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AN EXPLORATION OF BANDITRY AND THE EMERGENT NEW SOCIAL FORMATION IN NIGERIA'S NORTHWEST

ROSENJE, Musharafa Olapeju (PhD)
Department of Political Science,
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun,
P. M. B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria.
Email Address: rosenjemo@tasued.edu.ng
Phone Nos.: +2348074294124 & +2347065798489
&
OGUNDELE, Sikirulai Olawale
Department of Political Science,
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun,
P. M. B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria.
Email: sikirulaiogundele@gmail.com
Phone Number: +2348060810672
&
PEJU-ROSENJE, Temitope O.
Department of Political Science,
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun,
P. M. B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria.
Email: pejurosenjetemitope@gmail.com
Phone No.: +2348085196011
&
ADENIYI, Oluwatobi Peter
Department of Political Science
Tai Solarin University of Education,
Ijagun, P. M. B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.
Email Address: oluwatobiadeniyi30@gmail.com
Phone Number: +2347035474264 & 08116844154
&
OMOJOWO, Sunday Oluwatoyin
Department of Political Science
Tai Solarin University of Education,
Ijagun, P. M. B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.
Email Address: omojowotoyin770@gmail.com
Phone Number: 08109163246

Abstract
Banditry like any other security challenge is promptly crushed before it gets escalated in developed democracies of the world such as Germany, Belgium and Italy, among others, where the leadership is strong but in Nigeria, it has remained a critical security challenge and a flourishing venture because of apparent state collapse. This paper investigated banditry and how it has initiated the emergence of new social formation in Nigeria's North-west. The paper is exploratory in nature and it used secondary sources for gathering data, while Collective violence theory, Queer Ladder theory and Third Party Intervention theory were adopted as theoretical framework. It observed that banditry had not only severely disrupted the economic and agricultural activities of the people, brought about untold hardship, wanton killing and loss of lives and unquantifiable properties but has equally become wealth accumulation mechanism to the bandits' warlords through ransom-taking,

market levies and taxes collected from 'subjugated communities' thereby initiating the emergence of a new social structure in Nigeria's Northwest region. It argued that though successive governments in Nigeria, at various levels, and other stakeholders have made frantic efforts to address this scourge, most of such efforts have been uncoordinated, inadequate, belated and thus counter-productive; hence the phenomenon has become a tormenting mirage and remained intractable. It is concluded that if this ugly drift is not swiftly checkmated, the entire region may perpetually remain in the hands of bandits' warlords as it is the case in Somalia under Al-Shabab currently, while development will be retarded and human rights abuses will be heightened unabatedly. It is, therefore, recommended that the government should utilise sophisticated equipment to confront banditry head-on with a view to decimating banditry networks in Nigeria's Northwest, and deal ruthlessly with the warlords in accordance with the law to serve as deterrents to others.

Keywords: Banditry, new social formation, Nigeria's Northwest region, ransom-taking, wealth accumulation**,**

Introduction

For more than a decade now, Nigeria's Northwest region has been besieged by armed bandits, who often attack villages to raid and pillage, kidnap and rustle cattle, and also overwhelm the markets to plunder and maim people. Records indicate that between June 2011 and May 2019, a total of 6,319 lives were lost as a result of banditry in Zamfara state alone (Nwezeh, 2019), while "about 500 communities were destroyed, 2,000 people killed and over 33,000 people displaced" in Kaduna state (Sardauna, 2019). Also, between 2010 and 2020, Orjinmo (2020) contended that more than 8,000 deaths were recorded in Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara and Niger states In that same region, Salkida (2019) averred that over 10,000 cattle were lost, and 2,688 hectares of farmlands and 10,000 houses were destroyed between 2011 and June 2018.

Instead of getting abated, banditry as an organised crime keeps escalating, becoming pervasive and threatening lives and property of people in Nigeria. Since 2011, banditry has broadened in scope to consist of cattle rusting and village raids, arms smuggling, protection rackets, kidnapping for ransom, gender-based violence and armed robbery. In the Northwest region alone, the activities of bandits have directly or otherwise affected roughly 21 million people living in Zamfara, Kaduna, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina (Osasona, 2021).

