

Armed Banditry and Mass School Abductions in Northern Nigeria: Implications for National Security

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Abstract

Security threats in Nigeria, due to activities of armed bandits/extremist such as kidnapping school children for ransom is one of the major prevalent insecurity issues that threaten to collapse government structures in the country. Nigeria is currently groaning under the yoke of the jihadist/Islamic movement, secessionist's movement and all manners of criminalities. The recent spate of abductions and mass kidnapping of school children represents one of the existential threats to the future of education in northern Nigeria. The problems have provoked serious concerns across the nation, has called for urgent and holistic resolution. It has continued to be precarious, volatile and highly unpredictable, therefore creating untold fear on the people in the region; exacerbate the close down of many schools, food crisis situation, sexual molestation/slavery, and increasing wave of Internally Displaced Persons. Government's response to the challenges has generally been ineffectual, uncoordinated and poorly executed. This paper, therefore, examines the mainstream of armed banditry, hostage taking/kidnapping in northern schools and their security threats to Nigeria. This paper anchored on "Failed state theory" and data were sourced through secondary means and analyzed qualitatively. The paper revealed that lack of education, mass illiteracy and lack of employment opportunities are among the root causes of the criminalities, banditry, and terrorism in northern Nigeria. Hence, government cannot be passive about this security challenge. It is obviously clear that government has failed in her duty to provide basic needs and has

also failed to defend and protect her people. Therefore, government should address the root causes of insecurity in the northern Nigeria including overhauling the security architecture system among other policies geared towards eliminating structural imbalance in the region.

Key words: Armed banditry; Kidnapping; Abductions; Security threat; Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

No nation, be it developed or not, is totally free from the dangers of insecurity. Consequently, each country adopts its own system of government and constitution for the benefits of her citizens mostly as it relates to protection of life and property. By so doing, ensuring their safety via laws and state-based institutions and agencies- the judiciary, police, military, prisons, immigration and other related agencies such as human rights organizations are fully funded and equipped with competent personnel (Daudu, 2019, p.260).

But this has not been in the case of Nigeria in recent time. Security threats in Nigeria owing to activities of armed bandits/extremist, kidnapping school children for ransom has remain some of the major prevalent insecurity issues threatening to collapse government structures in the country. The country is currently creaking under the yoke of the jihadist/Islamic movement, secessionist's movement, armed robbers, ritualist, and all manners of criminalities. The first known abduction of school children in Nigeria took place in 2014, when 276 girls were taken from their school dormitory in Government Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria. Several years

later, more than 100 of the girls remain missing and a recent report estimates that 40 have died. This follows the mass students' abduction in Dapchi, Yobe State, and again in 2020, when suspected gunmen attacked the government Boy Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina State and abducted over 300 students (Ojelu, 2021). There were two cases of abductions which involves 27 students and 15 others both in Kagara in Niger State. Few days later, 317 female students at Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara State were abducted. In a similar event, 150 schools children of Salihu Tanko Islamic School and another 39 students of Federal College of Forestry were abducted by armed bandits (Ojelu, 2021). In case of Bethel Baptist High School, Kaduna State over 140 students was reportedly abducted including undisclosed or unreported schools abduction in northern region. These armed groups have continuously attacked school children in the region, abducting over 800 students for ransom since 2020 (Iwara, 2021).

