

AN APPRAISAL OF UNGOVERNED SPACE, ARMED BANDITRY AND HUMAN SECURITY IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is currently ravaged by manifold of security challenges and prominent among them is armed banditry, which is speedily spreading threatening the security of lives and property in the country. This paper examined the nexus between ungoverned space, armed banditry and human security in South-west Nigeria. It adopted descriptive research method and made use of secondary source of data while the predatory theory of government was used as its theoretical premise. It argued that armed banditry is driven by the inability or failure of the state to assume territorial control within its jurisdiction. It argued further that the ungoverned space, which accentuates armed banditry, has been upsetting the security of lives and property of people as many now live in tension and uncertainty. The paper concludes that armed bandits took advantage of the availability of ungoverned space to unleash terror and endanger human security in the country. To salvage the situation, it is recommended that government should ensure adequate training and retraining of its security personnel while sophisticated weapons and logistics are made adequately available for the police, the military, and other local/indigenous security outfits such as the Amotekun, vigilante and local hunters involved in combating banditry in order to enhance their performance. It recommends further that government should utilise modern technological security gadgets like CCTV cameras, drones and satellites, among others, to monitor the ungoverned spaces.

Keywords: Armed banditry, Bandits, Human security, South-west, Ungoverned spaces,

Introduction

Human security is undeniably one of the most important topic of discussion across the globe, as it concerns the safety of states and their citizens, as well as their very survival. Citizens' safety, which centres

on the adequate protection of human lives, property and well-being, occupies a central place in the development of a strong society. Thus, all efforts are channels toward ensuring the safety and wellbeing of people in an idle society (Nkwatoh & Nathaniel, 2018). However, in Nigeria, violence due to armed banditry has obstructed the quest for human security over time. Armed banditry, which consists of violent crimes such as kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, cattle rustling, and village or market raids, have threatened the security of human lives. Hence, this development makes the security situation in the nation to be complex, precarious, volatile and highly unpredictable (Edet, Aniefiok & Samuel, 2019).

There is no doubt that armed banditry in Nigeria is engendered by multifarious factors but prominent among these is the inability of government to administer its territories, which thus gives room for the phenomenon of ungoverned spaces. Ungoverned spaces are the places where government does not have control due to lack of presence of the security agents that give room for criminality to proliferate without any form of curtailment. In other words, ungoverned spaces are the uncontrolled land territories that are vulnerable to occupation and control by violent non-state actors such as bandits, terrorists, insurgents, militant herders and other criminal elements, who maintain organised networks to perpetrate reign of terror. Ungoverned territories thus exhibit the characteristics of absence of basic institutions of the state to enforce rules and regulations, law enforcement agency and social amenities (Ojo, 2020).

These ungoverned spaces serve as incubating place for outlaws. It also serves as a perfect hideout for the bandits from the reach of law and security agents. It also serves as recruitment and training ground for bandits. Therefore, armed banditry continues to broaden unabatedly in Nigeria. However, there is no gainsaying the fact that armed banditry poses a serious challenge to human security in the country at large and also Southwest states. This is because the increasing attacks of armed bandit groups have led to loss of lives and destruction of properties, displacement of people from their various communities; and bringing about a growing number of widows; widowers and orphans across different areas of the region (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021, Mustapha, 2019).

The level at which armed bandits operate within the Southwest region has undermined the essential elements of human security, which are personal security, community security, political security, food security, health security, educational security and environmental security (Abdulrasheed, 2020). This situation thus calls for attention by both the State and Federal governments. Though, government at the federal level has responded to the alarming rate of armed banditry in the nation through the deployment of security forces, which yielded insignificant result. Also, state governments in the Southwest region collectively established a security outfit called Operation Amotekun to stem down the rising trend of insecurity as occasioned by herder-farmer crisis, armed banditry and other security threats in the region. However, in spite of these initiatives, the scourge of armed banditry continues to wreck serious havoc in the region. Thus, this paper examined ungoverned space, armed banditry and human security in Southwest Nigeria

Conceptual Clarification

Ungoverned Space

The term “Ungoverned Spaces” emanated from the state-centered operationalisation by many governments and international organisations after the cold war of politically disordered territories in which state provision of effective governance had collapsed (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010). Ungoverned spaces have been envisioned largely in terms of geographical connotation of places or locations of borderlands, forestlands, wetlands, mountainous regions and generally inaccessible terrains, characteristically devoid of government presence, and where non-state actors typically holds sway. The concept extends beyond this geographical connotation to include spaces right under our noses; social sectors, including health, education, transport, public utilities service, among others. Any of these sectors can be described as ungoverned when aspects of a sector

are abandoned by the government, or deliberately ceded, partially or fully, to non-state actors, with express approval to extract rents from the sector largely for the benefit of the latter (Agbonifo, 2022).

