THE LAKURAWA INSURGENCY AND THE DYNAMICS OF STATE FAILURE IN NORTH-WEST NIGERIA, 2015-2025

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Abstract

Research Problem:
The security architecture of North-West Nigeria has deteriorated from conventional banditry to a more complex insurgent threat marked by the emergence of the Lakurawa group. Available discourses distort the group by portraying it as a new entity and not questioning the structural realities that facilitated its emergence, thus leaving a gap in the literature.
Methods/Theory:
This work is based on a qualitative historical approach that incorporates Anaemic State Theory and State Weakness Theory to examine the interplay between institutional decay and the emergence of non-state armed groups.
Results:
The results indicate that the Lakurawa phenomenon is a direct outcome of a power vacuum created by the failure of the state to secure the peripheral areas. The group has institutionalised a parallel system of government,

such as independent judicial systems and the imposition of religious taxation (zakat), thus weakening Nigerian sovereignty. The paper also substantiates that misinformed and reactive reactions of the state are indicators of poor institutional capacity and historical learning.

Conclusion:

The rise and centralization of the Lakurawa organisation are evidence that it is systemic insecurity and socio-economic distress that chiefly underlie the continuing insurgency in North-West Nigeria.

Contribution to Knowledge:

The work contributes to the discussion of state failure by showing how uncontrollable borderlands facilitate the process of turning armed groups into support actors and opposition to sovereign powers.

Recommendation:

The mitigation interests should be based on the operation of a transition between militarised response and positive governance strategies that enhance state presence, remedy socio-economic vulnerabilities, and restore institutional capabilities within border communities.

Introduction

The sustained existence of violent non-state actors in North West Nigeria poses a fundamental question of whether the Nigerian state has the ability to sustain its monopoly on the use of legitimate force in its peripheral jurisdictions. The repetitive patterns of violence, loss of territory, and coexistence of competing systems of authority suggest a more structural crisis underlying institutional breakdown and failure of governance. Over the past few years, the security situation in the area has developed further out of rural banditry into more structured and ideologically motivated types of insurgencies, with the Lakurawa group being the most notable example of such. Though banditry has been the primary insecurity since 2015 since it has caused massive loss of life and displacement on a great scale, the formation of Lakurawa marks a qualitative shift in the structure of the organisation and the missions of armed parties that are active in the area. Contrary to opportunistic criminal networks, the group has created aspects of a different socio-political order in the regions of Sokoto and Kebbi States, including the imposition of a religious taxation (zakat), the functioning of an alternative judicial system, and the enforcement of militant religious principles. Such developments not only point to the continuity of insecurity but also to the slow erosion of state power and legitimacy within the affected societies.

Existing studies on insecurity in northern Nigeria have largely focused on banditry, insurgency in the North East, and farmer-herder conflicts, often treating these phenomena as distinct or loosely connected security challenges. Amidst this larger literature, the rise of new armed groups in the North West has received increased interest, especially in the context of cross-border movements, rural violence, and the evolving character of non-state armed groups. The Lakurawa phenomenon can thus be contextualised in a broader trend of changing security issues in weak border areas where the presence of the state is low and disputed. It is against this background that this paper focuses on the formation and consolidation of the Lakurawa group in an environment of state weakness in North West Nigeria. It takes a historical and analytical stance to question the

role institutional vulnerability; lack of governance and borderland processes have played in the emergence of the group and also allowed the group to take up the role that the state is traditionally held to play.

Statement of the Problem

The literature and policy discourse on the Lakurawa phenomenon is analytically deficient in explaining its appearance and functioning nature in North West Nigeria. A great part of the extant commentary, especially in the media and official security discourse, describes the group as a new terrorist organization, restricting analysis to transient security reactions and concealing its historical and structural roots. Despite the fact that there have already been scholarly efforts to place the group into the context of cross-border mobility and Sahelian insecurity, those representations tend to subsume the group within more global discourses of rural banditry or transnational crime without sufficiently differentiating its organisational structure and ideological orientation.This has led to a lack of cohesive analytical agreement on the nature, origins,and direction of the Lakurawa group. More importantly, very little attention has been paid to the underlying factors that allow such formations to take shape, grow, and play almost governmental roles in secondary areas. The disintegration of local government structures, permeable international borders, politicisation of security, and strategic mobilisation of identity in the recruitment and control have not been sufficiently theorised in the existing literature.

