

The patterns of banditry in a specific geopolitical region in Nigeria

PAUL A. IRABOR

ORCID: 0000-0002-1084-7921

Department of Political Science,

Olabisi Onabanjo University,

Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State

e-mail: paul.irabor@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

Keywords

banditry, armed group, herder-farmer conflict, herdsmen militancy, geopolitical region

Abstract

This paper aims to prove that banditry exists across Nigeria's geopolitical regions, evolving into distinct characteristics that define the security situations in these regions. The objectives of the study are to examine the patterns of banditry in Nigeria's geopolitical regions and to suggest methods to curb it. Relying on secondary data and systematic analysis, the study's findings demonstrate the various ways that banditry has taken shape throughout Nigeria's geopolitical regions. These include insurgency in the North-East, ethnic/religious conflict between Hausa farmers and Fulani herders in the North-Central, herder-farmer conflict, criminal gang violence and insurgency in the North-West, separatist violence and herder-farmer conflict in the South-East, militancy, and herder-farmer conflict in the South-South as well as urban crime and herder-farmer conflict in the South-West. The study suggests regional security measures through decentralisation of the security system to control the complex nature of banditry in Nigeria.

Introduction

Since Nigeria's democratic government was reinstated in 1999, armed groups have posed a serious threat to the state's corporate existence. In northern Nigeria, insecurity resulting from banditry has been more prominent, in property destruction, human displacement, and fatalities. For instance, the Boko Haram terrorist group in the North-East region has continued to demonstrate a high degree of violence through killings and kidnappings to establish a parallel government based on Islamic doctrines (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020; Alimba & Salihu, 2020). Moreover, conflict over land and grazing resources between farmers and herdsmen in the North-Central and North-West regions has escalated into the formation of armed groups, resulting in more deaths and displacement of people than the Boko Haram assaults in 2017 and 2018 combined (Ameh, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2020). Yet, this paper aims to prove that banditry has spread to other parts of the country, evolving into peculiarities that define the security situation in these regions.

In the southern region of Nigeria, armed groups of herdsmen and farmers have also emerged as a result of the movement of the Fulani herders from the northern to the southern region in search of grazing resources to feed cattle (Egwu, 2016; Atoyebi & Dada, 2019; Onanuga, 2019). Similarly, agitation for secession by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-East region and the problem of resource control in the South-South region have also led to the emergence of armed gangs and violent actions against the government (Uwerunonye, 2017; Abada, Omeh, & Okoye, 2020). The operations of these armed groups are crucial to investigating the current trends of banditry across the geopolitical regions of Nigeria.

The proliferation of armed herdsmen in rural areas has been the focus of the majority of research on banditry in Nigeria (Olaniyan, 2017; Ameh, 2018; Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). Shalangwa (2013), Mobolaji and Alabi (2017), and Murtala (2018) are a few more studies that looked into the causes and effects of banditry in Nigeria's border communities. However, not much attention has been paid to examining the different patterns of banditry across the geopolitical regions in Nigeria. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to examine the patterns of banditry in Nigeria's geopolitical regions and suggest methods to curb it. The study relied on secondary data, while systematic analysis was used to analyse the data. There are six sections in this study. The first section is the introductory aspect of the study in which the problem statement is explained. The second section is the literature review, which comprises conceptual explanations of major terms and an empirical review of related works. The third part is the theoretical underpinning of the study, which situates the work in its proper framework, while the fourth aspect discusses the research method used for the study. The fifth part is based on findings and discussion, while the sixth aspect is the conclusion of the study.

Literature review

Banditry

The origin of banditry has transformed from a primitive form of social protest in traditional societies to a modernized form of organized crime. Classical works, including those of Hobbsbawm (1959, 1969) and Blok (1972), revealed that banditry emerged as a traditional method of robbing the rich for the benefit of the poor. Viewed from this perspective, banditry can be described as a form of conflict against peasant oppression and hardship in society. Tiedemann (1982) and Mburu (1999) linked the golden age of banditry to the advent of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution during the 17th and 18th centuries, when agricultural societies became industrialized. The modern equivalent of traditional banditry became associated with urban robbery, burglary, and kidnapping.

