidents demonstrated an upward trend from 2019. Both areas experienced a peak in incidents in 2022, followed by a decline in 2023. In Maru, kidnapping incidents surged between 2019 and 2021, slightly decreasing in 2022 and then increasing again in 2023.¹²⁶ These variations and fluctuations in patterns of kidnappings are shaped by different factors, including changes in levels and locations of military operations, cash scarcity resulting from the naira redesign policy,¹²⁷ shifts in the geographic scope of armed bandit activities and the displacement of local populations.

Kidnapping is a major source of revenue for armed bandits and other criminal actors operating in other parts of the country. The table below gives an estimate of the amount demanded and paid as ransom across the country. Though this amount includes ransom demanded by and paid to other types of criminal actors operating in other regions, a large proportion of it was paid to armed bandits in the North West and North Central parts of the country.

As noted in the section above, there is a distinct inverse correlation observed between kidnapping and cattle rustling. In Birnin Gwari and Maru, instances of kidnapping tended to be higher during periods when cattle rustling levels were comparatively lower.

However, though the kidnapping of individuals has been declining since 2023 (see Figure 11), there has been an escalation of mass abductions in the first quarter of 2024. At least 500 people have been kidnapped in a string of large-scale abductions occurring in North East and North West regions. On 29 February, individuals believed to be affiliated with JAS abducted a minimum of 200 individuals, predominantly women and children, in the North Eastern state of Borno.¹²⁸ At least three incidents of mass kidnappings have happened since early March. On 7 March, a group of gunmen invaded a school and kidnapped 287 pupils in Chikun local government area in Kaduna. In another incident, gunmen abducted 15 children from an Islamic school in Sokoto on 9 March. On 12 March, gunmen kidnapped about 61 people in Kajuru area, Kaduna State.¹²⁹

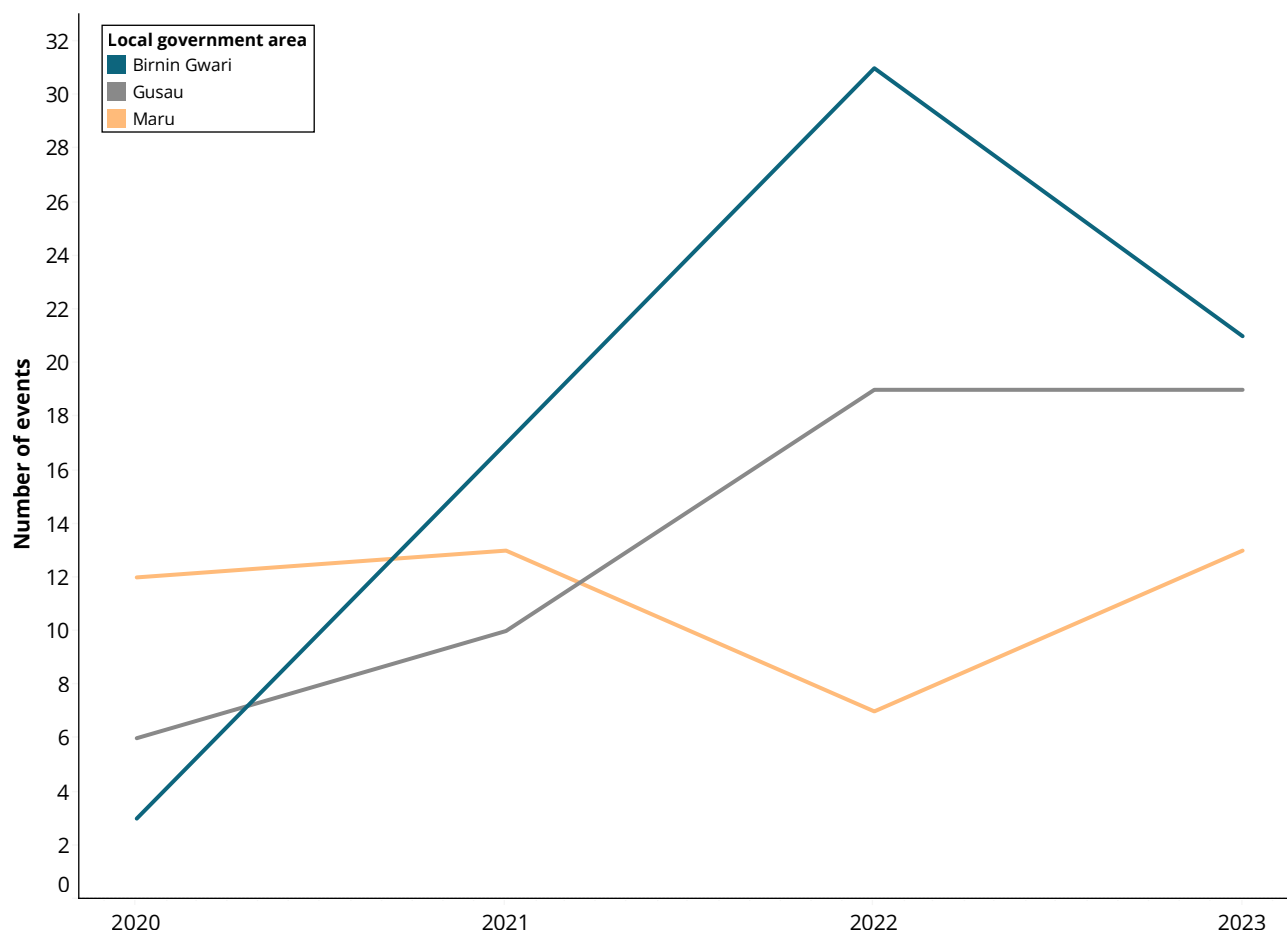


FIGURE 11 Kidnapping incidents in Birnin Gwari, Gusau and Maru, 2020–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED

Number of kidnap-related incidents	582
Number of people kidnapped	3 620
Victims killed in kidnap-related incidents	430
Ransom demanded	5 billion naira (€6 078 550)
Ransom paid	302 million naira (€367 144)

FIGURE 12 Kidnap-related incidents and ransom paid in Nigeria, July 2022 to June 2023.

NOTE: SBM data is used here because ACLED does not systematically collect data on ransom payments. The figures are not only for kidnappings by armed bandits in North West – they reflect national trends, including ransoms paid to other actors involved in kidnapping in other regions, among them violent extremist groups in the North East, and cult groups and political gangs in the south.

SOURCE: SBM Intelligence, The economics of Nigeria's kidnap industry: Follow the money, 23 August 2023

Several factors have likely contributed to the resurgence of mass kidnappings, including the declining profitability of individual kidnappings for ransom; the strategic advantage of using Ramadan to pressure the government into paying ransoms; the desire to gain bargaining leverage for the release of detained members of armed bandit groups; and the killing

of an armed bandit leader in February 2024.¹³⁰ Many of the kidnapped victims have been freed, though some remain in captivity. Media reports indicate that the government paid substantial sums in ransom to secure the release of these victims, but government spokespersons have refuted these claims.¹³¹