However, these school abductions in northern Nigeria has continued to be unjustified, impulsive and highly unpredictable hence, creating untold fear on the people in the region; exacerbate the close down of many schools, food crisis situation, sexual molestation/slavery, and increasing wave of Internally Displaced Persons as it has become a daily tragedy in north-west Nigeria and environs. Many of these attacks go unreported. Those that are reported are either mass abduction or the abduction of prominent people in the region. According to Iwara (2021), that towards the tail end of 2020, the armed bandits have emulated Boko Haram's tactic of committing over 10 mass abductions, resulting to over 1,000 school children, to extort ransoms across northern Nigeria. Bandits for years have committed small-scale kidnappings of highway travelers, but now use the public horror and political pressures from school kidnappings to force more lucrative payoffs. These attacks on schools and abductions of students have grown in number and spread across the northern part of the country. The Cable Index (2021), a Lagos-based data, research and policy outfit carried out a study on the spate of abductions of school children in northern Nigeria and its observed that no fewer than 821 students have regrettably being subjected to the 'abduction treatment' in the first eight months of 2021. But that's just a part of the disturbing revelation. The figure, 821 is far outweighs two-thirds of the 1191 students kidnapped across Nigeria between 2014 and 2020 (Odunoye, 2021). "These horrific abductions often result in the immediate closure of all schools in the affected states thereby putting an abrupt halt to the education of affected students.

Though, insecurity is as old as man and it is evident in the "state of nature" which results to "social contract" and eventually led to the creation of the civil state which is aimed at protecting citizens' lives, rights and property. To this effect, Thomas Hobbes endorsed the "monarch", John Locke, "representative government"

and Jean Jacques Rousseau, the "general will". When citizens of a country lose their rights and are displaced from their ancestral homelands, they end up in identity crisis. Nigeria, especially its northern part, has become a nightmare to many Nigerians due to security challenges in the form of armed banditry and school abductions. In the 1990s, most people saw the north as a comfort zone. They even relocated there to make a living. The north, then, guarantee someone peace, good job with good pay, blooming business, access to basic amenities of life, sense of belonging in spite of the high level of Islamic religious practice, low cost living in terms of food, transport and accommodation. But all these beautiful dreams started disappearing due to security threats of armed banditry, school abductions among others. Northern part of Nigeria (especially northwest, northeast regions) that once attracted all walks of life is now considered desolate, a place of discomfort, and a place of insecurity. People have started turning away from the northern Nigeria, declining the good job and excellent offers been provided. To them, of what good are the jobs when their lives are at stake; money, they believe cannot buy life, and life has no duplicate. This rejection and relocation of so many people from the north has made the north short of competent manpower. Most National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members (graduates) do not like to be posted to Maiduguri, Borno State because of the security challenges, and if posted there, they either refuse to go or plead to be redeployed.

Northern Nigeria is under siege by armed bandits and abductors. These armed bandits vandalize at will, destroy lives and properties without being checked. They unleash terror on towns, communities and villages even in the presence of security outposts and operatives. Abductors abduct school children and most times, go scot free and later demand ransoms from the parents or family members of the abductees and the government. The saddest part is that some heartless and unpatriotic Nigerians politicized armed banditry and school abduction for either personal, economic or party/political gains, or even both. Out of crisis come opportunities, they believe. By October 1, 2022, Nigeria will be celebrating its sixty-two independence day but how committed is the federal government to the fight against this armed banditry and school abductions in northern Nigeria? What are the likely causes of armed banditry and school abductions in northern Nigeria? What are the existential implications and way out of these hydra-monsters- armed banditry and school abductions? These are pertinent questions this paper seeks to unravel.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: ARMED BANDITRY, SCHOOL ABDUCTIONS AND NORTHERN NIGERIA

Major Concepts used in this study were clarified in this section. Nigeria is an African country domiciled in African

continent. One interesting part of Nigeria is the north. It comprises security institutions, independent traditions and foreign connections. Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Kano, Katsina, Plateau, Kaduna, Niger, Adamawa, Zaria, Sokoto, Kabb and Ilorin are considered to be the thirteen provinces of Northern Nigeria (Wikipedia). In terms of economy and population, Kano is regarded as the largest province. Hausa is the predominant language in northern part of Nigeria and the Hausa people are the largest tribe in Nigeria.

