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Research article

Insurgency and Armed Banditry in Central Nigeria: Dissecting the Existing Policy Options

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the security challenges posed by insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria and proposes policy options to mitigate these issues. A secure nation ensures development. Unfortunately, Central Nigeria is drifting apart in this aspect because of the activities of insurgency and armed banditry. Although providing a peaceful and secure nation is enormous, especially in a heterogeneous geopolitical zone such as Central Nigeria, the government's efforts yield little result. This paper reviews the security architecture in place to stop this menace. In terms of methodology, secondary data were used; the paper opined that insurgency and armed banditry affect socio-economic development in the Central Nigeria complex, while content analysis was conducted on the data. The paper further reviews that insecurity is one of the main destructive tools to socio-economic development in Central Nigeria. The paper, therefore, concludes that a safe and secure Central Nigeria ensures not only development but also creates an avenue for all-around development. Thus, it recommends that to ensure development in Central Nigeria, combating insurgency and armed banditry in the region should be the starting point, which can be achieved through education and advocacy.

KEYWORDS

Armed banditry; insurgency; insecurity; socio-economic development; policy options.

1. Introduction

The government's primary duty to its people is to protect them and their property. The social compact between the people and the government is based on the protection of people's lives and property. The social contract voluntarily entered into by citizens guarantees their survival through the state. Thus, a secure state from the social contract perspective reduces tension, ensures a non-violent, conflict-free society, and guarantees socio-political and economic development. One of the basic roles of a social contract is to ensure a secure state, promote national cohesion, peace, and sustainable development. A bridge in the social contract begot an insecure state. Unfortunately, the activities of the insurgency group and armed banditry have constituted a challenge to the socio-economic development of Central Nigeria. For example, the death toll and property damage nationwide, particularly in Central Nigeria, constitute a bridge to the social contract. The security challenges



in Central Nigeria are growing in strength, capability, and sophistication, making them difficult to combat. The security situation in Nigeria is getting complicated by the day, as captured by Igbini (2020:76): Ironically, political violence on some occasion, inherited tribalism, and corruption, as well as nepotism, the activities of Boko Haram and its associated groups have been complicated by a lack of discipline in nearly every area of public life, kidnappings and kidnappings, armed robberies, murder, extortion, and bombings of places of worship and innocent Nigerians.

The continuous crisis of security in Central Nigerians has been attributed to the incidents of armed robbery and cattle rustling, and the competition for scarce resources such as land between the local collaborates the position of Akinwotu and Sahabi, by stating further that there is no denying, however, that the rapid population growth and climate change pose a double threat to the Fulani nomadic pastoralists who inhabit West Africa. These factors have reduced the amount of available land, which has regrettably led to their migration from the northern to the southern regions of the country in search of verdant pastures for their cattle. Scholars have proposed that the trustworthy source of the conflict between the Fulani herders and the host people in the south is not migration, but rather the invasion of private farmlands and destruction of crops. The activities of the insurgency group and armed banditry have led to a series of violent assaults, random shootings of defenseless people, arson of police buildings and places of worship, numerous kidnappings, rapes, armed robberies, and killings. According to the World Bank report "Conflict, Security and Progress," more than 1.5 billion of the world's estimated 7 billion people live in nations where political and criminal violence has exacerbated human suffering and hampered socioeconomic progress. Insurgency and armed banditry are costing Central Nigeria a great deal of fortune (World Bank, 1993). The consequences of these groups' activities thus demand new initiatives to tackle this menace in the region.