Thus, Wagner (2007) defined banditry as a predatory action driven by the intent to deprive people of property through the threat or actual use of force. Shalangwa (2013) referred to banditry as the practice of raiding and assaulting victims with the use of weapons by members of organized gangs. The themes and contexts of these definitions equate banditry with criminal activities deliberately designed and carried out by organized armed groups. In the context of this study, banditry is defined as the actions of armed groups that threaten the existence of the government. In

other words, it refers to violent activities carried out by armed or militia groups against the public and the government. The major incidents of banditry in Nigeria include cattle rustling, armed robbery, and kidnapping for ransom (Shalangwa, 2013; European Asylum Support Office, 2018).

This definition has expanded the concept of banditry in Nigeria to include violent actions by ideological and non-ideological armed groups. For instance, the ideology of the Boko Haram group is to establish a Sharia government based on strict Islamic principles, headed by a religious leader, while non-ideological groups such as illicit bands operating in the North-West region have capitalized on the lingering herder-farmer conflicts to engage in illicit enterprises, including kidnapping, cattle rustling, and robbery (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Onanuga, 2019).

Herder-farmer conflict

There has been a significant shift in banditry in Nigeria, with herder-farmer conflicts becoming more intense and leading to militancy among herdsman. Herder-farmer conflict refers to the regular disputes that occur between pastoral livestock breeders and farmers over grazing resources to feed cattle and land for farming, leading to the creation of militias. It is also described as the struggle over land and forage resources between farmers and herders, leading to the use of weapons by both sides (Onah, 2010; Olaniyan & Aliyu, 2016). Northern Nigeria has been the epicentre of herder-farmer conflict, predominantly in Benue and Plateau states, as well as Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina states. However, new events have shown that southern Nigerian states like Oyo, Enugu, and Ekiti are now affected by the crisis (Atoyebi & Dada, 2019). The intensity and spread of the crises in Nigeria have been attributed to by several factors, such as climate conditions, high population growth, and environmental degradation, which have affected both farmers and herders in their quest to sustain their economic activities (Abubakar, 2019; Atoyebi & Dada, 2019).

Militant herdsman carried out more attacks and killed more people than the Boko Haram insurgent group in 2016 and 2017, respectively (Global Terrorism Index, 2017). Again, the conflict between herders and farmers claimed the lives of over 1,300 people between January and June 2018, which was more than the deaths recorded from the Boko Haram insurgency in the year under review (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Onanuga, 2019). According to Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin (2018) and the European Asylum Support Office (2018), the Fulani ethnic agenda for expansionism in Nigeria was perceived to be reflected in the ethnic colouration of the attacks by armed herdsman against other ethnic groups.

Empirical review: Banditry and herdsman militancy in Nigeria

Empirical studies about banditry and herdsman militancy in Nigeria are not new in the literature. Through qualitative interviews elicited from key respondents in three North-Central states, including Kaduna, Plateau, and Nasarawa, Egwu (2016) examined the major causes and incidents of cattle rustling and banditry in northern Nigeria. Findings from the work identified scarcity of land and water resources, ineffectual security system, desertion of designated cattle routes, and

the failure of government grazing reserves policy as the causes of cattle rustling and banditry in northern Nigeria. Findings also revealed the major incidents of rural banditry in northern Nigeria, which includes kidnapping, cattle rustling, and pilfering. The study recommended the need for an effective grazing reserves policy, the provision of employment opportunities, and the creation of an enabling environment for business to thrive to curb cattle rustling and rural banditry in Nigeria.

A related study that focused on rural violence in North-Central Nigeria was conducted by Amadi, Igwe, and Ukachikara (2019). The primary source of data was structured interviews administered to key respondents selected from two states in North-Central Nigeria, including Nassarawa and Benue states. Results from the research showed that violence between herders and farmers in North-Central Nigeria propels the logic for cattle rustling in a trans-locational and transnational dimension by international criminal syndicates. The effects of these crimes manifested in the deaths of rural farmers, the destruction of rural livelihoods, and a shortage of food production. The recommendation from the study favours the deployment of mobile security personnel in rural areas to check the violent confrontation between farmers and herdsman.