Thus, the term ungoverned space is not merely a geographical connotation but is equally social, political and economic zones, where states do not have effective control but where non-state actors can exploit state surveillance and undermine state sovereignty (Usman & Singh, 2021). Ungoverned spaces, therefore, connotes both non-existence of effective state sovereignty and governmental control in both physical and non-physical geographical territory (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013). This implies that in such territories, the state is entirely non-physical; and such non-existence results in ineffective governance and can therefore, lead to the eventual emergence and sporadic rise of conflict and other forms of insecurities, whenever there is clash of interests.

Ungoverned spaces is thus viewed as places in which a state government encounters prominent challenges in establishing control, or in which the national government's authority does not reach these areas thereby serving as a breeding ground for terrorism, insecurities and conflict (Rabasa, Steven, Peter, Kim, Theodore, Jennifer, Kevin, & John, 2007). Ungoverned areas or restricted statehood are territories in a country in which the national authority (or all levels of government) has no ability to enforce laws and decisions or in which the legal power over the means of violence is absent (Risse, 2011).

Ungoverned territories often take place not only on poorly controlled land territories but also maritime borders, which can also extend to airspace that the countries affected are unable to control. Ungoverned territories can therefore be perceived as failed or failing nations or states that are not able to effectively exercise sovereignty and can be seen along a continuum of state control in which when healthy States lose control of some geographic or functional areas within their territories become ungoverned territories. For instance, a state that otherwise functions effectively could be infected with a high level of illegal immigration across less controlled or porous borders, which can lead to smuggling of small arms and weapons, the influx of criminals. Inclusively, ungoverned territories can equally manifest as a result of weak states in which the organisations, especially the security agencies of the national government are incapacitated to the extent that they cannot maintain authority or political law beyond the major cities (Sackflame & Omitola, 2022).

Therefore, ungoverned spaces in the context of this paper are regarded as the physical or non-physical areas or territories, where there is absence of state capacity or political will to exercise control or sovereignty. These territories are generally characteristically rugged, remote, maritime, or littoral areas not effectively governed by a sovereign state.

Armed Banditry

The concept of banditry has been conditioned by the changing time, space and circumstances. Globally, banditry conveys different meaning ranging from location and time, for instance, bandits in Europe and Americas in the time past are freedom fighters who fight for the oppressed in the society, while Mexicans perceived bandits as "social workers" (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021). Although armed banditry in African, West African sub region and Nigeria is as ancient as the region itself, reflecting itself in cattle rustling, village/market pillaging and robbery, but the crime has recently evolved into a sophisticated and well-organised criminal network, posing serious danger to human security in the afflicted states in Nigeria (Sunday, 2021: Adewuyi, 2021). While the term "bandits" from the archival documents refers to those who refuse to abide by the law of the state, go around in bands and armed and as well sometimes had the support of the local population. They are frequently involved in damage to enclosed property and in the rustling of livestock belonging to majors of the various villages, in demolishing the walls enclosing fields, cattle and resources once belonging to the corporate village communities (Rossetti, 1982, cited in Usman & Singh, 2021).

Egwu (2016) conceived armed banditry as a set-up criminal activity deliberately designed and carried out for personal gains. Also, armed banditry is perceived as the totality of armed robbery or other violent crimes such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, village raids, highway raids that entail the use of force, or the threat of force,

to intimidate a person or a group of people with the intention of robbing, raping, kidnapping, or killing the victims (Abdussalam, Olayiwola & Akinniyi- Duyile, 2022). In the perception of Anka (2017), armed banditry is expressed as the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not it was planned, using weapons of offense or defense, especially in semi-organised groups, with the goal of overpowering the victim and getting loot or achieving some political goals. Most people think of these bandits as outlaws, desperate and lawless marauders who do not have a home or a place to go.

Of recent, therefore, armed banditry has become criminal escapade comprising cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape and the brazen and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected gunmen and reprisal attacks from surviving victims (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). This is a development that has been brought to the fore of human security as about 2,968 people were killed while 1,484 were abducted in Nigeria between January and March 2022 (Babangida, 2022). Also, not fewer than 1,230 persons were killed; including 79 security personnel while over 658 people has been abducted by armed bandits in different places across Nigeria between January and March 2023 (Eromosele, 2023). Thus, armed banditry is a human security threat in which the leaders and the led could fall victims at any time (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). In the context of this paper, however, armed banditry is defined from a wide scope in line with the above explication.