Northerners are political in nature. Politics permeates every aspect of their existence. The highest number of heads of state or presidents Nigeria has produced come from the north. The Hausa-Fulani believe that they are born to rule and presidency is their birthright. In this light, Miyetti Allah asserted that “Fulani own Nigeria and will rule the country forever” (*Daily Post*, 2020). Nevertheless, in Northern Nigeria, armed banditry and school abductions are politicized for self-interest or gain. They have eaten deep into the fabrics of northern Nigeria. According to Adeparusi (2021):

The northern states, particularly the North-Eastern region of the country [Nigeria], have suffered more serious violence due to terrorism and banditry...As a matter of fact, Zamfara state- one of the poorest states in Nigeria is at the centre of banditry and terrorism. The poor state leads the country's league of the table of violent insurgency, with over 500 reputed killings in five months, that is, between July and November, 2021.

Cases of banditry are seen in Zamfara, Kaduna and Katsina States to the extent that their governors, Abdul Azeez Abubakar and Aminu Masari publicly declared that their states are under siege and that they are fed up (Daudu, 2019, p.269). They blamed the federal government for not taking security issues seriously. Governors of Kaduna (Nasir El-Rufai), Katsina (Aminu Bello Masari), Niger (Abubakar Sani Bello) and Zamfara (Bello Mohammed Matawalle) States have been threatened by bandits, resulting to destruction of lives and property of residents. Locals, students, and traditional rulers have all been abducted for ransom and some even lose their lives at the end. These helpless governors have no option than to lock down the affected communities due to banditry but this has attracted mixed reactions from Nigerians (*Daily Trust Newspaper*, 2021). In January 17, 2022 governor of Zamfara State, Bello Matawalle warned that the issue of banditry will not end soon. He thus submits:

With the kind of people we have in Zamafara State, I don't think this issue of banditry will end very soon because, already, some people are behind it. Some people are using it [for personal or political gain]. And all they need is, at least, to show Nigerians that both the Federal and Zamfara State Governments are not serious on the issue of insecurity, despite the fact that some of them are involved in the crisis of this insecurity [banditry]. But we are doing our best (“Nigeria: Banditry not ending in Zamfara any time soon, governor Matawalle warns”, 2022).

The governor of Katsina State, Aminu Masari was not happy with the persistent attacks on farmers in his state by bandits forcing them to abandon their ancestral homeland.

He implored the federal government to take the matter seriously. The best legacy a nation can give to its citizens is education. Former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo once said:

“If you think education is expensive, then try ignorance.” Education should not be restricted to a class of persons in the society but to all. Through education, citizens receive and internalize values so that they can be useful to themselves and to the society at large.

To Benjamin Franklin, education “enables you to learn more than educator (cited in Malone, 1990, p.52). Dame Wedgwood asserts, “an educated man should know something about everything and everything about something” (cited in Malone, 1990, p.51). But it is quite unfortunate that the northern part of Nigeria is lagging in quality education as compared to other parts of Nigeria. The Federal and State Governments have put up benefiting school structures, and they employed competent teachers to some extent to boost up northern formal education. School fees payment in the north is low and national and foreign scholarships are made available to pupils and students to encourage them but to no avail as they prefer Islamic education to western education. In fact, one of the reasons Boko haram insurgent group was formed is to put an end to western education in the north. However, the educational pedagogy in middle belt or north-central states (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Plateau, Nasarawa and Niger) is far better than what we have in the other states of the north. It quite unfortunate and disheartening to see that the educational system in the north is badly affected by armed banditry and mass school abductions, which are on the increase on a yearly basis without proper resolution on how to prevent or tackle this menace. At this juncture, what is armed banditry? What is school abduction? What are their consequences on the region?

Banditry, according to Hornby (2006), is the “acts of stealing and violence by bandits” To some scholars; banditry is synonymous with the establishment of gang groups who use small and light weapons to carry out attacks against people. It is a set-up criminal activity intentionally designed and carried out for personal gains. To Egwu (2016), banditry is the practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle from their ranches. It manifests itself in varied forms such as cattle rustling, incessant killing of people, robbery, raiding/looting and kidnapping. Okoli and Ugwu (2019) are of the opinion that economic or political interests motivate banditry. They identified four perspectives of armed banditry, viz. village raids, highway robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling. Village raids are raids carried out on village settlements by bandits or gang groups. To Yaro and Tobias (2019, pp.60-98), village raids could sometimes be reprisals attack on a rival village. Highway robbery is robbery committed on or near a public highway usually against travelers (*Merriam Webster*). The victims of highway robbery are normally travelers and road motorists.

