ARMED BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING IN KWARA STATE: AN IMPACT ANALAYSIS

KADIR, HASSAN OBA
Centre for Peace and Security Studies, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin Kwara State
kadirson1964@gmail.com ORCID ID:https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4732-2656

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Keywords

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Abstract

Research Problem: *Armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State have escalated despite various security interventions, highlighting concerns about their structural drivers, spatial spread, and far-reaching effects on governance, livelihoods, education and community stability. However, existing studies have focused on other regions in Nigeria, leaving a significant gap in understanding the dynamics of insecurity in relatively stable states such as Kwara.*
Methods/Theory: *The study adopted a survey research design, drawing on primary data obtained through Key Informant Interviews with twelve purposively selected respondents, complemented by secondary sources. Data were analysed using qualitative thematic and content analysis. The study is anchored on Weak State Theory, reinterpreted to explain how non-state armed actors reconfigure state authority in contexts of governance fragility.*
Results: *Findings reveal that banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State are driven by poverty, weak governance, ungoverned forest spaces, resource competition, illegal mining, ethno-communal tensions and criminal collaboration networks. The phenomenon follows a persistent and expanding spatial pattern, with continuous attacks across multiple local government areas, resulted in killings, abductions, displacement and disruption of agricultural production and education systems.*
Conclusion: *The study concludes that insecurity in Kwara State is structurally embedded and sustained by interacting socio-economic and governance failures, with significant effects on traditional authority, rural livelihoods and human capital development. Although state and non-state responses combine kinetic and humanitarian interventions, the persistence of violence reflects structural weaknesses.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The study advances Weak State Theory by demonstrating that banditry and kidnapping in semi-stable regions operate as adaptive systems that actively reshape governance structures, rather than merely reflects the state weakness.*
Recommendation: *It recommends integrated long-term strategies*

combining poverty reduction, rural development, strengthened intelligence-led policing, regulation of illegal mining, community security frameworks and expanded psychosocial and livelihood recovery programmes.

Introduction

One of the most urgent problems for modern states is the increase in terrorism and security threats worldwide. Over the past two decades, violent extremism, organised criminality and transnational insurgency have become increasingly destabilising to national stability, to state institutions and to human security in many regions of the world. Terrorism is generally understood as the use of violence or the threat of violence by non-state actors or clandestine groups to create fear, coerce governments and influence political, ideological or religious objectives (Idris et al., 2025). Today's security environments are increasingly characterised by hybrid threats that combine insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, cybercrime and violent extremism beyond conventional terrorism. These new threats have challenged traditional security structures and called for new policy responses by governments and security institutions.

Terrorism, historically associated with regions such as the Middle East and some portions of Asia, has significantly escalated in occurrence across Africa in recent years. Across the continent, violent extremist groups and organised crime syndicates have used weak governmental structures, socio-economic inequalities, porous borders, and regional dissatisfaction to establish operational bases (Kim & Sandler, 2020). In the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, extremist-affiliated groups in Burkina Faso have intensified attacks on civilians, military installations, and public infrastructure, thereby exacerbating already fragile political situations. These changes have resulted in humanitarian disasters and established new patterns of displacement, economic upheaval, and insecurity that transcend national borders (Idris et al., 2025).

Terrorism and security threats issue has taken an alarming dimension in Nigeria. From the early 2000s, the country has witnessed the rise of violent extremist movements, insurgent groups, bandit networks and kidnapping syndicates operating in many regions. National security architecture is under pressure from the insurgency in the North-East, rampant banditry in the North-West and a surge in kidnappings and organised crime in other parts of the country. These developments have also revealed the intricate interconnection between security challenges, socio-economic marginalisation, governance deficits and communal tensions in Nigeria (Thompson et al., 2025; Ojo, 2024).

Northern Nigeria has been the epicentre of insurgency and banditry, but recent developments point to a gradual diffusion of security threats into relatively stable regions (Ojo, 2020). states in the North-Central geopolitical zone in particular have felt increasing security pressures linked with inter-communal conflicts, criminal networks and infiltration of armed groups from neighbouring regions. Long regarded as one of Nigeria's more tranquil states, Kwara State has over the years begun to show signs of developing security vulnerabilities (Gbadeyan et al., 2025). There have been several reports of kidnapping, rural banditry, cross-border criminal activities and the alleged presence of extremist cells which have raised concerns among policy makers, security

agencies and local communities on the changing security landscape of the state.

Despite the growing public interest in the issue, there is little academic interest in the dynamics of armed banditry and abduction in Kwara State. Existing research on insecurity in Nigeria are majorly on the insurgency in North-East and the intractable banditry crisis in North-West. This dominant pre-occupation has tended to obscure the changing and context-specific nature of insecurity in relatively stable states such as Kwara where emerging patterns of violence are shaped by a combination of local socio-economic factors, leaky security governance and adaptable criminal networks. This study departs from previous studies by moving the analytical lens from the assumption that insecurity in Nigeria is limited to the conventional conflict hotspots and situating Kwara State as a critical case for understanding how armed banditry and kidnapping mutate within semi-stable environments. In doing so, it interrogates not only the mechanisms driving these threats and institutional responses to them, but also how their increasing normalisation is transforming local governance, community trust and security architecture in ways that have been insufficiently theorised in prior work.

Research Problem

Armed banditry and kidnapping have been common security challenges in Kwara State that have been undermining public safety as well as governance and socio-economic stability. In spite of the gamut of security measures, these violent acts have grown in scope and magnitude and have laid bare the fundamental deficiencies in state capacity, institutional coordination and policy implementation. The problem is not that there is criminal violence but the inability to appreciate the changing dynamics and implications of that violence for political stability and communal cohesiveness. In response, force-based measures have been popular, often ignoring the socio-political and structural factors that reproduce insecurity. This division has limited the impact of interventions and resulted in piecemeal approaches that failed to engage the root causes and adaptive nature of armed banditry and kidnapping in the state.