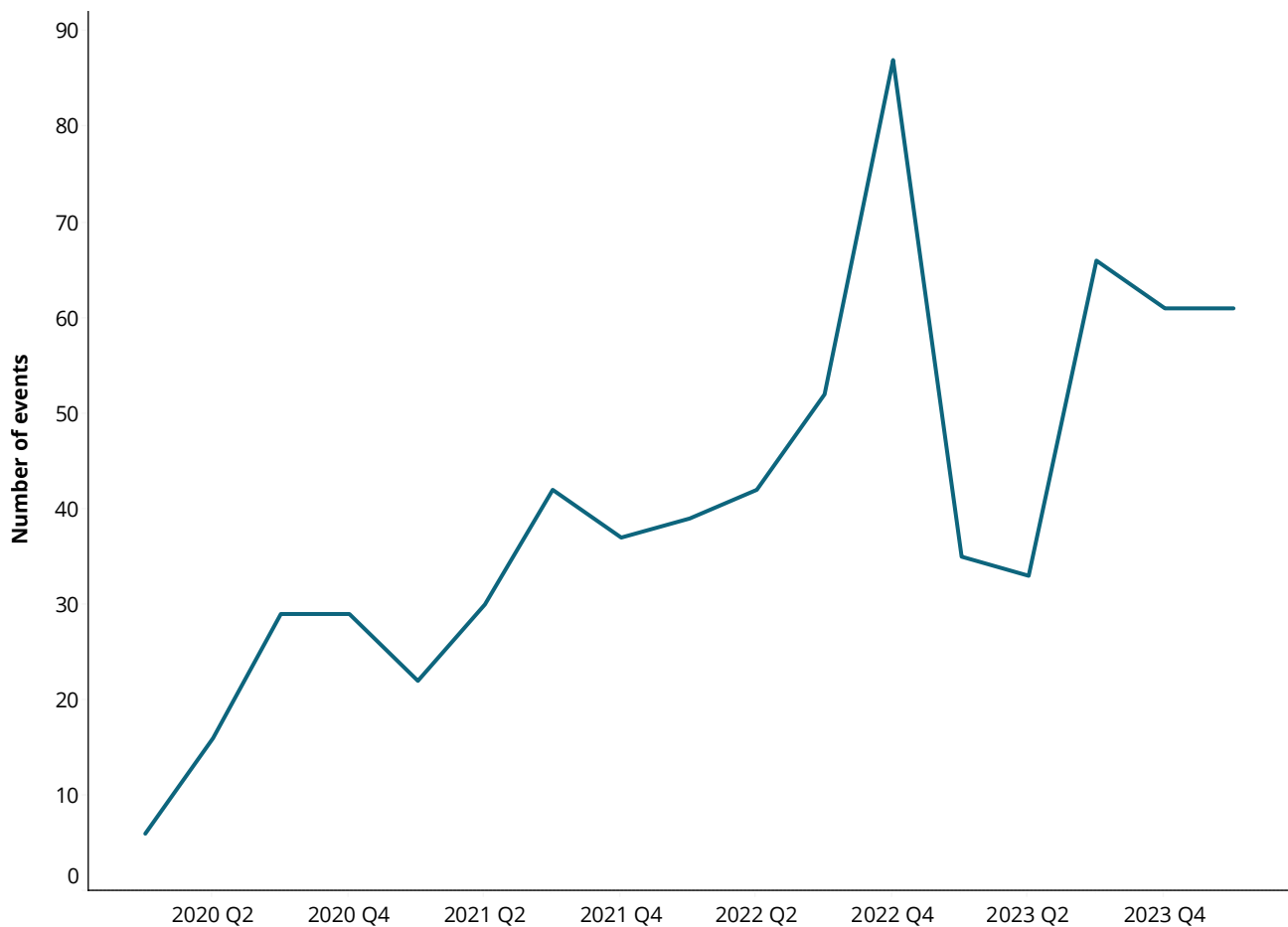


FIGURE 13 Abductions in North West Nigeria, January 2020 to March 2024.

SOURCE: ACLED

Before this recent surge in mass kidnappings, armed bandits had been solidifying their position as significant players in the artisanal gold mining sector in North West. While kidnappings are expected to continue as an important source of financing

for bandits, the artisanal gold mining industry is progressively becoming the primary revenue source for them, as outlined in the following section.

Artisanal gold mining

As revenues from kidnapping and cattle rustling have declined, bandits have increasingly turned to the gold mining industry for financing. Gold mining has a long history in North West Nigeria. While colonial companies officially started mining in parts of Zamfara and Kaduna states in 1913, including Maru and Birnin Gwari, artisanal gold mining likely pre-dated this by centuries. Colonial gold mining peaked in the early 1940s, but World War II brought it to an abrupt stop around 1945. Subsequent attempts to nationalize profits from mining – for example with the Nigerian Mining Corporation, which commenced gold mining in the early 1980s – were short-lived, with the corporation quickly stopping due to lack of funds. The discovery of petroleum diverted attention away from gold exploration, despite its considerable untapped potential.¹³²

The gold mining industry in Zamfara and Kaduna is predominantly artisanal and informal, despite some steps by the government towards formalization. Four key actors are involved in the gold industry: local artisanal miners and middlemen who operate informally; companies owned mostly by state actors and their political associates; foreign companies, mostly Chinese-owned; and armed bandit groups.¹³³

The precise quantity of gold extracted in Zamfara, Kaduna and other regions in the North West remains uncertain due to the informal nature of the industry. Though the figures could not be independently confirmed, media reports suggest that approximately 97 metric tonnes of gold, valued at over US\$3 billion, was illicitly transported out of Nigeria between 2012 and 2018.¹³⁴

Armed bandits' interactions with the gold mining industry have evolved over time. Initially, bandits attacked and robbed miners and intermediaries involved in purchasing gold at mining sites. Escalating attacks started attracting media attention in 2016, particularly after an attack that left 36 gold miners dead in Gidan Ardo community in Zamfara.¹³⁵ Attacks intensified further between 2016 and 2018, especially in Kaduna and Zamfara.

During such incidents, bandits confiscated money, gold and other valuable items, killing scores of people. For instance, on 7 November 2016, armed bandits raided an artisanal gold mining site in Gidan Ardo, Maru LGA, resulting in the seizure of gold and valuables, and the killing of 40 gold miners and dealers.¹³⁶ In another incident on 11 April 2018, bandits seized gold from artisanal miners in Kuru Kuru, Anka LGA, and left at least 26 dead.¹³⁷

Beyond the direct appropriation of gold, cattle and other valuables, lethal attacks also instilled a profound sense of fear within targeted communities, catalyzing future compliance with directives issued by the bandits. These lethal attacks and robberies have been more prevalent in regions where armed bandits sought to assert dominance and establish control over licit and illicit economies compared to areas where they have relatively more control.

In response to escalating bandit attacks on gold mining actors and recognizing the significant role of the gold mining sector in financing armed banditry – as is the case in a number of conflict theatres across West and Central Africa – the federal government implemented a ban on all mining activities in Zamfara in April 2019.¹³⁸ This mirrors government responses to the risk of conflict actors drawing revenues from gold mining across West Africa, particularly in the Sahel.¹³⁹ While mining continued despite the ban, the prohibition had significant repercussions on the operations of small-scale miners, as armed bandits escalated protection fees for mining activities. Unable to meet the heightened fees, many small-scale miners vacated the mining sites. By contrast, the ban had a limited impact on slightly larger mining companies, particularly those with ties to the state government and Chinese mining entities.¹⁴⁰ According to an academic source who has conducted extensive research on armed banditry and mining in North West, these entities were able to continue mining and paying the increased protection fees.¹⁴¹

In the wake of the ban, bandits have continued imposing levies on miners as a 'protection fee' to gain access to various artisanal gold mining sites in Zamfara and Kaduna. For example, since November 2022, miners and purchasers in mines

within Bukuyum and Maru, were forced to pay 10% of their monthly earnings as a levy to armed bandits;¹⁴² 'local miners pay them taxes to operate in the forest,' a youth leader said.¹⁴³ This levy is often referred to as a 'protection fee', although it operates primarily as a payment in return for granting miners and dealers access to the mines, rather than assurances of safety. Local miners view the levies and actions imposed by armed bandits negatively, yet many comply due to fear of repercussions.¹⁴⁴

A number of different bandit groups exert levies on distinct mining sites: one local miner counted the different bandit leaders operating around Ahrawa community in Maru: 'Dan Nagala group, Alin Nagala group, Heshi group, Mamuda group and Zakiru group. They are known to everybody living here and are not far away from our community. In fact, the number of armed groups terrorizing this area is more than 15.'¹⁴⁵ However, one leader was repeatedly flagged as a key figure in the market: 'Dogo Gide is the most prominent leader who is involved in illegal mining...'¹⁴⁶

Notably, while local miners pay their protection fees in cash, according to one academic, Chinese miners reportedly made payments in both currency and weaponry.¹⁴⁷ A number of different media sources have reported Chinese companies bribing armed bandits to gain access to mining sites in Katsina, Zamfara and Niger.¹⁴⁸ However, certain mining companies have contested such allegations. For instance, Ming Xin, a Chinese company, reportedly refuted accusations of paying bribes to Dogo Gide for access to mining sites in the Kurube community of Niger state, in rebuttals local authorities supported.¹⁴⁹ This research was not able to separately verify these statements.

In Anka LGA, among other mining sites in Zamfara, armed bandits started forcing miners to work for them on designated days of the week (where all findings were handed over to the bandits), reserving other days for independent mining.¹⁵⁰ However, many local miners resisted this arrangement, refusing to work at sites and insisting on direct cash payments instead. Armed bandits acquiesced to this demand, prompting numerous local miners to resume working at the mines controlled by the bandits.¹⁵¹ This demonstrates a negotiated settlement between miners and bandits, where the former were able to influence the operations of the latter.

Since late 2023, armed bandits have started seizing full control of certain mining sites in Kaduna, expelling all mining companies, even those with affiliations to the state government and Chinese firms, and working in the mines themselves. 'Some of the bandits operating around Kurega axis are involved in local

mining for precious stones and silver to earn money,' said a senior official of a community association in Birnin Gwari.¹⁵² This could present a further evolution in bandits' engagement with the gold industry.

Revenue generation on roads

Roads are important spaces for revenue generation in North West. Armed bandits extract rents from roads and highways through two primary methods: operating transport businesses and extorting or robbing commercial motorists who transport traders to and from markets.

Armed bandits have since 2022 started providing transport services in some parts of Zamfara. The deteriorating security situation and spikes in attacks on road users led to the suspension of transportation services by private operators.¹⁵⁴ Mobility was further hampered by the absence of motorcycles, which ceased to be a popular means of transportation when bandits started stealing them in 2014.