This scholarly gap narrows the space of theoretical interest and policy-making because it does not describe how the interaction of intersecting structural processes creates and maintains insurgent actors in the borderlands of Nigeria. As a result, systematic and historically informed analysis that goes beyond descriptive explanations of violence is needed to challenge the connection between state weakness and the emergence of alternative centres of power. This research fills this gap by analyzing the Lakurawa phenomenon in the context of state failure, and, specifically, how institutional incapacity and governance failures have contributed to its appearance and entrenchment.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of the research is to investigate the emergence and consolidation of the Lakurawa group within the context of state weakness in North West Nigeria. In particular, the research aims to examine the structural circumstances that enabled the emergence of the group, determine its organisational and ideological nature, and analyse its consequences for state power and local governance in the communities impacted.

Conceptual Clarification

This paper uses significant concepts as the core of its argument. The concept of non-state armed actors can be defined as organised groups that are not controlled by the state and apply coercive power within the boundaries of territories.

State weakness is the failure of the state to offer security, execute law, and maintain effective control of its territory. The idea of insurgency is regarded as a structured and long-lasting opposition to state power, which is often accompanied by the creation of an alternative government.

Lakurawa is a cross-border militia that is involved in the operation in areas of North West Nigeria, especially in Sokoto and Kebbi States. It derives its name from the French term *la recrue*, or *recruit*, modified into local use. The

group has been typified by transnational makeup, ideological inclination, and the creation of parallel systems of command, such as taxation and arbitration mechanisms. In the framework of the current research, Lakurawa is not simply a criminal or a bandit group, but a new insurgent actor who functions in the environment of state weakness.

Research Methodology

This study is based onthe historical method, relying on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from oral interviews and media reports, while secondary data included scholarly books, journal articles, and policy reports. The study employs a thematic approach to analyse and explain the findings, identifying recurring patterns and issues in the emergence, organisation, and operations of the Lakurawa group. Descriptive and analytical methods are used to situate the group within its historical and socio-political context and to examine its implications for state authority and local governance.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The complexity of the Lakurawa phenomenon in North-West Nigeria necessitates a robust theoretical underpinning that moves beyond surface-level security analysis. This study adopts a dual theoretical approach, integrating the Anaemic State Theory and the State Weakness Theory. These theories can be used to explain how institutional decay and governance failures can lead to the emergence of non-state armed actors and the usurping of state functions that normally belong to the state. The Anaemic State Theory, as formulated by Jean Germain Gros, refers to a situation where the state maintains its formal forms of power but lacks the institutional density and organisational capacity to be able to effectively control its territory(Gros, 1996). In this case, the central government is in a debilitated form with little or no presence in the peripheral regions. In such regions, state agents often do not have resources, coordination, and institutional support to enforce law and order, which in turn enables the local actors and armed groups to engage in their activities with relative autonomy.The theory also highlights that such a situation could either be attributed to long-term internal strife that could exhaust state capacity or the historical absence of powerful administrative and developmental institutions.

State Weakness Theory is concerned with the failure of the state to fulfil its core functions, especially the supply of security, the upholding of law, and sovereignty over its borders. A weak state is defined as having weak control of the national borders, poor governance, and the failure to control the activities of armed groups(Rotberg, 2004). Such circumstances usually create power vacuums where non-state actors are created, expand, and even form other systems of governance.The theory brings into light the connection between institutional failure and the growth of insurgent and militant groups, particularly in areas where the state does not maintain a regular presence.

Existing literature on the application of these theories has mostly assumed non-state armed groups are homogeneous products of state failure, with little account taken of the internal differentiation and dynamic nature of such actors. This work goes beyond such a stance by showing that the Lakurawa phenomenon represents a further development in the process of state fragility, in which non-state actors not only take advantage of governance failure, but actually build up mechanisms of power that compete in terms of functionality and legitimacy with the state itself. The creation of tax regimes, law and order that the group developed, depicts

how opportunistic violence has evolved into organised governance.The paper builds upon Anaemic State Theory by engaging in an in-depth analysis of the manner in which the weak presence of the state in border societies facilitates the external armed actors to integrate into local socio-political systems. The study evidence demonstrates that the Lakurawa were not foisted on these communities but were, at least, accommodated, and, in certain instances, invited as substitute security providers. This shows that the weakness of institutions at the periphery is not only generating insecurity but also leading to the localisation and normalisation of non-state power.