To Hazen and Horner (2007), abduction or hostages are often carried out for two major reasons: political reason and economic factor. This extensive classification of kidnapping is very essential for further understanding the underlying factors responsible for abduction or kidnapping, particularly for ransom. But outside these extensive typologies, people are kidnapped and abducted by criminals for various motives and purposes, such as for adoption, begging, camel racing, illicit intercourse, marriage, prostitution, ransom, revenge, sale, selling body parts, slavery, unlawful activity, murder and for other purposes (NCRB, 2014). Kidnapping in Nigeria is often motivated by ransom and political ends. It has escalated to something else (Ngwama, 2014, pp.133-145). Aghedo (2011) noted that kidnapping is “an engagement for economic survival, securing political and business advantage over rivals and co-competitors. It has now become a lucrative alternative to armed robbery offence”. Kidnapping is similar to hostage-taking. Kidnapping is the seizing and confining of a victim to a secret location and making demands that are conditional for the release of the victim while hostage-taking is a direct confrontation with authorities at a known location where victims are held.

In view of Thomas and Nta (2009, p.6) kidnapping is labeled as robbery of the highest rank. To them, it is an organized and systematic robbery which is not as deadly as armed-robbery, but more lucrative and profitable than robbery. The lucrateness has encouraged those that indulged in it to carry on with the act although there is a law prohibiting it. Nwaorah (2009, p.14) defined kidnapping as an act of an angry man who wants to take any person of value captive, and who could be rescued by loved ones. In most cases, victims are often released after payment of ransom. In case of criminal law, kidnapping is defined as taking away of a person by force, threat or deceit with intent to cause him/her to be detained against his or her will (Asuquo, 2009). Walsh and Poole (2019) have described the phenomenon as ‘abducting or capturing away of a person intentionally to deprive them of personal freedom. Generally, kidnapping comprises capturing and detaining an individual against his or her will, usually in an extension of other criminal intentions.

Hence, the abduction of school children in northern Nigeria though, is worrisome but it seems to be more economically motivated than political owing to level of poverty in the region. Muktar (2021) noted that insurgency, banditry and kidnapping have extended to the educational sector of the country. The crime is indeed heinous, and mass abduction of students has become the order of the day. In the abductors’ den, the students are subjected to various inhumane treatments and some even die in the process. The kidnapping of 276 Chibok school girls in 2014 is seen as the first incident in the history of Nigeria. UNICEF representative in Nigeria, Peter Hawkins (2021) holds that “with increasing incidents of

attacks on schools and kidnapping of students, the entire educational system in northern Nigeria is at serious risk if nothing is done urgently to put a halt to the attacks and abductions.” This has already imprinted psychological trauma and fear in parents which makes it impossible to allow their wards or children go to schools even after the matter of abduction seems to be resolved.

TIMELINE OF SELECTED INCIDENTS OF SCHOOL ABDUCTION WITH DATES IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Since Boko Haram redefined abductions in the country, schools and students have become targets for all forms of bandits. Below is a timeline of how far terrorists and armed bandits have gone in making schools dangerous and insecure for both teachers and students in northern Nigeria. To begin with, on April 14, 2014 bandits attacked Girls Secondary School, Chibok and this was the first well-known school abduction in Nigeria. The students were mostly Christian female students aged from 16 to 18 and were kidnapped by the Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram from the Government Girls Secondary School at the town of Chibok in Borno State. Prior to the raid the school was closed down for four weeks owing to deteriorating security conditions, but the girls were in attendance in order to take final exams in Physics (Ojelu, 2021). No fewer than 57 of the schoolgirls escaped immediately following the incident by jumping from the trucks on which they were being transported, and others have been rescued by the Nigerian Armed Forces on various occasions. Hopes were raised that the 219 remaining girls might be released; however some girls are believed to be dead. Amina Ali, one of the missing girls, was found in May 2016. As of April 14, 2021, seven years after the initial kidnapping, over 100 of the girls remain missing.