Some bandits saw an opportunity to venture into the transportation business: Dandela, a popular bandit leader, has since 2022 provided trucks that shuttle passengers and goods between Kango and Bindim as well as Dangulbi and Magami in Zamfara. Only Dandela's vehicles run commercial services and are not attacked by bandits along the routes. 'If the vehicles are not carrying passengers, they are conveying villagers to his (Dandela's) farm at Kango,' a vigilante member noted.¹⁵⁵

Where armed groups have disrupted transportation routes through ongoing violence, the same groups have either stepped into the void to provide the disrupted service – as is the case with Dadela – or only permitted operations by allied actors, in return for a fee, as has been tracked across areas of the Sahel.¹⁵⁶

In Birnin Gwari, both armed bandits and JAS separately set up roadblocks on roads to local markets, such as the Udawa market, seizing crops from villagers and blocking traders going to markets. JAS controls the road on Udawa – Niger State border, while the armed bandits control the road to Lukope, Kucellah Kutere, Manini and Kurega, where they engage in kidnappings, seize valuables and abduct women.¹⁵⁷

Bandits then coerce villagers into purchasing market goods stolen from them. Those who resist can face expulsion from

Given the substantial gold reserves in North West,¹⁵³ the industry presents armed bandits with significant earning potential but could also attract other armed groups, intensifying competition over control.

the community. Bandits employ non-bandit traders to sell stolen goods, including rustled cattle, typically at significantly reduced prices. This helps conceal the illicit origins of the items and is also deployed where the bandits' access to markets is restricted due to the presence of law enforcement or community vigilantes. Over time, these markets evolve into hubs for trading illicit goods.

Roadblocks can also be employed by bandit foot soldiers who rob road users of money and mobile phones without the knowledge of the leadership: 'Sometimes these roadblocks are mounted by young members who want money or phones. We even try to stop it now but sometimes you don't know when they go out to do it ...,' noted one bandit member.¹⁵⁸ Beyond roadblocks, this can also mean these young members can sometimes carry out low-level attacks and robberies without the knowledge of the leadership, an occurrence that can potentially complicate the prospects of negotiating peace pacts with bandit leaders.

When armed bandits are relocating due to pressure from military operations, they mount roadblocks on the highways and loot local communities as they move from one place to the other (*see Figure 14*). Apart from being sources of income on the go, bandit leaders sanction roadblocks, attacks and lootings to express their frustrations against military operations and the activities of vigilantes. 'For example, bandits like Kawaje mounted many roadblocks along the Magami-Dansadau axis in reaction to the activities of the military and vigilantes between 2021 and 2023,' a bandit said.¹⁵⁹

However, when compared to alternative revenue streams such as cattle rustling and kidnapping, roadblocks – unless specifically set up for kidnapping purposes – are not a significant source of funding for armed bandits. As discussed in the following section, armed bandits are increasingly turning to taxing farmers, seizing farms and enforcing forced labour to generate income.

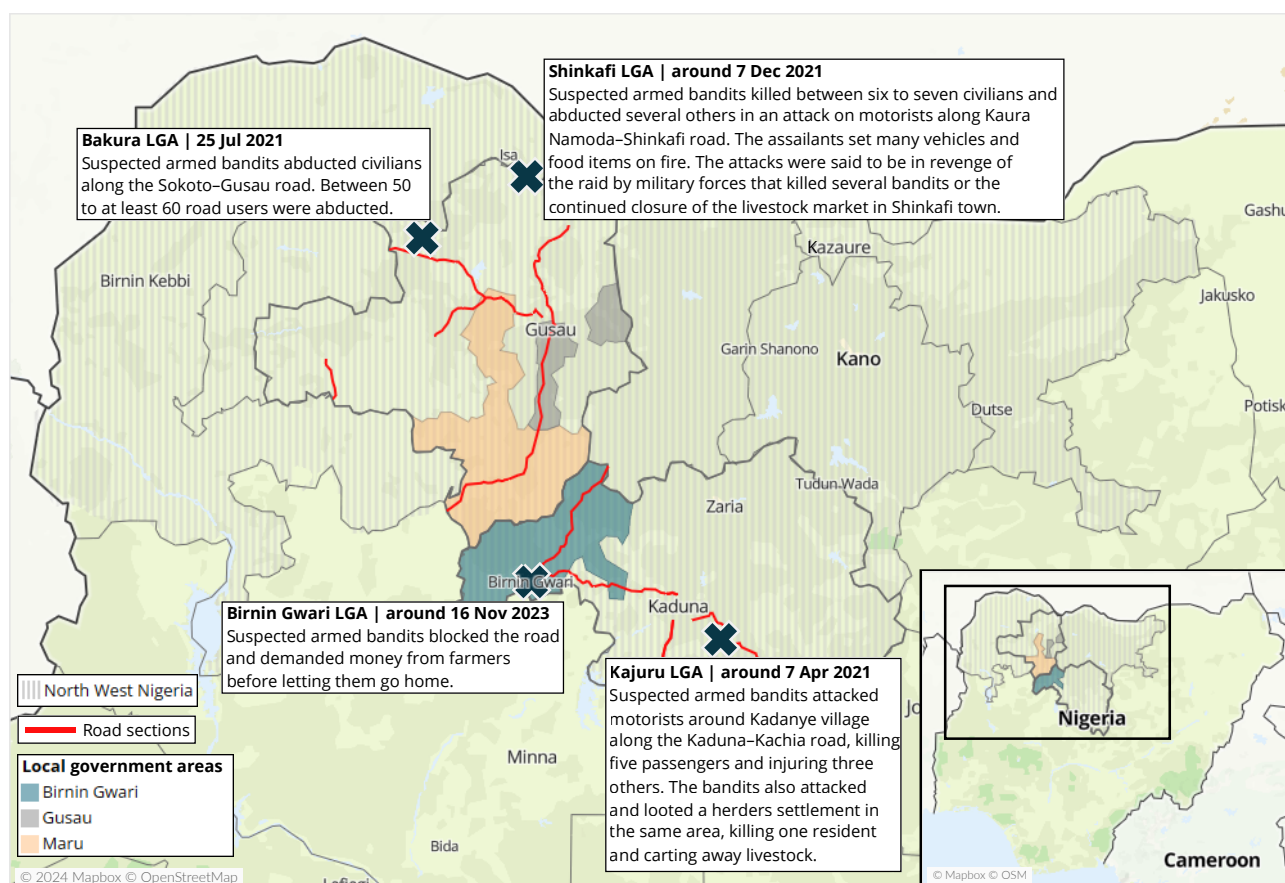


FIGURE 14 Road sections with major banditry activity in Zamfara and Kaduna, 2020–2023.

SOURCE: ACLED

Taxation of farmers, seizing of farms and forced labour

Particularly since 2021, bandit groups across areas of Zamfara and Kaduna have imposed levies on farming communities in exchange for enabling access to their own farmlands. This illegitimate taxation, ranging from five to 10 million naira (US\$8 033), is enforced prior to planting and a subsequent levy of the same amount is demanded during the harvest period, according to a local vigilante in Maru.¹⁶⁰ However, even those who comply with these levies are not necessarily safe from bandit violence: some levy-compliant farmers still fall victim to kidnappings, forcing their relatives 'to sell the entire harvest to meet ransom demands'.¹⁶¹

The levies exacted from farming communities serve as a significant revenue stream for armed bandits, with numerous communities in Gusau, Maru and Birnin Gwari currently paying taxes. Demands can be high, and requested suddenly, with exactions for failure to pay consistently severe. In May 2023, three communities in Birnin Gwari – Sabon Layi, Tashar Keji and Ruwan Rana – faced a 10 million naira (US\$8 033)¹⁶² levy imposed by armed bandits.¹⁶³ In June 2022, farming

communities in Birnin Gwari reportedly disbursed over 400 million naira in levies to access their farms.¹⁶⁴

Non-compliance with these levies results in farmers being denied access to their lands and is met by violence, including lethal attacks. In July 2022, bandits under a leader called Damina killed 16 members of Dangulbi and Kango communities in Maru LGA, Kaduna, following the communities' failure to pay a 5 million naira (US\$4 016) levy imposed one week prior.¹⁶⁵ Consistent violence against non-compliant communities contributes to a heightened level of compliance with these levies.

From 2021, armed bandits evolved from imposing levies on farmers to taking over farms entirely. Bandits first forcibly seize the lands, then cultivate the land through forced labour (forcing villagers to nominate a decreed number of workers), primarily sourced from local villagers. According to a leader in the Bingi community of Maru, 'They snatch farms and force the owners to provide seeds and insecticide for them as well as clear the land, plant, harvest the crops and also take to their

homes.¹⁶⁶ Although communities in Maru first observed this emerging trend in 2021, it has become increasingly prevalent and expanded geographically to other areas in Katsina and Kaduna. Sometimes, trucks are sent to bring people to the farms, where they plant, weed, spray and harvest crops. The labour conditions are, according to villagers, very harsh, with workers not fed or paid and constantly beaten when they show signs of exhaustion. Villagers who have retained some of their own land report alternating these tasks with working on their own farms.

Taxation of farmland and direct cultivation leveraging forced labour provide bandit groups with food for their members and a central source of revenue. These revenue sources involve aspects of governance and are mainly employed in regions where armed bandits exert relatively greater control. In areas where they resort to more aggressive financing methods such as cattle rustling, armed robbery and kidnapping, their authority might be less prominent.