State Weakness Theory is further refined through the analysis of the processes that sustain the Lakurawa presence over time. The paper demonstrates that power gaps are not only structural voids but also constructed dynamically as a result of the interaction between the locals and the armed forces. Lakurawa authority consolidation is associated with the capacity to offer dispute resolution, social order, and address the local security demands, thus creating a certain level of legitimacy that underpins its stand. This interpretation does not view the absence of a state as the sole issue, but the bargaining of power in delicate settings.When these theories are used together, one can provide a more solid explanation of the phenomenon of Lakurawa as a case of emerging parallel authority in an environment of institutional decline. Emphasis is therefore placed on the failure of the state and also on the mechanisms by which non-state actors make that failure into structured mechanisms of control. This approach adds to the theoretical debates on the fragility of the state by providing an example of how the circumstances in the borderlands, local agency, and institutional decay are combined to create stable insurgent formations.

The Emergence of Lakurawa

The name Lakurawa is neither rooted in Hausa nor Fulfulde linguistic traditions, a feature that immediately raises questions about the origin and identity of the group. The term is attributed to a French phrase *la recrue*, which translates as recruit, and has undergone linguistic adaptation within local contexts (Afolaranmi, 2024). While this etymological origin points to an external lineage, it is the way the term has been appropriated and deployed locally that offers deeper analytical value. Rather than functioning simply as a label, Lakurawa has become a social category through which communities interpret and classify a new form of armed presence that differs from earlier patterns of banditry and pastoral militancy.

Accounts from Tangaza and Gudu indicate that neighbouring Nigerien communities first used the term to describe the group, suggesting that its circulation preceded its widespread adoption within Nigeria. Testimonies further reveal that members of the group do not speak Hausa or Fulfulde fluently and rely on interpreters when interacting with local populations (Bukarti, 2025). At first glance, this linguistic distance reinforces the perception of the group as foreign. However, such an interpretation requires qualification. Evidence also shows that the group translates its messages into multiple local languages, including Hausa and Fulfulde, particularly during religious preaching and market interactions (Isamotu et al., 2024). This duality points to a process of strategic adaptation rather than fixed externality. The group's ability to operate across linguistic boundaries suggests that its survival depends not on isolation but on negotiated communication and gradual integration.

Physical descriptions of the Lakurawa, often emphasising fair complexion, tall stature, and

resemblance to Tuareg or Arab populations, have been used to reinforce claims of non-Nigerian origin (Bukarti, 2025). While such descriptions contribute to local perceptions, they should not be taken at face value as definitive markers of identity. Instead, they function as part of a broader narrative through which communities differentiate the group from familiar actors such as Fulani herders or local bandits. The analytical implication is that identity in this context is constructed through both observable traits and social interpretation. This distinction becomes important in understanding how the group is initially received and subsequently embedded within local environments.

The spatial distribution of the Lakurawa further complicates conventional explanations of insecurity in North West Nigeria. Their presence in forested corridors such as the Tsauni axis, which stretches across multiple local government areas and extends into the Niger Republic, reflects a deliberate engagement with borderland geography. Existing literature frequently attributes such patterns to porous borders and weak state control (Rotberg, 2004). While this explanation captures an important dimension, it remains incomplete if treated as the sole factor. Border regions in this context are not simply spaces of absence but are structured environments with established patterns of mobility, trade, and informal governance. The Lakurawa's ability to establish camps and sustain operations within these regionindicates an understanding of these dynamics and a capacity to exploit them effectively.