No doubt, development in Central Nigeria has been affected by security issues. The level of insecurity in Central Nigeria today is unimaginable. This remains a core issue for the government, which has deemed it necessary to increase the nation's security budget allocation to curb this menace without improvement (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Robaro, 2013). Despite the increase in budgetary provision to the security sectors, which has manifested in the acquisition of more security facilities, partial installation of Closed Circuit Television cameras, intense investigation of a criminal offense, and increased security awareness, unfortunately, the much-needed serene atmosphere for socio-economic development has not been achieved (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Robaro, 2013). The security challenge remains due to the activities of armed banditry and insurgency, with significant consequences for the socio-economic growth and development of the nation. A secure and peaceful society promotes socio-economic development for the benefit of the citizens and the state at large. A secure society also fosters peaceful coexistence, guaranteeing the free movement of people and goods without hindrance. The ability of any nation to adequately secure the lives and property of its citizens promotes growth in the country's socio-economic sector. It attracts foreign investors, which is much needed in central Nigeria. Unfortunately, the group's insurgent operations and armed banditry in Central Nigeria have spread like wildfire across every state in the geopolitical zone, and the increasing number of cases of these groups' activities has become a significant threat to the region's corporate existence (Ocheni & Jacob, 2019). **The activities of the insurgency group** and armed banditry in Central Nigeria led to emotional and psychological trauma, loss of life and properties, and have degenerated the social relations of the people, especially among women and children.

Security is the foundation for socio-economic development and its sustenance; equally, insecurity undermines such development (Davies, 1995). The unprecedented cases of kidnapping, rape, cattle rustling, abduction for ransom, and robberies as a result of worsening insecurity in the geopolitical zone have constituted a hindrance to the socio-economic development of the geopolitical zone. The activities of these groups have brought an extra dimension to security crises in central Nigeria. Thus, insecurity is the greatest challenge hindering the region's stakeholders and the government's initiatives. The activities of the insurgency group and armed banditry have further heightened the existing economic insecurity in Central Nigeria. Hence, this work blends existing knowledge on insecurity in Nigeria to explore the challenges it poses to nation-building. A substantial body of literature on armed banditry exists; most of it focuses on historical accounts of gold mining and cattle rustling in Nigeria's northwest and other places. An atmosphere favorable to armed banditry is created by cattle theft by criminal organizations, as well as by the illegal exploitation and rivalry among non-state actors over natural resources, including gold (Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023). Furthermore, several academic publications have addressed the topic, presenting arguments that highlight Fulani-pastoralists as significant participants in banditry and other criminal activities (Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023). The paper begins with

the introduction, followed by the conceptualization of security, insecurity, and nation-building. Subsequent sections are Nigeria's difficulty in building a nation due to insecurity, the Nigerian experience, the way forward, and the conclusion. What is the impact of insurgency and armed banditry in central Nigeria? What policy options can ensure adequate security in central Nigeria?

2. Conceptual clarification

Banditry: According to White (1981), a bandit is a person who has been forced to become an outlaw by robbing wealthy people and donating to the underprivileged. He went on to say that the rich people's attitudes and actions in society, which lead to robbing the affluent to feed the poor, are largely to blame for the oppressed people's impoverished condition. In Nigeria, banditry is not a recent development. It had been widespread across the nation in various forms before the 1980s. It is a violent crime that has become increasingly fatal from an antiquated custom into a highly coordinated, expertly executed act of criminal activity. These days, it is marked by the employment of contemporary weapons together with organized attacks on towns and villages, rape, armed robberies, kidnappings, and livestock rustling (Madubuegwu & Abah, 2023). According to Williams (1998), bandits are international gangs and criminals who use bribery, extortion, and intimidation to control people and organizations, thereby furthering or enabling their own illicit activities. Therefore, in the globalized world, bandits are more than just outlaws and rural groups.

The activities of banditry over time evolved in both context and geography worldwide. Stimulants have been the basis of its progress, ensuring its expansion, development, and mechanization, particularly in recent times. In the past, banditry involved planning an act in dilapidated homes, structures, or even straightforward hiding places before carrying it out (Okoro, 2024). It developed into using supporters' homes, where the bandits could be hidden and their activities kept under wraps. Subsequently, as elitism gained power, the act was transformed into an action whose plans were methodically coordinated at the periphery of rural locations, making use of the rough, occasionally sloping terrain as obvious barriers essential to their movement and escape to safety (Okoro, 2024).