The phenomenon, which is caused by a combination of factors, has grown into hydra-headed criminality. Within the past decade, banditry has evolved from a communal rivalry of groups into lethal militia formations led by warlords as particularly in the case of Zamfara state, where illegal gold mining has become a flourishing enterprise. These bandits with their sophisticated weapons have become terribly menacing, killing, maiming and abducting people for ransom in various communities in the rural areas as well as in the urban centres. These scenarios have led to desertion of various communities, displacement of thousands of people, dislocation of family members, disruption of socio-economic activities and development, and accentuated humanitarian crisis (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021).

Invariably, banditry has changed the political economy of the enclave and has strikingly become an appealing means of raising sustainable income for criminals in Northwest Nigeria (Brenner, 2021). The various forms of banditry activities have become business opportunities for the bandits, raking in huge amount of money and thus becoming wealth accumulation mechanism for the bandits' warlords. The ransom collected on those abducted, as well as money made on the rustled livestock or armed robbery is so enormous as to engender new social formation in Nigeria's Northwest region. With the lethal arms they have acquired and the corresponding fear instituted in members of the society, particularly those in the local communities, the bandits' leaders are now being accorded recognition, prestige and enhanced

social status to the extent that some were even given chieftaincy titles by the traditional rulers of their domain.

The rapport established between bandits' warlords, some traditional rulers and government officials, as well as other conflict entrepreneurs has profited many in that cartel. The enormous gains accruing to the gang leaders have surreptitiously constituted them into a class thus initiating the emergence of new moneyed class in the Northwest region. This narrative has made the social status of the warlords to soar high thus making them to become men of influence and recognition in their society, making them to bestride the various forests and wetlands as Lords of Manor's farm.

Against the foregoing exposition, this study explores banditry and the emergent new social formation in Nigeria's Northwest region. In order to accomplish the task of this discourse, the paper is divided into five segments. The first segment treats the conceptual clarification and gives a theoretical framework to explain the discourse, while the second segment x-rays the incidences, manifestations and consequences of "ransom-taking" and "rent-seeking" in Nigeria's northwest. The third segment evaluates government and stakeholders' response towards curbing banditry in Nigeria's Northwest and the fourth segment examines banditry and the emergence of new social formation in Nigeria's Northwest. The last segment offers the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

This section deals with the detailed clarification of the key concepts in the study. The concepts discussed include banditry and social class formation.

Banditry

Scholars like Brenner (2021), Osasona (2021), and Okoli and Ugwu (2019) and institutions such as West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP) (2020) have conceived banditry from different perspectives. Brenner (2021) perceives banditry as a type of organised crime that includes kidnapping, armed robbery, murder, rape, cattle-rustling, and the exploitation of environmental resources. Banditry thus involves the incidences of highway robbery, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling and village pillaging or market raids by organised criminal gangs, otherwise known as bandits (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; WANEP, 2020). In the same vein, Osasona (2021) explained that bandits are an assortment of criminal gangs involved in large-scale cattle rustling, sexual violence, kidnapping, armed robbery, pillage and attacks on gold miners and traders, particularly in Nigeria's Northwest. In concurrence to the perception above, Okoli (2019) viewed rural banditry as armed violence driven principally by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. It is composed of established gang groups who use sophisticated weapons to carry out attacks against people.

What are however, common to the above definitions are patterns of banditry, which include highway robbery, abduction, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling and village or market raids. In this paper, therefore, banditry is used to connote groups that are largely composed of criminals, who reside in Nigeria's Northwest forestlands, attacking, pillaging, kidnapping, maiming and looting the various rural communities. In terms of organisational structure, they are typically characterised by non-formalised command structures. They operate in independent clusters that are not cohesive and have their bases deep in the forests, which provide hideout opportunities.

Social Class Formation

The concept of social class formation is a debatable narrative among scholars from various fields and ideological orientation due to the fact that there is no unanimity on the true meaning of class and there are no precise measurements to determine the concept. In common parlance, social class is used to denote people having the same status in the society such as working class, professional class, among others (Rubin *et al,* 2014). The concept of

social class is however, mostly a socio-economic construct and it tends to explore the division of people into hierarchical groupings according to their shared social standing. A social class is synonymous with social strata; it is a classification of individuals into order of social classes, the most prevalent of which are the upper class, middle class, and lower class. This order is usually determined by or based on education, wealth, occupation, income, and affiliation with a specific subculture or social network (Grant, 2001).