The early interaction between the group and Nigerian security agencies in 2018 provides a critical insight into the institutional dimensions of the problem. Local communities raised concerns about the activities of armed herders in Marake and Tsauni forests, yet official investigations concluded that the group posed no significant threat (Jamiu, 2024). This misclassification brings to the fore a deeper structural limitation in state response mechanisms. Rather than being an isolated error, it illustrates a pattern in which peripheral intelligence is either undervalued or inadequately processed within centralised security frameworks. Gros' conception of the anaemic state is particularly instructive here, as it highlights the consequences of weakened institutional capacity in interpreting and responding to emerging threats. The state's inability to distinguish between routine pastoral movement and organised armed mobilisation created the conditions for the group's subsequent entrenchment.

However, the trajectory of the Lakurawa cannot be fully explained through institutional failure alone. Evidence indicates that local communities played an active role in facilitating their entry. Faced with escalating violence from Zamfarawa bandits, community leaders reportedly engaged external actors, including Lakurawa fighters, as a form of alternative security provision (Thompson et al., 2024). This development introduces a critical dimension that is often underemphasised in existing studies. State weakness is frequently conceptualised as a top-down failure, yet the Lakurawa case demonstrates that bottom-up responses can significantly shape security outcomes. The invitation of the group reflects a calculated decision by local actors who perceived the state as incapable of fulfilling its primary obligation of protection.The involvement of traditional authorities and organisations such as the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) in discussions around hiring the group further illustrates the institutional complexity of this process. The decision to recruit foreign armed actors was not an ad hoc reaction but a structured attempt to address a pressing security

challenge. This development complicates the narrative of state failure by revealing the existence of alternative decision-making centres that operate alongside formal institutions. The implication is that authority in these areas is fragmented, with multiple actors exercising influence over security arrangements.

The transformation of the Lakurawa from invited protectors to dominant actors imposing regulatory systems represents a critical turning point. Reports indicate that the group established camps known as *Darul Islam* and expanded its membership from a small contingent to a more organised formation (Jamiu, 2024). This expansion was accompanied by the introduction of taxation systems, the enforcement of religious codes, and the regulation of local activities. Such developments mark a shift from reactive security provision to proactive governance. The existingbody of thought often interprets this transition as a predictable outcome of weak state presence. However, the Lakurawa case suggests that the process is more contingent and involves continuous interaction with local communities. Their authority is not imposed in a vacuum but is negotiated through a combination of coercion, service provision, and ideological persuasion.

The ability of the group to generate a degree of legitimacy, despite its coercive practices, highlights an important analytical gap in conventional approaches. Theories of state weakness tend to emphasise absence and vacuum, yet they pay limited attention to the mechanisms through which non-state actors fill these spaces in socially meaningful ways. The Lakurawa's engagement in dispute resolution, selective protection, and economic regulation demonstrates that their authority is partly sustained through functionality. This does not imply widespread acceptance but indicates that their presence is tolerated or even supported under certain conditions.

The temporary displacement of the group in 2020 by combined security operations offers further insight into the limitations of state intervention. While military action succeeded in disrupting their activities, it did not address the underlying conditions that enabled their emergence. The subsequent regrouping of the Lakurawa in 2023 underscores the cyclical nature of insecurity in the region. This pattern reflects what Gros describes as the lack of institutional vitality, where the state is capable of episodic intervention but unable to sustain long-term control. The failure to consolidate military gains with administrative and developmental measures allowed the re-emergence of the group in an even more expansive form.

Debates regarding the chronology of the Lakurawa's presence reveal additional layers of complexity. Official accounts have at times presented the group as a recent development linked to broader Sahelian insurgent networks (Buba, 2025). In contrast, other analyses trace their activities back to earlier periods, emphasising patterns of seasonal or circular migration between Nigeria and neighbouring countries (Bukarti, 2025). This divergence is analytically significant. A focus on recent emergence encourages reactive policy responses, while recognition of longer-term patterns highlights the gradual processes of infiltration and adaptation. The evidence suggests that the Lakurawa did not suddenly appear but evolved through sustained interaction with the borderland environment.The recruitment strategies employed by the group further reinforce their adaptive capacity. Targeting young men between the ages of 15 and 27, the Lakurawa combine coercion with incentives, including financial rewards, weapons, and access to mobility resources such as motorbikes (Alhassan, Oginni, and Breitung, 2025). These strategies are closely tied to the socio-economic

conditions of the area, particularly youth marginalisation and limited economic opportunities. Recruitment in this context is not simply a function of ideological alignment but is embedded in broader patterns of economic survival and social mobility.