Shalangwa (2013) investigated the origins, characteristics, and effects of banditry in border towns in Nigeria's Adamawa State. Quantitative and qualitative sources were used to elicit information from community leaders, police officers and victims of bandits. According to the study, cross-border banditry in Adamawa State was facilitated by the inflow of rebels from neighbouring countries like Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, youth unemployment, and easy access to weapons. Findings on the nature of banditry indicated that bandits attack people from the forest and mountains along highways so as to escape after operations. People's lives in border communities are negatively impacted by banditry, ranging from the disruption of commercial activities to inadequate supply and delivery of social amenities. The study identified the challenges faced by the security agencies in curbing banditry at the border to include poor intelligence gathering, inadequate funding, training, and equipment. Suggestions from the study draw on the holistic approach of policing, involving inter-state security cooperation towards the prevention and control of banditry in border communities.

Another study on the resilience of rural banditry in the Nimbo community, Enugu State, was conducted by Uche and Iwuamadi (2018). The study examined the causes of rural violence by armed herdsman in the Nimbo community and suggested ways to curb the menace. Relying on qualitative research methods through interviews with key respondents, the study claimed that rural governance shortfalls, ineffective security mechanisms, and conflict among the local vigilante groups bred criminal activities in the Nimbo community, Enugu State. The study proposed the need for the government to prioritize rural security, enhance intelligence gathering, and early response to insecurity signals in order to curb violence between herders and farmers.

Nigerian herdsman militancy was studied by Okoli and Ogayi (2018) for its type and frequency. Using secondary data that was systematically analyzed, the study posited that the emergence of herdsman militancy in Nigeria offers a fresh approach to the herder-farmer crisis, with the use of more sophisticated weapons by armed herdsman against farmers and host communities. Given the dire humanitarian consequences of herdsman militancy (loss of lives and property, displacement

of farmers from their productive bases), the study makes a case for a pragmatic policy (such as the prohibition of open grazing) capable of mitigating factors that trigger herdsmen militancy.

Murtala (2018) studied the phenomenon of cattle rustling and armed banditry along Nigeria-Niger borderlands and analyzed the effect on the relationship between the two countries. Employing a desk review method of research, the study revealed that the porous border in Nigeria permitted cross-border cattle rustling, which contributed to increased insecurity in Nigeria's borderlands. It was recommended that security agents of both countries (Nigeria and Niger) should synergize and establish a cross-border security patrol team that could regularly conduct reconnaissance the borderlands. On the other hand, Jumba (2019) conducted a study on the dynamics and menace of cattle rustling in the Lake Chad Basin Area, Northern Nigeria. A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method was adopted to elicit information from victims of cattle rustling, local vigilante groups, and the police. Results from the study showed that strong connections in terms of culture, language, and religion engendered free movement of rebel groups as well as the flow of illicit SALW in Nigeria.

Theoretical underpinning: Relative Deprivation Theory

The study is situated within Relative Deprivation Theory. Relative Deprivation Theory provided the means for assessing conflict and violent crime as the product of social exclusion faced by dissatisfied groups, resulting in the rise of armed groups in Nigeria. Gurr (1970) is one of the scholars who propounded the Relative Deprivation Theory in his thesis, *Why Men Rebel*. Gurr (1970) believed that the reason for violence in any society is the outcome of difficulties an individual encounters in their attempts to achieve success, which lead them to relative deprivation. The expected outcome of this condition is an uprising or protest to challenge the basis of the deficit in resources. It was opined that frustration does not always lead to violent behavior, but when it becomes intense and widespread, it frequently leads to outrage and, at last, savagery (Gurr, 1970; Gurr and Duvall, 1973).

Gurr (1970) explained this position through the concept of relative deprivation. He opined that if there is any significant difference between an individual's sense of value-expectancy and their value situation, frustration and dissatisfaction will occur. Value-expectancy connotes the resources individuals assume they are eligible to have, while value situation refers to the level of resources and facilities that have been achieved. This disparity results in relative deprivation, leading to dissatisfaction and aggravation that can easily lead to political instability and revolution. It was believed that dissimilar desires lead to feelings of disaffection, while unfulfilled potentials produce feelings of deficiency (Gurr, 1970). While disaffection may largely be tolerable, individuals are motivated by resource and emotional deficits to resort to remedies through any available method if prolonged deprivation persists.