Objectives

This study aim is to examine the armed banditry and kidnapping Kwara state. The following objectives will guide this study, is to:

1. examine the drivers of armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State
2. analyse the patterns of armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State
3. assess the implication of armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara state
4. explore the responses to armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara state

Conceptual Clarification

Armed Banditry: refers to organised and violent criminal enterprises carried out by loosely or semi-structured factions using weaponry to carry out rural assaults, including village raids and coordinated attacks on communities, usually for economic profit. Banditry thrives in “ungoverned spaces” where a weak state presence allows criminal networks to flourish and exert quasi-territorial dominance over communities.

Kidnapping: is the illegal act of capturing and detaining people against their will, often to demand ransom, political concessions or some other form of coercion.

Theoretical framework

Weak State Theory has been used to explain the persistence of insecurity in cases where state institutions are unable to properly exercise their control over their areas. However, much of the current research has employed the concept to describe armed banditry and kidnapping as direct consequences of state incapacity, without adequately addressing how these forms of violence are actively transforming the fundamental fabric of state weakness. This study is not about mechanical application, but about the use of Weak State Theory as a tool of explanation and as a lens for theoretical refinement. It argues that armed banditry and kidnapping should not be seen simply as symptoms of bad governance, but as adaptive forces that reconfigure state authority through the creation of zones of negotiated control, informal taxation and rival systems of power.

Classic formulations of Weak State Theory, developed by Gros (1996), Rotberg (2000), Jackson (2000) and Krasner (2004), focus on institutional fragility, control of territory and monopoly on legitimate violence, but give little analytical weight to how non-state armed groups strategically seek to exploit governance gaps to institutionalise their activities over time. Our theoretical contribution is to demonstrate that in Kwara State armed banditry and kidnapping flourish not only due to weak institutions but also because these actors adapt and reconfigure patterns of authority, complicating the traditional dichotomy of state strength and weakness. In doing so, it challenges the idea that the only response to insecurity is to increase coercive capacity, instead demonstrating that insecurity is the product of an interaction between state absence, community survival strategies and the political economics of violence.

Weak State Theory has helpfully identified structural weaknesses such as corruption, porous borders and uneven state presence. However, this paper explores its feeble ability to account for the spatial and operational dispersion of armed banditry in states like Kwara where insecurity is no longer confined to periphery zones but has pervaded semi-urban and transport corridors. It therefore reconceptualises state weakness, not as a static condition, but as an outcome that is constantly re-enacted in the socio-political interaction between governance failures and the dynamic strategies of criminal networks. This approach aids theory development by situating armed banditry and kidnapping in a feedback loop where insecurity is a symptom and a cause of state instability.

Literature Review

Recent studies on insecurity in Nigeria have focused on the increase in armed banditry and kidnapping but its interpretation Yahaya and Bello (2020) observed that the increase in violent criminal activities in Katsina State between 2017 and 2019 indicated that the occurrence of kidnapping, armed robbery and banditry was no longer confined to remote rural areas but had spread to urban centres, often occurring with alarming regularity and visibility. This research reveals the patterns of incidence of violence and its spatial dispersion and normalisation. However, its explanatory power is limited because it does not examine the structural elements enabling such a dispersion. Verjee and Kwaja (2021) provide political and economic context to the increase in school abductions between December 2020 and August 2021, arguing that the activities had become economically driven businesses enabled by governance failures and poor institutional responses. This perspective makes the debate about criminality connect to systemic incentives.

However, it prefers a macro level paradigm that tends to generalise local occurrences. Whatever the utility of these researches, they do not offer an adequate analysis of the specific socio-political configurations that constitute armed banditry and kidnapping in kwara State.

Ojo, Oyewole and Aina (2023) observed that armed banditry in north-western Nigeria has led to widespread instability characterised by kidnapping, murder, displacement of population, livestock rustling and disruption of socio-economic activity. "It cannot be reduced to the pastoralist or rebel narrative," they said, "but is sustained by a complex web of socio-political and criminal entities." While this contribution does highlight the scale and complexity of the problem, it indicates little about how these dynamics are slowly seeping into neighbouring states such as Kwara State, where similar patterns of violent insecurity are emerging. The existence of ungoverned territories, which are characterised by the absence of governmental authority, poverty and institutional weakness, directly relates to the emergence of armed organisations, which in turn promotes the proliferation of weapons and organised crime (Ojo, 2020). While this approach is useful for contextualising insecurity within governance challenges, it tends to generalise the spatiality of violence and fails to engage meaningfully with the particular local conditions that have fuelled the rise of banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State. However, these studies point to a lack of knowledge on the emerging security challenges in Kwara State, although they highlight important structural issues.

Oladoyin et al, (2024) and Ayegbusi, (2024) contends that the security issues have been attributed to unemployment, poverty and poor educational attainment. These factors endanger societal stability and have repercussions for agriculture, education, investment and demographic change. This is a helpful linkage between material distress and insecurity. But it is often happy to treat poverty as a simple proximal cause, not asking how these are created and sustained by government failures and weak enforcement systems. Anagba and Sokoajin (2025) attributed the intractable problem of kidnapping to corruption, feeble government institutions and erratic policy implementation. Such deficiencies, they noted, compound economic strain and retard developmental progress. Their reasoning is governance-oriented, but it does not take enough account of the actual impact of insecurity on the daily workings of the rural economy. This was the basis for Oyekanmi & Oyekanmi Olorunfemi (2025) to show that violent activities negatively affect the productivity of agriculture by displacing farmers and fishers from their means of livelihood, destruction of local infrastructure and the rise in unemployment and poverty. These publications provide useful but partial explanations. There is need for a more integrated study to show how livelihood pressures, governance inadequacies and rural disruption interact in influencing the rise of armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State.