Their establishment of concealed camps across Sokoto, Kebbi, and Katsina, coupled with their involvement in local dispute resolution and enforcement of protection levies, indicates a deliberate effort to consolidate territorial control. Competition with existing bandit groups further underscores the dynamic nature of the security landscape, where multiple non-state actors vie for influence. The ability of the Lakurawa to navigate this environment and maintain relevance suggests a level of organisational sophistication that goes beyond opportunistic violence.

When critically examined, the Lakurawa phenomenon reflects a convergence of factors that cannot be reduced to a single explanatory framework. Institutional failure, while significant, operates alongside local agency, borderland dynamics, and adaptive insurgent strategies. The group's evolution from a foreign entrant to a locally embedded authority illustrates a process in which state absence is transformed into structured systems of control. This interpretation moves beyond descriptive accounts and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how non-state armed actors emerge, adapt, and sustain themselves within fragile environments.The analytical significance of this case lies in its demonstration that insecurity in North West Nigeria is not just a consequence of state weakness but a product of interaction between state failure and societal response. The Lakurawa did not simply fill a vacuum; they were drawn into it, shaped by it, and ultimately restructured it to their advantage. This perspective provides a more comprehensive basis for understanding the persistence of insurgent formations and the challenges associated with restoring state authority in affected regions.

Modus Operandi of the Lakurawa

The pattern of operations of the Lakurawa does not merely reflect the action of an armed group, but it reveals a conscious project of a power-building operation in a place where the Nigerian state has effectively disappeared. According to evidence from affected communities, the group adjudicates disputes, imposes religious laws, and collects taxes. Some scholarly compendia tend to introduce such practises as a symptom of state failure. Although such a reading is helpful, it is simply not complete unless it questions how all these actions are reconfiguring power at the local level. This larger agenda is most evident in how the group dominates the systems of justice.

An alternative judicial order sits at the centre of this transformation.According to field reports, the Lakurawa also act as arbitrators in local disputes, and specifically forbid traditional rulers to do so. Bukarti (2024) reports that non-compliance is punishable by the possibility of death, and traditional authorities have minimal chances of resistance. This trend is often mentioned as an indicator of the weakness of states. The implication is more than institutional absence though. The cautious omission of traditional rulers is an indication of institutional displacement wherein the existing structures are not only weakened but actually substituted. The involvement of the group in adjudication is hence a calculated attempt to monopolise power and the reproduction of the origin of legitimacy in these communities. Having gained the power to solve disputes, the group expands its control over the daily social life of the people.

Social behaviour is controlled by strict religious codes. Resident testimonies, including the accounts of Abdullahi Maigari(2025), reveal that people have been punished by being beaten because of shaving their beards, keeping certain hairstyles, or listening to secular music. There are other reports that the operators of the Point of Sale were penalised due to charging interest, which is against Islamic law, according to the group. There were cases of looting and destroying equipment as a response to enforcement (Bukarti, 2024). Such acts are perceived in most cases to be reflecting religious extremism. Although such an interpretation is legitimate, it does not reflect their role exhaustively. The regulation of such norms functions as a system of standardisation of behaviour which is directed towards the restructuring of social identity. The coercion, in this case, is not ad hoc but organised to give rise to conformity and entrench a new moral order. This social regulation is also supported by economic means of attaching obedience to material punishment.

Another way of understanding the operational logic of the group is economic practises. The zakat collection is a common issue being reported in the communities where it is practised. Alhaji Isa Salihu Kalenjeni, Chairman of Tangaza Local Government Area, attests that those who fail to pay are coerced through confiscation of property. In another case, an owner of a shop was robbed of N2 million, and his vehicle could be released after N350,000 was paid (Isamotu et al., 2024). Such acts are frequently termed extortion. Nevertheless, taxation is traditionally associated with the claims of power. It is thus clear that the institutionalisation of zakat indicates an act of fiscal control and not opportunism. The enforcement trend also displays a strategic aspect. Whereas the individuals could hold on to property when the price is paid, any property that is associated with political elites could be outrightly confiscated. This kind of targeted attack implies that the state is trying to subvert state-related forces and, at the same time, build local credibility. Other than taxation, the group unifies its power in the way it manages the conflict within the community.