GOVERNANCE

For the purposes of this report, and the broader series on illicit economies and armed groups, governance by non-state armed groups is conceptualized as regulating the behaviour of residents, providing services and taking control of local finances and economies.¹⁶⁷ Given the typical – though somewhat contested – classification of Nigerian bandit groups as criminal rather than political or insurgent groups, we also consider definitions of criminal governance, framed by Benjamin Lessing, to be when the lives, routines and activities of a population are impacted by rules or codes imposed by a criminal organization.¹⁶⁸ According to Lessing's analyses, mere extortion, without imposing rules and codes on populations, does not qualify as criminal governance.

While bandit groups are too heterogenous to make generalized conclusions regarding their provision of 'governance', tracing the behaviour of a number of bandit groups in the focus areas indicates that groups do exhibit some behaviours falling within these forms of governance in their interactions with communities – predominantly in regulating behaviour and controlling local economies. These are too often ignored because bandits' overarching objectives typically remain focused on revenue generation, with the provision of services or 'governance' a collateral result.

Bandits shape local orders by prohibiting communities from providing intelligence to state forces on their activities, with violent repercussions – including looting, attacking and abducting residents – for communities that breach this rule.¹⁶⁹ Between 2020 and 2023, ACLED recorded at least 16 incidents in which communities were targeted for assisting state security forces in Kaduna and Zamfara.¹⁷⁰ Bandits' use of informants embedded within local communities facilitates such retaliations. As a result, communities often hold back information concerning bandit activities.¹⁷¹

In some instances, bandit groups have also imposed other codes of conduct on communities, which appear directly linked to their alliances with violent extremist organizations. For example, community members reported that the bandit leader Dogo Gide, for a while close to Ansaru, imposed a ban on the sale of alcohol and illicit drugs in some communities in Dansadua in Zamfara.¹⁷²

While a range of bandit groups purportedly provide protection services, these are typically of limited effect in practice. Similarly, while one bandit group provides transport services, this is an explicitly profit-making venture. Bucking this trend, in Dandalla (Zamfara), Kachalla Kawaje – a bandit leader who was reportedly later killed in a clash with state forces in December 2023 – was known for safeguarding the rights of shop owners against the excesses of members of his group.¹⁷³

Kawaje created an environment where local shop owners felt secure and protected. A former member of Kawaje's group mentioned that Kawaje created an atmosphere in which 'shop owners could confidently confront a bandit owing them money, even if the bandit was armed with a gun or a rocket'.¹⁷⁴

Although bandit groups in Maru have imposed movement restrictions on communities they exert a degree of control over, we have not documented such behaviours in other areas. In Maru, bandit groups have restricted movements or prevent populations from going to the market at certain times: 'They also block roads to local markets, collect crops from traders and stop villagers from coming to Udawa for trade... they decide what goes out and comes in around the area'.¹⁷⁵ On some occasions, villagers are allowed to go to the market for certain hours and return before a deadline.¹⁷⁶ Though the rationale behind this remains unclear, it appears likely driven by the bandits' desire to prevent communities from contacting and sharing information with state security forces, as well as to rob traders of their belongings.

The bandit leader Kachalla Turji has sometimes been cited as an example of bandit provision of governance. However, Turji's actions remain focused on revenue extraction. Illustratively, in 2021, upon Turji's arrival in Sokoto,¹⁷⁷ the village heads of the area fled along with other residents, leaving behind older men and women who were too frail to flee. Turji appointed some of the old men as village heads. Traditionally, across North West and other parts of Nigeria, village heads are in charge of governance roles such as resolving local disputes, presiding over village meetings and making security decisions. However, the village heads that Turji appointed were reportedly focused on the collection of taxes and levies, without fulfilling these other governance functions.

It is clear that bandit groups exhibit some – though not many – behaviours qualifying as 'governance'. Most instances of bandits regulating behaviour and controlling markets have the goal of enhancing the effectiveness of revenue extraction and minimizing friction with communities in order to facilitate their operations. However, the by-product of some of these 'governance' behaviours can make bandit orders more attractive to communities, positioning them as regulators of economic opportunities, as is particularly occurring in gold mining spaces.

Reducing friction with civilians is particularly key where bandits rely on community collaboration for revenue generation – as is the case in artisanal mining sites, where in some cases bandits amended their behaviours following resistance from mining communities – as occurred in the example of Anka LGA outlined in the section on gold mining above. The nature of the revenue extraction mechanism thus also shapes the

balance between coercive and cooperative behaviours, with artisanal mining typically driving towards the latter.

Literature on rebel and insurgent groups suggests that armed groups are less inclined to engage in governance when they have short-term objectives and face competition from other armed actors, than when they have long-term goals and face no substantial competition.¹⁷⁸ The high number of distinct bandit groups operating across the North West, and the intense and dynamic competition between different groups, is likely one factor contributing to limited investments in

governance by bandit groups, alongside more commonly identified factors relating to their lack of explicitly political motivations. This fragmented and intensely competitive operating environment also creates conditions conducive to extremely high levels of violence – as has been witnessed across North West. Notably, the situation with Nigerian bandits illustrates a spectrum ranging from predation to control, cooperation and even governance. Analyzing the position of armed groups on this spectrum requires a nuanced approach to the distinction between ‘criminal’ and ‘political’ activities.

Options for community responses: Peace pacts

Some bandit groups have entered into ‘peace pacts’ with local communities. Some communities reported feeling compelled to enter into such pacts as security interventions had failed to stop attacks. For example, in Randagi/Kakangi village in Birnin Gwari, interventions by security forces had temporarily pushed bandits out of the village, but been followed by bandit reprisals as punishment.¹⁷⁹

Other communities have entered into peace agreements after losing the fight against bandit groups. A resident of Tabanni in east Birnin Gwari said:

Previously, our community used to confront the bandits, but all the heroes within the community have been identified and killed by the bandits. This has weakened us, and we now rely solely on God’s intervention and entered into peace negotiations with the bandits, but the situation has not changed.¹⁸⁰

In the wake of peace deals, bandits often seek recruits among the communities. The secretary of an association for the development of Birnin Gwari, Birnin Gwari Emirate Progressives Union, a group that self-identifies as a pressure group, said:

The Fulani bandits in Kakangi Area have sealed a peace deal with the community that gives the bandits access to the village markets to mingle with the locals. This is an easy way for them to recruit more members because they lavish money on the villagers.¹⁸¹

In some cases, religious and community leaders have mediated peace agreements with armed bandit groups. For example, in 2021 over 500 Kaduna armed bandits and state leaders entered into a peace deal facilitated by prominent Islamic Cleric, Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, in Sabon Garin Yadi to quell the violence in the region. Gumi called on the government to

grant amnesty to the bandits in return for peace.¹⁸² Similarly, a Zamfara armed bandit group in November 2021 reached a peace agreement with the Dan Sadau emirate in Maru, allowing farmers to resume their activities and enabling other residents to carry on with their daily routines.¹⁸³

However, these peace pacts have often proven unsustainable. This is to some extent because of the decentralized character of armed bandits: a peace pact with one bandit leader does not prevent another bandit leader from attacking a community. Neither does it prevent foot soldiers from operating (setting roadblocks and possibly orchestrating low-level robberies) without the knowledge of their leadership. Although the literature has demonstrated that the exclusion of certain groups from peace pacts does not necessarily doom such agreements to failure and that a ‘partial peace’ is possible, piecemeal agreements with bandit groups have in practice typically led to geographically delimited, and unreliable, drops in violence.¹⁸⁴

Bandits have also repeatedly reneged on peace pacts when they suspect communities are cooperating with state security forces and breached agreements without a clear logic. For example, bandits breached a pact with a community in Birnin Gwari in 2022. According to a resident, ‘They abducted people from Gagumi and Sabon Layi villages, and ran to Kakangi to wait for the ransom to be paid,’ despite having an existing agreement with the targeted communities.¹⁸⁵

The fragmentation of the armed banditry landscape to some extent acts as an obstacle to the power of the groups, which are distracted by confrontation between groups and only sometimes pool resources. It also complicates any attempt to negotiate with group leaders, because they cannot bind the armed bandits as a whole. Though peace pacts have proven unsustainable, communities are forced to resort to them in the absence of more effective alternative responses.



CONCLUSION

Armed bandits are currently the predominant security threat facing Nigeria's North West. Bandits' approaches to revenue extraction have evolved significantly since their material emergence in 2011, moving shrewdly to maximize revenue streams and sustain their activities. This has proved one factor underpinning bandits' substantial resilience to ongoing militarized interventions. Looking forward, farming and the artisanal gold mining sector look set to remain stable sources of financing. If the resurgence in mass abductions such as those observed in February 2024 proves sustained, they can further turn into a considerable source of revenue and instability.