Armed banditry and kidnapping have been among the recurrent security challenges in Kwara State that have been threatening public safety as well as governance and socio-economic stability. There have been many security measures, but these violent actions have grown in extent and intensity, exposing the fundamental flaws in government capability, institutional coordination and policy implementation. The problem is not the existence of criminal violence but the inability to sufficiently understand the emerging dynamics and consequences for political stability and social cohesion. In response, interventions based

on the use of force have been prioritized, frequently to the detriment of the socio-political and structural conditions that sustain insecurity. This has limited the effectiveness of efforts and led to dispersed approaches that fail to address the root causes and the adaptive nature of armed banditry and kidnapping in the state. However, existing academic discourses are largely centred to northern Nigeria and other known areas of intense conflict with little analytical focus on rising insecurity trends in more stable states such as Kwara. This has led to a lacuna in empirical and contextual understanding of how these violent crimes are locally expressed, how state responses are organized and how they impact on human security and socio-economic development within the state, hence the need for a more focused investigation of the phenomenon in Kwara State.

Methodology

The study employed survey research design. Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KII) with respondents purposively selected based on relevant knowledge and direct experience on armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State. Twelve (12) respondents were interviewed during the period of February to April 2026. The respondents were made up of community leaders, local vigilante members, security personnel, victims of kidnapping and residents of communities affected by incidents of armed banditry and kidnapping in selected areas of Kwara State. Purposive sampling was used to select only participants who had sufficient knowledge and direct experience of the security challenges in Kwara state. The respondents all participated voluntarily and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality so that they could freely express their opinions and experiences. Their responses were analysed qualitatively with thematic interpretation and content categorisation.

Secondary data were employed to complement and augment the primary data by offering background knowledge on armed banditry and kidnapping. These sources comprised published journal articles, textbooks, newspaper reports, reports of security agencies and publications of relevant international organisations. The rationale for the use of secondary sources was to identify the findings of previous related studies and to establish the relationship of the present study to existing scholarship. Critical content analysis was used to extract relevant information and contextual understanding for the study from the secondary materials.

Drivers of Armed Banditry and Kidnapping in Kwara State

One of the major causes of banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State has been endemic poverty which has continued to create difficult socio-economic conditions for many residents, especially among unemployed youths and vulnerable populations. Poverty with poor standards of living, limited access to education, unemployment and limited healthcare opportunities have contributed significantly to frustration, social discontent and economic desperation. In many cases, those who engaged in banditry and kidnapping may have turned to crime as a strategy for survival after experiencing harsh living conditions and economic marginalisation. The continued poor human welfare has created an enabling environment for criminal networks to recruit vulnerable persons into kidnapping and banditry, thereby worsening insecurity across affected communities.

The prevalence of banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State is a result of the structural factors of poverty, ineffective governance and vulnerable security institutions. Rural communities in Kaiama, Baruten and Patigi continue to suffer from limited access to infrastructure, education and economic opportunities which breed hardship and provide the basis for recruitment into criminal networks.KII3 revealed that:

….where underdevelopment and the absence of industrial activity have intensified struggles over natural resources. It was stated that economic activities and infrastructural development are largely concentrated in the central areas, left the rural communities economically marginalised and exposed to insecurity. This situation has created a vacuum in which forests and grazing areas have become contested spaces.

Poverty has diminished livelihood opportunities and heightened susceptibility to coercion by armed organisations who exploit socio-economic distress to garner operational support. Forest communities, along with ungoverned areas, have diminished governmental surveillance and afforded armed groups opportunities to establish themselves with minimal opposition. Inadequate security management at international borders has enabled the transit of criminal entities, arms, and contraband, complicating enforcement efforts. Inadequate institutional capacity has compromised the efficacy of early warning and fast response mechanisms, permitting insecurity to persist unrestrained. The structural flaws underpin the escalation of violent criminality within the state (Akiyemi, 2025; Jimoh, 2025).

At the level of proximate causes, banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State have been driven by environmental stressors and socio-economic competitiveness. Climate change has disrupted agricultural cycles leading to lower production and increased rivalry for land and water amongst rural populations. This competition has led time and again to violent conflicts in agricultural communities that rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. KII2 revealed that resource competition is an important factor of banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State.KII6 stated that:

…in the southern axis, some of these forest zones are now occupied by herders, who are perceived by local residents as having strategically positioned themselves around key resources under the guise of livestock rearing. This perceived encroachment has heightened tensions between host communities and pastoral groups, which contributes to competition over land, forest resources and livelihoods.

This reflect the fact that between Oke-Ero, Babanla, Oreke, and Oro-Ago, there are stretches of over 70 kilometres with very few or no settled communities. This sparse settlement pattern has provided herders with detailed familiarity of the terrain, enabling them to occupy forested areas and remote settlements. From these strategic locations, attacks are often launched, leading to killings and abductions of residents within surrounding communities.

Furthermore, informal security arrangements and community-based vigilante practices, although aimed at reducing insecurity, have also led to unintended outcomes, including abuses and retaliatory violence commonly known as jungle justice. Ethno-communal tensions and religious intolerance have also contributed to localised conflicts that undermine social cohesion and create opportunities for criminal infiltration. KII 4 showed that, prior to the attack on the community, Woro attacked by the extremist armed group issued warning letters

and distributed pamphlets in which they called for the rejection of the Nigerian constitution, adoption of their interpretation of Sharia law and compliance with their radical ideological positions. The residents were observed to resist these demands and to stay loyal to existing legal and civil structures. This resistance was said to have raised tensions and expedited the increase of hostility that resulted in the later attack. The resource curse phenomenon is seen in mineral-rich areas of Kwara where unregulated extraction has led to competition, illegal mining and violent struggle for access to wealth. In addition, criminality and drug abuse aggravate the situation by enhancing the operational capacity and unpredictability of armed groups engaged in kidnapping and banditry (Mansur, 2025; Jimoh, 2024).

