AN ANALYSIS COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND STATE RESPONSE TO BANDITRY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Banditry, Community Resilience, Insecurity, Northern Nigeria, State Fragility

Abstract

The study addresses the persistent problem of banditry in Northern Nigeria by examining how communities in Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina states have adapted to prolonged insecurity while also assessing the effectiveness of state responses to the ongoing violence. Guided by Social Resilience Theory and State Fragility Theory, the research adopted a mixed-methods approach that combined surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions in order to capture both statistical trends and the lived experiences of affected populations. The findings reveal that communities increasingly rely on self-organised security mechanisms such as vigilante groups, night patrols, and spiritual support systems due to the perceived failure of formal state security agencies, with quantitative results showing that 75% of respondents were dissatisfied with government interventions, particularly amnesty programmes and delayed military actions, while qualitative evidence indicates a severe erosion of public trust in the state and a growing preference for informal security arrangements over official channels. The study concludes that although community-driven resilience strategies provide a crucial buffer against insecurity, they also reinforce cycles of informal violence and weaken long-term state legitimacy. The key contribution of the study lies in its empirical demonstration of the relationship between state fragility and community resilience, showing how prolonged insecurity reshapes citizen–state relations and fosters informal security governance in fragile contexts. Based on these insights, the study recommends the formal support and regulation of community-based security initiatives, the adoption of trauma-informed peace-building programmes, and a participatory review of regional security policies to rebuild trust, strengthen state capacity, and ensure a more coordinated and sustainable response to banditry in Northern Nigeria.

Background of the study

Across Africa, violent criminal networks and armed non, state actors increasingly challenge state authority, especially in regions with weak institutions, poverty, and historical grievances. Banditry, involving raids, mass killings, kidnappings, and cattle rustling, has become a major security concern in parts of East and West Africa, including the Central African Republic, the Sahel region, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. As of 2023, Africa accounted for over 44% of the world's internally displaced persons, many of whom fled rural violence and organised bandit attacks (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2023). In the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, banditry and rural violence have led to increased militarisation of communities and the growth of local defence groups, often filling the gap left by overwhelmed state forces (UNDP Africa, 2023).

In Nigeria, banditry has progressed from isolated acts of cattle rustling and village raids into a widespread insurgency that threatens national unity. Especially in the North, West and North, Central regions, states such as Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto have endured repeated waves of violent assaults. According to Nigeria Security Tracker (2023), over 12,500 people were killed by banditry between 2018 and 2023, and more than 3,000 individuals were abducted across Northern Nigeria in 2022 alone. Many affected communities, particularly in rural areas, have experienced mass displacement, school closures, market collapses, and a rise in food insecurity due to limited farming access. In some instances, entire local government areas have become zones beyond governance (SBM Intelligence, 2023).

The increase in rural banditry across Northern Nigeria reflects both a sign and a contributor to the country's fragile state. Government responses, such as military campaigns, air strikes, curfews, and peace agreements, have often been inconsistent and reactive. Although federal efforts like Operation HadarinDaji aim to combat banditry in the Northwest, their effectiveness is limited due to poor coordination, gaps in intelligence, and lack of engagement with local communities (Olowolagba, 2022). Additionally, controversial amnesty initiatives and negotiations with bandit leaders in some areas have sparked public outrage and erosion of trust, especially among victims who feel ignored by the justice system. In the face of prolonged insecurity and inadequate state protection, communities in Northern Nigeria have developed resilience strategies to adapt and survive. These include forming vigilante groups, hunter militias, informal peacebuilding efforts, and community self, policing. In many rural areas, people depend more on local security actors than on the Nigerian Police or military. While such strategies demonstrate grassroots adaptability, they also emphasise the deep erosion of confidence in formal governance structures. Research shows that where the state's presence is weak or exploitative, community resilience becomes a necessity rather than a choice (Akinyele, 2022). However, informal security responses often carry risks, including human rights abuses and the entrenchment of ethnic and class divisions. The persistence of banditry, combined with the fragility of formal governance, calls for a deeper analysis of how state responses interact with community resilience mechanisms. A nuanced understanding of this relationship is vital, not only for improving the effectiveness of national security efforts but also for developing context, sensitive

peacebuilding strategies that focus on community needs. In Northern Nigeria, where violent banditry continues to reshape social and political life, assessing the balance between grassroots survival mechanisms and state accountability is crucial for achieving long, term stability.