Despite internal fragmentation and internecine competition, bandit groups also demonstrate a significant capacity for collaboration. This enables bandit leaders to recruit and mobilize large numbers of fighters. In fact, some recent major bandit attacks in both Kaduna and Zamfara were the result of collaborative efforts between two or more armed gangs. As their geographies of operation increasingly overlap, there are growing indications of both collaboration and competition between certain bandit groups and violent extremist groups such as JAS and Ansaru. While alliances have repeatedly proved temporary, ongoing opportunities for collaboration between bandits and violent extremist groups are a significant cause for concern.

While increased aerial campaigns have proved able to decrease violence in the short term in some areas, a sustained increase in security in the North West remains elusive. Short-term lulls in violence hard-won through military operations need to be capitalized on with longer-term security and service provision for communities, to prevent bandits from quickly returning and conducting reprisal attacks against communities perceived to have collaborated with the state. As part of this, responses need to also consider how to demobilize informants embedded within local communities, who play a crucial role in the resilience and intractability of armed bandit groups by providing them with information on potential targets and the movements of state forces and vigilantes.

Bandits' ongoing predation of communities and limited investment in governance for the purposes of enhancing their legitimacy empowers the state to provide a system of governance preferable to the orders imposed in territories under bandit influence. However, it is key to reconsider the state's positioning in spaces where communities prefer bandit orders. In the context of North West Nigeria, such spaces are predominantly mining areas, where continuing to mine under bandit rule is seen as preferable to abiding by state prohibitions on mining activity.

Recommendations

Security responses

■ **Disrupting communication and collaboration between bandit groups**

Communication between different bandit group leaders is crucial to inter-group collaboration, which in turn underpins bandits' resilience and capacity to launch large-scale attacks. Disrupting and intercepting such communication channels should therefore be a priority for responses. Rather than implementing blanket measures such as the past region-wide shutdown of GSM and internet services, which had significant effects on communities, authorities should focus on intercepting communication channels between bandit leaders,

garnering information crucial to anticipating future attacks and enabling disruption of crucial communication lines.¹⁸⁶ The Department of State Services can collaborate with GSM service providers to track and intercept these lines, minimizing collateral damage and avoiding community backlash. Some violent extremist organizations – such as JNIM – are known to handle communication channels in a sophisticated manner, which obfuscates tracking. Growing collaborations between bandits and such groups could include sharing of equipment and techniques around communication, posing further obstacles to tracing and disrupting communication channels.

■ Preventing extortion during planting and harvesting seasons

Augment state security forces during farming season between April and June, and harvest between October and November, to prevent extortion and levies imposed on farmers, which finance armed banditry. Recognizing the seasonality of these criminal activities and implementing targeted security measures disrupts the economic support systems of armed banditry.

■ Tackle the different licit and illicit economies that bandits draw rent from simultaneously

Responses should adopt a multi-pronged approach, simultaneously addressing all the various illicit economies that bandits participate in. Simply targeting one revenue stream at a time is ineffective, as they can easily pivot to another source. Seeking to target a broader panoply of the illicit and licit economies that armed bandits draw rents from may enable authorities to more effectively disrupt their revenue streams over the long term, reducing the profitability of armed banditry and ultimately weakening their capabilities.

Community resilience responses

■ Providing alternative means of livelihoods to vulnerable communities and individuals

Precedent demonstrates that communities robbed of livelihoods by heightened instability are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into bandit groups and into roles as informants. This includes, but is not limited to, communities displaced by bandit violence and pastoralists robbed of their herds. Prioritizing these vulnerable communities in provision of alternative livelihoods, such as support to undertake crop farming to the extent land is available, is crucial to prevent them from resorting to armed banditry.

■ Tackling informants

Recognize the role of informants in sustaining armed banditry and implement awareness programmes and revenue-generating projects to dissuade vulnerable groups from becoming informants. Simultaneously, dismantle existing informant networks through effective intelligence gathering and targeted policing. Disrupting recruitment of informants and the sustained support of informants to bandit groups should not be solely premised on law enforcement interventions, but on broader community resilience programming such as awareness raising around the harms of informants and targeting vulnerable groups with alternative livelihoods.

■ Intensify intelligence gathering through collaborative approaches with local communities

Intelligence collection should aim to disrupt bandits' activities, including their imposition of levies and control over illicit economies, focusing on areas of greatest harm against

communities. Presently, the focus tends to be primarily on military measures, addressing bandits' violent actions within illicit economies, while insufficient attention is given to their non-violent activities such as imposing levies and controlling parts of both legal and illegal supply chains. It is key that intelligence gathering approaches mitigate the risks of reprisal attacks, common in contexts where bandits have identified communities sharing information with the state – this must be a priority for state authorities.

Regulatory responses

■ Formalizing the artisanal gold mining sector

Avoid bans on the mining sector, and instead encourage and facilitate formalization of artisanal gold mining activities to avoid alienating mining communities and driving support for bandit groups. This includes initiatives such as registering miners and providing state security measures at gold mines, aiming to curtail the revenue streams of armed bandits and minimize recruitment opportunities. As outlined in the GI-TOC's research, formalizing the artisanal gold mining sector includes strengthening national regulatory bodies and enhancing regional coordination to ensure consistent and effective oversight of the sector.¹⁸⁷

■ Entrenching a system of accountability for self-defence groups

The unregulated actions of local vigilantes, namely the Yan Sakai, were key in fuelling banditry recruitment – it is key this cycle of reprisals is addressed. Consequently, engagement with self-defence groups should emphasize respect for basic human rights ethics and the rule of law, and self-defence group leaders should take a stand against extrajudicial killings, mitigating the cycle of reprisal attacks. The state should take action to pierce the rampant impunity of self-defence groups, with cases of accountability publicized by the press. Strengthening community and civil society oversight mechanisms for self-defence groups should be prioritized. Civilian oversight bodies should draw from different channels of authority. For example, governance functions can be split between customary leaders (a role in vetting potential recruits), local police (operational oversight) and local governments (financial support). Doing so is one step towards mitigating the personalisation of power to regulate self-defence groups and the risks of oversight mechanisms becoming extensions of patronage networks or overly politicized by state representatives. Customary leaders and traditional authorities should play a significant role in self-defence oversight committees, binding such groups into existing accountability structures.

NOTES

- 1 The term 'armed bandits' in this report refers broadly to rural-based criminal armed groups primarily operating in North West Nigeria, with increasing presence in parts of the North Central and South West regions. They engage in various illicit activities such as cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, and extortion of farming and mining communities, employing lethal violence as a key tactic. Specificity for individual armed bandit groups is indicated by the gang leader's name or geographical location.
- 2 'Generally speaking, Nigeria's bandits are rural gangs that engage in criminal activities such as cattle rustling, looting of villages, extortion of local communities and kidnapping for ransom. Banditry has been widespread throughout the country but has grown most acute in North West, particularly Zamfara state, in the past decade.' See James Barnett, Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i and Abdulaziz Abdulaziz, Northwestern Nigeria: A jihadization of banditry, or a "banditization" of Jihad?, *CTC Sentinel*, 15, 1 (2022); 'Banditry refers to a form of organised crime that involves kidnapping, armed robbery, cattle-rustling, murder, rape and the exploitation of environmental resources'. See Tope Shola Akinyetun, Banditry in Nigeria: Insights from situational action and situational crime prevention theories, *ACCORD*, 15 March 2022.
- 3 Monitoring and analysis of ACLED data.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Oluwole Ojewale, The bandits' world: recruitment strategies, command structure and motivations for mass casualty attacks in northwest Nigeria, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 35, 2 (2024).
- 6 To reflect this overlap, ACLED's data set on 'political violence' now includes some groups traditionally labelled as criminal. See ACLED, Gang violence: Concepts, benchmarks, and coding rules, 2 November 2023; For more on the distinction between criminal and political, see Nicholas Barnes, Criminal politics: An integrated approach to the study of organized crime, politics, and violence, *Perspectives on Politics*, 15, 4 (2017).
- 7 Kingsley L Madueke et al, 'Do not come out to vote': Gangs, elections, political violence and criminality in Kano and Rivers, Nigeria, *GI-TOC*, October 2023.
- 8 Lucia Bird and Lyes Tagziria, Organized crime and instability dynamics: Mapping illicit hubs in West Africa, *GI-TOC*, September 2022.
- 9 *Daily Trust*, How banditry started in Zamfara, 10 September 2021.
- 10 Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, "I am a bandit": A decade of research in Zamfara State bandit's den, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto seminar series, 9 September 2021.
- 11 Olayemi Akinwumi, Princes as highway men: A consideration of the phenomenon of armed banditry in precolonial Borgu, *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 162 (2001) 333–350.
- 12 Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, *GI-TOC*, January 2023.
- 13 Frederick Lugard established the protectorate of Northern Nigeria in Ibadan, Kogi, on 1 January 1897, based on the 1885 Treaty of Berlin. This treaty granted Britain control over Northern Nigeria, expanding its existing influence from Southern Nigeria. Conflict ensued with the Sokoto Caliphate, leading to the conquest of key regions such as Kabba, Kotogora and Illorin. By February 1903, Kano, the stronghold of the Kano Emirate, was captured, followed by Sokoto and much of its caliphate. On 13 March 1903, the Grand Shura of the Sokoto Caliphate yielded to Lugard's demands thereby marking the onset of colonial rule in northern Nigeria. See: Umar Zubairu, Mohammed Auwalu and Adamu Babayo Usman, British colonial conquest and population movement in Northern Nigeria 1897–1903, *Wukari International Studies Journal*, 6, 1 (2022).
- 14 John Sunday Ojo, Samuel Oyewole and Folahanmi Aina, 'Forces of terror: Armed banditry and insecurity in North-west Nigeria, *Democracy and Security*, 19, 4 (2023); Abdulyakeen Abdulrasheed, Armed banditry and human security in North Western Nigeria: The impacts and the way forward, *Journal of Humanities Social and Management Sciences*, 1, 1 (2021).
- 15 Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, *GI-TOC*, January 2023.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Interview with vigilante leader in Maru, 23 June 2023.
- 18 Alexandre Bish et al, The crime paradox: Illicit markets, violence and instability in Nigeria, *GI-TOC*, April 2022.
- 19 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, In north-western Nigeria, violence carried out by bandit groups has escalated so fast that killings now rival those that take place in Borno state, where extremist groups hold sway, *GI-TOC, Risk bulletin*, Issue 1, September 2021.
- 20 Alexandre Bish et al, The crime paradox: Illicit markets, violence and instability in Nigeria, *GI-TOC*, April 2022.
- 21 Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, *GI-TOC*, January 2023.
- 22 Ibid.