The crisis is further sustained by a network of enablers that facilitate logistics, financing and operational continuity of banditry and kidnapping activities. Weak state enforcement and alleged complicity of some actors have eroded public trust in security institutions and created openings exploited by criminals. Illegal mining by foreign actors has brought in outside resources and networks that bolster criminal economies in remote communities. Some members of the community have been known to assist, inform, or provide logistical support to criminal organisations and there have been instances of kidnappers coordinating with the local population. In some cases, insiders in the affected communities have helped to relocate, hide or identify victims, making operations easier for the kidnappers. KII1 also disclosed that there was a collaboration between the kidnappers and some of the local people. Such cooperation was widely believed to take different forms including the provision of intelligence on victims, concealment of criminal movements and logistical assistance such as food supply, shelter and route guidance through forest corridors. These individuals were described as providing accurate information about the daily movement patterns of targeted individuals and security patrol schedules. This is corroboration with the view of Olesin (2026) stated that:

> …handed over their weapons to a female accomplice for onward transfer to a prearranged operational location where the planned criminal activities were to be carried out. The suspects thereafter led operatives to a hideout, where the following exhibits were recovered: three AK-47 rifles, five AK-47 magazines, and 143 rounds of 7.62mm live ammunition (Olesin, 2026).

In some instances, traditional rulers have become victims of abduction while serving as custodians of authority, leaving them exposed to opportunities for ransom negotiation middlemen to work within a growing shadow economy of kidnapping settlements. Gun manufacturers keep supplying weapons to ensure the availability of firearms and ammunition, hence the level of attacks rises. Criminal groups operating in forest hideouts require food and fuel suppliers to sustain their operations over long periods in difficult terrains. Intelligence about victim movements is supplied by informants embedded in communities and negotiators who act as mediators of communication between abductors and victims families, thereby institutionalising ransom economies. These enablers are combined to transform banditry and kidnapping into organised and sustained enterprises within the state (Abdulwahab, 2024; Garba, 2026).

Moreover, the banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State has further been defined along ethno-communal and religious lines especially where local grievances intersect with ideological contestations and armed mobilisation. In some

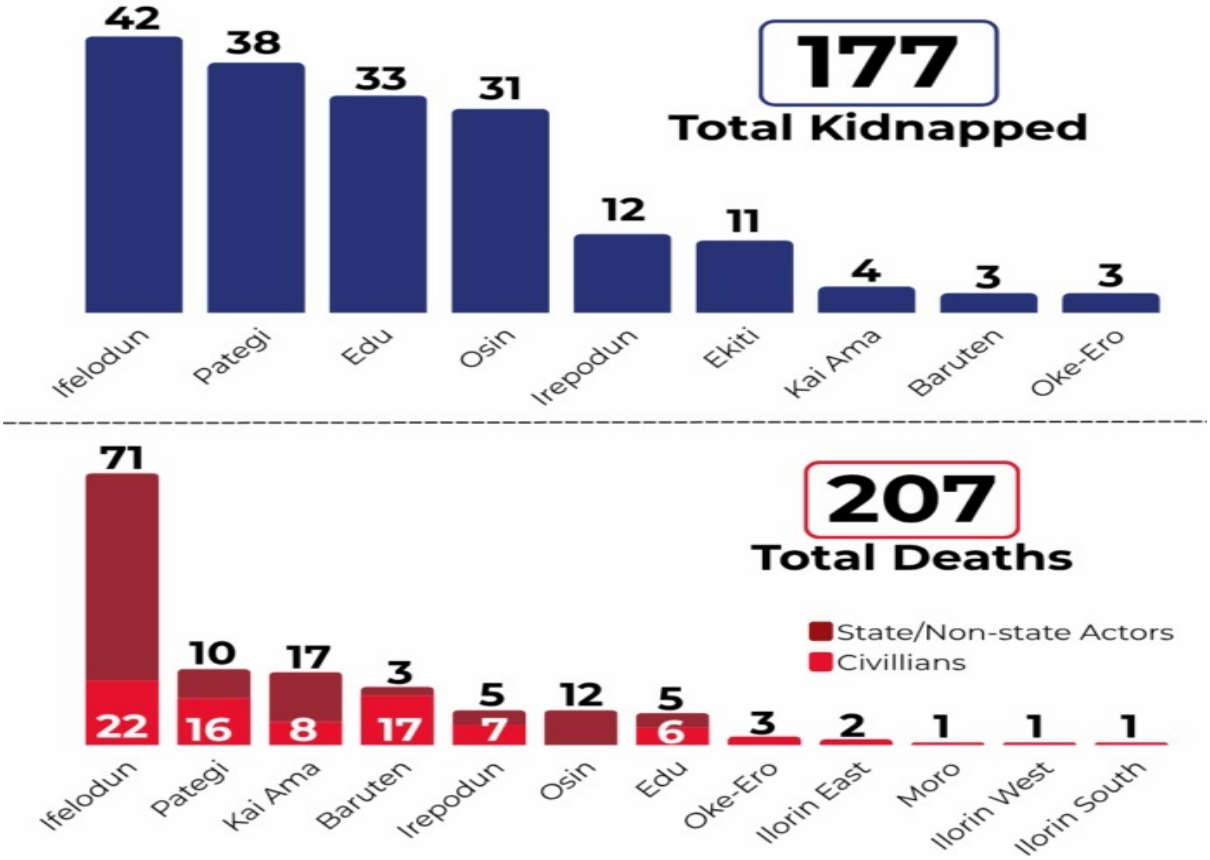
rural societies, social relations are mediated by strong communal identities and divergent religious orientations which can sometimes increase mistrust and open the door to conflict escalation. This is visible in the violence that has affected Woro and neighbouring Nuku communities in Kaiama Local Government Area, where insecurity has been blamed on not only armed incursions but also tensions between residents and militant actors. In another version of the story, the village head blamed the recent attack on the tense relations with a faction identified as the Mamuda group, saying the violence followed the resistance of the residents to accept the ideological demands of the group. Usman (2026) stated that "Our people are not ready to adopt that ideology, I think that was what made them angry to come and attack the communities" (Usman, 2026). This suggests that in addition to territorial and material disputes, ideological resistance and tensions over communal identity have become factors exploited by armed groups to justify violence.