Security: Security is the aftermath or by-product of entrenched measures to ensure people's protection, property, and information against hostility from individuals or groups. Security is ensured when citizens and non-citizens of a particular country can live in a serene environment free from crime, violence, and other social problems (Onimisi, 2014). According to Achumba (2013), security is the ability to support oneself, predictability in day-to-day activities, stability, safety from criminal activity, and an absence of psychological trauma. Security is fundamentally proactive and preventive, to safeguard the nation and its residents from dangers. Dangers are detected and evaluated by law enforcement, intelligence, and risk assessments based on actual prior events. Security is the maintenance of institutions that promote core values. According to Imobighe (2013), Security is the absence of any threat or risk to a nation's ability to defend and grow, to further its legitimate interests and basic values, and to enhance the welfare of its people. Thus, internal security is viewed as the absence of liberty or freedom from tendencies that could jeopardize national cooperation, internal cohesion, and the nation's ability to preserve the institutions necessary to advance its fundamental goals and achieve its sociopolitical and economic goals while also satisfying the justifiable aspirations of its citizens. Liberation from threats to one's life and well-being is another aspect of internal security. Security is one of the basic needs of life. Security remains a basic value in human societies and promotes and guarantees socio-economic development. Security is a basic need that human beings guarantee for themselves and create a niche for it. Scholars in the social sciences critically analyze the concepts of security and insecurity, concluding that the lack of consistent definitions, theoretical development, and prerequisite empirical testing of hypotheses in this area is due to the vague and tendentious nature of the concept.

Insecurity: As it stands, insecurity can be viewed differently by different people. To some, it is an absence of safety and uncertainty; others see it as a danger, a hazard, and a complete lack of security in and around the environment. Ewetan & Ese, in their study of *"Insecurity and Socio-economic Development in Nigeria"*, captures the conceptualization of security as provided by Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Robaro (2013:5), with a further explanation thus: First of all, being open to risk or the possibility of danger is the state of being insecure, whereas danger is the state of being susceptible to harm or injury. Being exposed to risk or experiencing worry, a vaguely uncomfortable emotion felt in anticipation of some calamity, is the second definition of insecurity.

ty. This understanding of insecurity highlights a crucial point: those who experience it are not only unsure of what might happen but also susceptible to risks and dangers when they materialize.

Insecurity is a situation of perpetual anxiety or fear arising from an unprotected environment (Achumba, Ighomereho, & Akpor-Robaro, 2013; 5). Insecurity exists when the sanctity of human life is absent, where property and criminality remain the order of the day. The level of insecurity and its effects on economic and socio-political development in Central Nigeria warrant concern among researchers and policymakers. A secure nation ensures the social contract entered into by the people voluntarily with the government, and it guarantees their survival. Within the scope of this work, insecurity is the decreased limit and the inability of the government to effectively defend and ensure the safety of citizens, property, and against assaults from armed banditry and insurgency in Central Nigeria.

Insurgency: Insurgency is a conflictual phenomenon that takes the form of cellular development of resistance against the perceived enemy of a political regime and an expanded form of subversion-infiltration through a persistent intermediate stage of overt resistance, which eventually leads to civil war, beginning with small armed bands and insurrection (Béland, 2005; Pustay, 1965). Insurgency is a revolution, revolt, rebellion, riot, or mutiny carried out against the state and its citizens. Insurgency groups in Central Nigeria use arms and other sophisticated equipment to carry out their plans (Fjäder, 2014). Insurgencies are a group of political struggles, not a military struggle, which requires a political solution, not necessarily a purely military solution, because military involvement may resort to brutality and attack some innocent Nigerians. Insurgency is an organized movement that seeks to overthrow a government through subversion and armed conflict. An organized armed group or group of people waging war against the established political order in order to take control of a territory through violence and subversion is known as an insurgency. Through the use of force such as political mobilization, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, coercion or intimidation, propaganda, and subversion, insurgents frequently aim to overthrow or subvert an established government in order to gain full or partial control over the resources and population of a given geopolitical area (Abdu & Shehu, 2019; Ibidapo-Obe, 2008).