The Lakurawa have established themselves as a quasi-judicial force in terms of conflict between farmers and herders and cattle rustling. It has been proven that farmers are increasingly reporting cases of encroachment to the group whereupon it adjudicates cases and imposes compensation. Equally, those who lost their cows to cattle rustlers request the Lakurawa to intervene in the process and carry out recovery activities. Available literature explains this change as an anaemic symptom. Although this is true, it does not entirely describe how this preference has continued so much. This is because the group can offer some sort of order that the institutions of state have failed to offer because of timely and enforceable results. In this regard, therefore, legitimacy is not based on legality but rather on performance. Political power is acquired through service delivery.The group conducts systematic audits of grazing herds to determine ownership and enforce levies. Livestock identified as belonging to political elites or government officials are often confiscated entirely, while others are allowed retention upon payment of zakat. This approach reflects a highly organised economic system rather than random predation. Unlike bandit groups that rely heavily on kidnapping for ransom, the Lakurawa operate a more predictable and routinised model of resource extraction. This distinction marks a transition from opportunistic violence to administrative control.

Security operations also indicate the governance capacity of the group. Residents who have given testimonies such as MalamBauni reveal that strangers entering their communities are arrested and questioned. Individuals who are considered government officials are allegedly executed and others are set free after interrogation (Isamotu et al., 2024). The same scrutiny is also applied to returning residents. The practises have a role of surveillance and population control. Such movement control is an indicator of trying to impose some sort of territory control as opposed to merely providing security. The more the territorial control is solidified, the more the group focuses its operations towards challenging other centres of power. The attack on a military installation in Sokoto on August 10, 2024, that left three security personnel dead and destroyed a patrol vehicle was a major move in this direction. This event could be seen as a shift in local authority over the confrontation with the state. The target approach of the group has been expanded to the security forces, vigilantes, and other armed groups that are opponents. Although it is claimed that they do not kill civilians, the fact that they abducted a healthcare worker on November 3, 2024, shows the unreliability in their actions. Such events imply a new strategic realignment where violence has been used selectively to protect and extend power.

This interpretation advances the central argument of this study. The Lakurawa phenomenon represents not only the consequence of weak institutions but also the construction of alternative systems of authority. The combination of coercion, service provision, and ideological enforcement enables the group to function as a competing centre of power. This transformation from armed group to governing actor defines the depth of the threat and underscores the limitations of existing analytical approaches.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this research pose some basic analytical questions that transcend descriptive explanations of insecurity and demand a critical questioning of the structural conditions that surround the Lakurawa phenomenon.To what degree can the rise of the group be described as a spontaneous security threat instead of a structural result of state failure?The evidence shows that the Lakurawa was not an isolated or accidental development but a direct result of the failure of institutions in the peripheral parts of Nigeria.Failure of the state to control territories and offer basic security in Sokoto and Kebbi has left a functional vacuum upon which the group could rise and establish itself. This implies that the weakness of states is not a background phenomenon but an enabling structure that helps in the creation of other centres of power.Although available literature tends to focus on the foreign origins or transnational aspects of armed groups, the findings of this research suggest that internal failure of governance is the critical factor. In this regard, the emergence of Lakurawa is better understood as a systemic outcome of institutional decline rather than a temporary security aberration, thereby extending the explanatory scope of State Weakness Theory beyond passive institutional failure to active conditions of insurgent formation.

This brings up another question about what the group is about: is Lakurawa an extension of banditry, or is it a different form of organised authority? The results show a glaring breakaway of the traditional armed groups in North West Nigeria. Compared to bandits, whose operations are mainly episodic and predatory, the Lakurawa have formalised systems of taxation, dispute settlement and social control and this kind of organisation is more or less the level of governance. These practises are not an incident

but are at the very heart of their mode of operation, which signifies that they are trying to build power instead of just harvesting resources. This refutes the mainstream suppositions in the literature that non-state armed actors act mainly by opportunistic violence. Rather, the group functions under a hybrid type of structure whereby force is supplemented by service delivery, thus gaining some degree of legitimacy through performance as opposed to legality. Unlike in previous literature which includes these groups in larger categories of insurgency without much distinction, the results here show that Lakurawa is a development in the nature of non-state violence, where criminality gives way to organised government. The implication is that the group does not merely act as a violent actor but it is an alternative system of authority thus redefining what constitutes insecurity in the region.