Foreign involvement, especially in illegal mining, has exacerbated insecurity dynamics in Kwara State, by strengthening the resource-conflict nexus associated with banditry and kidnapping. The presence of transnational actors in the state's mineral economy is suggested by reports of arrests of foreign nationals, particularly Chinese miners operating without the proper licenses. These actors often exploit weak regulation and operate in remote rural areas where the state is weak, thus creating opportunities for criminal penetration. Illegal mining in mineral-rich communities such as Ifelodun, Patigi and Baruten have been linked to informal labour networks, illicit mineral supply chains and unregulated extraction practices. These environments are attractive to armed groups to use these operations to generate revenue, protection rackets or territorial control. The relationship between foreign miners and local middlemen adds another layer of complexity to governance and security monitoring, especially in areas where informal arrangements substitute formal regulation. Illegal mining therefore undermines economic governance and enhances the operational infrastructure of banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State (Garba, 2023).

Patterns of Armed Banditry and Kidnapping in Kwara State

The level of deaths and abductions recorded between January and November 2025 is a disturbing dimension to the insecurity in Kwara State. Usman et. al., (2025) claimed that a minimum of 207 persons were killed across the state including 84 civilians, while 177 persons were abducted. The violence was largely concentrated in certain local government areas notably Ifelodun, Pategi, Kaiama, Irepodun and Edu, which recorded most of the incidents. Ifelodun has the highest number of fatalities with 93 deaths followed by Pategi, Kaiama and Baruten. Several violent incidents have indicated the gravity of the crisis. One is the attack on Oke-Ode community in Ifelodun in September 2025, resulting in the killing of more than 15 vigilantes and hunters, along with several abductions. Similarly, the assault on Kemanji in Kaiama in April 2025 led to the killing of vigilante members and villagers. These events illustrate the growing vulnerability of civilians and local security personnel to armed groups operating within the state (Usman et. al., 2025). Figure 1 show the kidnap and death in Kwara state between January and November, 2025.

Figure 1: Kidnapped and Death in Kwara State



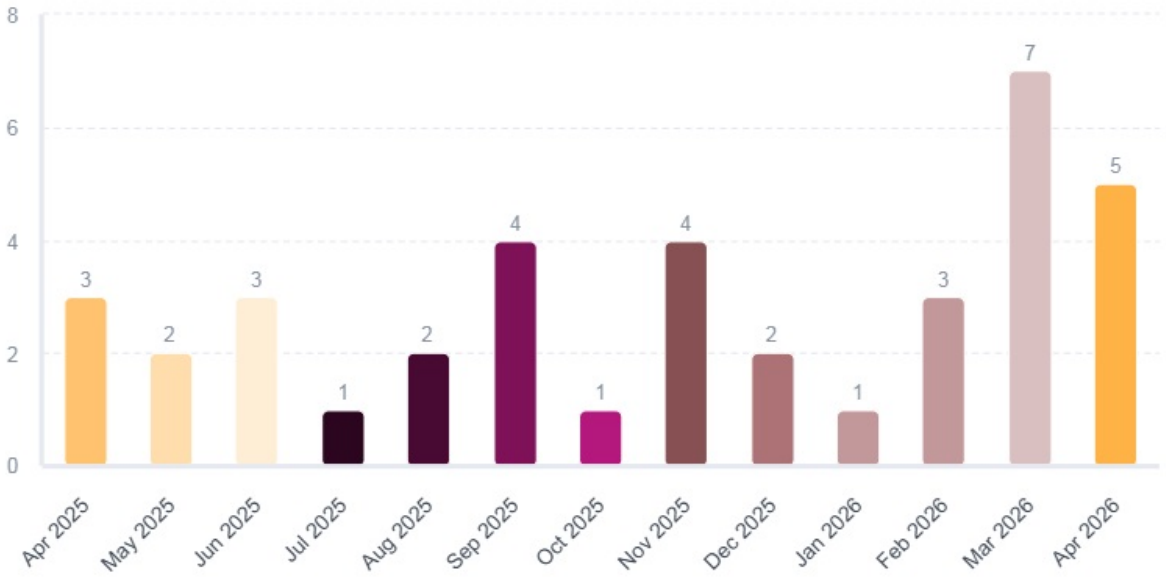
Source: Usman et. al., (2025).

Geographically, the pattern of insecurity reveals a concentration of violence in LGAs that are close to or affected by neighbouring states like Kogi and Niger which have also experienced insecurity and banditry. Patigi, which borders Niger and Kogi States through the Niger River, recorded 26 deaths and 38 kidnappings, underlining its exposure to cross-regional criminal activities. Far from being a barrier, the river has become a conduit for the movement of armed groups, offering a pathway for spill-over violence. The high number of attacks in LGAs that do not directly border these states, for example Ifelodun, points to the mobility and adaptability of armed groups across adjoining territories. However, places like Ekiti and Asa recorded no fatality in the period indicating the uneven distribution of insecurity in the state (Usman et. al., 2025).

KII 9 indicated that incessant violent attacks among different communities in Kwara State had led to kidnapping, killing, abduction and attack on security operatives, markets and religious centres. This is consistent with the fact that there was no month between January 2025 to April 2026 that was free from violent attacks; thus, depicting an unbroken cycle of insecurity, The series of coordinated attacks include the kidnapping of travelers and government officials along Obbo-Aiyegunle/Osi Road in Ekiti LGA and Eleyin Village in Isin LGA. In the months

that followed, there were repeated attacks in Edu, Baruten, Ifelodun and Patigi LGAs, which included abductions, attacks on security operatives, markets, religious centres and mining sites, as well as killings. The September 2025 attack on Oke-Ode was especially significant because it led to the killing of at least 15 residents, including forest guards and community leaders, and forced the state government to consider community-based security responses (Abatta, 2026). Figure 2 presents the usual attacks in Kwara State within April, 2025 and April, 2026.