Barely four years after the attack on Chibok, had the insurgents taken their onslaught to Yobe, another state in the troubled North-West region. The Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed confirmed that 110 students were kidnapped after Boko Haram invaded the Government Girls Science Technical College (GGSTC) in Dapchi, on Monday, February 19, 2018. When the gunmen attacked the all-girls boarding school, many residents of the town had thought they were security forces as they came in camouflaged vehicles (Ojelu, 2021). Although most of the students have reunited with their families after they were released on March 21, 2018 by their abductors, Leah Sharibu is yet to be freed by the gunmen. Reports suggest the 14-year-old, a Christian, wasn’t freed with the others because she refused to convert to Islam.

On Friday, December 11, 2020 bandits took 303 students of Government Science Secondary School,

Kankara, Katsina into captivity. A week after the students were taken into captivity, their abductors released them. Though, the government denied paying a ransom to secure the students from the all-boys educational institution. Less than two days after the kidnapped Kankara students' release, some gunmen abducted more than 80 Islamic school students in the same Katsina State. This time, the pupils were quickly rescued by security forces after a fierce gun battle, according to the police. Nigeria Vanguard (2021) also reported that an attempted kidnapping took place in Dandume, about 64 kilometres from Kankara, the town where the earlier kidnapping of schoolboys occurred. Gunmen invaded a school in Niger State on Wednesday, February 17, 2021 kidnapping 41 persons. The gunmen raided the Government Science College Kagara, Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State, capturing students, teachers, and their family members from the school. 27 students were among the abductees. Less than 10 days after the bandits raided Kagara, gunmen kidnapped 317 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Science Secondary School Jangebe in Jangebe, Zamfara State. The incident happened on Friday, February 26, 2021. The Afaka kidnapping took place on March 11, 2021, when gunmen attacked Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Afaka, Igabi LGA, Kaduna State, and kidnapped 39 students just weeks after a similar attack in Jangebe, Zamfara State. The abducted comprised 23 females along with 16 males. Security forces were able to rescue 180 staff and students the next day (Ojelu, 2021). On April 5, 2021, the government of Kaduna State announced that five of the 39 people abducted from the Afaka School have been released. On April 8, 2021, the state further announced that another five more students

have been released, leaving 29 in captivity. On May 5, 2021, the state government announced that the remaining 29 students have been released after spending 55 days in captivity.

The Greenfield University kidnapping took place on April 20, 2021, when at least 20 students and two staff were kidnapped in Kasarami village, Chikun LGA, Kaduna State, during an attack by suspected armed bandits at Greenfield University. The kidnappers demanded N800 million ransoms. On April 23, 2021, the kidnappers killed three of the students to demonstrate how serious they were (Ojelu, 2021). On May 29, 2021, after 40 days in captivity the remaining 14 students were freed. Their parents also said they paid a ransom of N150 million and eight brand new motorcycles to the bandits. On May 30, 2021, an armed gang abducted dozens of students from an Islamic school in Niger State. One of the school's officials disclosed that the attackers initially took more than 100 children "but later sent back those they considered too small for them, those between four and 12 years old". The state government, in a series of tweets, said the attackers had released 11 of the pupils who were "too small and couldn't walk" very far. On 17 June, 103 students were abducted from the Federal Government Girls College in Birnin Yauri, Kebbi State. On 5 July, 121 School children were abducted from the Bethel Baptist High School in Maramara, Kaduna State. On 16 August, fifteen students, a teacher, and his family, were abducted from the College of Agriculture in Bakura, Zamfara State; and, on 17 August, 2021, nine students were kidnapped on their way home from the Islamiyya School in Sakkai village in Faskari, Katsina State (Ojelu, 2021).