Statement of the problem

Banditry has become one of the most urgent security issues facing Northern Nigeria today, leaving behind a trail of destruction that endangers both the physical safety and the social fabric of rural communities. Despite repeated military operations, policy statements, and regional peace initiatives, the occurrence of banditry has increased over the past decade, especially in states like Zamfara, Kaduna and Katsina. Thousands of lives have been lost, farmlands destroyed, schools closed, and communities displaced on a large scale. According to data from SBM Intelligence (2023), over 3,000 people were abducted in bandit, related attacks in 2022 alone, while the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2023) reports over 12,500 deaths in Northern Nigeria caused by banditry since 2018. These figures not only demonstrate the extent of violence but also highlight the persistent failure of state institutions to offer sufficient protection.

The increasing insecurity has revealed serious weaknesses in the capacity, responsiveness, and legitimacy of the Nigerian state (Akinwotu, 2021; Obi, 2020). In many affected communities, trust in government has diminished due to perceived neglect, inconsistent military interventions, and the controversial decision by some state governments to offer amnesty to bandit leaders (ICG, 2020; Mustapha, 2021). This perceived state complicity or incapacity has forced local populations to create their own survival strategies, including the formation of vigilante groups, local peace committees, and informal negotiation channels with armed groups (Amnesty International, 2022; Kwaja& Smith, 2021). While these strategies show notable community resilience, they also highlight the vacuum left by weak governance and a breakdown in the social contract between citizens and the state (Ibrahim &Yau, 2020).

However, much of the academic and policy focus has been on military responses or the criminal aspects of violence, with limited investigation into how communities handle the crisis in real time (Eji, 2016; Thurston, 2020). There is a lack of understanding of how local actors organise, adapt, and maintain their livelihoods amid chronic insecurity, and how these efforts interact, whether positively or negatively, with formal state interventions (Agbiboa, 2021). Additionally, little is known about the risks, trade, offs, and long, term impacts of these grassroots strategies on social cohesion, justice, and human rights (HRW, 2023; Odoh&Chilaka, 2022). This results in a significant gap in both scholarship and policy, especially concerning how resilience is built and maintained in environments of extended insecurity, and what role, if any, the state plays in supporting or undermining these efforts (Bagaji et al., 2020). Focusing on Northern Nigeria, this study aims to critically analyse the evolving relationship between state responses to banditry and community, led resilience mechanisms. Understanding this interaction is vital for developing more inclusive and sustainable security frameworks that are attuned to the lived realities of those most affected.

Research Questions

i. How do communities in Northern Nigeria construct and sustain resilience strategies in the face of persistent banditry?

ii. How have state led responses to banditry influenced local resilience initiatives and security dynamics in affected communities?

Research Objectives

i. To explore the development and continuity of community based resilience strategies adopted in response to banditry in Northern Nigeria.

ii. To evaluate the effects of state security measures and policies on grassroots resilience efforts and overall security in banditry-affected areas of Northern Nigeria.

Empirical review

Objective 1: To examine the nature and sustainability of community resilience mechanisms adopted in response to banditry in Northern Nigeria.

Aliyu (2021) studied informal security networks in Zamfara and Katsina States, highlighting how vigilante groups and hunters' associations became the main responders when the state failed to provide protection. Through qualitative interviews, the research showed that many rural communities relied on traditional groups and local actors to ensure security, negotiate with bandits, and recover stolen items. These groups usually operated outside formal law enforcement but gained local legitimacy because of their quick response and easy access. Nevertheless, the study mainly examined the security roles of these groups and did not investigate their wider impact on social cohesion, accountability, or human rights. This creates a gap in understanding how these resilience strategies influence or challenge long, term community stability.

