

## A WEB OF CRIMES, ROUTINE ACTIVITY THEORY AND THE DEEPENING SCOURGE OF ARMED BANDITRY IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract.** *The incidence of banditry in Nigeria has assumed an unprecedented mien which constitutes a major bane to the hitherto troubled security in the country. The phenomenon has created a multi-pronged security challenge that has amplified the spate of destruction of life and property and displacement. Meanwhile, inchoate and nascent erudition is still associated with the incidence of banditry in Nigeria. Thus, this study attempts to satiate this lacuna by annotating the incidence from the Routine Activity Theory standpoint. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical armchair analysis which relies on a secondary source of data. The study found out that the menace of banditry is prevalent in Nigeria, particularly in the Northwest. Some of the methods favoured by bandits include armed robbery, cattle rustling, arson, sexual violence, kidnapping, raiding villages and schools, looting, stealing livestock and gruesome killing. The incidence is attributable to the conflicts between farmers and herders for scarce resources, the influx of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) into Nigeria, an overwhelmed, weak and understaffed security apparatus, illegal mining, slow response and poor engagement of the Nigerian government, and a vast ungoverned forest territory. To adequately address the incidence of banditry in Nigeria, the study recommends a prevention strategy that focuses on the three major areas identified by the Routine Activity Theory: the motivated offender, the suitable target, and the absence of guardianship.*

**Key words:** *banditry, farmer-herder, insecurity, kidnapping, routine activity theory, violence*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The threat of insecurity in Nigeria is perpetual and precariously reinforcing, leading one to presume that Nigeria is a highly volatile and distressed country. This ambience of volatility is a pretext for instability, fragility and disunity, thus underscoring the relevance

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of this study. To be sure, the state of insecurity in Nigeria is multifaceted and, against popular belief, is attributable to the reprehensive activities in the various regions of the country. The North is ravaged by the Boko Haram and splinter Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) sects (on one end), then cattle rustling, banditry and Fulani herdsmen attack on the other end (Akinyetun, 2016; Nigeria Watch, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Olapeju & Peter, 2021). The Southeast is bedevilled by herdsmen onslaught, kidnapping, banditry, commercial crime and secessionist agitations of the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) (Igbini, 2020; Nigeria Watch, 2018). Meanwhile, in the Southwest, there has been a dramatic surge in cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, farmer-herder crisis, local crime, extra-judicial killing, cybercrime and banditry (Nigeria Watch, 2018).

The above is a testament to the spate of insecurity in Nigeria that has in the last decade transmogrified into social anomie that threatens peaceful coexistence, national security, and national integration. Observably, banditry has recently become a recurring security challenge in all parts of the country. The phenomenon is rapidly growing and threatens to plunge the country into an abyss of incessant insecurity. Indeed, the activities of marauders and banditry in Nigeria – largely Hobbesian – has made, nay, is making the life of citizens solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. According to the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) (2020) and Barnett (2021), bandits are known for cattle rustling, kidnapping, shooting and killing, raping, looting and torching of villages. They have left scores of displaced persons and fatalities in the wake of their attacks. Between 2018 and 2020, more than 3300 people were killed while over 1600 fatalities were recorded. In addition, banditry violence has led to the displacement of over 247,000 persons while more than 60,000 have been made refugees. Meanwhile, these attacks continue to increase.

Even though the Boko Haram insurgency and farmer-herder crisis have received a wide coverage (Akinyetun, 2020; Barnett, 2021; Igbini, 2020; Nigeria Watch, 2018; Ojewale, 2021), an inchoate and nascent erudition is still associated with the incidence of marauders and bandits in Nigeria (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016; Bashir, 2021). Yet, relevant underpinning theories expound on the ‘why’ of the prevalence of banditry is also incipient. The extant scholarly works on the subject matter (Abdullahi, 2021; Bashir, 2021; Umaru, 2020) have not offered comprehensive theoretical explanations of the phenomenon. This study is an attempt to satiate this lacuna by annotating the incidence of banditry in Nigeria from the Routine Activity Theory standpoint. The study seeks to answer analytical posers such as: What is banditry? What is the prevalence of banditry in Nigeria? What are the causes and effects of banditry? How does the Routine Activity Theory explicate the occurrence?

Given the sparse research on the matter, this study adopts a descriptive and analytical armchair theorization to advance literature and provide a theoretical basis for further research. This will be done by relying on secondary data sourced from journal articles, government reports, local and international newspaper articles, agency reports and internet materials. The study will be thematically discussed under the following subsections: introduction, literature review, theoretical underpinning, conclusion and recommendations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1. What is banditry?

The conceptualization of banditry can only be made clear by understanding who a bandit is. The perception of a bandit has undergone several stages. A bandit could be referred to as a freedom fighter, in the context of the 19th century Americas and Europe, whose duty was to fight for the liberation of the colonized. In the 21st-century African context, a bandit could be seen as one who commits the crime of armed robbery, killing and destruction of properties, particularly, of herders, merchants and business owners (Olapeju & Peter, 2021). These bandits have come to be known as ‘armed bandits’ or ‘weaponized bandits’ due to their penchant for the use of small arms and light weapons. According to Umaru (2020), a bandit perpetuates violence along a country’s borderlines and rural interiors. An armed bandit engages in an array of criminal offences, which include kidnapping, armed robbery, destruction of life and property, and cattle rustling. In the Nigerian context, they are also notable for arson, rape, raids and extrajudicial killings. These bandits have become associated with intimidation, threat and outright elimination. Their motives are either to amass material and wealth or to promote an ideology. Orjinmo (2021) says that the word bandit, as used in Nigeria, is a loose term referring to armed robbers, kidnappers, armed militia, cattle rustlers and Fulani herdsmen whose motivation is pecuniary.