Suffice to say that social formation is a Marxist concept which describes the concrete historical delineation between the capitalist mode of production and the institutional context of the economy. The classical concept of social formation was developed and elaborated in his *Capital,* where he describes the capitalist mode of production as a specific combination of productive forces, and social and technical relations of production (Cohen, 2000). In the same vein, Koleksyon (2012) perceives a social formation as referring to a society exhibiting a social structure at any level, with all its complexities, as it is historically constituted. As such, it includes all the internal contradictions that exist in a society, all emerging and disappearing tendencies in the economy and superstructure, in the social relationships that comprise them.

Karl Marx, a pioneer of class structure conceived class structure as a person's class in relationship to the means of production, of which more often, there are always two classes of people in the society. In contemporary capitalist society, the bourgeoisie, who invests in and profits from the surplus produced by the proletariat's use of the means of production, does not work at all, and the proletariat works but do not own the means of production. Marx views class as a product of both objective and subjective elements. A class is objectively related to the means of production in the same way (Conley, 2017). However, for the sake of this paper, the Weberian perspective of social formation will be adopted.

For Max Weber, a social class consists of persons who share a similar relationship in the marketplace. Though this description is somewhat consistent with the Marxian economic stratification, Weber, however, disagreed with Marx on the process of social mobility. This is because whereas Marx posits that it is through a revolution that the proletariat can rise up to ascendancy; Weber advocates that the workers can attain upward mobility through hard work and promotion in the factory. Within the context of banditry in Nigeria's Northwest, though the situation could not be assumed in a straight jacket perception of Weber, the fact remains that the bandits warlords are of the perception that they can rise up social mobility in the context of their environment through primitive accumulation of wealth, using the elements of force, violence and extortion of the people by resorting to ransom-taking. The notion of foul is fair exemplifying their behavioural psychology. It is this narrative that makes this perception relevant to this paper.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted multiple theories namely collective violence theory, the queer ladder theory and third party intervention theory as its framework of analysis. Though they are interdependent, they nevertheless appear to be mutually complimentary and reinforcing in the sense that while the first two justifies the position of the bandits, the latter explains the position of other collaborators who profit from bandits' exploits.

The concept of collective violence could be gleaned from the writings of a French scholar, Gustave Le Bon, who ostensibly advocated '*the contagion theory of collective behaviour* in his book titled "*The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*" (1895) when he examined the reason for violent collective behaviour. Other scholars who espoused and copiously contributed to the popularity of the theory include Turner and Killian (1957), Neil (1963), Goode (1992) and Tilly (2004). The theory's basic assumption is that there is innate propensity for violence whenever the interest of an individual and group collide. Violence would occur when the interest of people align with other people of the same shared interest and respond to a common stimulus, which is always external to them. Crowd influence their

members in a hypnotic way and gives them anonymity, which makes them to give up on personal responsibility and give in to the infectious emotions of the mob or group. Thus, a mob takes on a life of its own, evoking strong feelings and motivating individuals to act irrationally and sometimes violently too (Gustave, 1895).

This theory also holds that people are not disproportionately influenced by crowds to act in emotional or even aggressive ways. Instead, the attitudes and actions of the people, who choose to join a crowd, are reflected in the behaviour of the crowd. When individuals gather in a crowd, their actions and attitudes influence the collective behaviour of the group. Individuals within the group influence it, rather than the crowd affecting the individuals within it. In line with the proverb "birds of a feather flock together, persons who have strong opinions on a given subject and want to take certain actions will typically seek out and associate with like-minded peers. Their views and intended activities are then reflected in the crowd that forms (Goode, 1992).

Although the reasons of collective violence are varied, complicated, and unpredictable, the fact remains that they all stem from comparable issues that are coupled in various ways and contexts. To understand the factors that contribute to collective violence and its variations as well as how to lessen it can be accomplished by identifying its causes, combinations and situations (Tilly, 2004).This is why Gurr (1972) argued that relative deprivation creates a huge potential for collective violence. In other words, collective violence occurs when what a group of people who have been relatively deprived socially, economically and politically or not satisfied with basic needs come together to fight for what they believe belongs to them or what they, that is, the resources they contend have been denied them.