Human Security

The concept “security” has attracted a plethora of divergent opinions, which are based on individual perceptions and usage of the concept. Security represents a situation when an individual, group or community can move freely to carry out their daily activities without any hindrance, fear of danger, injury to the body or destruction of properties (*Premium Times*, 2019). Security is thus broadly perceived as freedom from danger or threats to an individual or a nation. It is the ability to protect and defend oneself, be it an individual or a nation, his/its cherished values and legitimate interests and the enhancement of his/its wellbeing (Caleb, 2021).

Security in the views of Sanchi, Alhassan, Ajibade and Sabo (2022) is conceived as having a stable source of income, a predictable daily routine, protection from crime, and freedom from psychological harm. Safety or protection from emotional stress results from having the assurance that one is wanted, accepted, loved, and protected in one's community or neighborhood and by extension, those nearby. It also emphasises the psychological and emotional aspects of feeling a part of a social group that can provide security. In a more encompassing manner, security is regarded as the structures and processes within human society, locally that work towards the reduction of threats and risks that determine individual or group's lives. The greater the level of security enjoyed by individuals or groups in a society, the more individuals and groups (including society as a whole) can have an existence beyond the instinctual animal struggle merely to survive (Booth, 2007).

However, it is the primary responsibility of the government to ensure security of lives and property. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided in section 14 (1) (b) that “the very security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government” (1999 Constitution). Therefore, Goke (2019) asserted that a state's capacity to defend against threats to its fundamental interests and values is a key component of security in a dynamic situation. It is in line with this responsibility that governments established several security forces/agencies to ensure and maintain security within a country and even to respond to external aggressions and threats (Usman & Singh, 2021).

Conversely stated, the concept of human security was introduced in the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Report of 1994, which focuses on people. This document asserts that security as a concept has long been construed too narrowly from state-centric dimension, within the context of security of territory from foreign assault. The emphasis has now been shifted from state-centric to security of the individuals implying human security. Human security is perceived as protection from chronic dangers such as starvation, disease, and repression, as well as protection from sudden and detrimental disturbances in regular life patterns - whether in

homes, jobs, or communities (UNDP, 1994). Human security in this perspective encompasses economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security (Abdullahi, 2022; Adewuyi, 2021).

Though human security involves protecting the citizenry from hunger, disease, poverty, unemployment, natural disasters, among others, all these can, however, only take place where there is peace and stability in the polity (Ighodalo, 2012). Hence, human security remains a necessary prerequisite for the development of human beings and society. This underscores the significance of security as the requirement for survival of the Nigerian people and nation. Therefore, security is the most major need of human beings and society (Caleb, 2021; Temitope, 2019). For the purpose of this paper, human security is perceived as all provisions and efforts made towards ensuring economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political safety and sanity of the citizenry of a nation.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Predatory theory of government as the framework of analysis. The Predatory theory of government was proposed around 1969 by a number of scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm, Howard Becker, and Olson Mancur, among others (Conroy, 2016). A predatory government is made up of people whose main concern is advancing their own interests rather than the idea of the collective benefit of everyone in the state (Alkhatir, 2012). Any failure to do so will result in economic and social crises, which could cause insecurity, underdevelopment, and social mistrust among various social groupings. The theory professes that the government is established to offer public goods to its citizens, and any failure on the part of the government to do so will result in crises of conflict and violence. The predatory theory of the state focused on how government policies affect a state's ability to develop, foster relationships, and provide for its citizens (Egwu, 2015; Currot & Fink, 2012).

The theory's central tenet is the conviction that endogenous government policy directly impinges on people's chances for economic advancement, social security, and the preservation of law and order in society. This is because, in societies where the political system is dominated by an elite group, whose main goal is to advance their own personal interests, social insecurity like banditry will be widespread (Alkhatir, 2012). In view of the fact people feel that any crime perpetuated against the autocrats will benefit them, the government has no sympathy for bandits, who breach any laws that are enforced by a predatory government. Therefore, ungoverned spaces provide a channel for armed banditry to serve as a check on state power and a system of rules and their enforcement when the government is unable to do so (Egwu, 2015).

Although the theory recognises that ungoverned spaces and armed banditry have many negative effects on society, including threat to human security due to the violence and ruthlessness. However, according to Robinson (2001), armed banditry unintentionally advances the wellbeing of residents by fighting unpopular policies and reducing the negative effects of an ineffective and predatory government. In other words, bandits frequently fill the void left by failed governments by seizing the chance. Even self-serving regimes would have an incentive to support development if they could collect enough of the accompanying riches, which is why the prevalence of bad policy is perplexing.