Okoli and Ugwu (2019) distinguish between the economic and political motives of banditry. Banditry motivated by economic factors is geared towards material accumulation whereas politically motivated banditry involves the spread of fear to promote a political ideology. Egwu (2016) defines banditry as an economic-based act of criminality that involves stealing cattle from herders. This activity often involves rape, looting, attacks and kidnapping. It also destabilizes the pastoralist transhumant activities of herders that requires periodic migration to satisfy environmental and ecological needs. For Olapeju & Peter (2021), banditry is “the totality of incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, village raids as well as highway raids which involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person or a group of persons to rob, rape, kidnap or kill the victims” (Olapeju & Peter, 2021:4). From the foregoing, therefore, banditry involves an array of illicit activities that involves raiding, arson, armed robbery, killing, kidnapping, cattle rustling and maiming for primitive accumulation of material wealth or to propagate an ideology. This suggests that there are typologies of banditry that espouses the various contexts within which banditry takes place.

Okoli and Ugwu (2019) provide useful insights in this regard by advancing a typology of banditry. The authors argue that the motive behind banditry could be to provoke a social awakening against societal ills, such as inequality. Thus, they mention social banditry. Meanwhile, banditry could also be aimed at achieving a political or economic objective. Another factor that drives banditry is the location that causes bandits to move from rural to urban areas, from the frontier to countryside or mainland as a result of climate change, scarcity of water and land resources or desertification. Maritime banditry is restricted to the sea and often takes the form of piracy. Likewise, the structure of banditry in terms of headship has informed mercenary and autonomous typologies. In effect, bandits can be contracted by an agency to foment trouble but they can also be self-motivated to act autonomously. Regarding formation, bandits can be organized under a network or syndicate, or as petty bandits lacking in organization. In terms of operation, bandits can be seen to be mobile or settled (Table 1).

**Table 1** Typology of banditry

Type	Typological index
Social vs. political vs. economic	Intent or motive
Rural vs. urban	Location
Mercenary vs. autonomous	Agency and autonomy
Organized vs. petty	Form and formation
Roving vs. stationary	Operational mode
Frontier vs. countryside	Location
Maritime vs. coastal vs. mainland	Location

*Source:* Okoli & Ugwu (2019)

According to Abdullahi (2019) and Olapeju & Peter (2021), the *primaevae* internecine conflict that characterizes the historical development of most African states over economic resources is plausible for the incidence of banditry in the continent as the occurrence has come to be a means of survival. This is evidenced in the prevalence of banditry in the Niger Republic, where cattle rustling is associated with the high level of poverty in the country. The situation in Mali is by no means better as the lack of service delivery, ignited by religious extremism and insurgency, has increased the chances of banditry. Meanwhile, the scarcity of pasture, water and animal feeds and the resultant conflict with local groups has necessitated banditry in Mauritania. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, Egwu (2016) notes that identity-based conflicts between the Fulani and Hausa fuels banditry. The Fulani (predominantly herders) perceive themselves as marginalized and lacking in having a voice, while the Hausa (mostly farmers) see the Fulani as violent; these local groups often clash with each other, with the latter accusing the former of being deliberately armed to destroy its crops. As Egwu (2016) puts it, “there is a negative perception of pastoralists; in the frequent violent conflicts with agricultural farmers, the pastoralists are often blamed for problems related to crop damage, farming along cattle routes, and access to water” (Egwu, 2016:17). The conflict has become more pronounced and has contributed to the rise in banditry in the country..

## 2.2. Incidence of Banditry in Nigeria

Banditry has a long-checked history in Nigeria which dates back to 1901, when 210 merchants transporting grains on a 12,000-camel train were killed in Western Hausaland. Since then, the disaster of ungoverned spaces where the state’s authority is weak has become dominant (Anyadike, 2018). Umaru (2020) adds that banditry started in pre-colonial Nigeria, when travelling merchants were waylaid and robbed by bandits. Anyadike (2018) posits that bandits have generally been excluded from government control as they are notable for invading rural towns and assuming local authority. The competition for resources by the Hausa and the Fulani pastoralists has been compounded by banditry which is majorly brandished by the latter as compensation for excision from local political power by the former. Although presently a national security challenge, the prevalence of banditry is linked to Northwest states of Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara (Bashir, 2021; ACAPS, 2020; Nigeria Watch, 2018) while Sokoto, Niger and Zamfara are said to be the hotspots (Anyadike, 2018).