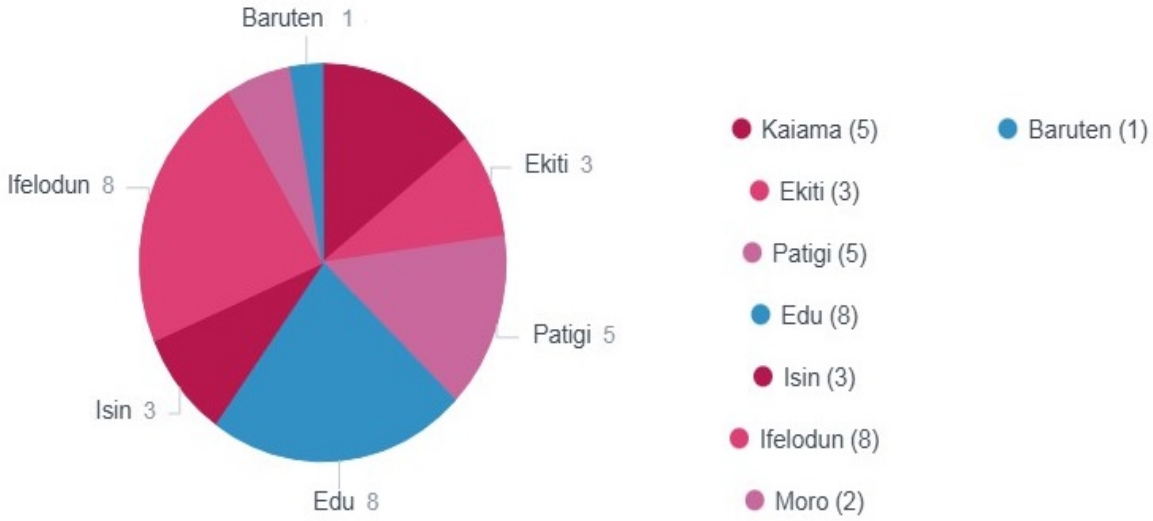
Figure 2: Bandit Attacks in Kwara between 2025 and 2026



Source: Abatta, (2026).

The trend of widening targets is reflected by the abduction of 38 worshippers in Eruku during a church service in November 2025 alone, as well the kidnapping of a traditional ruler on his farm in Ifelodun LGA. Other attacks were recorded in other parts of Edu, Isin and Moro LGAs including the kidnapping of pregnant women, nursing mothers and local security personnel. The situation hit a critical level in February 2026, when terrorists attacked Woro in Kaiama LGA, killing 187 residents and abducting 176 others. In the months that followed, more killings, abductions and use of improvised explosive devices took place, especially in the LGAs of Kaiama and Patigi. Thus, Edu and Ifelodun LGAs were the most affected areas, followed by Kaiama and Patigi, which showed a geographically widespread and intensifying insecurity pattern that severely disrupted socio-economic life, governance and public safety across Kwara State (Abatta, 2026). The communities affected by the insecurity problem in Kwara State are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Communities Affected by Bandit Attacks in Kwara State



Source: Abatta, (2026).

Implications of the Banditry and Kidnapping

The prevalence of banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State has been severe, and has had a particularly strong effect on traditional governance and community stability. No fewer than 30 traditional rulers in the southern part of Kwara state were reported to have fled their palaces as a result of persistent attacks, killings and abductions to take refuge in urban centres like Ilorin, Offa, Osogbo and Lagos. This displacement has created a serious leadership vacuum in rural communities such as Omugo, Afin, Oreke, Alabe and Igbo Agbon where the monarchs were central to the local administration and conflict resolution. The absence of traditional rulers has undermined the structures of grassroots governance, dislocated communal coordination and eroded the capacity for organised local response to insecurity (Akogun et al., 2026). Also, interview with the victim said that a traditional ruler from southern Kwara who was abducted along with others had earlier escaped from his residence after he got intelligence about a planned kidnap but later recaptured upon his return. The monarch showed a strong determination not to return to his town even after release because of lingering insecurity, he added (KII12).

The abduction of the Ojibara of Bayagan, Oba Kamilu Salami, in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State, is an indication of the consequences of banditry and terrorism in the state, particularly the erosion of traditional authority and community peace. The attack on a first class traditional ruler, is a new dimension to

criminality, where the most revered custodians of culture and local administration are not spared of violent attacks. The development has further eroded public confidence in the local leadership structures, weakened the symbolic and administrative role of the traditional institutions, and heightened fear in the rural communities. It also exposes the increased susceptibility of powerful people, which accelerates dislocation, distorts local governance and weakens coordinated community response to insecurity (Ayobami, 2025). KII5 also stated that among the kidnapped victims was a traditional ruler who was abducted, while he was in captivity, his captors called him "Seriki", a status they attributed to him in their camp. It was also disclosed that the kidnappers had attempted to kidnap him on several occasions before finally succeeding in abducting him.

Among residents, many of whom have fled their homes after repeated attacks by armed groups, the insecurity has also caused widespread fear and population displacement. Communities like Omugo in the Oro-Ago axis have faced violent incidents including attacks on churches to mass abduction, with long-term psychological trauma and loss of livelihood activities. The lack of traditional leadership has hindered recovery efforts and diminished public confidence in returning to affected areas in-between some sporadic improvements in security conditions. Overall, banditry and kidnapping have not only increased physical insecurity but have also undermined governance structures and disrupted socio-economic life in Kwara State (Akogun et al., 2026). Also, KII8 revealed that many community members have fled their settlements as a result of the incessant attacks by bandits thereby causing serious depopulation of the affected areas. Since then, the armed groups have occupied and used the abandoned communities as operational hideouts.