3. Methodology

This article relied on qualitative methods, and a case study design was adopted because it enabled pragmatic inquiry into the study participants' life experiences (Creswell, 2003). The data for this paper were sourced from scholarly journal articles. A total of 20 articles were found and used, sourced from scholarly search engines such as Sage and Google Scholar. The data were analyzed using content analysis, and themes were identified in some of the articles. The analysis focused on phenomena including insurgency and armed banditry in central Nigeria. This paper's data came from academic journal articles. About 25 academics using systematic review methods, with an emphasis on secondary data sources, were identified through Web of Science, Sage, Google Scholar, and other scholarly search engines. In the analysis, the researchers use categories to identify the key point and to more readily identify facts when coding is concluded. Text might be edited to remove errors and incorporate all available data that were considered valid.

4. Theoretical framework

Conflict transformation theorists use a broad range of conceptual building blocks, some of which are ancient, some of which are more recent, and some of which are borrowed from other schools. Different perspectives and different kinds of intervenors (state and non-state, internal and external) are reflected in the theories of conflict transformation. One intellectual source that contributes to the field of conflict transformation is the functionalist school of thought, exemplified by Georg Simmel and Lewis Coser. Both thinkers emphasized the constructive societal role of conflict. Simmel stated that conflict has an integrative quality, as it unites opposing and divergent elements in his 1955 essay "Conflict". He viewed it as a source of creativity and social cohesiveness. According to Coser (The Functions of Social Conflict, 1956), conflict has certain beneficial social purposes. Conflict transformation theory, which encompasses the concepts of conflict generation and analysis, is yet another school of thought that sheds light on the topic. Johan Galtung's work was the most influential in this school of thought. Nonviolence thinkers like Gene Sharp have made a substantial contribution to the field

of conflict transformation. One potential strategy for bringing about peace and justice is nonviolent resistance, which is regarded as an essential component of conflict transformation.

Nigeria's security environment is getting more complicated and unpredictable. Recent years have seen the emergence and consolidation of coercive power by several non-state armed groups to terrorize the Nigerian populace. Examples of these groups include criminal gangs, armed bandits, and separatist organizations. The Nigerian media often refers to Islamic fundamentalists, unclear kidnappers, and several other individuals as "unknown gunmen" (Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023). These actors have different objectives, approaches, and operational simulations. Over 8.7 million people in the nation today need essential humanitarian relief due to the actions of non-state armed organizations that target civilian populations and the ensuing security repercussions (Global Center for Responsibility to Protect, 2022). The situation has gotten worse in recent years due to a rise in bandit attacks, which have caused significant relocation throughout the region. Inter-communal violence in northern Nigeria, especially in the northwest states, has been increasing since 2011. Growing violence in farming and herding communities has been attributed to an increase in armed groups and gangs. These armed organizations carry out coordinated attacks that include rape, kidnapping, murder, stealing, pillage, and rustling cattle. In the Northwest, armed banditry caused hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and at least 4,900 deaths between 2018 and 2020 (IOM, 2022).

Public and national security concerns have been raised by the widespread armed banditry and the human security risks it presents in the North-West region of Nigeria, particularly in the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Sokoto, and in the North-Central region in Niger State. To reduce the threat that armed banditry poses to peace and security in the affected states, effective measures are needed given its recurring nature and the multiple layers of crime it involves (Madubuegwu & Abah, 2023). As if to highlight the gravity of this massive menace even further, Rufai (2021) disclosed that over 10,000 armed bandits are active throughout Zamfara state. Between 2011 and 2021, these gangs are estimated to have killed over 12,000 people and taken over 25,000 cattle. About 50,000 people were internally displaced or forced to flee to the neighboring Niger Republic, while over 120 villages were devastated. The government's efforts to curb insurgency and armed banditry in Nigeria, Adedire, Ake, & Olowojolu (2016:70). Thus, since the start of the insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria, the government has implemented several measures to stop Boko Haram's operations. First, there is the deployment of nearly 8,000 troops into affected areas of northern Nigeria and the use of excessive force against rebel groups—all without a clear Military Code of Justice for the operation. For instance, the slaughter and incursion by Nigerian soldiers on Sunday, April 21, 2013, in the Baga community in Borno state... The creation and procurement of more advanced, suitable, and acceptable military gear, as well as the African Union's recent approval and the formation of an extensive international coalition to work with our armed forces, come in second. Third, is the consent granted by international organizations to bordering countries (Chad, Niger, and Cameroon) allowing them to lawfully station military forces on Nigerian territory? The Nigerian military also operates across national borders to track down escaping terrorists and eliminate their sanctuary. The fourth step involves the proclamation of a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe, the three northern states most severely impacted. However, the number of victims in Northern Nigeria has escalated much more due to the lack of a particular Military Code of Justice that would protect civilians and explicitly designate targets. Fifth, the government supports the people and media in providing information on terrorist organizations and their operations.