The vicious contestation between farmers and herders for scarce resources is at the heart of incessant conflicts. Banditry is enclosed in a range of broader issues, such as religious dissimilarity, identity crisis, ethnic tension and indigene/settler dichotomy which fuels the

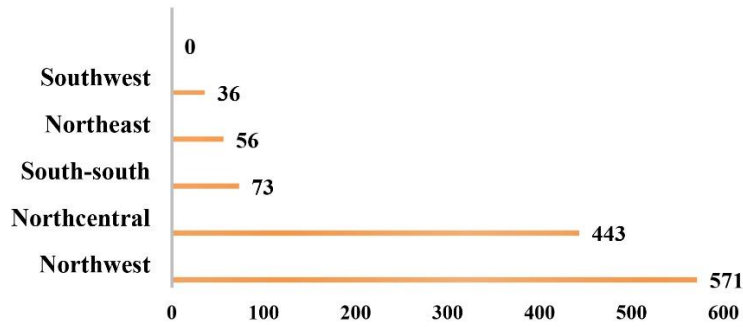
struggle for water and land resources. This is further complicated by resource scarcity, rapid population growth, desertification and environmental changes, which drive herders to go in search of arable lands and locks the farmers and herders in continued hostility. This lack of consensus and the recurring clashes have led each group to arm itself, thus providing the impetus for banditry and aggravating insecurity. For instance, the acquisition of land by the grazer without payment of corresponding compensation and the tension caused by court cases related to crop damage, and land disputes exacerbates the farmer-herder crisis and gives impetus to banditry (ACAPS, 2020; Egwu, 2016; Igbini, 2020).

The epidemic of insecurity caused by banditry remains a bane of peaceful coexistence and national cohesion (Igbini, 2015). In the last decade, banditry has evolved from being a localized herder-related activity to a highly militarized national issue that mimics a non-state armed group (NSAG) (ACAPS, 2020). According to Amnesty International (2018), the recurring clashes between herders and farmers in Zamfara engendered the recent armed banditry, when 200 people were killed in April 2014 in Yar Galadima village, Zamfara. Villages in Shinkafi and Maradun Local Government Areas were subsequently attacked by armed bandits on November 16 and 17, 2017, respectively, where many people were also killed. These gruesome attacks have continued unabated ever since. Ojewale (2021) submits that the farmer-herder crisis in the country is more lethal than the Boko Haram insurgency, six times over. Al Jazeera (2021) and Olaniyan & Yahaya (2016) report that armed bandits have carried out numerous attacks in the Northwest by raiding villages and schools, cattle rustling, abduction, looting, stealing livestock, burning homes, sexual violence, kidnapping students for ransom, and wanton killing. There have also been alleged attacks by bandits in other parts of the country. Barnett (2021) and Olaniyan & Yahaya (2016) aver that it is suspected that bandits have formed alliances with Boko Haram, which resulted in the kidnapping of school children in December 2020 in Katsina state. For sure, banditry is gradually becoming a precursor to jihadism (Barnett, 2021).

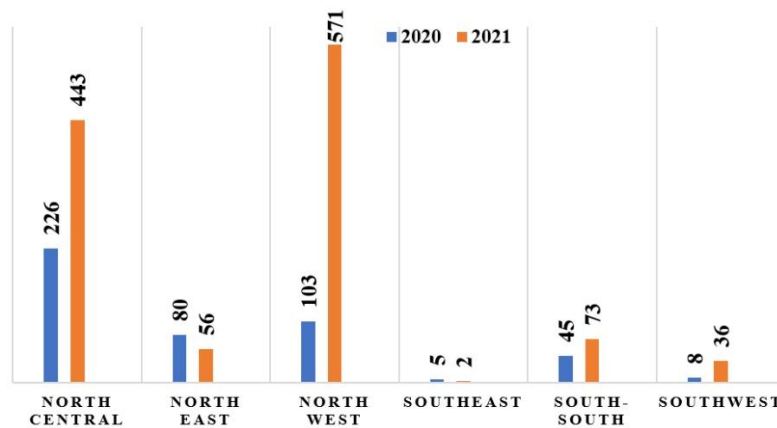
Ojewale (2021) corroborates that what is commonly downplayed as banditry is terrorism. The presence of terrorist groups (such as the Islamic State in West Africa Province, Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara) in the Northwest lends credence to this submission. More so, the act of attacking villages, kidnapping residents and abducting school children models the footprint of the Boko Haram sect which kidnapped schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, in 2014. Orjinmo (2021) argues that the abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok by Boko Haram and the publicity it garnered has encouraged the shift in the choice of the victims from road travellers in the Northwest to school children in various parts of the country. As Orjinmo (2021) puts it, "kidnapping hundreds of students rather than road travellers guarantees publicity and government involvement in negotiations, which could mean millions of dollars in ransom payments" (Orjinmo, 2021:1).

According to the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding [WANEP] (2021) and Orjinmo (2021), one of the most favoured methods used by the Boko Haram sect and armed bandits in Nigeria is kidnapping or kidnap-for-ransom. Kidnapping has become prevalent and continues to rise. The incidence of secondary school students' abduction by bandits in 2020 alone (on February 17 in Kagara, Niger State; on February 26 in Jangebe, Zamfara State; on December 11 in Kankara, Katsina State; and on December 19 in Mahuta, Katsina State) are cases illustrating the point. Meanwhile, between January and February 2021, 120 incidents of kidnapping were recorded, where 1,181 people were kidnapped (WANEP, 2021). This is a sharp increase in the number of kidnapping incidents within the same

period in 2020, where 467 people were kidnapped. The major victims of these kidnapping incidents are school children. The WANEP reports that about 730 secondary school students were abducted from Niger, Katsina and Zamfara states, between December 2020 and February 2021. Further analysis shows that these kidnaps took place across various regions in the country: South-south, Northcentral, Southwest, Southeast, Northeast and Northwest, the last of which has the highest incidents of kidnapping (Figures 1 and 2).