Smelser (1963) for instance, believed that collective violence only happens when certain prerequisites are met of which structural tension or social problems that make people feel frustrated and aggressive is one of these conditions. People would not have a cause to engage in collective violence if there was no structural strain inflicted on them by a system or an agency. Also, people would not involve themselves if they believe that the circumstances they do not like are their own fault. In a similar vein, if they determine that collective violence would not make the situation better, they will not be involved. Lastly, the presence of precipitating factors or abrupt occurrences that spark collective violence is a third prerequisite.

In spite of the relevance of this theory to the explanation of violence in the society, especially the emergence and escalation of banditry, the theory has been severally criticised by a number of scholars such as Rule (1988). Scholars argued that crowd influences do not dominate individuals, as stated by collective violence theorists, and that individuals are far more reasonable sometimes even in the crowd. Another criticism levelled against the theory is that it lacks specificity; it does not specify the level of strain people must experience in order for collective violence to occur.

Another theory that is adopted to explain this paper is the Queer Ladder theory. The philosophical ideas contained in Queer Ladder theory are traceable to an American Sociologist, Daniel Bell (1919-2011). It is a manifestation of an attempt to explain the "instrumental essence of organised crime as a desperate means of economic empowerment and social climbing" (Okoli & Agada, 2014, p.137). According to Okoli and Agada (2014), the basic assumption of Queer Ladder theory states that organised crime is an instrumental behaviour and a means to an end; an instrument of social climbing and/or socio-economic advancement; and a means to accumulate wealth and build power (p. 137). Succinctly put, the organised criminal gangs engage in criminal activities in order to attain their objectives of power, popularity and monetary gains.

The exponents of this theory averred that organised crime functions as a "queer ladder of social mobility." The concept of "ladder" signifies awkward pattern of social mobility. It postulates that organised crime is merely a path to an end, which is to acquire social status and wealth with a view to getting more respected in the society. This theory is one of the

theories, which explain organised criminal behaviour in the society. It is popularly and widely used as theoretical framework in contemporary crime studies.

This theory is relevant in explaining why some people get involved in kidnapping, cattle rustling, armed robbery, village raids, among others, which constitutes the patterns of banditry in Nigeria's Northwest. Banditry is a criminal activity deliberately carried out for personal gains. This is why Okoli and Okpaleke (2014), citing Alemika (2013) posited that the involvement in cattle rustling by criminal gangs is largely motivated by the quest for primitive accumulation of capital and untaxed wealth. This perception is reinforced by Okoli and Agada (2014) who remarked that:

the phenomenon of kidnapping in Nigeria has been driven by criminal quest for economic accumulation in an environment that more or less condones and conduces crimes. This has been worsened by the prevailing socio-economic malaise and concomitant livelihood crisis in the country (p.137).

By and large, the prevalence of banditry in Nigeria's Northwest region demonstrates the dwindling capabilities of the Nigerian government to guarantee security of lives and properties for its citizenry and equally ensure sustainable development. In addition, there is seeming inaction of relevant security agencies in arresting the ugly situation. The consequence of banditry is that it has claimed many lives and caused destruction of unquantifiable properties. It has even been argued that there is hardly any village in Zamfara state that has not witnessed the impact of this phenomenon (Nadama, 2019).

In the estimation of Okoli (2019), in most of Nigeria's rural communities, there are many opportunities for criminal activity. Some of these opportunities are vulnerable to banditry because they are located in remote areas where there is little or no government presence and their households are separated by and interspersed with forest areas. The situation is made worse due to the absence of effective community policing mechanisms capable of addressing the hinterlands' peculiar security challenges, lack of political will on the part of government, the prevailing socio-existential conditions, proliferation of arms, illicit artisanal mining, poorly regulated rural pastoral sector and geography that is grossly under-policed. All these have given impetus to the bandits' intermittent and incessant attacks and other criminal syndicates.