Relative Deprivation Theory justifies the proliferation of armed groups along with socio-economic and ethno-religious differences in the country. Nigeria is a federal state with differences in languages and culture; it is passable to propose that dissimilar social values and vices will occur,

which validates the dynamics of banditry in Nigeria and the need for the government to solve the underlying causes of social exclusion, without which banditry may persist. Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 was first challenged by protests in the Niger Delta region against oil spillage and environmental degradation from oil production. The intensity of this protest resulted in the formation of various armed groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDV), among others, who engaged in the kidnapping of expatriates and domestic workers in the oil industry to further their agitations (Ebienfa, 2011; Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2017).

From another angle, prolonged resource conflict between herders and farmers in their attempt to source arable fields and land for herding and farming has been acknowledged as the primary source of banditry in Nigeria (International Crisis Group, 2017; Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018). While environmental issues such as climate alteration and desertification, population expansion, infringement on designated grazing areas, obstruction of grazing paths, modifications in crop farming, and pastoralism generated conflicts between herders and farmers, in the absence of more proficient techniques and solutions by the government, violent conflict became the byproduct of resource competition between the two groups (Shehu, Victor & Binta, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2017).

Research method

The literature survey method was used to gather data for the study. Pertinent sources on banditry, herder-farmer conflict, and herdsman militancy in Nigeria were carefully chosen for analysis. The purpose of employing secondary data was to sample the perspectives of writers and gather important information about the various occurrences of banditry in Nigeria. The data were presented using a systematic analysis.

Findings and discussions

The conditions that give rise to insecurity in any society tend to reflect the socio-political factors that form the society. Nigeria's 36-state structure and the FCT are stratified into six geopolitical regions, including the North-East, North-Central, North-West, South-South, South-East, and South-West. The security challenges in these regions have taken on different dimensions. As such, a review of these security challenges is important to reveal the pattern of banditry and the appropriate government action to reduce the menace in Nigeria.

The patterns of banditry across Nigeria's geopolitical regions

North-East region

The North-East region comprises six states, including Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. The region shares international boundaries with countries in the Lake Chad region, including Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. The pattern of banditry in the region is related to the

insurgency by the Boko Haram group. Although Boko Haram is driven by an ideological motive to overthrow the government, the activities undertaken to achieve the aim are similar to acts of banditry, such as kidnapping and pilfering (Cook, 2014; Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020). The goal of the Boko Haram group is to establish a Sharia government based on strict Islamic principles, to be headed by a religious leader (Alimba & Salihu, 2020; Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020). It was believed that the creation of an Islamic state would serve as a replica of good governance.

By condemning corruption in government, the Boko Haram group was attractive to underprivileged and unemployed Muslim youth across the North-East and neighbouring populations in the Lake Chad region (Ismail, 2015; Habila, 2016). Boko Haram employed violent tactics, including suicide bombings, and kidnappings to further the cause of insurgency. The armed group was responsible for the bombing of the United Nations building and police headquarters in the FCT, Abuja, in 2011 (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020; Alimba & Salihu, 2020). It was also responsible for the kidnappings of 276 secondary schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, and 110 female students in Dapchi, Yobe State (Habila, 2016; Zenn, 2018). At the height of the Boko Haram assault in 2015, it gained control of 11 out of the 27 local government areas in Borno State (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja, 2017; Zenn, 2018). The Boko Haram armed group was responsible for nearly 300,000 deaths and 2.3 million internally displaced persons in Nigeria (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020; Ojo, 2020).