**Fig. 1** Incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria (January-February 2021)  
*Source: WANEP (2021) | Authors' computation*



**Fig. 2** Incidence of kidnapping by region (Jan-Feb 2020 & Jan-Feb 2021)  
*Source: WANEP (2021) | Authors' computation*

According to Hamrouni (2021), since the beginning of 2021, no fewer than 7,660 Nigerians have fled to the neighbouring Niger Republic, bringing the total of Nigerian refugees in the region to 77,000 since the proliferation of armed banditry. Unfortunately, the attacks have spread into the host region where 22,153 have become displaced in Maradi, Niger. Meanwhile, Maradi is hitherto troubled by the displacement crises of two different regions; Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel, which has led to the displacement of over 5 million people since 2009. There is no gainsaying that the incidence of banditry in Northwest Nigeria has degenerated into a cross-border phenomenon.

### 2.3. Causes and effects of banditry

Banditry has recently become a courted phenomenon due to its profitability. The payment of ransoms, for instance, has made banditry attractive to criminals (Orjinmo, 2021). Rustling is made popular by the increasing demand for livestock and beef in the Southern parts of Nigeria, thus promising a quick turnover for money (Anyadike, 2018). More so, cattle rustling is run like a syndicate of organized crime that boosts an underground economy free from taxation (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). The Governor of Borno State, Shetima, noted:

*“Our security agencies have reasonably established that most of the cattle being traded at the markets [in Borno State] were the direct proceeds of cattle-rustling perpetrated by insurgents [and] were sold at prohibitive costs to unsuspecting customers through some unscrupulous middlemen who use underhand ploy[s] to deliberately disguise the transactions as legitimate. The money realised from such transaction[s] would then be channelled to fund their deadly activities” (Ogbeche, 2016).*

Egwu (2016) describes this as the crimes of the dominant classes and the crimes of the dominated classes. Crimes of the dominant classes refer to “those who have turned rustling into a criminal activity with discernible hierarchical networks that link rustlers with markets in a thriving underground economy that generates untaxed wealth”; crimes of the dominated classes refer to “actors who are involved in cattle rustling within the rural economy as part of a coping mechanism responding to socio-economic pressures” (Egwu, 2016: 24).

Banditry is caused by reinforcing factors such as the inflow of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) from the Sahel and Libya to the Northwest, the absence of efficient security forces, and conflicts over cattle and land. Egwu (2016) opines that about 8million illegal SALW are in circulation in Africa; while Nigeria has the highest number. Bandits have been seen wielding sophisticated arms, the influx of which has been on the increase since the 2011 civil war in Libya. Akinyetun (2016) decries the change in orientation of herders from the use of staff to a gun, indicating their readiness for conflicts. Akinyetun stresses that “the availability of illegally obtained arms fuels violent clashes and crisis. To continue to let the dastardly act linger on will proportionately lead to increase in and demand illegal arms needed as a tool of war” (Akinyetun, 2016: 41).

Concerning security forces, the police suffer from institutional challenges such as underfunding and shortage of manpower which has made the prompt response to attacks nearly impossible. Anyadike (2018) argues that one of the factors giving impetus to banditry is the shrunk police force in Nigeria. There are few (yet poorly trained and unmotivated) policemen in Nigeria as against the huge population which makes the rural communities generally undeserving of police attention. Rather, state governments have turned to vigilantes to make up for the shortfall, providing them with hunting rifles and motorbikes to confront banditry. However, due to late and inconsistent payment of allowances, some vigilantes themselves became bandits.

Meanwhile, the Nigerian Army are overwhelmed with the burden of confronting the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast. Regarding conflicts over cattle, the Fulani have over time accused the Hausa of stealing their cattle and taking over their grazing routes. As a result, several Fulani youths have taken to crime in a bid to even the scores (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). According to Egwu (2016), the Fulani herders have also been accused of cattle rustling and banditry. Egwu notes that “there are documented instances of pastoralists who resort to rustling after losing cattle to disease, inclement weather, and

violence; there also are Fulani nomads active in the international syndicate of cattle rustlers” (Egwu, 2016:18). Meanwhile, the porous borders in Nigeria are yet another factor that has increased the incursion of Malians and Nigeriens into Nigeria under the guise of pastoralism. The free unrestricted movement of people from Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso encourages the proliferation of sophisticated weapons and amplifies the incidence of terrorist activities in the region (Barnett, 2021; Ojewale, 2021).

Olapeju & Peter (2021) note that banditry in Nigeria is a result of poverty, weak leadership, bad governance, arms proliferation, weak state institutions, corruption, state fragility and a centralized security structure. The years of military interregnum left the security of the state in the hands of the federal government, thus incapacitating the role of governors as the chief security officers of their states. As a result, governors are administratively handicapped in responding swiftly to the security challenges in their political domain. Oladejo (2021) and WANEP (2021) add that widespread unemployment, extreme poverty and pervasive inequality (which are common symptoms in the Northwest) also fuel the occurrence of banditry. Some of the poorest states in the country are located in the northwest region (e.g., the Kebbi, Jigawa, Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina states). This level of exclusion and deprivation concentrated in one region is a recipe for disaster. It exposes the youth to criminal activities and makes them highly susceptible to recruitment by terror groups.