- 23 Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, January 2023; Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, In north-western Nigeria, violence carried out by bandit groups has escalated so fast that killings now rival those that take place in Borno state, where extremist groups hold sway, GI-TOC, Risk bulletin, Issue 1, September 2021.
- 24 Interviews with residents of Wonaka and Mada, Zamfara, June 2023.
- 25 Interview with chairman of a local vigilante group, Zamfara, 16 June 2023.
- 26 Aliyu Dahiru, Ansaru radicalising communities in Northwest Nigeria, HumAngle, 21 July 2022.
- 27 After the first major attack in Dansadau in 2011, the emir of the district blamed the deteriorating security situation on the absence of a single police station in the entire Dansadau town.
- 28 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, In north-western Nigeria, violence carried out by bandit groups has escalated so fast that killings now rival those that take place in Borno state, where extremist groups hold sway, GI-TOC, Risk bulletin, Issue 1, September 2021.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Interview with a resident of Tabanni village, Birnin Gwari, 12 April 2023.
- 31 Dogo Gide is one the prominent bandit leaders in North West Nigeria, reported to have more than 1000 gang members working under him. Also see: Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, January 2023.
- 32 Interview with a Kaduna state government official, Kaduna, 10 June 2023.
- 33 Interview with journalist, Kaduna, 26 March 2024.
- 34 Yusha'u A Ibrahim, Residents flee 10 Zamfara communities after bandits' threats, *Daily Trust*, 18 January 2024.
- 35 ACLED and GI-TOC, Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa: Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), October 2023; Therese Anders, Territorial control in civil wars: Theory and measurement using machine learning, *Journal of Peace Research*, 57, 6 (2020).
- 36 Lucia Bird and Lyes Tagziria, Organized crime and instability dynamics: Mapping illicit hubs in West Africa, GI-TOC, September 2022; Flore Berger, The silent threat: Kidnappings in Burkina Faso, GI-TOC, March 2023; Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, January 2023.
- 37 Non-physical violence, and threats thereof – including the use of forced labour – are not captured in the ACLED data set.
- 38 Kars de Bruijne and Clara Gehrling, Dangerous liaisons: Exploring the risk of violent extremism along the border between Northern Benin and Nigeria, Clingendael Institute (unpublished).
- 39 Godwin Isenyo, Security operatives feared killed by Kaduna terrorists, Punch, 10 January 2023.
- 40 Adeniyi Salaudeen, Seven soldiers feared dead as bandits attack Zamfara community, Channels TV, 25 July 2023.
- 41 Ahmed Kingimi, Armed gang attack military camp, village in Nigeria's northwest, Reuters, 15 January 2024.
- 42 ACLED records a total of 785 clashes with bandit groups and 177 air and drone strikes between 2018 and 2023.
- 43 All heads of security and intelligence forces were replaced. The changes also extended to various commanders of military units engaged in operations against armed bandits and other armed groups. In addition, there are allegations that certain armed bandits may have been hired for election-related violence. However, the data supporting this was not collected during this research.
- 44 Monitoring and analysis of ACLED data.
- 45 For example, in December 2021, the governor of Sokoto stated that military operations in Zamfara have pushed armed bandits into Sokoto. See Ebunoluwa Olafusi, Tambuwal: Military operation in Zamfara making Sokoto vulnerable to bandits' attacks, *The Cable*, 11 December 2021.
- 46 Monitoring and analysis of ACLED data.
- 47 'The Kamuku National Park criss-crosses five northern states of Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Zamfara and Kebbi states even though a large portion of the forest is situated within Kaduna's Birnin Gwari LGA. With a total land area of about 1,121 square kilometres, Kamuku is said to extend to Chikun, Kajuru and Giwa LGA within Kaduna State. With Kuduru forests also situated west of Birnin Gwari LGA, communities have over the years faced some of the most gruesome attacks.' See Daily Trust, Things you need to know about forests 'governed' by bandits, Boko Haram, 27 February 2021.
- 48 Maryam Abdullahi, Troops 'kill bandits behind abduction of Greenfield University students' in Kaduna, *The Cable*, 22 February 2024.
- 49 Matthew Atungwu, Notorious bandits' leader, Dogo Gide killed, *Daily Post*, 27 March 2024.
- 50 The Cable, Is Dogo Gide dead? Here's what we know about how this story went viral, 9 April 2024.
- 51 Idayat Hassan, Nigeria's rampant banditry, and some ideas on how to rein it in, *The New Humanitarian*, 8 November 2021; Daily Trust, 120 bandit gangs operate with 60,000 AK47 rifles in 6 northern states – Study, 10 September 2021; Oluwole Ojewale and Mahmud Malami Sadiq, Why Nigeria's bandits are recruiting women for gunrunning, Institute for Security Studies, 14 August 2023.
- 52 Interview with vigilante leader in Wonaka community, Maru, 17 June 2023.
- 53 Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, "I am a bandit": A decade of research in Zamfara State bandit's den, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto seminar series, 9 September 2021.
- 54 Interviews with a cross-section of stakeholders in Kaduna, June 2023.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Interview with an armed bandit, Gusau, 30 December 2023.
- 57 Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, "I am a bandit": A decade of research in Zamfara State bandit's den, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto seminar series, 9 September 2021.