North-Central region

The North-Central region comprises six states – Niger, Kogi, Plateau, Benue, Kwara, and Nasarawa – and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The region is divided in terms of ethnic groups, with over 230 tribes such as the Hausa, Tiv, Berom, and Fulani, etc. Owing to its wide ethnic diversity, the form of banditry in the region gives credence to ethnic/religious conflict, particularly between Hausa farmers and Fulani herders, over access to arable land for farming and grazing resources to feed cattle (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2021). Although historical dealings between herders and farmers in the region showed harmonious and reciprocal relationships between them, the relationship became strained with time owing to changes in climate conditions, the intrusion of cattle on farmland, deforestation, and encroachment on grazing routes (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; Amadi et al., 2019; Conflict Armament Research, 2020).

Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin (2018) revealed that the region has been affected by the reduced span of the rainy period, culminating in the lessening of the water springs and increasing desertification of the forest environments, which have contracted grassland for farming and cattle rearing. The growth of cities and population expansion contributed to deforestation in response to urban development and the increasing extension of farmland, leading to the fading away of grazing reserves, which formerly served the purpose for the Fulani herders to feed their cattle (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Conflict Armament Research, 2020). Furthermore, an open grazing law was promulgated in Benue State in 2017, prohibiting free-range grazing of cows (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution Abuja, 2017; Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018). This policy was,

however, opposed by the Fulani herders against their age-long pastoral culture of open grazing (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution Abuja, 2017; Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018).

Herder-farmer conflict escalated in 2011 in the North-Central region, developing from unplanned retaliation to organized assaults, ranging from destruction of farmland and crops to robbery of farm produce, and wanton killings (Amadi et al., 2019; Conflict Armament Research, 2020). Although both camps (herders and farmers) formed militias and vigilante groups to protect their interests, armed herdsmen have carried out more violent assaults, causing more deaths and displacement of other ethnic groups nationalities in the region (Conflict Armament Research, 2020; European Asylum Support Office, 2021). The Global Terrorism Index (2017) reported that armed herdsmen undertook more attacks and were responsible for more deaths than Boko Haram in 2017 and 2018, respectively. In Benue State, which remains the epicenter of the conflict, about 1,878 people lost their lives to assaults by the Fulani militias in 2020 alone (Conflict Armament Research, 2020). The ethnic colouration of the assaults by armed herdsmen against other groups in the region resonated with the perception of the Fulani ethnic agenda towards expansionism in the region (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; European Asylum Support Office, 2018).

North-West region

Nigeria's North-West region covers seven states, which are Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara. The pattern of banditry in the region is multifaceted, ranging from herder-farmer conflict, vigilante and criminal gang violence, and infiltration by the ISWAP and Ansaru insurgent groups (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Egbejule, 2018; Murtala, 2021). Like the situation in the North-Central region, the basis of herder-farmer conflict in the North-West zone is not exclusive from unresolved rivalry between Fulani herders and Hausa farmers relating to the shortage of land for grazing cattle and farming (Murtala, 2018; Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). A combination of factors, including weather conditions, high population growth, environmental degradation, and encroachment on grazing routes, instigated competition over land and grazing resources.

In another perspective, herder-farmer conflict was heightened by government policies that allocated land to farmers to the detriment of herders. In Zamfara State, a large expanse of forest and grazing reserves in the Maru and Zurmi local government areas was cleared by the state government for mechanized farming to boost food productivity in the state (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2020). This policy unsettled the survival of the Fulani settlements, restricted the availability of pasture for livestock, and obstructing of cattle grazing paths, resulting in increased herder intrusion on farms (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2020).

The volunteer guards were prominent vigilante groups formed by Hausa farmers to protect themselves against herdsmen attacks and grazing of cattle on farmland (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Murtala, 2018). In a similar move, Fulani herders also formed a militia group called the Gun Owners to defend their interests and retaliate against vigilante punitive punishment (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Murtala, 2018). Although both camps have been involved

in assaults against each other, armed herdsmen have carried out more violent assaults, causing more deaths and displacement of people in the region (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2019; Murtala, 2021). Between 2011 and 2019, statistics by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2019) revealed that about 8,000 people were killed and nearly 210,354 people were displaced by the Fulani militias in the North-West region, mainly Zamfara State.