The slow response and poor engagement by the Nigerian government have also emboldened bandits. As Akinyetun (2016) observes, “when conflicts, due to improper handling, degenerate into violent-conflict, they are thus gradually being internalized, patterned and conventionalized” (Akinyetun, 2016: 41). This submission captures how the government’s laxity has provided the unjustified impetus for the menace to thrive. It was not until 2014 that the government launched the Cattle Rustling and Associated Crime Task Force. Despite being saddled with the responsibility of intelligence gathering on cattle rustling and other related crimes, the Task Force has been slothful. In 2015, some governors of Northern extraction launched a joint operation that involved the police, the military, the civil defence corps and the state security service. This also ended up being lethargic. Another notable response was from Nasir El Rufai, the governor of Kaduna State, which included strengthening state border and tracking herds with computer chips to dissuade bandits from stealing cattle. Unfortunately, this is still a proposal (Binniyat, 2015; Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016; Yusuf, 2015). ACAPS (2020) adds that the government response also provoked banditry activities when the amnesty programme instituted by the governors of Zamfara and Katsina government neglected the two most prominent groups (Dogo Gyedi and Buharin Daji), while the deal was also criticized for being in the favour of the Fulanis. This further deepened the tension between the Fulani herders and the Hausa vigilantes.

Igbini (2015) notes that the state of insecurity in Nigeria as occasioned by banditry is better imagined than experienced. This has been worsened by ethnic chauvinism, secessionist agitations, corruption, government insincerity and a weak security apparatus. This has thrown the brigandage of banditry into a free-for-all mode. According to the WANEP (2021), the governments of Katsina, Yobe, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara, Niger and Kano states ordered the closure of all boarding schools in March 2021 while the Federal Government declared Zamfara a no-fly zone. Yet, bandits abducted 150 students from a secondary school in Tgina, Niger State, in June 2021 (UNICEF, 2021). Olaniyan & Yahaya (2016) and Oladejo (2021) opine that the large forests in the northern parts of the country provide the perfect hideout and operational base for bandits to thrive free from interference by security operatives. The forests have thus become ungoverned spaces where bandits have sovereignty. The terrain is sparsely populated and free from surveillance. When left ungoverned, these areas experience a power vacuum that



often gets filled with felonious groups. Umaru (2020) adds that the illicit trades and unregulated mining that takes in the vast forest spaces provides incentives for bandits to attack the mining sites and neighbouring communities. In some cases, the vigilante resistance of the communities evokes the lethality of the bandits.

According to Ogbonnaya (2020), mining used to be a great source of employment in the north, employing about 600,000 people and boosting local development. It has been hijacked by criminals who exploit the people and racketeer the process. The unholy alliance between political actors and Chinese companies in promoting illegal gold mining is responsible for the proliferation of banditry and conflicts, particularly in the Northcentral, Northwest and some parts of the Southwest. Ogbonnaya avers that over 5000 people have been killed between 2016 and 2021 in Zamfara due to the conflicts arising from illegal mining. This figure does not take into account the number of people killed in other states like Kebbi, Katsina, Plateau and Kaduna. In addition, there have been clashes between the army and bandits on one hand, and bandits and the police on the other hand. These clashes have led to the death of soldiers and bandits. Ogbonnaya (2020: 1) claims that two Chinese were arrested for illegal mining in 2020. In an interview for Roots TV on 19 June 2021, the President of the Northern Consensus Movement (NCM) Awwal Abdullahi Aliyu claimed that:

*“... we have a deposit of gold in Birnin Gwari that is more than the deposit of gold in South Africa and Ghana and that is why we are having the banditry also in Birnin Gwari axis so that we would not be allowed to harness it. The same goes to Zamfara and that is why we are having the banditry within that axis.”* (Roots TV, 2021)

The above submission is substantiated by Ogbonnaya (2020) who submits that that banditry in the Northwest is directly linked with mining, and further claims that the resulting conflict is two-fold. First, the sponsors of these mining activities, under the protection of state governments, fight for control over the fields. Secondly, these sponsors also finance cattle rustling and banditry to enflame violence among herders. The essence of this is to promote displacement and create opportunities for illegal mining to fester. This worsens the extent of poverty in the community and makes youths vulnerable to recruitment for illegal mining. In other words, banditry is sponsored to create a condition of double-jeopardy in the communities. This view finds a kindred spirit in Barnett (2021), who avers that the incidence of banditry in Nigeria as follows: “...politicians or business people in the Northwest are sponsoring the bandits in one way or another, whether for personal enrichment, to harm the interests of political rivals, to coerce populations into voting a certain way, or to reward Fulani herders for previous political support” (Barnett, 2021:1).

The effect of the phenomenon is extensive. According to the ACAPS (2020), the crisis has led to the following effects:

- a) *Displacement*: Banditry has led to the displacement of residents of Northwest Nigeria in their thousands to the Republic of Niger while others are scattered around Internally Displaced Camps; most of which are lacking in quality, without access to potable water, health care, basic utensils, toilets, and sleeping materials. The majority of these IDP have therefore resorted to begging to make a living.
- b) *Lack of protection*: Recurring bandit attacks have been recorded in the Northwest while children and women are at the risk of being sexually violated. This coupled with the overstretching of the Nigerian Army against Boko Haram and the inefficiency of the Police has subjected the residents of the region to attack. As a result, they have had to turn to vigilante groups for protection while others have been left to defend themselves.