Table 2
Selected Incidents of School Abductions in Northern Nigeria (2020-2022)

Date	Incident	Place
December 11, 2020	303 male students of Government Science Secondary School were kidnapped by bandits but released a week later.	Kankara, Katsina State.
December 19, 2020	Gunmen kidnap more than 80 Islamic school students but they were immediately rescued by security forces.	Dandume, Katsina.
February 17, 2021	Gunmen abduct 41 people (27 students, teachers and family members) of Government Science College.	Kagara, Niger State.
February 26, 2021	317 female students of Government Girls' Science secondary school were abducted by bandits.	Jangebe, Zamfara State.
March 11, 2021	Gunmen abduct 39 students of College of Forestry but they were later rescued by security forces.	Afaka, Kaduna State.
April 20, 2021	Bandits abduct 20 students and 2 staffers of Greenfield University.	Kaduna
May 20, 2021	Bandits kidnap dozens students of Islamic school.	Niger State
June 11, 2021	8 students and 2 lecturers of Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic were kidnapped but released on July 19.	Kaduna
July 5, 2021	121 students of Bethel Baptist High School Kidnapped.	Damishi, Chikun LGA, Kaduna State.
August 18, 2021	9 students abducted	Sakkai, Faskari LGA, Katsina State.
September 1, 2021	73 students of Government Day Secondary School abducted.	Kaya, Maradun LGA, Zamfara State.
Thursday, January 13, 2022	Four university students of the Federal University, Lafia were abducted by some unknown gunmen.	Lafia, Nasarawa State

Source: Authors' compilation, 2022

At least 1409 students have been kidnapped from the schools in Nigeria since the first incident in the country's latest school abduction epidemic which started in March 2020. In the 91 incidents of abductions recorded so far up until the latest kidnap in Nasarawa State in 2022. 17 teachers have also been kidnapped alongside their students and at least over N220 million has been paid out as ransoms to release the victims while, 16 of the victims have been reportedly died in these incidents. On average, Kebbi State, 105 people were kidnapped on 17th of June, 2021 In Zamfara, 237 people were kidnapped on the 28th of February, 2021, 9 people were abducted, This followed by the 73 students of Government Day Secondary School who were kidnapped on the 1st of September of the same year (Ojelu, 2021). This makes it a total of 311 people kidnapped in Zamfara alone. In Katsina, 344 people were kidnapped on the 11th of December, 2021. In addition, 84 people were kidnapped on the 12th of August, 2021 and 12 people on the 18th of August, 2021, making a total of 440. In Kaduna, 39 people were abducted on the 12th of March, 2021 and 22 people on the 20th of April, 2021. On the 18th of August 2021, another 121 students of Bethel Baptist High School were kidnapped. Also, 2 people were abducted on the 24th of August 2021, making a total of 284 people abducted in Kaduna. In Niger State, 30 people were kidnapped on the 17th of February, 2021 and 200 people on the 30th of May, 2021. By implication north-western states are mostly affected by this incidents of schools abduction with Katsina State worst affected (440), closely followed by Zamfara State (419) and third on the list goes to Kaduna State with (284) then, Niger State (236) and with Kebbi State having a share of (105).

CAUSES OF ARMED BANDITRY AND SCHOOL ABDUCTIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

There are so many factors responsible for armed banditry and school abductions in northern Nigeria, to mention but a few are: Geographical/topographical location, unemployment, poverty, use of hard drugs, political inclinations, quick-money syndrome, religious fanaticism and illiteracy.

Geographical/topographical location: Northwestern hinterlands are marked by extremely dispersed rural settlements separated by rangelands and farmlands that are susceptible to violent contestations. The same can be said of the forestlands and borderline having wetlands, rocks and caves. These areas are under-policed and they serve as perfect hideouts for bandits to carry out their operation successfully.