Policies that foster economic growth while creating wealth, however, may also change the allocation of political power in a way that has a negative impact on the initial political system-controlling groups. If individuals who will hold power in the future are unable to fulfill their promises, it might be better for those who currently hold it to hold onto it rather than encourage growth. By doing this, the government is reduced to a group of stationary bandits, as measures that support healthy institutions and economic growth are incompatible with maintaining the status quo. As a result, elites are encouraged to engage in predatory behaviour since the society is politically very active (Tafida, 2018). This is why, even under democracy, a country with enormous human and natural resources, like Nigeria, is likely to become poorer under oppressive leadership and constantly deal with societal problems like ungoverned spaces and armed banditry, which

snowball to endanger the human security (Abraham & Auwalu, 2022). It is worthy to note that the elements mentioned above are characteristically present in the rural communities prone to bandit attacks in South-west region. This is so because government as result of its predatory nature has not created an enabling environment for people to actualise their dreams. Therefore, bandits' groups perceive the need for them to embark on violence against the people to actualise their vested interest or desires.

Historical Overview of Armed Banditry in Nigeria

Armed banditry has evolved within the context of time, space, and specific conditions. In 19th-century Europe and the America a bandit was regarded as a freedom fighter whose mission included the emancipation of the oppressed from the upper class or colonised from the coloniser (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Rabaro, 2013). This is the reason robbers such as Chuchoel Roto, Herachico Bernel, and Santanon were frequently hailed as Mexican independence heroes (Daniel, 2006). Mexicans hold these "social workers" in high regard and respect, although the State frequently views them as a nuisance and criminals that need to be destroyed. In some pre-industrial communities, therefore, peasants saw bandits differently from the State, not as criminals, thugs, or miscreants, but as avengers and bread winners (Watts, as cited in Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021).

However, a bandit in a traditional African setting is perceived differently from the United States and Europe connotation, where they are regarded as experts in armed robbery and associated offenses (BBC, 2020). Since the most typical characteristics of armed banditry in Africa have been mutilation, murder, and wanton damage of property; therefore, there is a clear relationship between the two. Since the majority of herders would do anything to prevent the rustling of their herds, the bandit will also use force and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) to steal livestock. Hence, the use of force during livestock theft is referred to here as cattle rustling and armed banditry (Sanchi *et al.*, 2022; Labelewa, 2020).

From a historical standpoint, armed banditry in West Africa is not new. Its origins and evolution are as ancient as the sub-region itself, extending back to inter-tribal eras marked by disputes and warfare over scarce economic resources and territory expansion for political influence. During the slave trade, colonial, and post-colonial eras, various sorts of warfare occurred in many African States. Even if there have been considerable improvements in the nature and pattern of armed banditry and other kinds of warfare in West Africa, the socio-economic and political causes for the phenomenon's predominance in the sub-region remain substantial (Abdullahi, 2019). This is why the struggle for political independence and the subsequent development of the post-colonial state in West Africa were regarded as some of the significant events that established the armed banditry pattern in the region (Rufa'i, 2018).

In addition, it proposes that socio-economic and political realities could be used to explain the severity, prevalence, and dynamics of armed banditry as observed in various regions of West Africa. In the Tillaberi and Tahoua regions of the Niger Republic, for instance, armed banditry such as cattle and sheep rustling as well as the murder of innocent individuals in border settlements has a direct correlation with the widespread poverty of the population caused by weak administration (Sanchi *et al.*, 2022; Abdullahi, 2019).

The growth and development of banditry in Mali has been linked to religious fanaticism by sectarian religious groups but has been exacerbated by inadequacy or ineffectiveness of state institutions in terms of service delivery. Weak governmental institutions, insurgency, and lawlessness have pushed more pastoralists towards religious extremism, resulting in an increase in bandit's activities in Northern Mali (Okeowo & Kayode, 2014). The frequency of bandit operations has fostered the emergence of armed organisations in various regions of Mali and intensified tensions between farmers and herders (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021; Abdullahi, 2019).

However, in Mauritania, the nature and pattern of armed banditry are explained by trans-border banditry by local groups as well as issues associated with resource management and allocation of pastoralists' lands. Unlike Mali and Niger, Mauritania experienced a quick surge in armed banditry due to competition

over resources, particularly water, pasture, and animal feeds. Similarly, theft of livestock is becoming a transnational criminal activity that affects travels and interactions between Burkina Faso and Ghana. Local bandit groups, primarily Burkinabe, conspired with traditional leaders to steal animals and split the earnings of their illicit activity (Abdullahi, 2019).

In Nigeria, it is however, crucial to note that armed banditry is not novel as the phenomenon existed before Nigeria's establishment as a nation state. Thus, the region has a long history of armed banditry (Beland, 2005). For instance, in 1901, somewhere between western Hausa territory and the Niger border, a 12,000-strong camel train carrying a variety of grains was attacked and 210 merchants were slaughtered (The Humanitarian, 2018). It was also asserted that incidents of armed banditry were documented in colonial Nigeria as early as the 1930s (Jaafar, 2018). Though armed banditry is as old as Nigeria, it has evolved over time from its elementary phase to a more sophisticated and complex crime pattern (Egwu 2016; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2015).