An equally relevant theory adopted in this paper is the Third Party Intervention theory

Third party intervention is an instrument of intervention in helping people to settle disputes among themselves. It is a part of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) created in 1976 by Harvard Law School Professor, Frank Sanders. Third party intervention is when an external entity or outside party is interfering in a dispute between two other parties. The external party can provide resources or information, unbiased support, outside judgment or arbitration, and assistance in enhancing communication (Barseghyan & Karaev, 2004).

It is the involvement in conflict resolution by a person or organisation that is not a party to the conflict but aims to influence and assist in its resolution. It involves the use of an impartial third party to assist in resolving a conflict between two or more parties or to settle a dispute between parties. There are numerous ways by which third parties can intervene, such as through conciliation, arbitration, mediation, and facilitation. Third-party interventions are primarily meant to assist parties involved in conflict in coming to a resolution. The theory assumed third parties are mediators in disputes; they would not alter their approach during the dispute and would not always be able to resolve disputes with a single, cohesive intervention strategy (Ejbye-Ernst, 2023).

Bercovitch (1991) argued that third party's intervention takes place in the midst of a conflict, crisis, or war. Once a dispute arises, it can be resolved in a number of ways, such as through bilateral negotiation, the use of force, or the engagement of a third party to serve as an arbiter or mediator between the parties. When different issues threaten to undermine or degrade the bargaining relationship between the parties to a conflict, the function of a third party in conflict is focused on assisting the parties to realise their own interests. The theory

opens up the possibility of conflict management without being bias as third parties are expected to be neutral. It also espouses the strength of communication which when parties involved in conflict can sit at the round table and understand themselves better which helps to resolve it. More so, third part intervention helps to lower expenses, quicker turnaround times, discretion, process control, and maintenance of the parties' relationship.

However, third party intervention has also been criticised by a number of people. For instance, Bernstein (1993) argued that it is highly impossible to eliminate bias from third party intervention as the poorer or less favoured party will always not be at the winning or receiving end when the disputes are resolved. This is why many of third party intervention usually fail. Third party interventionists more often than not always have interests which they defend in any conflict situation. Since there are no safeguards or control mechanism against interventionist bias, the tendency is always to abuse their authority and follow their own biases.

Nature, Manifestations and Consequences of Banditry in Nigeria's Northwest Region

Nigeria's Northwest region, which is the hotbed of banditry violence, is comprised of seven states, namely Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. Out of these seven states, Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara and of recent Sokoto and Kebbi states are regarded the worse hit of banditry attacks. Indeed, the surge in banditry in the region has taken its toll on the security of lives and property, as well as human rights and freedoms of the populace (Duerksen, 2021; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

According to a 2019 report by the Zamfara State government, between 2011 and 2019, bandits have killed at least 6,319 people, kidnapped 3,672 people and burnt more than 500 villages in Zamfara State alone. In the past few months, more than 800 children have been kidnapped in mass abductions at four boarding schools in Northwest Nigeria (Brenner, 2021). In Sokoto, more than 250 people have been killed in about 20 attacks (Muhammed, 2020). Moreso, over 200,000 people have been displaced while more than 35,000 Nigerians have been forced to migrate to Niger Republic due to the destruction of their communities by bandits (Osasona, 2021).

Various perspectives abound on the motives behind such criminal attacks on innocent people. Among the identified perceptions are social, political and economic motives (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). By implication, social inequality (poverty, unemployment and illiteracy), state failure or weak governance, and economic depression and inflation (redistribution of wealth) motivate the bandits. The unpredictably declining capacity of or seemingly non-existence of security forces to protect the rural areas has often paved way for bandits to perpetuate their heinous acts of "robbing people, rustling cattle, looting, laying siege on rural markets and killing innocent people" (CDD, 2015, as cited in Okoli & Ugwu, 2019, p.207).

Also, contributing to incessant bandit attacks in the affected rural areas are proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs), porosity of borders, unregulated forest areas, weak regulation of pastoral activities (transhumance), and reprisal attacks as a result of indiscriminate killings of suspected bandits by security forces (WANEP, 2020). Furthermore, in an area where poverty is deeply rooted and illiteracy extremely high, banditry is always prevalent. There are also problems of failure of local justice and ethnic division, as well as uncoordinated borders. In recent times, banditry has become the order of the day due to government's inability to protect lives and property as well as failure to give the welfare of the people a priority (Ademola, 2021).