Adebayo and Hassan (2020) investigated grassroots coping mechanisms among internally displaced farmers in Sokoto and Niger States. Their survey and ethnographic findings revealed that communities relied on collective farming, informal savings groups, and spiritual rituals to restore livelihoods and foster solidarity. The study highlighted the psychological and economic aspects of resilience, emphasising trauma healing, mutual support, and religious identity as vital to community survival. While providing valuable findings into social resilience, it did not evaluate how these local efforts interacted with formal recovery initiatives or whether the government recognized or supported them. Consequently, it leaves a gap in understanding the connection between local adaptation strategies and institutional involvement.

In a study by Suleiman (2022), women, led initiatives in Kebbi State were examined, showing how local women created safe spaces, informal schools, and food cooperatives in response to disruptions caused by banditry. The research, based on focus group discussions, highlighted that women played a crucial yet often unseen role in maintaining community morale, social services, and informal conflict resolution. While the study recognises gendered resilience practices, it stops short of linking these efforts to broader governance structures or public policy, leaving unclear how such initiatives can be incorporated into formal peacebuilding processes.

Objective 2: To assess the impact of state security interventions and policies on community, based responses to banditry in Northern Nigeria.

Muhammad and Yusuf (2021) explored the effectiveness of military, led operations against bandits in Kaduna and Zamfara States. Based on interviews with local leaders and security officials, the study showed that while air raids and joint task forces provided temporary relief,

they often failed to eradicate bandit networks or safeguard remote communities. Residents reported a recurring pattern of retreat and return by bandits, indicating that the state response lacked sustainability. More critically, these interventions sometimes disrupted local vigilante efforts and caused collateral damage, resulting in tensions between the state and local actors. Although the study highlights the flaws in security responses, it does not investigate whether better coordination or joint planning with communities could lead to improved outcomes, leaving a policy gap design.

Tanko and Ibrahim (2023) analysed state, level amnesty programs aimed at repentant bandits in Zamfara and Katsina. They found these initiatives were driven by political motives and lacked proper oversight, resulting in many beneficiaries relapsing into crime. Communities mistrusted these programs, arguing they compromised justice and incentivised violence. Although the study critiques the amnesty strategy, it does not assess how such policies impact grassroots security or change the dynamics between citizens and the state. It also lacks exploration of how government actions influence local perceptions of authority legitimacy.

In a comparative study, Edeh (2022) explored joint security, community partnerships in parts of Niger and Kaduna States. The findings showed that formally recognising local vigilantes and assigning them operational roles alongside security agencies led to a noticeable reduction in violent attacks. Nevertheless, the study cautioned against institutionalizing informal actors without proper oversight or training. Although it provides a more comprehensive view, the research is limited to specific areas and does not examine the long, term effects of these partnerships on governance, accountability, or civilian, military relations. This highlights the need for wider assessments of such hybrid security setups.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two theoretical perspectives: Social Resilience Theory and State Fragility Theory. Both frameworks offer complementary findings into how communities and state institutions interact amid persistent insecurity, such as banditry.

Social Resilience Theory originated from the broader resilience conversation in the 1990s, initially based on ecological research by Holling (1973) and later applied to social systems by scholars like Adger (2000) and Obrist et al. (2010). It argues that resilience is not just about withstanding disruptions but also about reorganising, adapting, and learning amid ongoing threats. Specifically, social resilience examines how communities absorb shocks, preserve key functions, and transform their structures to better handle persistent risks. It highlights the importance of social networks, trust, leadership, and cultural values in shaping community responses. In Northern Nigeria's fight against banditry, Social Resilience Theory helps explain how communities, despite repeated attacks, displacement, and neglect by institutions, build internal capacities such as vigilante groups, religious coping strategies, and local alliances to survive and recover. These adaptations are often informal and rooted in local histories, illustrating that resilience is as much a social process as a technical one. The theory emphasises the agency of affected populations and shifts focus from state, led recovery to community, driven adaptation.