The modern metamorphosis of armed banditry in Nigeria can be seen in the context of her current security dialectics. Consequently, criminal gangs, frequently comprised of teenagers from farming and herding communities and/or local bandits, exploit the increasing instability, fear, and cyclical attacks to pillage local markets and villages, commit highway robberies, and steal animals for personal gain (Sanchi *et al.*, 2022; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Basse, 2016). However, armed banditry has initially been prevalent in Northern Nigeria, especially alarming in the North-west, where it has claimed about 13, 590 lives between 2015 and 2022 (Baiyewu, Omogbolagun, Odeniyi, Tunji, Tolu-Kolawole, Aina & Tyopuusu, 2022). The menace of armed banditry has surreptitiously crept into other parts of the country including the Southwestern region (Rosenje & Peju-Rosenje, 2022). It has become a callous incidence, which has come in different dimensions, manifesting in the form of insurgency, kidnapping, suicide attacks, self-suicide bombing, corruption, armed robbery and the like (Adegoke, 2020). The alarming rate of armed banditry has recorded about 2,170 deaths between 2015 and 2022 (Baiyewu *et al.*, 2022).

Scope and Recent Incidences of Armed Banditry in Southwest Nigeria

Armed banditry has four scopes, which are livestock rustling, highway robberies, kidnapping, and village raids (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Anka, 2017). Cattle rustling have been recorded as the first aspect of armed banditry that is prevalent in Nigeria. This is an organised kind of livestock theft motivated by shared accumulative or profit-seeking tendencies. In other words, they are organised criminal gangs that rob livestock in order to make money (Sanchi *et al.*, 2022; Asmau & Abdulrasheed, 2020). Village raids are incursions into rural areas that result in significant human casualties. Households, stores, and markets are typically the targets of village raids. While occasionally it is perceived as retaliation against a rival village (Yaro & Tobias, 2019; Ayo, 2018).

Highway robbery is another aspect of armed banditry whose occurrence is common in the States' interlinked roads in the Southwest region of the country. This was done by stopping drivers with passengers on the several routes in the Sagamu-Ore-Benin axis, Ibadan-Lagos axis, Ondo-Okene axis, Onisha-Ore axis and Ibadan-Ijebu-Ode axis, among others (Rosenje & Peju-Rosenje, 2022, Okeowo & Kayode, 2014). A crime that is carried out for ransom is kidnapping. The perpetrators of the crime frequently view their victims as having money that will be used as ransom. Travelers are kidnapped and held hostage by bandits on the highways, where they are then transported to a hideout in the ungoverned spaces where their family or acquaintances are contacted for ransom payment (Labelewa, 2020). However, the recent reported incidences of armed banditry, which cut across the majority of the foregoing dimensions in South-west Nigeria, are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Selected Recent Incidences of Armed Banditry in Southwest Nigeria

S/N	Date of Attack	Place of Attack	Nature of Attacks and Casualties
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JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

ISSN Print: 2992-2763 - ISSN Online: 2992-4618. /vol 1, No 3 / September, 2023.

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1.	March 9, 2017	Okerisa, Okitipupa LGA, Ondo State	Residents deserted their homes due to incessant attacks by hoodlums
2.	September 10, 2017	Akunnu, Akoko North LGA, Ondo State	Engaged couple were abducted by gunmen on their way to engagement ceremony
3.	June 18, 2019	Iroko, near Fiditi, Atiba LGA, Oyo State	Gunmen abducted Dayo Adewole in his farm
4.	July 23, 2019	Ajebo, Lagos-Ibadan expressway, Ogun State	Three person were abducted by gunmen in Ogun State
5.	September 22, 2019	Ajaoku Village between Otan Ile and Imesi, Obokun LGA, Osun State	10 passengers were abducted in Osun
6.	November 26, 2019	Ijoka Village, Atakumosa, Osun State	Three Chinese miners were kidnapped at mining site
7.	February 5, 2020	Ilu-Oluji Town, Oluji/Okeigbo LGA, Ondo State	Bandits attacked an old generation bank where about four people were killed
8.	August 1, 2020	Ikun-Oba Akoko Road, Akoko South LGA, Ondo State	Gunmen kidnapped two people
9.	January 2, 2021	Subawah Oil Filling Station, along Idere Road, Igboora, Ibarapa, Oyo State	Two nine-year old cousins were killed while a businesswomen was kidnapped
10.	January 2, 2021	Tapa, Ibarapa North LGA, Oyo State	Abduction of a medical doctor in his hospital
11.	February 13, 2021	Ijugbere axis of Owo LGA, Ondo State	Three farmers were killed during bandit's attack on a community
12.	March 2, 2021	Idigba Olomi Village, Ogbomoso, Surelere North LGA, Oyo State	Bandits attacked Fulani settlement in Oyo, where about five people were injured
13.	March 14, 2021	Wasinmi Village, Ayedire LGA, Osun State	Six people were killed by gunmen during an attack
14.	May 10, 2021	Onigari area of Shagari village, Akure, Ondo State	Gunmen kidnapped a pastor inside the church
15.	June 1, 2021	Akure-Ilesa Road, Ondo State	Eight Christians were abducted by bandits in an attack on church bus
16.	June 6, 2021	Igangan town, Iwajowa LGA, Oyo State	Night attack on Igangan town leaving several persons dead and properties razed
17.	June 8, 2021	Amule Kanji Village, Imeko/Afon LGA, Ogun State	Gunmen killed three people in an attack on a village in Ogun State
18.	August 19, 2021	Ile-Ife, Osun State	Bandits killed five farmers on their way to farm
19.	September 8, 2021	Ido Ani-Ifira Expressway, Ondo State	Bandits abducted five travellers