Not related to herder-farmer conflict are the activities of criminal gangs. Encompassing a fusion of various nationalities, criminal gangs in the North-West region operate as a decentralized armed groups that are largely interested in criminal enterprises such as cattle rustling and kidnapping (Murtala, 2018; Murtala, 2021). Murtala (2021) believed that the emergence of such criminal gangs was not unconnected to the proliferation of arms and the influx of rebels from the Sahel to the region. It was revealed that, aside from the 84 approved borders in the region, there are nearly 1,400 illegal routes where arms and rebel groups enter the country from Mali, Sudan, the Niger Republic, and Chad (Ukwayi & Anam, 2019; Murtala, 2021). In another dimension, Egbejule (2018) and the International Crisis Group (2020) linked the emergence of criminal gangs in the region to the unregulated exploration of gold resources, particularly in Zamfara State. With the increase in the price of gold globally in 2009, large numbers of young men were attracted to the exploration of gold in Zamfara State (Egbejule, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2020). The exploration of gold resources in Zamfara State also attracted traders and explorers from Burkina Faso, China, and Mali, leading to a concealed economy of dealers not only in gold resources but also in drugs and arms (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Murtala, 2021).

South-South region

The South-South region is made up of six states, including Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. The reason for banditry in the region is not exclusive to the crises over oil spillage, environmental degradation, and exclusion of the inhabitants from the vast petroleum resources in the region (Nseabasi, 2010; Adisa, 2020). Since the discovery of petroleum in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, in 1956, the Nigerian economy has shifted from agriculture to the petroleum industry, which accounted for about 90% of the government's exports and foreign exchange earnings (Nseabasi, 2010; Mukwuzi & Umeh, 2017). The exploration of oil by multinational companies in the region brought negative consequences, such as oil spillage and environmental degradation, leading to the destruction of fishing and farming activities, which serve as means of livelihood for the people in the region (Nseabasi, 2010; Adisa, 2020).

The study conducted by the World Bank (2019) revealed that almost 60% of the Niger Delta people live below the poverty line, making the region one of the poorest parts of the world. Suffering amid plenty, movements such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), were initially formed to protest against economic marginalization and environmental degradation (Nseabasi, 2010; Mukwuzi & Umeh, 2017). One notable protest against the government and oil companies was carried out by the MOSOP in 1992, leading to the arrest and death by hanging of the 'Ogoni Nine' activists by the government (Nseabasi, 2010; Bassey, 2012).

After the Restoration of to democratic rule in 1999, as early as the year 2000, violent conflict against the government and the multinational oil industry was resuscitated in the region. Armed groups, including the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, and Niger Delta Avengers, among others, were formed to further the cause of marginalization and ecological destruction (Ngwama, 2014; Mukwuzi & Umeh, 2017). Armed groups engaged in the kidnapping of oil expatriates and workers, pipeline vandalism, as well as oil bunkering, contributing greatly to insecurity in the region (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution Abuja, 2017; Adisa, 2020). As the crisis in the Niger Delta region worsened, the kidnapping of expatriates and workers in the oil industry for ransom became enterprising for the armed groups much more than a device for political struggle (Bassey, 2012; European Asylum Support Office, 2018). Despite the 2009 Federal Government Amnesty Programme leading to arms submission by armed groups, violent crime continued unabated in the region, with Rivers, Delta, and Edo states topping the list of kidnapping rates in the 2017 (Ezemenaka, 2018; European Asylum Support Office, 2018).

Another contemporary pattern of banditry in the region relates to the herder-farmer conflict. This problem arises due to some conditions in northern Nigeria which necessitates the movement of herders to the southern part of Nigeria. One such condition is poor grazing feed in the north during the dry season. Since the vegetation in the north is largely savannah, it suffers from a shortage of arable fields during the dry season, which is not conducive to feeding cattle. The insecurity situation in the north, ranging from herder-farmer conflict to Boko Haram insurgency, also compels herders to leave their abodes to the south where herding can be more conducive (Ofuoku & Isife, 2010; Mukwuzi & Umeh, 2017). Therefore, the same problems of encroachment on farmland and destruction of crops by cattle, shortage of land and grazing resources, and defecation by cattle on streams and waterways, give credence to intense competition and hostile relations between the farmers and host communities against herders. Although both groups (Fulani herders and farmers/natives allied armed groups) have been involved in conflict against each other, armed herdsmen have conducted more assaults against farmers and indigenes, including those of Ewu community, Edo state; Onocha-Olona and Ubulu-Uku, communities Delta State; and Afam-Uku community, Rivers State, amongst others (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Chilwa & Chilwa, 2020; Olayinka, 2020).