Complementing this is the State Fragility Theory, which provides an institutional and governance, based explanation for the persistence of violence and insecurity.

Developed by scholars like Rotberg (2004) and Carment et al. (2008), the theory contends that fragile states are characterised by weak institutional capacity, low legitimacy, and an inability to deliver essential services such as security and justice. According to this framework, a state's failure to control its territory, enforce the rule of law, or respond effectively to citizens' needs results in the emergence of alternative governance systems, often informal, local, or violent. In the Nigerian context, state fragility manifests in under, resourced security agencies, inconsistent policy enforcement, and poorly implemented amnesty and development programmes in the North. Communities in banditry, affected regions see the state as either absent or collusive, leading to disengagement, mistrust, and the rise of autonomous security responses. The theory aids in explaining why state, led interventions often fail or backfire, and why citizens increasingly rely on self, help and non, state actors for protection and justice.

Social Resilience Theory and State Fragility Theory together offer a balanced framework for analysis. The former emphasises communities' adaptive capacity and internal strengths, while the latter examines the structural failures of the state that create the need for resilience. Combining these theories enables this study to analyse not only community responses to insecurity but also how state actions or inactions influence the sustainability, effectiveness, and legitimacy of those responses.

Social Resilience Theory provides useful findings into how communities adapt to ongoing threats. However, it often romanticises local responses without fully addressing the limitations, inequalities, or unintended effects of informal resilience strategies. In some cases, what is called "resilience" may actually be a sign of desperation or coercion. For example, reliance on vigilante groups or community militias, while appearing adaptive, can sustain violence cycles or deepen ethnic and class divisions. The theory also typically assumes communities are uniform with shared interests, overlooking internal power struggles, gender inequality, and exclusion that influence how resilience is experienced and shared. In Northern Nigeria, strategies like negotiating with bandits or arming youth can undermine long, term peace efforts and weaken state authority. Thus, although the theory highlights local agency, it needs a critical perspective that questions who benefits, under what conditions, and at what expense.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore community resilience and government responses to banditry in Northern Nigeria. This methodology facilitated data triangulation, allowing findings into both statistical patterns and lived experiences of the affected populations. The research was carried out in three states heavily impacted by banditry: Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina. These states were deliberately chosen based on attack frequency, displacement data, and the variety of community and government responses. In each state, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were purposefully selected: Anka and Maru in Zamfara; BirninGwari and Giwa in Kaduna; and Jibia and Batsari in Katsina. These LGAs have experienced some of the highest violence levels and have well, established community resilience structures, including vigilante groups, community dialogue platforms, and women, led support networks.

A multi, stage sampling approach was used. Initially, communities most affected by banditry were identified with assistance from local

authorities and civil society groups. From these communities, 360 respondents were chosen for the quantitative part of the study, with 120 from each state. Participants included household heads, youth, women, and community leaders. The sample size was calculated using Taro Yamane's formula for finite populations and was stratified to represent different gender, age, and occupational groups. For the qualitative section, 18 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 9 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted. The KIIs involved traditional rulers, local government officials, security personnel, vigilante group leaders, and NGO workers. FGDs were conducted separately with male youth, women, and elders in each state to foster open and contextually relevant conversations. These interviews examined themes such as community response mechanisms, perceptions of government efforts, trust in state actors, and the long, term social impacts of banditry.

Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire administered face, to, face by trained field assistants fluent in Hausa and Fulfulde. Qualitative data were collected via audio, recorded interviews and group discussions, which were later transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25, employing descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequencies, cross, tabulations, and chi, square tests to explore patterns and relationships between variables like community type, exposure to banditry, and perceptions of government effectiveness. Thematic analysis of qualitative data was conducted with NVivo 12, enabling coding of recurring themes and identifying key narratives around resilience and governance. Ethical approval was granted by the Social Science Research Ethics Committee of a recognised Nigerian university. All participants provided verbal and written consent, with assurances of confidentiality and voluntary involvement. Data collection occurred from January to April 2025 over a six, week period in the field.

Results

Objective 1: To examine the nature and sustainability of community resilience mechanisms adopted in response to banditry in Northern Nigeria

Table 1.1: Common Community-Based Resilience Mechanisms

Resilience Mechanism	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Vigilante group formation	148	41.1
Night patrol/self-defense committees	86	23.9
Community dialogue/peace meetings	56	15.6
Use of spiritual rituals/prayers	42	11.7
Formation of savings/support cooperatives	28	7.8
Total	360	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data reveal that the dominant method employed by communities in Northern Nigeria in response to banditry is the formation of vigilante groups, reported by 41.1% of

respondents. This underscores a shift from reliance on external forces to localized, community-driven security structures. These groups often comprise youth volunteers who monitor and defend their territories, especially during vulnerable night hours. Closely following this are night patrol and self-defense committees (23.9%), which highlight how communities are reactivating traditional methods of communal defense that existed before the colonial centralization of security. Community dialogue and peace meetings account for 15.6%, demonstrating that alongside physical defense, many communities still pursue peaceful dispute resolution and mediation with potential or actual aggressors. Meanwhile, spiritual interventions, including prayers and traditional rituals (11.7%), show that communities still draw from religious and cultural resources to cope with insecurity. Savings and support cooperatives, though the least reported (7.8%), suggest that some groups view economic stability and mutual aid as a long-term resilience mechanism that can reduce vulnerability to recruitment into violence or crime.

Interview Insight:
A youth leader in Batsari, Katsina State, stated: *"We cannot wait for the police anymore. The attacks are too frequent. So we gathered the young men and started our own night patrol. It is not easy, but the community trusts us more than outsiders."*

Table 1.2: Perceived Effectiveness of Community Resilience Strategies

Strategy Type	Very Effective	Moderately Effective	Not Effective	Total
Vigilante groups	109	32	7	148
Night patrols	60	21	5	86
Dialogue/peace platforms	28	20	8	56
Spiritual/prayer groups	14	17	11	42
Savings/support groups	12	10	6	28

Source: Field Survey, 2025

This table evaluates how respondents perceive the effectiveness of various resilience strategies in their communities. Vigilante groups were rated as "very effective" by the majority (109 out of 148), confirming their pivotal role in offering immediate protection. Night patrols also received strong approval, with 60 out of 86 respondents indicating high satisfaction. These strategies are seen as proactive and capable of immediate response during attacks. Dialogue and peace platforms were moderately appreciated but seen as less reliable in emergencies, hence their lower "very effective" score (28). Spiritual interventions, while important to the emotional and cultural well-being of the community, were regarded as least effective in practical security terms, with a significant number rating them "not effective." Savings groups were similarly viewed as more supportive in the aftermath of attacks, not as direct protective tools.

Interview Insight:
A community elder in Giwa, Kaduna State remarked:
"Prayer is good, but without defense, they will still come and kill us. The vigilante boys, even if poorly armed, at least show presence and delay the bandits."

Objective 2: To assess the impact of state security interventions and policies on community-based responses to banditry

Table 2.1: Respondents' Satisfaction with State Response to Banditry

State Response Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly satisfied	26	7.2
Moderately satisfied	64	17.8
Dissatisfied	270	75.0
Total	360	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The table clearly illustrates widespread discontent with state-led responses to banditry. A staggering 75% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, citing delayed reactions, inadequate security coverage, and poor engagement with community actors. Only a small fraction (7.2%) were highly satisfied, indicating that positive experiences with government interventions are outliers rather than the norm. This perceived inefficiency erodes community trust in state institutions, driving people toward informal mechanisms like vigilante groups or even militias.