JOURNAL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

ISSN Print: 2992-2763 - ISSN Online: 2992-4618. /vol 1, No 3 / September, 2023.

<https://www.jopd.com.ng>

20.	December 1, 2021	Ori-Omipupa Village via Agric area, Obokun LGA, Osun State	Gunmen abducted couple at Osun farm settlement
21.	June 5, 2022	Owa-luwa Street, Owo Council Area, Ondo State	Bandits opened fire on worshipers at St. Francis Catholic Church and killed about 50 people
22.	June 9, 2022	Oke-Oko Community, Ewokoro LGA, Ogun State	Gunmen shot a man and abducted a housewife in Ogun
23.	July 27, 2022	Craneburg Construction Company, Folahammi Junction, Owo LGA, Ondo State	Gunmen attacked Owo Community and injured several people
24.	July 28, 2022	Aba Area, Ogbomoso, Oyo State	Gunmen abducted and killed a hotelier and a staff member
25.	August 4, 2022	Ago Panu on Owo-Ikare road, Owo LGA, Ondo State	Bandits kidnapped traditional ruler and four other people
26.	September 27, 2022	Igangan town, Iwajowa LGA, Oyo State	Gunmen attacked Police station and DCO and one other person
27.	October 9, 2022	Iseyin-Ipapo-Saki Road, Oyo State	Gunmen attacked farm settlement and abducted four farmers
28.	December 3, 2022	Abule-Okò, Agbado, Olaogun and Ijoko communities in Ifo LGA, Ogun State	Gunmen stormed the communities and shot three persons
29.	December 23, 2022	Ago Jinadu Axix, Akunnu-Ajowa Road, Akoko Area, Ondo State	Four students returning home were ambushed and abducted by gunmen
30.	February 6, 2023	Arimogija and Molege communities in Ose LGA, Ondo State	Gunmen killed eight persons in the attack on the communities
31.	March 31, 2023	Osogbo/Ikirun Road at Ayepe Community, Osun State	Bandits abducted commuters
32.	July 1, 2023	Abule-Ori, Obafemi Owode LGA, Ogun State	Gunmen stormed a Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), killed the pastor and abducted seven members of the church
33.	July 8, 2023	Agbado-Imesi-Ekiti Road in Gbonyin LGA, Ekiti State	Gunmen kidnapped the Ekiti State chairman of All Progressive Congress (APC)
34.	August 1, 2023	Celestial Church, Odu Village near Osogbo	12 members of the church were abducted

Source: Authors' Compilation from Nigerian Dailies (2023).

Ungoverned Space Perspective of Armed Banditry in Southwest Nigeria

The country's widespread incidents of armed banditry are thought to be caused by the state's incompetence or unwillingness to exercise territorial control within its jurisdiction, namely over ungoverned

territories. Nigeria's rural areas, frontiers, borderlands, and forestlands and wetlands have become spheres of competitive influence, where violent non-state actors exercise quasi-territorial powers in defiance of the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is due to the state's inability to assert and enforce its will and purposes there (Ojo, 2020). In some cases, the state just pretends to exist in these domains, ceding its sovereignty to criminal organisations and other shadowy forces. Armed bandits have found refuge in the ungoverned areas that dot Nigeria's enormous rural and forested environment, as well as its borders and boundaries, where they operate with the highest criminal opportunism and impunity (Okoli, 2021).