Banditry and terrorism have had a devastating effect on the socio-economic lives of people in Kwara State especially on the rural livelihoods and agricultural productivity. The stable seasonal farming on which communities have depended has been forced into displacement, abandonment of farmlands and loss of income sources. This was underlined by the experience of displaced farmers like Musa Sanni who said that his household used to harvest over 50 bags of yams per season but can no longer access his farmland due to insecurity. Due to fear of attack, many rural inhabitants have been forced to flee their communities overnight, leaving behind productive assets. KII7 revealed to corroborate this view that:

Many of the individuals displaced from their villages by banditry in Kwara State have been forced to adopt precarious means of survival, particularly menial labour and informal transport services, in order to sustain their families. Former farmers who once depended on seasonal agriculture for livelihood now engage in low-income daily jobs, including loading and offloading goods and riding commercial motorcycles to earn minimal income. In addition, abandoned farmlands left behind by fleeing communities have, in some cases, become accessible to criminal groups operating in the affected areas.

In addition, the insecurity crisis had profound implications for education in Kwara State, particularly in vulnerable rural communities where insecurity has disrupted teaching and learning activities. KII 10 revealed that revealed that his children were unable to attend school throughout his 60 days in captivity, a disruption he believed would negatively affect their academic performance upon resumption. Also, the challenge also led to the closure of public schools in areas affected by repeated attacks,

thereby denying children access to uninterrupted education. The Executive Chairman of KWSUBEB, Prof. Sheu Ibrahim Adaramaja Kwara State Universal Basic Education Board (KWSUBEB) revealed that no fewer than 45 public schools were shut down in communities such as Babanla, Baba Sango, Sangbe and Oke-Ode due to persistent threats posed by bandits., the closures were implemented as a protective. Some schools (ARISE News, 2025). In addition, the increasing insecurity in parts of Kwara South and North Senatorial Districts compelled the Kwara State Government to relocate the staff and students of the Kwara State College of Nursing Sciences, Oke-Ode, to Ilorin following violent bandit attacks in the community that resulted in deaths and abductions (ARISE News, 2025).

Similarly, the relocation of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) orientation camp from Yikpata in Edu Local Government Area to Ilorin reflects the worsening security situation in Kwara North, especially in the Edu and Patigi areas, which are frequently attacked by bandits (Akogun, 2025). These developments have disrupted the normal functioning of educational institutions, increased the financial burden associated with temporary relocation and introduced uncertainty about the continuation of academic programs. Also, the continued instability has created fear among students, lecturers, parents and corps members thus eroding confidence in the educational environment and limiting access to safe learning locations. This leads not only to educational instability but also to a barrier to human capital growth and social development in the affected areas.

Responses to Banditry and Kidnapping in Kwara State

It is important to note that the immediate security reinforcement along with humanitarian and psychosocial interventions to address both the direct consequences of violence and its longer-term social implications have been the response of the state government to the challenge of banditry and kidnapping in the state. In response to the attacks in Woro and Oke-Ode communities, the state government and UNICEF launched a joint effort to introduce mental health and psychosocial support services targeted at survivors especially women and children to support trauma management and the gradual resumption of livelihoods.

This initiative was complemented by capacity building programmes for teachers, social workers, healthcare providers and community volunteers, with a view of improving early detection of trauma cases, improving referral mechanisms, reducing stigma and fostering community-based care systems (Akanbi, 2026). In education, “school-in-a-box” kits were provided so that displaced pupils could continue their learning and to prevent disruption to education development. In addition, the Ministry of Health provided essential medical supplies to address emergency health needs arising from the attacks. UNICEF and partner agencies reaffirmed their commitment to provide integrated support through health, nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), education and child protection services, to strengthen the multi-sectoral response framework (Akanbi, 2026). As part of the emergency education materials, KII 11 confirmed that the distribution of essential medical supplies as well as the coordination of humanitarian interventions for the school

children needs supported the learning continuity for displaced pupils.

Also, following renewed episodes of violence involving fatalities and mass abductions, the government has been increasingly characterised by the reinforcement of operational security architecture, particularly through proposals for the establishment of a Forward Operating Base of the Nigerian Army and a Mobile Police Squadron in strategic locations such as Eruku in Ekiti Local Government Area. This development is a slow trend towards militarised containment strategies to improve rapid response capabilities in vulnerable communities. In addition to these measures, community-based security engagement has remained an integral part of the security architecture as traditional authorities continue to play a significant role in reporting threats, coordinating with security agencies and working alongside the Emirate Council to bolster early warning mechanisms and improve local intelligence gathering. In complementarity, non-state actors and development partners such as organisations like the Global Hope for Women and Children Foundation have provided psychosocial support to affected populations and at the same time advocate for the strengthening of community protection structures and hence bolstering state-led interventions through humanitarian and advocacy-oriented initiatives (Akogun, 2025).

In addition, President Bola Tinubu convened an emergency meeting with Kwara State Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq at the Presidential Villa in Abuja to orchestrate a coordinated response in the aftermath of the lethal assault on the Worro community in the Kaiama Local Government Area, which resulted in the reported deaths of over 100 people at the hands of suspected jihadists. In response to the attack, the President ordered the deployment of an army battalion to the affected area and authorised the creation of a new military command under Operation Savannah Shield to tackle terrorist activities and protect vulnerable rural communities in the region (Nda-Isaiah, 2026).