However, the activities of armed banditry and acts of insurgency in Central Nigeria have continued, and the actions of these groups against citizens remain unabated. It is important to understand that banditry in Nigeria did not just commence, as we can trace it to the pre-civil-war era, following the deterioration of government in some parts of the then old Western Region. The deteriorating situation because of armed banditry led to political violence, crime, and organized insurgency groups taking over certain areas (Odinkalu, 2018). Some bandits were allegedly involved in stealing domestic animals during the country's civil war period. The activities of an armed bandit in Central Nigeria have been worrisome because of the acts perpetrated by them, which include killing their victims as part of their method of operation. It comprises kidnapping, murder, robbery, rape, and cattle rustling (Mustapha, 2019). They also mobilized themselves and attacked citizens and residents via the forests by riding on fast motorcycles both at night and day, shooting at will, and unleashing harm in the societies/communities. The activities of the insurgency group have led to people being rendered homeless, many orphaned children, an increasing number of women becoming widows overnight, and food security has made life unbearable for many citizens in Central Nigeria. One admits that the initial government reaction was to bombard the bandits' hiding places with police and military forces. However, it seems the much-needed

result was not achieved, yielding no significant results. The governor of the state of Niger, Abdulkadir Hassan, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture, attributed the low attendance at the National Trade Fair in May 2019 to potential attendees' fears of armed bandit attacks and kidnapping (Madubuegwu & Abah, 2023). The disposable income of the comparatively affluent households in the area has also declined: in Zamfara, the average number of individuals who could afford to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina dropped from 4,500 in previous years to 1,500 in 2019 (Umar, 2020).

The activities of various militia groups, such as armed bandits and insurgents, have great consequences for governance in Central Nigeria. Due to these parties' actions, GDP is growing slowly, and few domestic and foreign investors are contributing to the economic development of the geopolitical zones. The challenges posed by insecurity in Central Nigeria appear in various phases. Conspicuous among them are the challenges posed by the insurgency group's activities, the increasing socio-economic inequalities, and poverty. Unfortunately, the socio-economic inequalities and increased poverty in Central Nigeria translate to a high level of insecurity in the country and thus pose an undeniable challenge to the development of the region. Another security challenge to nation-building comes from the aspect of institution-building (Onimisi et al., 2017). The institutions of government responsible for the security of the lives and properties of the citizens and residents in Central Nigeria appear to be weak. The institution cannot fully discharge its mandate of securing lives and property, as it itself threatens the peaceful coexistence of citizens.