- c) *Food insecurity*: Given that farming and animal rearing are the mainstay of the economy in the northwest, cattle rustling has significantly impaired animal rearing. More so, the attacks on rural villagers and farmers, and the consequent displacement of many more, has made farming, cultivation and harvest impossible. These developments increase the chances of food insufficiency, food insecurity, poverty, hunger and malnutrition.
- d) *Health risks*: Due to the lack of safe water and poor sanitation occasioned by open defecation, overcrowdedness, poor toilet facilities, the displaced persons run the risk of diarrhoea and cholera outbreaks in their respective camps (ACAPS, 2020).

According to Igbini (2020), banditry has deteriorated the social, economic and political activities in the country generally, and the Northwest in particular. It has discouraged economic activities such as trading, farming, mining and foreign investment.

Banditry has also increased the incidence of poverty in the Northwest. The north is a generally poor region compared to other regions of the country when applying the dimensions of multidimensional poverty (living standard, education and health). Concerning the living standard, banditry has deprived victims of the goods, property and businesses required for economic sustenance. The subsistence and commercial efforts of herders/farmers have been thwarted while a majority of these herders/farmers have been forced to abandon their farmlands, cattle and livestock. This intensifies the prevalence of poverty, unemployment, marginalization and social exclusion in the north. The most vulnerable groups are women and children (ACAPS, 2020).

Regarding education, the abduction of school children by bandits have forced many nearby schools to close down while the ones in operation have recorded fewer students for fear of kidnap. This further increases the level of illiteracy and out-of-school children in the north. According to Orjinmo (2021), “the bandits, motivated by money, might be ideologically different from groups like Boko Haram in the north-east, which are against secular education, but together, they are having a devastating effect on education across northern Nigeria” (Orjinmo, 2021:2). Meanwhile, concerning health, the consequent displacement that trails bandit attacks has exposed victims to health risk such as cholera, whilst forcing them to violate Covid-19 health guidelines (Bashir, 2021).

Umaru (2020) opines that banditry has negatively impacted food and human security and has subjected the victims to violence, abuse, fear and unnecessary want. Bashir (2021) submits that there is a general case of human rights violation wherever bandits attack. In addition to its economic and political effects, the psychological impact of banditry on the victims of rape, abuse, arson and kidnap remains untold. It has further created an unprecedented rural-urban drift wherein residents of affected communities have had to desert their homes and relocate to urban areas for fear of being attacked [again] by bandits. Egwu (2016) affirms that banditry has created a humanitarian tragedy with far-reaching consequences for an increase in internally displaced persons (IDPs), forced migrations, deaths and cattle rustling.

### 3. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

#### 3.1. Routine Activity Theory

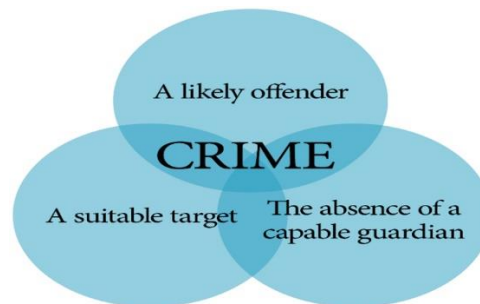
Routine Activity Theory (hereafter: RAT) is a construct that explains crime patterns as an opportunity caught in specific space and time. The theory was advanced by Cohen and Felson (1979) with the core argument that “the convergence in time and space of three

elements (motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians) appears useful for understanding crime rate trends. The lack of any of these elements is sufficient to prevent the occurrence of successful direct-contact predatory crime” (Cohen & Felson, 1979: 604). Kitteringham & Fennelly (2020) aver that the thrust of RAT is that the necessitating factors for the incidence of crime are an offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. The theory adopts the same rational choice methodology as situational crime prevention techniques. Sasse (2005) opines that “victimizations occur when there is a convergence in space and time of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and an absence of a capable guardian” (Sasse, 2005:547). Meanwhile, the motivation to offend may be intrinsic or extrinsic.

Purpura (2013) submits that RAT considers both the routine activities of the offender and the victim. A potential offender may routinely rove around a community, seeking suitable targets that are vulnerable to raiding. The presence of neighbours in the community may deter the criminal activity while the absence of a capable guardian will motivate the offender to attack the target. Rossmo & Summers (2015: 20) aver that RAT studies crime patterns related to conditions (such as: offender, victim, conducive environment, space and time) and proposes the following crime equation:

$$\text{“crime} = (\text{offender} + \text{target} - \text{guardian}) (\text{place} + \text{time})\text{”}$$

As conceived in this study, RAT is based on a treble logic that is centred around the motivation to commit a crime, the crime opportunities ensuing from the presence of a suitable target, and the absence of the relevant authority to prevent the crime (see Figure 3).