In spite of efforts made by the government at both the federal and state levels to curb banditry in Nigeria's Northwest, the phenomenon kept on spreading unabatedly. Banditry in form of kidnap for ransom, armed robbery and village/market raids, among others, had affected business activities in various parts of the affected states in Nigeria's Northwest. Bandits' attacks on pastoralists, farmers, travellers, and businessmen have disrupted economic and agricultural activities. Armed banditry was found to have had impact on the economic lives of the people (Shalangwa, 2013).

In the affected areas of the Northwest, agricultural activities such as planting and harvesting have suffered untold hardship as most farmers were afraid of going to their respective farms for fear of being attacked, kidnapped and killed. They have, for instance, abandoned farmlands in troubled areas like Birnin Gwari, Giwa and Chikun and have no immediate plans of returning to their farms, which have been occupied by bandits. Hence, this development has taken a huge toll on economic growth and agricultural productivity in the region. Banditry has paralysed industrial production like the mining of mineral resource going on in Zamfara state since production could not flourish in an atmosphere of crisis (HassanWuyo, 2021; Muhammed, 2020).

The upsurge of armed attacks has severely disrupted means of livelihood of people. It has led to disruption of social activities, such as celebration of festivals and public display of cultural practices. Kidnapping has impacted negatively on education and school activities such as school enrolment, school attendance, among others. It is fast becoming extremely difficult for students in Nigeria's Northwest region to attain their educational dreams due to attacks on schools and the abduction of students by kidnappers because many schools are now being faced with the menace of kidnapping. Recent events have shown that schools are now targets of kidnappers who are fond of abducting students and teachers for ransom (Edeh, 2021).

Banditry has also brought about negative impact on the supply and delivery of basic amenities to the citizenry. Residents that are victims and relatives of victims of armed banditry have suffered the psychological trauma arising from abductions and payment of ransom. Incidents of armed banditry have in some instances been accompanied by sexual violence against women and young girls, the consequences of which cannot be overlooked (Shalangwa, 2013). Fear and insecurity among the population have intensified. Concomitantly, due to the astronomical increase in the population of IDP communities, and the massive pressure it engendered, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities are faced with the challenge of scrambling for the available scarce resources, such as water, land and food in these various communities.

The phenomenon of banditry has contributed to bringing Nigeria to the status of a weakened state, especially with reference to the sovereignty of the Nigerian state to provide for its citizens as enshrined in the constitution and the social contract. It has eroded the respect which the country earns among the comity of nations. Consequently, the possibility of the collapse of the state cannot be over-emphasised (Mac-Leva, 2021). Banditry which takes place in various communities has disrupted political participation.

Evaluating Government's Efforts at Curbing Banditry in Nigeria's Northwest

Over the years, successive administrations in Nigeria at both the state and federal levels have made efforts to address the different kinds of banditry that they confronted. First, security agencies have utilised various tactics to combat banditry. Initially, the federal government embraced an aggressive approach by deploying police and military operations to the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Niger and Sokoto. The security forces under this arrangement and different operational code names have bombarded various abodes and hideouts of the bandits in the various forests. As argued, this method has pushed back attacks, destroyed hideouts, and led to killing and arrest of hundreds of bandits but recorded not much significant results (Ademola, 2021; Campbell, 2020).

The major significant effort made by the State government was to negotiate and give amnesty to repentant bandits. A peace deal was brokered between the armed bandits and the governors of Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara. The deal covered the areas of disarmament, release of kidnapped civilians, and pardoning for the bandits. This response has led to the decrease in the number of fatalities from August to November 2020 due to reconciliation initiatives but attacks picked up again in 2020. This process was characterised by distrust from both sides

resulting in the leveling of allegations and counter allegations from both sides, thus dovetailing into failure with little being achieved in this process.