South-East region

Nigeria's South-East region comprises five states, including Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The region largely consists of the Igbo ethnic group, which is one of the major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. The basis of banditry in the region is related to separatist violence arising from the political and economic exclusion of the people from the mainstream of the country (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Olisah, 2021). For instance, the creation of states and local government areas in line with the geopolitical configuration in Nigeria was met with a skewed figure to the detriment of the South-East states (five states) as against other regions (with more than five states), which also affects federal government allocation to the region (Adangor, 2017; Njoku &

Ogugbuaja, 2021). Uchime (2018) also found that appointments and positions in the federal government, particularly during the Buhari Administration (2015-2023), did not exhibit the federal nature of the country, but were tilted towards other regions to the detriment of the South-East region.

Thus, for a region that has undergone a separatist war against the Nigerian state during the civil war (1967-1970), it is not in doubt that separatist agitation will resonate, particularly when the conditions that initially led to the separatist war are not addressed. Separatist agitation played out in 1999 with the emergence of various pro-Biafra groups, including the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and the IPOB (Uchime, 2018; Daly, 2020). Among these groups, the IPOB has enjoyed mass appeal and the participation of the Igbo ethnic group (Daly, 2020; Olisah, 2021). Through its militant wing (the Eastern Security Network), the IPOB has consistently directed assaults against government institutions and agents, including military personnel in Enugu and Anambra states, correctional buildings in Anambra and Imo states, and the Independent National Electoral Commission complex in Anambra, Enugu, and Imo states (Njoku & Ogugbuaja, 2021; Olisah, 2021). In the same vein, the Nigerian government also ordered military operations against IPOB members, including those of Orlu, and Oru in Imo State, and Ohafia in Abia State, leading to the deaths of IPOB members and civilians (Uchime, 2018; European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Olisah, 2021).

Banditry in the region also manifested in herders and farmers/natives conflict, resulting from the migration of Fulani herders to the southern part of the country. One factor that facilitated the movement of herders from the north towards the south is the vegetation in the north, which suffers from a shortage of arable fields during the dry season, which is not conducive to feeding cattle (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2020). Another factor relates to insecurity in the region, ranging from herder-farmer conflict to insurgency (Ofuoku & Isife, 2010; International Crisis Group, 2017). However, the movement of Fulani herders from the north to the south was met with conflict by farmers and host communities over the same problems of encroachment on farmland and destruction of crops by cattle, shortage of land and grazing resources, and defecation by cattle on streams and waterways (Kwaja and Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2017). Armed herdsmen have conducted more assaults against farmers and indigenes, including those of Nimbo and Ohaji-Egbema, Enugu State; Ozuitem and Ndi Okereke Abam, Abia State; Umuawa-Ibu, Imo State; Ogbaru and Ihiala, Anambra State, amongst others (Ameh, 2018; Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2017).

South-West region

The South-West region covers six states, comprising Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, and Ondo. The region is largely dominated by the Yoruba ethnic group, making up 15.5% of the ethnic groups in Nigeria. Compared with the other geopolitical regions in Nigeria, the region is considered relatively peaceful, but not without its security challenges, particularly those related to urban violence as well as herder-farmer conflict (European Asylum Support Office, 2018; Institute for Peace and

Conflict Resolution Abuja, 2017). Urban violence in the region is connected to the consequences of city development, population density, and economic inequalities between the rich and the poor, which spur anti-social behavior and an increased tendency for crime (Ayoola, Adeyemi & Jabaru, 2015; Kunnuji, 2016). With insufficient social services, law enforcement capabilities, and an increasing rate of unemployed youths, the outcome of a disorganized urban city led to the development of some shabby and slum environments, which provided anonymity for criminal gangs who engaged in robbery, burglary, and car theft (Arinze, 2010; Kunnuji, 2016). Analysis of crime statistics by the National Bureau of Statistics (2018) revealed that Lagos State had the highest percentage of cases of armed robbery in Nigeria in 2017 and 2018.