The issue of persistent insecurity caused by activities of insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria remains a threat to the harmonious and continuous co-existence of Nigeria (Mustapha, 2019). The security situation in the region threatens the fundamental rights of the people. The region's security challenges were further polarized by mutual suspicion (Salawu, 2010). Insurgency and armed banditry appear to be destructive forces in the region's socio-economic development, especially in Central Nigeria. The activities of these groups have damaged the image of Central Nigeria as well as created a great humanitarian disaster. The violent activities of groups often lead to loss of property or infrastructure, death, destruction, and cause fear among the residents and citizenry. Security challenges arising from different groups in Nigeria hinder harmonious relationships within the region and the entire country. This challenge has further heightened tension in the region, fueled by mutual suspicion and fear amongst many ethnic groups. Unfortunately, mutual suspicion and distrust often lead to a violent confrontation in Central Nigeria. The selfish, parochial, non-nationalistic, and unpatriotic activities of these groups have caused Central Nigeria many issues that will take decades to recover from. Security challenges arising from a lack of institutional capacity are another hindrance to socio-economic development in Central Nigeria. The inability of governmental entities to establish a framework that provides an adequate and safe environment for citizens and residents of the region is a concern. Invariably, insecurity in Central Nigeria results from the government's failure to deliver one of the basic social needs of man: the security of lives and property, and it is disturbing (Salawu, 2010). The failure of the failed institution of government to provide the basic security needs of its citizens can be frustrating. Collaborating this position are scholars who argue that the lack of necessities among people in Nigeria has created a pool of frustrated people who are easily ignited by any event and prone to violence (Achumba et al., 2013).

5. Insurgency and armed banditry: understanding the security issues in central Nigeria

Nigeria's security environment is getting more complicated and unpredictable. Recent years have seen the emergence and consolidation of coercive power by several non-state armed groups to terrorize the Nigerian populace. Examples of these groups include criminal gangs, armed bandits, separatist organizations. The Nigerian media often refers to Islamic fundamentalists, unclear kidnappers, and several other individuals as "unknown gunmen" (Ojo, Oyewole, & Aina, 2023). These actors have different objectives, approaches, and operational simulations. Over 8.7 million people in the nation today need essential humanitarian relief due to the actions of non-state armed organizations that target civilian populations and the ensuing security repercussions (Global Center for Responsibility to Protect, 2022). The situation has gotten worse in recent years due to a rise in bandit attacks, which have caused significant relocation throughout the region. Inter-communal violence in northern Nigeria, especially in the northwest states, has been increasing since 2011. Growing violence in farming and herding communities has been attributed to an increase in armed groups and gangs. These armed or-

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6. Insurgency and army banditry in central Nigeria: implications for socio-economic development of the region

Central Nigeria, like most heterogeneous societies, has religious, racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity, which has contributed to continuous repression, violence, and tension in the region (Ojo & Adebayo, 2005). The complexity of Central Nigeria is further reflected in its many ethnic groups, whose citizens subscribe to diverse religious beliefs. Central Nigeria has a cross-cutting, interlocking divide along ethnic and religious lines. Central Nigeria has had its share of insurgency and armed banditry over the years. A look at the activities of insurgency and armed banditry shows that on December 18, 1999, churches were attacked in Ilorin, Kwara state, and looted, and several people, including the priest, were killed. In 1999, Central Nigeria saw an increasing viciousness in the activities of insurgency and armed banditry. There were cases of strict savagery in Jos and Abuja in February and September 2001; Abuja and Jos again in 2006 witnessed severe attacks from the insurgency and armed banditry. The properties and lives of the people were decimated because of the strict brutality of religious extremists in Nigeria between 1999 and 2003, especially in 2014, when many lives were lost in Plateau State.

How the government addresses security in Central Nigeria has thrown up additional security and socio-economic development issues across the country. Administrative lapses, inefficiencies, and poor governance contribute to security issues in the region. The series of damages because of the insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria is remarkably high, and it threatens the cooperative existence of Nigeria. And these insurgent groups and armed bandits have destabilized and threatened the region's peace and safety. The activities of the insurgent group and armed bandits have hampered the region's socio-economic development. The loss in human lives occasioned by the insurgency, the economic, social, and psychological costs on the citizen and resident are unquantifiable, as their act has reduced the commercial activities in the region, while the socio-economic development was adversely undermined, human capital and investment were affected by incessant attacks (Awojobi, 2014). Economic growth, development, and sustenance can only be guaranteed in a secure environment. The insurgency and armed banditry have disrupted the development plans of Central Nigeria and hindered foreign investment. No foreign investor will come to put resources in Central Nigeria with the present security challenges bedeviling the region.