These forests, which were once under the watchful eye of forestry authorities, gradually evolved into sanctuaries for criminals such as livestock rustlers, highway robbers, kidnappers, and cannabis farmers (Abdullahi, 2022). The prevalent occurrences of armed banditry in the Southwest region of Nigeria are perceived to be driven by the inability or failure of the state to assume territorial control within its jurisdiction in the sense of ungoverned spaces. The incapacity of the state to assert and enforce its will and purposes in the countryside, frontiers, borderlands and forested landscapes of Nigeria has created spheres of competitive influence where the violent non-state actors exercise quasi-territorial powers in negation of the sovereign and territorial integrity of the state (Ojo, 2020). In some instances, the state merely exists in absentia in such spheres, thereby abdicating its territoriality to the underworld and clandestine elements. The ungoverned spaces that dot Nigeria's vast rural and forested landscape as well as borderlines and frontiers have created safe havens for armed bandits, who operate with utmost criminal opportunism and impunity in such spheres (Okoli, 2021).

In addition, armed banditry is averred to be the ultimate consequences of the growing number of ungoverned spaces where effective government control was non-existent and ineffective. This endangered human rights and human security as a result of persistent fear and frustrations from violence, want, and poverty. Ungoverned spaces thus enhance armed banditry with relative freedom to carry out their dastardly acts and prey on the powerless citizens along rural roads and communities in the forest, where social life is very intricate or primitive. Thus, ungoverned spaces, with its accompanying protracted insecurity is the fundamental factor that motivated criminal gangs (bandits) activities for economic opportunities, as affected communities often experience the looting of their wealth and payment of ransom for kidnapping using scorched-earth tactics (Abraham & Auwalu, 2022; Egwu, 2015).

Impact of Ungoverned Space and Armed Banditry on Human Security in Nigeria

In Nigeria, frequent acts of violent crime have grown to form a major threat to Nigeria's national security (Gabriel, 2017). These include instances of militancy, insurgency and banditry. As earlier mentioned in the preceding paragraphs of this paper, banditry includes cattle rustling, armed robbery and kidnapping for ransom (Global Slavery Index, 2020). Kidnapping has remained the most virulent form of banditry in Nigeria. It has become the most pervasive and intractable violent crime in the country (Global Slavery Index, 2020). Kidnapping can be targeted at individuals or at groups. School children have usually been the prime targets of kidnapping for ransom because their parents are considered to be wealthy enough to pay a fee in exchange for being freed (Global Slavery Index, 2020).

The current frequency of armed bandit attacks with its concomitant negative impacts on virtually everyone has become worrisome to the government and the public. For Okoli (2016), armed banditry has increased astronomically in terms of scale and intensity with the use of sophisticated weapons in perpetrating armed robbery, assassination, cattle rustling and kidnapping among rural communities. In the Southwest Nigeria, such is the nature of the event in Igboora axis of Oyo State and Yewa Axis of Ogun State. In other words, armed bandit groups have metamorphosed to armed robbers, who raid villages, households, shops and markets for the purpose of looting. Besides, the bandits involve in highway robbery and kidnapping, which is a common experience in the southwest Nigeria as of today. In fact, there is a continual interception

of motorists with travelers on the various highways along Ibadan-Lagos axis, Ondo-Okene axis, Onisha-Ore axis and Ibadan-Ijebu-Ode axis (Rosenje & Peju-Rosenje, 2022; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019).

The scourge of armed banditry has posed a severe threat to all aspects of human security in the Southwest Region. Reports indicate the flourishing of bandit groups, whose members were seen displaying automated weapons, terrorizing rural settlements, farms, villages, and the highways to kill people and kidnapping (Olaniyan, 2018). The escalating attacks of armed bandit groups have resulted in the loss of lives and property, the eviction of people from their homes, and an increase in the number of widows, widowers, and orphans Southwest region of Nigeria (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021).

Due to the availability of ungoverned spaces, armed banditry has led to the emergence of humanitarian crises in Southwest region. It has led to loss of lives and properties, desertion of towns and villages within the rural setting, displacement of people and dislocation of family members while the economy of such areas has continued to suffer. In other words, the situation has grossly affected the economic, environmental and community security of humans, which have snowballed to affect the rural economy and socio-economic development of the affected areas and the states at large (Abdussalam *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, sexual violence has skyrocketed with women frequently being raped, kidnapped or commodified by families who are forced to exchange their daughters for protection. Additionally, the humanitarian toll of armed banditry in the face of ungoverned spaces extends to livelihoods relied on by women, with markets and farms often raided. Victims' highlight the effect of rape and hunger in the midst of rising insecurity and the desperate need of food, protection, shelter and clothes in the Southwest region of Nigeria (Ojewale & Balogun, 2022).