- 58 Interviews with vigilantes, community leaders and residents, Birnin Gwari, April to July 2023.
- 59 Interview with an armed bandit in Gusau, 30 December 2023.
- 60 Interview with vigilante leader in Maru, 23 June 2023.
- 61 Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, January 2023.
- 62 Interviews with a cross-section of vigilantes, community leaders and armed bandits, April to June and December 2023; Also see various analyses: James Barnett, Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i and Abdulaziz Abdulaziz, Northwestern Nigeria: A jihadization of banditry, or a "banditization" of Jihad?, *CTC Sentinel*, 15, 1 (2022); John Sunday Ojo, Samuel Oyewole and Folahanmi Aina, Forces of terror: Armed banditry and insecurity in North-west Nigeria, *Democracy and Security*, 19, 4 (2023).
- 63 Interview with researcher who has conducted extensive research on armed banditry in Dansadua, Zamfara, 20 February, 2024. A source noted that the larger armed bandit gangs have up to 2 500 members, see: Imrana Buba, Bandits in Nigeria: how protection payments to militias escalate conflict in the north-west, *The Conversation*, 15 August 2023.
- 64 Interviews in Birnin Gwari, Maru and Gusau, April to June 2023.
- 65 Interviews with armed bandits operating in Zamfara and Kaduna, December 2023.
- 66 Brian McQuinn, Armed-group proliferation: Origins and consequences, *Armed Conflict Survey*, 6, 1 (2020).
- 67 Interviews with local miners, farmers, vigilantes and residents of communities in Birnin Gwari, Maru and Gusau, April to June 2023.
- 68 Interview with armed bandit, Gusau, 30 December 2023.
- 69 Interview with armed bandit, Birnin Gwari, 21 December 2023.
- 70 James Barnett and Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, A "Sahelian" or a "Littoral" crisis? Examining the widening of Nigeria's Boko Haram conflict, Hudson Institute, April 2023.
- 71 Interview with a farmer in Kanoma, Maru, 16 June 2021.
- 72 Yusuf Anka, 'Banditry: Spotighting gang leaders who turn against one another, Human Angle, 19 April 2020.
- 73 Interview with armed bandit in Gusau, 30 December 2023.
- 74 Interview with an armed bandit who operates between Zamfara and Niger, 21 December 2023.
- 75 James Barnett, The bandit warlords of Nigeria, *New Lines Magazine*, 1 December 2021.
- 76 Daily Trust, Hundreds flee as bandits abduct 50, take over Kaduna communities, 1 August 2022; Daily Trust, ISWAP establishing camps in Zamfara community, govt raises alarm, 18 October 2022; Timothy Obiezu, Nigerian authorities say terror groups are shifting to new bases, *Voice of America*, 20 May 2022.
- 77 Wale Odunsi, Boko Haram sends bomb makers to Kaduna as ISIS visits ISWAP in Lake Chad, *Daily Post*, 27 October 2021.
- 78 Musa Umar Bologi, Niger, Kogi: Terrorists' new haven. What you need to know, *Human Angle*, 6 September 2022.
- 79 For example, interactions between bandit leader *Kachalla* Na-Bello's group and JAS appear limited. One group member detailed the only time he was aware of his group being in touch with JAS was once in 2022 when 'some Boko Haram members came to meet with our leaders, including Alhaji Ado Aleru, Dan Nigeria and our *Kachalla* Na-Bello. Our *Kachalla* told me that they came to seek permission from him and other leaders operating in the area to allow them to pass through our communities. We allowed them to pass on the condition that there will be no attacks.' Interview with an armed bandit in Gusau, 30 December 2023.
- 80 Interview with youth leader in Birnin Gwari, 6 April 2023.
- 81 James Barnett and Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, A "Sahelian" or a "Littoral" crisis? Examining the widening of Nigeria's Boko Haram conflict, Hudson Institute, April 2023.
- 82 Interview with a vigilante leader, Gagumi village, Birnin Gwari, 28 April 2023.
- 83 Interview with community leader in Birnin Gwari, 6 April 2023.
- 84 Godwin Isenyo, Two die as bandits, terrorists clash in Kaduna, *Punch*, 15 July 2022.
- 85 James Barnett and Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, A "Sahelian" or a "Littoral" crisis? Examining the widening of Nigeria's Boko Haram conflict, Hudson Institute, April 2023.
- 86 Interview with community leader in Birnin Gwari, 6 April 2023.
- 87 Interview with community leader in Birnin Gwari, 6 April 2023. For example, clashes broke out between Ansaru and bandits in Damari, where the insurgents tried to gain a foothold. The fighting forced Ansaru to relocate to the forests around Kwasakwasa and Old Kuyello; Abdulaziz Abdulaziz, 10 months after, 11 Yauri schoolgirls still in captivity, 7 April 2022; Umar Aminu Yandaki, Timeline of the Birnin Yauri school kidnapping, *Human Angle*, 22 November 2022.
- 88 Yakubu Mohammed, Terrorists fight each other in Nigeria, decimate notorious Dogo Gide's group, *Premium Times*, 16 January 2024.
- 89 Interview with a resident of Dansadua, Zamfara, 20 October 2023; interview with a community leader, Birnin Gwari, 6 April 2023. This is corroborated by a researcher who conducted interviews with armed bandits in Dansadua, 20 February 2024.
- 90 James Barnett and Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, A "Sahelian" or a "Littoral" crisis? Examining the widening of Nigeria's Boko Haram conflict, Hudson Institute, April 2023.
- 91 Ibid.
- 92 The relationship between the two groups remains contested.
- 93 James Barnett and Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, A "Sahelian" or a "Littoral" crisis? Examining the widening of Nigeria's Boko Haram conflict, Hudson Institute, April 2023.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Interview with residents and vigilantes, Maru, April to June 2023.

- 97 Interviews with residents and vigilantes in Birnin Gwari, April 2023.
- 98 Yusuf Anka, Are Nigeria's bandits a new Boko Haram cell or rival 'terrorists'?, Al Jazeera, 19 April 2022.
- 99 Monitoring and analysis of ACLED data.
- 100 BBC News Pidgin, Nigeria military confirm Islamic State of West Africa Province, ISWAP presence for Zamfara, 12 July 2022; Aliyu Dahiru, ISWAP rebrands, expands scope of operations, Human Angle, 1 October 2022; Yusuf Anka, Military says it bombed ISWAP positions in Zamfara, 'It could be ANSARU', Human Angle, 12 July 2020. Following a series of airstrikes in Kuyanbana forest in July 2020, the Nigeria army reported that it destroyed an ISWAP operational positions in the forest. One military officer, however, told journalists that it was likely an Ansaru position; Abdulkareem Haruna, Many killed as troops repel ISWAP attack on military base in North West Nigeria, Human Angle, 27 September 2021.
- 101 James Barnett and Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, A "Sahelian" or a "Littoral" crisis? Examining the widening of Nigeria's Boko Haram conflict, Hudson Institute, April 2023.
- 102 See European Agency for Asylum, Country guidance Nigeria 2021, Boko Haram, including JAS, ISWAP and Ansaru, October 2021.
- 103 See US Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Foreign terrorist organizations: Ansaru, updated September 2022 and accessed 3 April 2024; Passeint Ahmed, Factional split inside Boko Haram: Evolving dynamics and future implications, Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, 15 January 2019.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Kingsley L. Madueke, Lawan Danjuma Adamu and Ladd Serwat, What does the recent escalation of mass abductions in Nigeria tell us?, GI-TOC and ACLED, 15 March 2024.
- 106 See Maryam Abdullahi, Troops 'kill bandits behind abduction of Greenfield University students' in Kaduna, The Cable, 22 February 2024; Matthew Atungwu, Notorious bandits' leader, Dogo Gide killed, Daily Post, 27 March 2024; For a report that claims Dogo Gide is alive, see: Shehu Olayinka, Is Dogo Gide dead? Here's what we know about how this story went viral, 9 April 2024.
- 107 Truth Nigeria, Dogo Gide fingered as kingpin behind mass kidnap of women in Kaduna, 9 October 2023.
- 108 Kehinde Giwa, Dogo Gide: The re-emergence of Nigeria's notorious bandit kingpin, News Central, 18 August, 2023.
- 109 Interview with a Zamfara-based journalist, 25 November 2023.
- 110 Interviews with a cross-section of residents in Zamfara, November 2023.
- 111 Abubakar Ahmadu Maishanu and Mohammed Babangida, Inside criminal enterprise of Dogo Gide, Ali Kachalla, suspected masterminds of Kaduna train attack, *Premium Times*, 19 April 2022; Umar Aminu Yandaki, Timeline of the Birnin Yauri school kidnapping, Human Angle, 22 November 2022; Olugbenga Adanikin, Bandits release 28 out of 121 kidnapped Kaduna students, International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 25 July 2021; Ahmed Kingimi, Gunmen kill 14, kidnap 60 in attacks in northern Nigeria, Reuters, 24 November 2023.
- 112 Mohammed Babangida, Exclusive: Why I abducted FGC Yauri school girls – Dogo Gide, *Premium Times*, 21 December 2021. While this source states that 90 students were abducted, other sources state that more than 100 students were abducted. For example, see Umar Aminu Yandaki, Timeline of the Birnin Yauri school kidnapping, Human Angle, 22 November 2022.
- 113 Mohammed Babangida, 'Is notorious bandit Dogo Gide dead? What we know so far, *Premium Times*, 3 November 2021.
- 114 Mohammed Babangida, Ansaru-linked Dogo Gide claims responsibility for NAF helicopter crash, *Premium Times*, 16 August 2023.
- 115 Al Jazeera, Two dozen Nigerian troops die in air crash and evacuation mission gone awry, 17 August 2023.
- 116 Al Jazeera, 'Bandits' shoot down Nigerian fighter jet; pilot survives, 19 July 2021.
- 117 Interview with former political appointee in Birnin Gwari, 6 April 2023.
- 118 Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, January 2023.
- 119 Interview with a cross-section of residents of Gusau, Maru and Birnin Gwari, June and July 2023.
- 120 Kingsley L Madueke, Driving destruction: Cattle rustling and instability in Nigeria, GI-TOC, January 2023.
- 121 Ibid. Ongoing GI-TOC monitoring of dynamics in North West Nigeria.
- 122 Kidnapping for ransom predates 2019, but it was not the primary source of income for armed bandits until that year. From 2019, kidnapping for ransom replaced cattle rustling as the main source of financing for armed bandits.
- 123 Interview with a youth leader in Kuyello village in Birnin Gwari, 4 April 2023.
- 124 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, Armed bandits extort crop farmers amid dwindling alternative illicit revenue sources in Zamfara, north-western Nigeria, GI-TOC, Risk bulletin, Issue 5, October 2022.
- 125 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, In north-western Nigeria, violence carried out by bandit groups has escalated so fast that killings now rival those that take place in Borno state, where extremist groups hold sway, GI-TOC, Risk bulletin, Issue 1, September 2021.
- 126 Monitoring and analysis of ACLED data.
- 127 The cash shortage resulting from the introduction of former Central Bank Governor Godwin Emefiele's naira redesign policy on 26 October 2022 had significant implications for kidnapping-for-ransom payments. The highest denominations of the naira, including the N200, N500 and N1000 notes, were slated for a redesign, with a deadline of 31 January 2023 set for the exchange of old notes for new ones at banks. This policy was presented as a strategy to address the escalating menace of kidnapping for ransom, among other objectives, and to manage excessive currency circulation. As a result, securing ransom payments became increasingly challenging. ACLED records an almost 50% decrease in abduction events in