Payment of ransom to the bandits is another way the government at both the federal and state levels have embraced in order to secure the release of the victims from bandits' dens. Although, these have been routinely denied, it is obvious that Nigerian authorities often pay ransom to keep victims alive since their primary responsibility is to protect lives of their citizens. An instance of this situation could be deciphered from the release of the over 300 school boys who were abducted by bandits in Kankara Local Government Area of Kastina State. The state government denied the payment of ransom while the bandits' commander admitted the group collected ₦30 million from the state government before the boys were released. A leaked telephone conversation between the bandit's commander - Awule and a former council boss in Kastina state backed up this contradiction (Campbell, 2021; Sahara Reporters, 2021) However, most of these efforts were mostly futile or counter-productive.

Banditry and the Emergent New Social Formation in Nigeria's Northwest Region

The menace of banditry has become a contradictory phenomenon for both the warlords and the people of Nigeria's Northwest region depicting wealth for the former and a nightmare for the latter, amassing stupendous wealth through ransom-taking to a group of people and inflicting extreme poverty through dispossession of resources, , injuries and death to the other.

Despite the efforts made by the government at both the federal and state levels to curb banditry in Nigeria's Northwest, the phenomenon kept on spreading in a contagious manner. Consequent upon the various exploits made by these ferocious bandit groups, those kidnapped were subsequently requested to pay ransom to secure their release. For instance, bandits demanded ₦40 trillion as ransom for the release of 16 residents abducted from Gonin Gora area of Kaduna State (Atungwu, 2024). Also, bandits demanded N30m to release children and women abducted in Wanzamai village, Zamfara state (Tauna, 2023). Apart from the "ransom-taking", sales made from rustled cattle, levies were imposed on communities in form of protection fees while taxes and rates were imposed on markets and vehicles plying the roads. A good example is the case of farming communities in Birnin Gwari Local Government Area of Kaduna state, where bandits imposed ₦12 million levies on the communities (Shiklam, 2022). In these processes, bandit leaders and warlords were able to secure enormous funds to defray their voluptuous life style.

Invariably, banditry has changed the political economy of the enclave and has strikingly become an appealing means of raising sustainable income for criminals in Northwest Nigeria (Brenner, 2021). The various forms of banditry activities have become business opportunities for the bandits, raking in huge amount of money and thus becoming wealth accumulation mechanism for the bandits' warlords. The ransom collected on those abducted, as well as money made on the rustled livestock or armed robbery is so enormous as to engender new social formation in Nigeria's Northwest region. With the lethal arms they have acquired and the corresponding fear instituted in members of the society, particularly those in the local communities, the bandits' leaders are now being accorded recognition, prestige and enhanced social status to the extent that some were even given chieftaincy titles by the traditional rulers of their domain. For instance, a notorious bandit warlord, Ado Aleiro of Zamfara state was controversially turbaned as the Sarkin Fulanin Yandoto by the Yandoton Daji Emirate (Muaz, 2022).

The rapport established between bandits' warlords, some traditional rulers and government officials, as well as other conflict entrepreneurs such as Tukur Mamu, a relation of Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, who served as truce broker between the warlords and abductor's family (Odeniyi & Isenyo, 2022) has profited many in that cartel. Even Sheikh Gumi, a prominent Muslim cleric, has notoriously become the propagandist and spokesman, who negotiate with bandits' warlords, defending their cause in the public domain and canvassing for the granting of amnesty and rehabilitation for them. For example, he was involved in the release of 27 students

abducted in March from a forestry college in Kaduna (Ochieng & Kiriungi, 2021). His role has, however, been criticised by many Nigerians who perceived his mediatory role of appeasement as openly pacifying and accommodating the outlawed activities of the bandits (Fasan, 2021). The enormous gains accruing to the gang leaders have surreptitiously initiated the emergence of new moneyed class in the North-west region. Bandits are not only becoming wealthy but they equally command respect. Table 3 exemplifies a list of ransom demanded and purportedly collected by the warlords.