**Fig. 3** Illustration of Routine Activity Theory  
Source: Choo (2011)

RAT is hinged upon the following assumptions (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Kitteringham & Fennelly, 2020; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Purpura, 2013):

- a) Crime is likely to occur when there is a spatial-temporal convergence of three essential elements of crime: a motivated offender, an attractive target, and the absence of capable guardianship;
- b) The factors that render a particular target attractive are situational and crime-specific;
- c) Crime can be perpetrated by anyone who has the opportunity in terms of capability and availability of vulnerable target;
- d) Victims have choices on whether to be victims mainly by possibly avoiding situations where a crime can be committed against them.

The theory addresses crime from an offender's view. A crime will only be committed if a potential offender finds a target fitting and if guardianship is absent. Therefore, the occurrence of crime is dependent on the potential offender's assessment of a situation and level of motivation. This is because "a potential criminal must be motivated at the time of the encounter" (Rossmo & Summers, 2015:20). Sasse (2005) argued that:

"...Motivations, or the desires to commit crimes—which includes armed robbery, are not necessarily realized immediately with the presentation of the right opportunity at the right moment. While this process will vary depending on the offence and where it happens as Routine Activities literature argues, the victimization processes do not always occur in the heat of the moment, may take years to come to fruition, and will vary according to the motivations of the offender" (Sasse, 2005:547).

According to Turvey & Freeman (2014), the factors that propel an offender to carry out an attack influences victim selection, i.e. how a motivated offender selects his victim. The authors classified victim selection into two broad categories: a targeted victim and an opportunistic victim. A *targeted victim* is the primary object of crime. The victim is purposefully selected for various reasons including, among other things, acquaintance with the offender, possession of what the offender is interested in, or a victim who poses a threat to the offender. An *opportunistic victim* is often secondary and merely selected by circumstance. Such circumstances include vulnerability, proximity, location and availability. Such victims could also be chosen because they represent a symbol to the offender, or because they possess a trait which is considered desirable by the offender.

Felson & Cohen (1979) and Turvey & Freeman (2014) describe a suitable target as the victim of crime who is perceived to be weak. In one way or another, such a vulnerable victim fits into the offender's *modus operandi*. They refer to a capable guardian as a person or institution whose presence can deter an offender from perpetuating a crime. Examples include family members, friends, respected individuals, security officers and law enforcement agencies. These individuals are believed to be capable guardians because they are capable of preventing the crime from taking place, and they can respond when such crime is committed.

When applied to the incidence of banditry in Nigeria, this theory holds substantial relevance. It expounds on the relationship between a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian. In this discourse, *the motivated offender* are herdsmen, unemployed and poverty stricken-youths, victims of cattle rustling, victims of displacement, marauders, victims of illegal mining activities, and victims of other forms of attack seeking to get even. Thus, the motivation of these potential offenders is fueled by socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural factors that have limited their functioning and capability in society. *The suitable target* refers to objects/subjects presumed to have caused the predicament of the potential offender, or objects/subjects believed to have the solutions to their woes. This includes farmers, government properties and agents, political actors and unharmed citizens. These targets fit into the classification of a targeted or an opportunistic victim. Meanwhile, the absence of a capable guardian implies the weak presence of the security forces in the areas of attack.

As formerly observed, the Nigerian police are understaffed, unmotivated, enmeshed in corruption, and lacking adequate training. As a result, the police have been weakened in carrying out their primary objective of maintaining law and order. This explains why banditry attacks continue to rise and why the perpetrators are yet to be identified, arrested and prosecuted. The ungoverned spaces have thus become a shadow enclave where the government's presence is not felt, hence the rise in banditry and criminality. The absence of

capable guardians in the form of government institutions (e.g. police stations, army barracks and courthouses) coupled with the presence of suitable targets is a motivation for crime.

Okoli & Ugwu's (2019) contribution on this subject matter is highly valuable:

*"...the presence and prevalence of under-policed and unregulated hinterlands, forestlands and borderlands have provided an enormous opportunity for rural criminality. In addition, the presence of a viable but vulnerable rural economy based largely on animal husbandry, crop production and informal mining, equally provides an avalanche of handy crime objects/ targets: cattle, cash, treasure, etc. In this context, the virtual absence of governmental security apparatus in most rural communities gives incentive for criminal opportunism and impunity as well". (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019:205)*

RAT provides a social structural explanation to the incidence of banditry in Nigeria that crime (banditry) thrives because of the expanse of land and ungoverned spaces and the perceived accruals of crime in the face of an overstretched and inefficient security apparatus. Rossmo & Summers (2015) maintain that one must identify the context of crime occurrence to have a grasp of the crime's chemistry. However, crime chemistry is crime specific. Thus, the spatial pattern and conditions necessary for banditry to take place are different from those for burglary. For instance, the context (time and place) required for banditry is different. The offender has to consider the access to and escape from the location of the attack. Rossmo & Summers (2015) opine that:

*"Most crime is not random; rather, it is spatially structured, occurring where the awareness space of the offender intersects with perceived suitable targets (desirable targets with an acceptable risk level attached to them). The awareness spaces of offenders, in turn, are shaped by their routine activities" (Rossmo & Summers, 2015:20).*

The above clarifies why the present incidence of banditry in Nigeria is centred in rural areas with access to vast forests and majorly lacking in guardianship.