Closely connected with this is the issue of local agency: do communities remain just passive observers of insurgency or are they actively involved in the process of its development and solidification? The results show that local actors played a critical role in enabling the entry of Lakurawa as an alternative security provider to repeated bandit attacks.This questions the prevailing top-down interpretation of state failure and develops a crucial bottom-up aspect to the analysis. Instead of unilateral imposing, the existence of the group was first negotiated in a survival context wherein the community focused on the immediate security rather than the formal loyalty to the state. The available literature recognises the interaction of communities with armed forces without interrogating the meaning of such interaction adequately. This paper has shown that this kind of engagement is a rational, strategic response to state failure thus giving a broader interpretation of Anaemic State Theory and State Weakness Theory to take into account the process of local decision-making. But this agency is not a lasting one. The further introduction of taxation, the introduction of strict social codes and the ousting of traditional structures of authority speaks of the shift of negotiated presence to imposed control. This implies that although local involvement helps to formulate insurgent groups in the first place, this process leads to the loss of autonomy, and thus communities become not the strategic players but the subjects of an alternate power. Lakurawa legitimacy is thus contingent and transactional in nature, as it is based on the ability to offer order, and not on any long-term ideological pledge.

The consequences of such dynamics pose a last but crucial question namely, does the existence of Lakurawa signify a temporary loss of state power or complete structural reorganisation of government in impacted areas? The latter interpretation is supported by the findings. The creation of judicial systems, taxation systems, and systems of territorial surveillance denotes the straight replacement of the state functions, which implies not the lack of governance, but its substitution. This goes further than the traditional understanding of uncontrollable spaces but rather indicates the rise of other availed governed spaces where non-state actors have an efficient leadership. Although this is consistent with the theoretical approaches that have characterised state failure as lack of ability to deliver political goods, the research makes a further step in presenting this argument by showing how state failure leads to functional substitutes as opposed to institutional voids. The state is not merely out of play, but is actively repelled by actors that can impose order, though by force.

Conclusion

This paper re-contextualises the Lakurawa phenomenon in current scholarly discourse about state failure, insurgency, and the concept of sovereignty to show that the crisis in the North-West of Nigeria cannot be satisfactorily understood using traditional security theories that focus on the classification of threats and the military response. Instead of perceiving non-state armed forces as by-products of instability, the results necessitate a redefinition of state weakness as a producing state that actively gives rise to alternative forms of authority. In this sense, this study broadens the explanatory reach of the State Weakness Theory by demonstrating that institutional failure does not merely create a vacuum but enables the formation of structured systems of governance that directly compete with the state.

According to the existing literature, especially the writings of Rotberg, state failure is largely defined in terms of failure to provide political goods. The findings of this study not only agree with this stance but also transcend it. They verify that the inability to offer security is still central, but they also indicate that the result of such inability is not institutional absence but rather functional substitution. This is a very important difference. The Lakurawa case demonstrates that non-state actors do not just fill the ungoverned spaces but also create alternative regimes of taxation, justice, and social control. It is in this respect that the study undermines dominant interpretations that objectify insecurity as a state of disorder but rather develops the argument that it is a reordering of authority.

Anaemic State Theory, as articulated by Gros, is also engaged and refined through the findings of this study.The evidence confirms that a lack of institutional capacity in peripheral areas opens space to non-state actors, which can act relatively independently. The analysis, however, leaves existing applications of the theory by showing that such actors do not stay peripheral or opportunistic. They turn into administratively structured entities that can exert the territorial power and produce conditional legitimacy. This observation proposes a significant theoretical correction, which is that anaemia in state formations does not only undermine power but makes it possible to transfer it to the non-state ones.

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