The activities of an insurgent group and armed bandits remain a great threat to the very peaceful coexistence of the region. The sharp increase in herdsmen conflict, kidnappers, armed robbers, and smugglers has devoured the peaceful existence of the citizens and residents of Central Nigeria. The absence of peace in the region creates a feeling of frustration and psychological trauma. The activities of these groups create mental injury and psychological trauma to people in the region. The psychological trauma that the activities of these elements have caused the people cannot be measured. The impact of these groups has disrupted the academic calendars of most regions and states. The activities of these groups do not disrupt the academic calendar of the schools in the region; they have equally led to the looting of educational materials and the vandalization of school buildings. Also, students in Central Nigeria have been psychologically traumatized as a result of the loss of loved ones and fellow students.

The nature of insecurity in Central Nigeria differs from that in other regions. The Boko Haram group attacking most of the Northern geopolitical region, especially the Northeast states, while kidnappers and the activities of the secessionist group are in the South-eastern part of the country, in Niger-Delta militant vandalism and vandalism remains the order of the day, in Central Nigeria insurgency and armed banditry are causing severe damage to the region, and politically motivated killings across the country (Oladiran, 2014). These security challenges come with implications. For example, investors are moving out of the region to neighboring African countries where relative peace exists. Investors are leaving the region because they want to invest where their investment and even their life are not secure (Okonkwo et al, 2015). In Central Nigeria, armed robbery is a persistent issue. The guardian in Central Nigeria, which would have been used to stimulate the region's economic growth and development, is, unfortunately, invested in security to curtail the activities of insurgency and armed banditry. Numerous foreign investors are reluctant to allocate capital in the region due to the actions of these groups. In Central Nigeria, kidnapping—the act of removing a person from their will or from the authority of parents or guardians—has become a prevalent occurrence. Kidnapping also refers to the abduction of someone under duress, typically by force, violence, threats, or intimidation, in a situation where the victim is deprived of their freedom of movement and has no influence over the development and growth of the economy. Armed bandits have made kidnapping a business venture as they make those captures to pay a ransom, while some are sexually abused. Kidnapping in Central Nigeria is widespread and has thus dented the image of the region (Onimisi, 2018; Onimisi, 2014).

Because of the activities of insurgency and armed banditry, poverty is rapidly increasing in Central Nigeria, and the region is also placed poorly on socioeconomic indices, including life expectancy, crime rate, access to water, death rate, poverty rate, and mortality rate (Azazi, 2011). Central Nigeria is recognized as a poor region despite abundant human and natural resources across the states that make up the zone (Azazi, 2011). Insurgency and armed banditry have contributed to the decades-long security issues that have plagued the area, seriously harming its socioeconomic development. It is crucial to remember that in a setting of social and physical instability, Central Nigeria can barely hope to achieve socioeconomic progress. They have also attributed the increasing challenges posed by insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria to the failure of leadership to deliver good governance, ensure equality, secure citizens' welfare, and promote justice. The country's constitution, which provides for citizens' right to life, acknowledges that the government has failed to guarantee these rights. In Central Nigeria, the inability of the government to provide a secure and safe environment free from insurgency and armed banditry, and protect the citizens' lives and properties, as well as the conduct of business and economic activities, has led to resentment and disaffection in the region. The destruction of lives and properties disrupted businesses, and economic activities in Central Nigeria have retarded the economic growth and development of the region. The socio-economic development of Central Nigeria, one of the government's primary objectives, has taken a back seat due to insurgency and armed banditry (Muzan, 2014). The activities of insurgency and armed banditry have destroyed the economic, human, and social capital structure of the region. These groups in Central Nigeria have almost crippled economic activities in the region. The insurgency and armed banditry have led to security crises in different parts of Central Nigeria, destroying existing infrastructure and preventing a peaceful environment needed for the socio-economic development of the region.