Table 3: Wealth accumulation by Bandits' Warlords through Ransom-Taking

S/No	**Bandits' Exploits**	**Ransom Demanded/Purportedly Paid (#)**	**Date**
1.	Bandits abducted lecturer, Mary Nasiru Mohammed, Zamfara State College of Education.	2 million	December 15, 2023
2.	Bandits kidnapped village head and Imam, Tsafe LGA, Zamfara State	500,000	December 18, 2023
3.	Bandits kidnapped wife of village head of Gwombe, Kuje, Abuja	6 million	December 5, 2023
4.	Bandits abducted 19 victims in Kudiri village, Kaduna State	10 million	December 3, 2023
5.	Bandits kidnapped and killed 1 in Sabon Gaya, Kaduna State	3 million	January 1, 2023
6.	Bandits kidnapped and killed Alhaji Yakubu Bala, Director of works, Mariga, Niger State	8 million	September 5, 2023
7.	Bandits kidnapped Obadiah Ibrahim	3 million	November 13, 2022
8.	Bandits abducted Kankara school boys, Katsina State	30 million	February 4, 2021
9.	Bandits kidnapped a corp. member in Sokoto State	17.2 million	November 30, 2023
10.	Bandits kidnapped 120 pupils of Bethel Baptist school, Kaduna	250 million	November 9, 2023
11.	Bandits abducted and killed Mr. Akinluyi Oladipupo, Kaduna State	8 million	December 8, 2023
12.	Bandits abducted 156 pupils of Salihu Tanko Isamiyya school in Rafi, Niger State	20 million	July 1, 2021
13.	Bandits kidnapped the Emir of Bungudu, Zamafara State	20 million	October 19, 2021
14.	Bandits kidnapped 6 people in Bassa community, Shiroro	2 million	January 31, 2021
15.	Bandits kidnapped 28 persons in Batsari, Katsina state	2.5 million	July 25, 2021
16.	Bandits kidnapped the Village head and 35 others residents of Guga in Bakori Local Government Area of Kastina State	26 million	March 7, 2022
17.	Bandits kidnapped 85 people from	1.7 million	April 10, 2023

	Wanzamai Village in Zamfara State		
18.	Armed bandits abducted 4 persons in Danbaza community in Maradun Local Government Area of Zamfara State	80 million	July 10, 2023
19.	Bandits kidnapped 16 people from Gonin Gora Area of Kaduna State	40 million	March 11, 2024
20.	Bandit abducted 287 pupils in Kuriga in Chikun Local Government area of Kaduna State	1 billion	March 12, 2024

Source: Authors' Compilation from Nigerian Dailies (2024)

Suffice to say that the social status of these bandits has reasonably soared high thus making them to become men of influence and recognition in their society, to the extent that some members of the society offered their female children freely to them as wives with a view to pacifying them and allaying their fury (Abolade, 2022). Though the government and other stakeholders are making efforts to dispel banditry's scourge through the establishment of Military Joint Task Force and the community self-help respectively, its inability to promptly stem the tide has given bandits' warlords much time to gain ground and entrench themselves as Lords of Manor's farm in the various forests and wetlands, which are often regarded as their spheres of influence.

Going by the enormity of money garnered by these bandits, it is evident that a new social formation, in the form of money bags, with new status is beginning to emerge in Nigeria's North-west region.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has explored banditry and emergent new social formation in Nigeria's North-west region. In it, scholarly perspectives on banditry and social formation were examined. It evaluated the Collective Violence, Queer Ladder and Third Party Intervention theories as framework of analysis. Also, the nature, manifestations and consequences of "ransom-taking" banditry in Nigeria's Northwest were appraised. It equally explored banditry and the emergent new social formation in Nigeria's North-west. The paper then concluded that consequent upon the gains accruing to the warlords from ransom-taking and levies derivable from rent-seeking it is apparent that a new moneyed class is emerging in Nigeria's Northwest.

In view of the above, the paper suggests that effective mechanisms must be put in place to checkmate the bandits' warlords with the concomitant ransom-taking from becoming a means of instituting new social formation in Nigeria's Northwest region. Hence, the following recommendations are made as policy options. There should be:

i. increasing federal government funding for police and security forces in order to acquire sophisticated weapons and effectively oversee rural areas, control cross-border arms proliferation,
ii. intensification of effective policing and strengthening of intelligence gathering with a view to grasping early warning signals,
iii. deployment of sophisticated equipment such as satellite, GPRS, drones, among others, to intensify the monitoring of the ungoverned forestlands, the bandit groups and their leaders in their haven,
iv. government attention to the challenges of inequality, poverty, illiteracy and unemployment with a view to stemming the recruitment of youth into bandit groups and prompt trial of the warlords in accordance with the laws to serve as deterrents to others.

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