The region also experienced insecurity relating to herder-farmer/native conflict resulting from the migration of Fulani herders from the North to the South owing to poor vegetation and insecurity in the region (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution Abuja, 2017; Chilwa & Chilwa, 2020). The movement of Fulani herders from the North to the South was met with conflict against farmers and host communities over encroachment on farmland and destruction of crops by cattle, shortage of land and grazing resources, and defecation by cattle on streams and waterways (International Crisis Group, 2017; Ogundairo & Ijimakinwa, 2021). Armed herdsmen have conducted more assaults against farmers and indigenes, including those of Igoba, Ajowa, and Ijugbere communities, Ondo State; Irele-Ekiti, Ikole-Ekiti, and Orin-Ekiti, Ekiti State; Igangan, Oyo State, amongst others (Ajayi & Umoru, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2017; Ogundairo & Ijimakinwa, 2021).

Method to curb the patterns of banditry in Nigeria's geopolitical region

Nonetheless, despite the strategies employed by the government to curb banditry in Nigeria, including deployment of security operatives to conflict areas, increased funding for the military for the purchase of equipment, hardware, training, and other logistics, implementation of the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) and the banning of open grazing system as a remedy to herder-farmer-conflict, it has continued unabated (Kura, 2017; Umahi, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2021). The following suggestions are put forward as solutions to curb banditry in Nigeria. The Nigerian Constitution centralized the security architecture under the President. Among other powers granted to the President, Section 7(1) emphasizes that the control and administration of the police and other security institutions fall within the exclusive lists of the federal government (Nigerian Constitution, 1999). While the Constitution vested the executive powers of the states in the Governors, it, however, restricted them from meddling with the powers of the federal government, including control of security agencies and operational use of force in the state.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country that comprises many ethnic groups and languages. In the same vein, insecurity issues are varied in Nigeria to such an extent the current method of centralized policing may not be feasible for addressing complex security challenges and ensuring effective policing in the country. Further justifying the need for state security outfits, Nabhon and Aghedo (2014) identified the problems confronting the security system to include a shortage of personnel

to cover the entire country and the inability of the personnel to understand the geographical terrain and language of the people they are posted to secure. Okaiyeto (2021) also found that the centralisation of security power in the federal government exposed the low capacity and performance of the security personnel to effectively provide security in rural areas due to inadequate intelligence gathering, language barriers, and poor road networks, such that the security agencies have become estranged and uninformed in communities they were meant to secure. To this extent, Ugbedeajo (2023) found that the state and local governments, being closer to the people, are in the best position to provide security in their space and to deal with the peculiarities of insecurity across states in Nigeria. Therefore, decentralisation of security powers and functions is suggested as a method to cope with the diversity of banditry in Nigeria.

Conclusion

According to the study, banditry has taken on a new form throughout the country's geopolitical regions and developed into distinct features that characterise the security environment in the regions. These include insurgency in the North-East, ethnic/religious conflict between Hausa farmers and Fulani herders in the North-Central, herder-farmer conflict, criminal gang violence, and insurgency in the North-West, separatist violence and herder-farmer conflict in the South-East, militancy, and herder-farmer conflict in the South-South, as well as urban crime and herder-farmer conflict in the South-West. According to the general consensus among the study's academics, decentralisation of security authority is necessary to address the unique security challenges faced by each of Nigeria's states and enable the government to effectively combat banditry in the country.

Data Availability Statement: The data can be accessed, and they are sourced from textbooks, journals, and internet materials.

Competing Interest Declaration: The author hereby declares that there is no competing interest in the article.

Ethical Statement: The author declares that the article is original and has not been published or sent to any other journal outlet.

Funding Declaration: There is no funding associated with this article.

Author Contribution: Paul IRABOR is the only author of this research. He developed the topic and wrote the body of the article, including the abstract, introduction, conceptual and empirical review, theoretical framework, methodology, findings of the study, and conclusion.

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Citation

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