7. Policy options

Central Nigeria's quest for peace and development can be achieved through the committed efforts of all stakeholders through various peace-building initiatives, networks, and an effective local security outfit. For

Central Nigeria to ensure comprehensive security of life and property, the citizens and residents, the fight against insurgency and armed banditry should be prioritized. Civil society plays an important role in ensuring the security of Central Nigeria. Civil society can draw the government's and stakeholders' attention to the social menace posed by these groups. Civil society can help create an enabling environment through advocacy. Ethno-religious tolerance is another prominent factor that can help promote security in the environment. Central Nigeria is a highly heterogeneous society with diverse ethnic groups, religious beliefs, and different political and social affiliations. These can help create the secure environment we are looking for. Tolerance among the people of Central Nigeria is the key to upholding security in Nigeria and, in the long run, promotes development in the country.

The provision of employment opportunities and poverty alleviation in Central Nigeria is another way of reducing tension and rising in the zone. A situation where people cannot afford their basic needs like shelter, clothing, and food, and thus, they turn to criminality for survival. Some claim to commit crimes in society to make ends meet; thus, the government should prioritize the welfare and well-being of youth to curb the menace of insecurity in Central Nigeria. Ensuring adequate welfare, equal and proper allocation of wealth, and making the youth a priority will go a long way in reducing the causes of insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria. The reduction in the unfair and unequal allocation and distribution of wealth among the people of Central Nigeria can help reduce social manance in the region. The strict application of rules and policies guiding the owners of light weapons would help reduce the activities of insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria. The governments at all levels in Central Nigeria should intervene more decisively to stem this ugly trend since the proliferation of small arms and light weapons is dangerously becoming a transnational organized crime, thus creating a threat to security and development in the region. Policies on the security of Central Nigeria should be redirected to make it more difficult to access small arms and light weapons in the country.

The government of Central Nigeria should also address the herders-farmers conflicts that have degenerated into a serious crisis for the region. Region. Armed banditry in Central Nigeria requires serious attention because these groups' activities affect the production of goods and services and the nation's development. The region, which is home to Nigeria's food basket, remains impoverished due to the neglect of security challenges. Education is an important tool for fighting insecurity. The importance of education to national security cannot be overemphasized, as it helps achieve the significant task of ensuring the security of life and property when used effectively and in the right direction. Educating youth and vulnerable people in moral ethics, for example, by fostering trustworthiness, duty, and regard for others, would be an effective tool against insecurity. Sound educational training is an important starting point for educating young minds against social menace. Providing sound educational policies and the provision of quality education will go a long way in fighting insecurity and reducing the incidence of armed banditry in Central Nigeria. Including key stakeholders such as traditional rulers, leaders of all religious organizations, community leaders, youth-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society in advocacy and enlightening the public about the danger of involvement in insurgency and armed banditry, and the implications of these groups would be helpful in the fight against this social menace. These key stakeholders can also engage those perpetrating this mayhem in Central Nigeria. The leaders of religious organizations should be encouraged and engaged to reach out to the people by organizing events that focus on moral issues. *The National Security Strategy (2019), the Small Arms and Light Weapons Control Policy, and regional initiatives such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) documents should be consulted and used to enhance the security of central Nigeria and the country in general.*

8. Conclusion

Only the living can develop a nation. Hence, the security of the lives and property of citizens and residents can help promote the nation's socio-economic development. A secure Central Nigeria ensures peace, co-existence, unity, and infrastructural development. Insurgency and armed banditry hinder the region's socio-economic development. There is a need for serious action toward curbing this menace. The activities of the insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria fuel disunity and fear of the unknown; thus, there is a need for the government to nip it in the bud. Insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria are a major threat to socio-development and nation-building. Thus, fixing the insurgency and armed banditry would promote meaningful social, cultural, economic, and political development in Central Nigeria. Fostering a responsible and transparent approach in dealing with it is a panacea for solving the challenges of insurgency and armed

banditry in Central Nigeria. To accelerate the region's socio-economic development, the government and relevant stakeholders should pursue advocacy for ethnic and political tolerance. Also, all the levels of government in Central Nigeria should create the needed opportunities for the youth, as this will reduce youth restiveness and poverty. Finally, good governance is a panacea for insurgency and armed banditry in Central Nigeria, thus paving the way for sustained socio-economic development.

9. References

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