- Nigeria between October 2022 and March 2023, with the North West region of the country experiencing a 69% reduction in abduction events during the same period.
- 128 Timothy Obiezu, UN condemns mass abduction of displaced persons in Nigeria, *Voice of America*, 7 March 2024; Reuters, Suspected insurgents kidnap 50 people in northeast Nigeria, 6 March 2024.
 - 129 Israel Bulus, 'Just in: Terrorists abduct scores in fresh Kaduna attack, *Punch*, 12 March 2024; Kingsley L. Madueke, Lawan Danjuma Adamu and Ladd Serwat, What does the recent escalation of mass abductions in Nigeria tell us?, *GI-TOC and ACLED*, 15 March 2024.
 - 130 Kingsley L. Madueke, Lawan Danjuma Adamu and Ladd Serwat, What does the recent escalation of mass abductions in Nigeria tell us?, *GI-TOC and ACLED*, 15 March 2024.
 - 131 Yakubu Mohammed, Three bandit groups participated in Kuriga students abduction, received ransom – Sources, *Premium Times*, 31 March 2024; Stephen Angbulu, No ransom paid for Kaduna school children's release – FG, *Punch*, 24 March 2024.
 - 132 Ministry of Mines and Steel Development, Gold deposits: Exploration opportunities in Nigeria, 2010.
 - 133 Interview with an academic who has conducted extensive research on armed banditry and mining in North West Nigeria, 14 October 2023.
 - 134 Claire Mom, Falana says Nigeria loses \$9bn to gold smuggling annually — but is this true?, *The Cable*, 26 August 2023.
 - 135 Associated Press, Armed bandits attack gold miners, kill 36 in north Nigeria, 8 November 2016.
 - 136 *Premium Times*, How gunmen killed over 40 people in Zamfara – Residents, 8 November 2016.
 - 137 Bukola Adebayo, Gunmen kill 26 in Nigeria's Zamfara state, *CNN*, 12 April 2018.
 - 138 Tony Ailemen, FG bans mining activities in Zamfara, *Business Day*, 7 April 2019.
 - 139 Marcena Hunter, Beyond blood: Gold, conflict and criminality in West Africa, *GI-TOC*, November 2022; see Lucia Bird Ruiz Benitez de Lugo and Marcena Hunter, Will Burkina Faso's closure of artisanal gold mines work this time?, *ENACT*, 28 October 2022.
 - 140 Interview with an academic who has conducted extensive research on armed banditry and gold mining in North West Nigeria and has met with leaders, 14 October 2023.
 - 141 Ibid.
 - 142 Abdullahi Abubakar, Terrorists threaten to attack miners if they refuse to pay enforced dues in Zamfara, *Human Angle*, 29 November 2022.
 - 143 Interview with a youth leader in Kuyello village of Birnin Gwari, 4 April 2023.
 - 144 Interview with a cross-section of miners in Kaduna and Zamfara, June and July 2023.
 - 145 Interview with a local miner in Ahrawa, Maru, 18 June 2023.
 - 146 Interview with a former political appointee in Birnin Gwari, 6 April 2023.
 - 147 Ibid, 24 October 2023.
 - 148 Chinedu Ndigwe, Chinese groups bribe militants to secure mineral resources in Nigeria, *Business Day*, 16 April 2023; Sahara Reporters, Investigation: Secret details of how Chinese-affiliated miners bribed Dogo Gide terror group to access mining sites in Nigeria's Niger state, 17 September 2023.
 - 149 Sahara Reporters, We lost six workers, our driver also abducted – Chinese mining company, Ming Xin denies conniving with bandits in Nigeria, 22 September 2023.
 - 150 Interview with academic who has conducted extensive research on armed banditry and gold mining in North West Nigeria as well as met with some leaders, 14 October 2023.
 - 151 Ibid.
 - 152 Interview with secretary of the Birnin Gwari Emirate Progressives Union, 27 April 2023.
 - 153 For example, describing the quantity of gold deposit in Kaduna, former governor El-Rufai said in 2016 that there is more gold in Kaduna than in South Africa. See Mayowa Tijani, El-Rufai: Kaduna has more gold than S'Africa, 6 April 2016.
 - 154 Interview with a vigilante member, Magami, October 2023.
 - 155 Ibid.
 - 156 Eleanor Beevor, Car thieves of the Sahel: Dynamics of the stolen vehicle trade, *GI-TOC*, June 2023.
 - 157 Interview with Chief Imam of Udawa, Birnin Gwari, 17 April 2023.
 - 158 Interview with an armed bandit in Gusau, 30 December 2023.
 - 159 Interview with an armed bandit in Gusau, December 2023.
 - 160 Interview with a vigilante in Arahwa, Maru LGA, 18 June 2023.
 - 161 Ibid.
 - 162 The exchange rate is based on OANDA currency converter.
 - 163 Amos Tauna, Bandits impose N10m levy on Kaduna farmers, *Daily Post*, 1 June 2023.
 - 164 Tosin Ajuwan, Kaduna bandits levied N400 million taxes on Birnin-Gwari farmers: Official, *People's Gazette*, 30 June 2022.
 - 165 Observatory of Illicit Economies in West Africa, Armed bandits extort crop farmers amid dwindling alternative illicit revenue sources in Zamfara, north-western Nigeria, *GI-TOC, Risk bulletin*, Issue 5, October 2022.
 - 166 Interview with a Yan Sakai leader in Bingi community of Maru LGA, 20 July 2023.
 - 167 Natasja Rupesinghe, Mikael Hibergh Naghizadeh and Corentin Cohen, Reviewing Jihadist governance in the Sahel, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 12 May 2021; Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde and Boubacar Ba, Jihadist ideological conflict and local governance in Mali, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2022).
 - 168 Benjamin Lessing, Conceptualizing criminal governance, *Perspectives on Politics*, 19, 3 (2021).
 - 169 Remote interviews with residents of Mada in Gusau and Maru, 1 March 2024.
 - 170 For example, on May 6, 2022, members of a Zamfara armed bandit group launched an attack on civilians in Sabon Gari Damri and Kalahe in Zamfara. Between 40 and

- 56 bodies were recovered in the aftermath. The attack was reported to be linked to the clash the group had with the military in the region two weeks earlier that resulted in the deaths of 10 militiamen.
- 171 Interviews with community leaders and residents in Birnin Gwari, Maru and Gusau, April to June 2023.
 - 172 Daily Trust, Dogo Gide, notorious bandit, 'bans' consumption of narcotics in Zamfara villages, 28 October 2021.
 - 173 Mustapha Usman, Notorious bandit Kachalla Kawaje, who kidnapped Zamfara female students killed in Niger, International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 12 December 2023.
 - 174 Interview with armed bandit in Birnin Gwari, 21 December 2023.
 - 175 Interview with a community leader in Udawa community of Birnin Gwari, 17 April 2023.
 - 176 Interview with a vigilante commander in Maru, Zamfara, 16 June 2023.
 - 177 In September 2021, Turji reportedly moved from Zurmi in Zamfara area and Sabon Birni in Sokoto to elude state forces. Mohammed Babangida, Exclusive: Notorious banditry suspect, Turji, moves to new headquarters, *Premium Times*, 30 September 2021.
 - 178 Ana Arjona, Rebelocracy: A theory of social order in civil war, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, June 2017.
 - 179 Interview with a resident of Randagi/Kakangi, Birnin Gwari, 12 April 2023.
 - 180 Interview with a resident of Tabanni, Birnin Gwari, 12 April 2023.
 - 181 Interview with the secretary of the Birnin Gwari Emirate Progressives Union, 27 April 23; See Birnin Gwari Emirate Progressives' Union: <https://web.facebook.com/bepubng/about>.
 - 182 Aishat Babatunde, Islamic cleric wants 'blanket' amnesty for terrorists in Northwest Nigeria, Human Angle, 19 February 2021.
 - 183 Daily Trust, Zamfara Emirate enters peace deal with terror kingpin, Ali Kachalla, 26 November 2021.
 - 184 Desirée Nilsson, Partial peace: Rebel groups inside and outside civil war settlements, World Bank, 2008.
 - 185 Interview with a farmer in Dansadau, Maru, 16 June 2023; interview with a vigilante leader, Gagumi village, 28 April 2023.
 - 186 For analysis of the potential benefits of such approaches, see Peter Bell and Mitchell Congram, Communication Interception Technology (CIT) and its use in the fight against Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) in Australia: A review of the literature, *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 2, 1 (2014).
 - 187 Marcena Hunter et al, Learnings from West Africa's regional experiences in the gold sector, OCFAR-T, November 2023.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a global network with over 600 Network Experts around the world. The Global Initiative provides a platform to promote greater debate and innovative approaches as the building blocks to an inclusive global strategy against organized crime.

www.globalinitiative.net

ABOUT ACLED

The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project. ACLED is a non-profit organization that collects and analyzes real-time information on the locations, dates, actors, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world.

www.acleddata.com



ACLED

Supported
by



Federal Foreign Office