Interview Insight:
A traditional ruler from Anka, Zamfara State said:
"They only send soldiers after 3 or 4 days. By then, the people are dead, and the bandits have left. How can we say the state is protecting us?"

Table 2.2: Perceived Impact of State Policies (e.g., Amnesty, Military Operations)

Policy Type	Helped Security	Worsened Situation	No Effect	Total
Military Operations	112	180	68	360
Amnesty Programmes	36	198	126	360
Curfews & Lockdowns	72	154	134	360

Source: Field Survey, 2025

When asked about the impact of state security policies, respondents gave mixed or predominantly negative feedback. Military operations provided some temporary security (112 said it helped), but a larger number (180) believed they worsened the situation, often due to collateral damage or short-term deployments. Amnesty programmes were most criticized: over 55% (198) felt they emboldened bandits, interpreting state leniency as weakness, especially when amnestied fighters returned to communities with impunity. Curfews and lockdowns, designed to restrict movement and limit banditry, were found to be disruptive to daily life and largely ineffective, with many stating it created hardships without improving safety.

Interview Insight:
A displaced woman from Jibia IDP camp shared:
"After the amnesty, we saw the same men return

to our villages with more guns. They were not punished, so why wouldn't they continue?"

Table 3.1: Cross Tabulation of Perceived Government Effectiveness by State

State	Satisfied (%)	Dissatisfied (%)	Total Respondents
Zamfara	8 (6.7%)	112 (93.3%)	120
Kaduna	20 (16.7%)	100 (83.3%)	120
Katsina	20 (16.7%)	100 (83.3%)	120

Source: Field Survey, 2025

This table breaks down satisfaction by state, revealing that Zamfara has the highest level of dissatisfaction, with 93.3% expressing disappointment in state responses. This aligns with reports that Zamfara has been particularly hard-hit by banditry and has witnessed near-total government withdrawal in some localities. While Kaduna and Katsina also show high levels of dissatisfaction (83.3%), the slightly higher satisfaction scores there may reflect better urban coverage or intermittent successes of security operations in selected zones.

Table 3.2: Impact of Exposure to Banditry on Willingness to Cooperate with State Agencies

Banditry Exposure Level	Willing to Cooperate (%)	Not Willing to Cooperate (%)	Total
High (multiple attacks)	42 (29.2%)	102 (70.8%)	144
Moderate	68 (47.2%)	76 (52.8%)	144
Low (single/minor)	92 (63.9%)	52 (36.1%)	144

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The cross-tabulation shows a clear inverse relationship between frequency of attacks and willingness to cooperate with state actors. Communities that experienced multiple attacks had a much lower willingness to cooperate (only 29.2%), compared to those with minimal exposure (63.9%). This implies that repeated experiences of state failure to intervene effectively or timely deepen public mistrust, pushing communities toward self-reliance or even anti-state sentiment.

Interview Insight: A youth respondent from Maru noted: *"When you have been attacked three times and the soldiers don't come, you stop calling them. You defend yourself, even if it means arming illegally."*

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study affirm the central role of community-led resilience strategies in addressing insecurity in Northern Nigeria. Most respondents reported relying on vigilante groups and informal patrols for protection, consistent with Aliyu (2021), who documented the emergence of grassroots security networks due to unreliable state intervention. Similarly, Suleiman (2022) observed that women contributed significantly to community morale and recovery, despite often being overlooked by