As any other theory, RAT is subject to criticism. This theory has been criticized for emphasizing the assessment of crime by a motivated offender without considering the variation in motivation per offender. Moreover, while the theory is rooted in opportunity, it fails to account for the circumstances in which the motivated offender and a suitable target converge in the absence of guardianship (Argun & Daglar, 2016). Brunet (2002) argues that the presence of a capable guardian is not enough to deter the occurrence of crime. In most cases, it moves the offender to perpetrate the attack in another location. It also ignores the psychological attributes of the offender, such as self-esteem and identity. RAT is also criticized (Degarmo, 2011) for being excessively reliant on basic assumptions of space and time, thus confining the theory to a particular location rather than considering inter-related crime beyond a specific location.

Regardless of criticisms, RAT remains relevant by providing a simple yet empirical explanation of the occurrence of crime. It shows the importance of time and space in characterizing crime, and how the absence of a capable guardian enables an offender, as in the case of Nigeria.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenge of armed banditry is a terrifying menace threatening the security of Nigeria. As this study has shown, the phenomenon is predominant in the northwest region of the

country, thus subjecting the North and indeed the entire country to a multi-pronged security challenge. The incidence of banditry has led to the destruction of life and property, displacement, poverty, unemployment, hunger and a devastating humanitarian crisis. Some of the methods favoured by bandits include armed robbery, cattle rustling, arson, sexual violence, kidnapping, raiding of villages and schools, looting, stealing livestock and gruesome killing. The incidence is attributable to the conflicts between farmers and herders for scarce resources, the influx of Small Arms and Light Weapons into Nigeria, an overwhelmed, weak and understaffed security apparatus, illegal mining, slow response and poor engagement by the Nigerian government, and a vast ungoverned forest territory. These factors are reinforced by bad governance, poverty, corruption and a weak state institution.

To adequately address the incidence of banditry in Nigeria, any proposed prevention strategy must focus on the three major areas identified by Routine Activity Theory: the motivated offender, the suitable target and the absence of guardianship. Therefore, the authors of this study make the following recommendations

- 1) As for the motivated offender(s), the incessant herder-farmer crisis should be addressed by creating livestock ranches to reduce the chances of moving around or encroaching on the farmlands of farmers. Meanwhile, frantic efforts should be made to reduce the incidence of poverty and unemployment in the country to reduce youths' vulnerability to banditry. Policies targeted at rural development, social inclusion, social protection and social cohesion should be given prominence.
- 2) Considering the victims of displacement, cattle rustling and other forms of attack should be compensated through a joint effort of the government, the private sector, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations. In addition, the government should secure the interests of suitable targets such as farmers, government institutions, political actors and ordinary citizens by improving the security situation of the country.
- 3) Regarding a capable guardian, the government must devise a comprehensive security plan that will combat arms proliferation, illegal mining, porous borders, and ensure adequate surveillance of the large ungoverned territories. The security forces in the country should be trained on the use of technology to track criminal activities and illicit trades in the country.

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## MREŽA ZLOČINA, TEORIJA RUTINSKIH AKTIVNOSTI I POŠAST ORUŽANOG RAZBOJNIŠTVA U NIGERIJU

*Učestalost oružanog razbojništva poprimila je neviđene razmere u Nigeriji. Ova pojava nanosi veliku štetu već problematičnoj državnoj bezbednosti i predstavlja višestruki bezbednosni izazov jer prouzrokuje novi talas uništavanja ljudskih života, imovine, kao i raseljavanje stanovništva. S druge strane, naučno-teorijska istraživanja se još uvek bave pojavom razbojništva u Nigeriji. Ovo istraživanje nastoji da popuni postojeću prazninu kroz analizu pojavnih oblika oružanog razbojništva sa stanovišta Teorije rutinskih aktivnosti (engl. Routine Activity Theory). U radu se koristi deskriptivna i analitička metoda koja se oslanja na sekundarne izvore podataka. Istraživanje ukazuje da je opasnost od oružanog razbojništva (banditizma) prilično rasprostranjena u Nigeriji, posebno u severozapadnim oblastima. Neka od najčešćih krivičnih dela su: oružane pljačke, krađa stoke, paljevine, seksualno nasilje, otmice, upadi u sela i škole, otimačina, imovinske krađe, i brutalna ubistva. Učestalost ovih krivičnih dela može se pripisati brojnim faktorima: dugogodišnjim sukobima između farmera i stočara oko oskudnih resursa; prilivu malokalibarskog i lakog naoružanja u Nigeriju; preopterećenom i slabom bezbednosnom aparatu koji je hronično opterećen nedostatkom kvalifikovanog osoblja; sporoj reakciji, lošoj organizaciji i neadekvatnom angažovanju nigerijske vlade u rešavanju ovih problema; prisustvu protizakonitih rudarskih aktivnosti, kao i ogromnih šumskih prostranstava koja su velikoj meri neregulisana. Kako bi se država na adekvatan način pozabavila pojavom oružanog razbojništva u Nigeriji, u radu se preporučuje strategija zasnovana na Teoriji rutinskih aktivnosti koja identifikuje tri ključna cilja u prevenciji ovih krivičnih dela: motivisani prestupnik, privlačna/osetljiva meta, i odsustvo "sposobnog čuvara".*

*Ključne reči: Nigerija, oružano razbojništvo, zemljoradnik-stočar, nasilje, nesigurnost, Teorija rutinskih aktivnosti.*