The attendant number of casualties and population displacement across farming communities are worrisome. In other words, armed banditry involves acts of robbery and violence on the people, especially rural dwellers who mainly engaged in farming, cattle rearing and other food production activities; it is bound to have negative impacts on food scarcity (Blench, 2016). This explains reason behind the chronic and seasonal food scarcity persist in every southwest region of Nigeria, escalated by frequent high food prices, impact of conflict related to bandits attacks and insurgency, communal pastoralist farmer crises, kidnapping, cattle rustling and climate change (FEWS NET, 2020). In recent times, there is no doubt that about 73% of the farm produces, which are cultivated in the Southwest region and the other regions of Nigeria is disrupted by armed banditry (Shanka, 2022; World Bank, 2018). Thus, the economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security of people in the Southwest region are undermined by the seemingly intractable armed banditry due to the presence of ungoverned spaces.

Efforts at Managing Ungoverned Space and Armed Banditry in Southwest Nigeria

In Southwest Nigeria, stakeholders and governments have made significant efforts to manage armed banditry as orchestrated by ungoverned spaces. The media has made a substantial contribution to shaping public opinion as well as pressuring the government to take action against armed banditry in the Southwest region through its editorials, feature articles, reporting, enlightenment journalism, and advocacy journalism. Similar to this, a number of well-known public figures, including scholars, businessmen, musicians, actors, and actresses, have at various times shared their views on how to effectively combat armed banditry through the media.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) have also made significant contributions to the battle against armed banditry and ungoverned spaces through research, reporting, advocacy, public campaigns, public lectures, and awareness. Equally, they occasionally urged and pressured the government to take tough action to stop armed banditry in Southwest Nigeria. Traditional rulers in the region have in the same manner participated in the fight against armed banditry. They have in addition contributed efforts

in establishing neighborhood security networks like vigilante groups, and local hunters, which to some extent, have complemented the efforts of government's established security apparatus toward securing the ungoverned spaces and reducing armed banditry in Southwest Nigeria (Adeniyi, 2020).

What is more, the six governors of Southwest States launched Western Nigeria Security Network (WNSN), dubbed "Operation Amotekun," on January 9, 2020 as a key initiative to intensifying security in the hinterlands, combating armed banditry and other crimes so as to and enhance security and sustain peace in the region (Yahaya & Bello, 2020). The establishment of "Operation Amotekun" is intended to supplement national security apparatuses' efforts to protect the lives and property of the people in the area (Odewale & Lamidi, 2020). Hence, the security outfit was established primarily to rescue the region from the growing insecurity that was aggravated by, among other things, armed banditry, indiscriminate killing, kidnapping and destruction of farmlands (Oikhala, 2022; Adetunmbi & Adedigba, 2021).

However, the Amotekun security outfit has fallen short of expectations in the fight against armed banditry due to a number of factors, including its inability to use sophisticated weapons, a lack of investigative autonomy, insufficient manpower and funding, a lack of access to modern technology and information, inadequate transportation infrastructure, and inadequate welfare services (Odeyinka, 2021; Odewale & Lamidi, 2020).

In effort to monitor the ungoverned territories in the region, the Oyo and Ogun state governments convened their first combined security meeting on February 2, 2022, with the goal of putting an end to armed banditry and kidnapping in the border communities of the two states. By establishing a cooperative security committee to handle security issues along the villages located at the two states' border, the states decided to reduce insecurity. Therefore, to guarantee adequate security of lives and property against armed banditry, kidnapping, and other criminalities throughout the communities along the boundary of the two states, a Joint Border Security Task Force made up of several security agencies in each state is anticipated to be on patrol (Olatunji, 2022; Olukoya, 2022).

All these efforts made by different stakeholders at different level has to some extent yield minimal result, which has not made significant impact in securing the ungoverned spaces as well as in curbing the alarming rate of armed banditry in the Southwest region of Nigeria. Thus, there is a need for a comprehensive, long-lasting, and strong legislative framework, as well as strong political will to effectively oversees the ungoverned spaces and flush out armed banditry toward enhancing human security in the region.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined ungoverned spaces, armed banditry and human security in southwest Nigeria. It revealed that armed banditry is driven by the inability or failure of the state to assume territorial control within its jurisdiction. Also, it asserted that ungoverned spaces aiding armed bandits has been threatening the security of lives and property of people as many now live in tension and uncertainty. Furthermore, the paper revealed that the various efforts put in place to address the menace are yet to yield meaning results. Thus, it concludes that armed bandits seized the opportunity of the vacuum created by dysfunctional governments' incapacity oversees its territory to unleash terror, endangering human security in the nation. To salvage the situation therefore, it is recommended that government should ensure adequate training and weapons for the police, army, Amotekun security outfit, vigilante and local hunters in order to enhance their performance; and government should utilise modern technological security gadgets like CCTV cameras, drones and satellites, among others to monitor the ungoverned spaces.

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