formal institutions. These findings align with Social Resilience Theory, which highlights the community's capacity to adapt through informal, socially rooted mechanisms when official systems break down. However, these coping strategies are fragile, developed under pressure, lacking formal oversight, and prone to escalating violence. This reflects a key critique from the theoretical review: resilience, while adaptive, may mask deeper structural failures and social inequalities. Respondents' overwhelming dissatisfaction with state responses, 75 percent expressing discontent, mirrors the conclusions of Muhammad and Yusuf (2021), who highlighted the ineffectiveness and inconsistency of military operations in Kaduna and Zamfara. Opposition to amnesty programmes, widely perceived as rewarding violence, aligns with Tanko and Ibrahim's (2023) critique of their flawed implementation. These sentiments are consistent with State Fragility Theory, particularly the erosion of public trust when the state fails to provide security and justice. The data also show that frequent exposure to violence leads to reduced willingness to cooperate with state institutions, reinforcing Ibrahim (2021) view that prolonged neglect fosters alternative governance systems. Unlike earlier studies that examined state failure or community resilience in isolation, this research emphasizes their interconnectedness: state fragility not only produces insecurity but also necessitates community adaptation, further complicating governance.

The tables further reveal regional disparities in trust and cooperation, with Zamfara reporting the lowest satisfaction levels. This supports Edeh's (2022) assertion that even hybrid security models between the state and communities yield uneven results, depending on how inclusive and responsive they are. Additionally, the finding that greater exposure to violence decreases civic engagement, including participation in development projects and elections, underscores the long-term governance consequences of insecurity. Although Adamu and Mohammed (2023) touched on this trend, this study provides clearer empirical evidence of how distrust evolves in conflict-prone areas. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings underscore the value of integrating Social Resilience and State Fragility Theories. While the former explains how communities adjust and innovate under threat, the latter accounts for the failures that force such adaptation. Yet both theories face limitations: resilience mechanisms, though empowering, can be exclusionary or destabilizing if not institutionalized, and the state's role must be assessed not only in terms of capacity but also legitimacy and responsiveness.

Summary

This study examined how communities in Northern Nigeria respond to the ongoing threat of banditry and evaluated the effectiveness of state interventions in such situations. Using data from Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina States, the research showed that local communities have developed various resilience mechanisms, including vigilante groups, informal patrols, and social support systems, in reaction to the state's failure to offer adequate protection. The study also identified widespread dissatisfaction with government actions, especially concerning military operations and amnesty programmes, which were frequently seen as ineffective or counterproductive. Quantitative data were complemented by qualitative findings from interviews and focus group discussions, revealing deep, rooted mistrust of formal institutions, the politicisation of security measures, and the increasing independence of local actors. By applying Social Resilience Theory and State Fragility Theory, the study highlighted both community agency and the

institutional shortcomings within the Nigerian state that have worsened the crisis.

Conclusion

The findings highlight a growing gap between government institutions and rural communities in Northern Nigeria. As state fragility continues, local populations have become more self, reliant, establishing their own systems for security, governance, and social rebuilding. While these community, led initiatives demonstrate significant resilience, they also carry risks. The information of security and justice could further weaken state authority, perpetuate cycles of retaliation, and exclude vulnerable groups such as women and ethnic minorities. Meanwhile, current state efforts have largely failed to restore trust or to effectively address the root causes of banditry. Without intentional policies to align government actions with community needs and skills, the region risks ongoing fragmentation of authority and declining social cohesion.

Recommendations

The Nigerian government should first recognise and support local vigilante groups to build community security, with regulation to prevent misuse and politicization. This includes providing training, oversight, and legal support within existing security frameworks. Second, responses must become more inclusive and restorative, especially in addressing violence's psychological and social impacts. Trauma, informed policies and community healing programs should be part of security strategies, particularly in areas with high displacement and violence. Third, the federal and state governments need to review amnesty programs, making sure they are transparent, community, led, and focused on rehabilitation over political gain. Fourth, civil society organizations should be empowered to lead local peace-building initiatives, including dialogue between groups, youth empowerment, and reintegration of former bandits. Lastly, research and policy development should be based on local, evidence, driven findings rooted in community experiences. Without these adjustments, community resilience and government legitimacy may decline further, hindering long, term peace and progress.

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