Also, the official launch of the Operation Savannah Shield, a multi-agency military operation approved by the President in the wake of the upsurge of attacks in Kaiama and some parts of Niger State. Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq, Chief of Defence Staff, General Olufemi Olatubosun Oluyede and Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Waidi Shaibu, flagged off the operation at Sobi Barracks, Ilorin. The operation is to restore security in Kwara State and neighbouring states. The initiative is a preemptive kinetic and non-kinetic approach to counter the increasing antics of bandit groups and kidnapping syndicates that have put human security and farming livelihoods in the state on the line. The operation's mandate involves sweeping operations in forested and ungoverned spaces, particularly around the Kainji Lake National Park, which has been identified as a major hideout of armed groups (Kasali, 2026).

Also, following of the attacks on settlements in Woro and Nuku in Kaiama, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) deployed a specialised response team from its Minna Operations Office to assess the situation and determine the immediate needs of the victims. The intervention was conducted in conjunction with the Kwara State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and other security agencies for a coordinated and structured response. In support of this operation, NEMA supported the provision and distribution of relief commodities including food and non-food items to displaced and affected persons in the affected communities. Abeku (2026) states that there is a need for strong collaboration between federal

and state emergency actors, local authorities and security personnel to enhance response efficiency.

Discussion of Findings

The findings show that the drivers of armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State are linked to poverty, bad governance, competition over resources, unregulated forest spaces, ethno-religious crises, illegal mining activities, networks of criminal collaboration and weak security agencies, which breed economic desperation, social disintegration and operational support for organised criminal activities. This finding is in line with the argument of Rufus and Ogbe (2024) that banditry in northwest Nigeria is associated with poverty, unemployment and ungoverned areas. This finding place the study within the context of existing literature and partially confirms earlier conclusions on poverty and ungoverned territories as the main drivers of banditry. However, it differs by illustrating that in Kwara State, criminality is sustained through a more complex web of facilitators such as illegal mining economies, ideological battles, and inside collaborators.

The results show that the phenomenon of armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State was characterised by continuous and spatially targeted attacks involving killings, abductions and attacks on civilians and security operatives in rural areas of the state. The study is in agreement with the work of Adelani and Onoja (2025) which stated that porous borders influence banditry and kidnapping in north west Nigeria. The study adds to the argument that the trends of armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara state are not entirely driven by prorous borders but also sustained by week rural security structure, difficult terrain and socio-economic vulnerabilities which led to the pattern of organised crime in the state.

The findings reveal that banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State is the systematic erosion of traditional governance, displacement of rural populations, collapse of agricultural livelihoods and widespread disruption of education, which all weaken community stability, socio-economic development and human capital formation in the affected areas. This study finding is consistent with the work of Ebonine, (2022), which show that persistent violent attacks in rural communities lead to population displacement, weakening of traditional institutional and undermine education continuity in Northern Nigeria. This study shows that these effects are not only the result of insecurity but also mutually reinforcing processes that increase governance failure and socio-economic fragility over time. This study contributes to a more integrated understanding of armed banditry and kidnapping as a multidimensional crisis that simultaneously undermines governance structures, development outcomes and community resilience.

The results show that the responses to armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State combined kinetic security operations with non-kinetic humanitarian interventions such as the deployment of the military and the establishment of new security formations and coordinated multi-agency operations such as Operation Savannah Shield to restore order and neutralise armed groups. The result showed that government and partner agencies provided psychosocial support, distributed relief items, implemented educational continuity measures and community-based security initiatives to address trauma, displacement and long-term socio-economic disruption among affected populations. This research agrees with the work

of Aina et al., (2023), stresses that state responses have depended on increased military operation, surveillance techniques and multi-agency security collaboration targeted at reclaiming the ungoverned spaces and disrupting armed groups. Likewise, the study is consistent with the study of Eyinnaya and Olomjobi (2022) which emphasises the increased adoption of coordinated security framework in tackling kidnapping network in Nigeria. This study is also in line with the findings that trauma management, education continuity measures and social reintegration support for affected population are now part of the kidnapping responses by government and humanitarian actors as part of recovery strategies. The study reveals a more extended operational reality in Kwara state where humanitarian and psychosocial dimension are more explicitly engaged with the response architecture that the military response as predominance in other studies. The study thus confirms and advances existing scholarship on the persistence of kinetic, state-centric security logics, but also demonstrates a growing institutionalisation of victim-centred and recovery-oriented intervention within security responses.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that the rise of armed banditry and kidnapping in Kwara State is a function of a complex interaction of structural, proximate and enabling factors such as poverty, poor governance, ungoverned forest spaces, competition for resources as a result of climate change, ethno-communal tensions, illegal mining and the involvement of local and transnational criminal networks. Fragile security institutions, porous borders and socio-economic deprivation have exacerbated these conditions. These resonate with the theoretical tenets of relative deprivation and weak state perspectives. The study also found that the state's insecurity has taken a persistent and spatially widening trend, devastating rural communities, eroding traditional authority, disrupting education, displacing populations and undermining agricultural productivity. In response, federal and state authorities have taken a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic measures such as establishment of Operation Savannah Shield, deployment of multi-agency security forces, intelligence-led operations and psychosocial interventions with support of development partners. However, the persistence of attacks indicates that the problem is still one of structural vulnerabilities that require sustained and coordinated action beyond militarised responses.

Based on the findings, the study therefore recommends that government should give priority to the long-term structural interventions that address the root causes of insecurity, especially poverty reduction programmes, youth employment schemes, rural infrastructure development and equitable distribution of economic opportunities. There is the need to strengthen security operations through sustained intelligence gathering, improved border surveillance and enhanced collaboration between formal security agencies and credible community-based structures including traditional rulers and local vigilante groups. There is a pressing need to enforce the regulation of mining activities to curb illegal extraction and break down criminal networks benefiting from resource exploitation in rural areas. There is also need for enhanced community policing frameworks that promote trust building, early warning systems and rapid response mechanisms tailored to local contexts. Finally, government and development partners should improve psychosocial support and educational recovery programmes and livelihood

restoration initiatives for affected populations to reduce vulnerability and prevent the re-emergence of criminal recruitment networks.

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