Unemployment: An idle mind is the devil's workshop. The youths are easily enticed to be involved in banditry and abduction to make a living. According to Adegba, Ugwu and Eme (2012), the youths tend to do

whatever it takes to get rich. Thus, the increasing rate of unemployment among the youths results to violent crime such as banditry. To some abductors and bandits, their crime is a way of life (Catlin Group, 2012). Boko Haram, for instance, is thriving because there are lots of jobless youths in aforesaid troubled areas.

Poverty: A hungry man is an angry man. Poverty increases the level of frustrations among the youths. In this pathetic situation, they make themselves available to be used as instruments of armed banditry and school abductions. They are beastlike, destroying lives and property; transferring aggression to innocent residents due to the rate of squalor in such states.

Use of hard drugs: Excessive consumption and trafficking of hard drugs stir up kidnapping and armed banditry in Northern Nigeria. Taking hard drugs can make one to do the unthinkable without showing any iota of remorse. Armed bandits and school abductors, judging by their actions, are very heartless and not remorseful.

Political inclination: Power tussle between political parties or politicians creates and fuels insurgent groups. For instance, it is believed that "Boko Haram was created by northern politicians as a bargaining chip designed to wrestle political power from the Jonathan administration for the breaking North-South/Christian-Muslim rotational presidency agreement" (Walker, 2012, pp.1-16; Iyi, 2018).

Quick-money syndrome: This syndrome is a causative of kidnapping (Dodo, 2020, pp.1-4). To some persons, banditry and abduction are lucrative business, easy means of making money, not minding the risk involved.

Religious fanaticism: Nigerians are religiously inclined. Nigeria is divided along religious line, and everyone fights to defend his or her religion even at the expense of national interest. They can die for their religious belief but not for their country. Boko Haram group is a religious sect that disregards Western education and sees non-Muslims as infidels. In spite of their religious foundation, they rely on violence to propagate their messages. Where then is the message of love and peace? Most armed bandits and school abductors are Christians, Muslims or traditional worshippers; not practicing the morals they tend to preach.

Illiteracy: This refers to "a state whereby one is unable to read and write; a lack of any or sufficient education" (IMP Center, 2017). Most youths in northern Nigeria are illiterates, ignorant and are easily manipulated. They cannot think for themselves and their minds unrefined. They are also school dropouts, and they dislike Western education.

Moral Decadence: The issue of "moral decadence" and the "quest to get rich quick" syndrome has been identified as one among the causes of kidnapping. Inyang, (2009, pp.11-15) claimed that nobody ask questions on how people make their wealth in Nigeria. He believes that a jobless man today can show up with an expensive car or

other properties tomorrow with nobody dare to question the sudden wealth without office or job. The inconsistency between economic transparency and accountability in the running of normal government affairs and the desire to amass wealth among public office holders at different levels of government often also contribute to the influence by kidnappers. They believe that, when those in government settings loot government treasury openly without fear, they too can as well take the laws into their hands by abducting people for ransom in order to live in luxury.

ARMED BANDITRY AND MASS SCHOOL ABDUCTIONS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: FAILED STATE THESIS ANALYSIS

The issue of insecurity in Nigeria has reached its climax. What is really the problem of Nigeria? Is it leadership as Achebe (1973) claimed? Is it visionlessness as Maier (2000) submitted? Or unpatriotism as noted by Egbunu (2009)? Is it dysfunctional institutions as most scholars have claimed?

Nigeria has become a country of expediency and is lagging behind among the comity of nations. The security threats of armed banditry and school abductors call for serious existential concerns. Nigeria's security system has become so porous that many security personnel do compromise; they favour the rich and disfavor the poor because of money. The rich and the affluent are above law. They are regarded as "the untouchables". This is absolutely wrong. Everyone should be equal and each person's right and life should be respected, protected and preserved by the federal government and security personnel. There should be an existential freewill on the part of every Nigerian to change our existential narrative including security challenges.

It is pertinent to say that the idea of a state (or nation) as a failed one goes beyond the idea of a state unable to control its territory. Anyanwu (2005) argued that:

Failed states are perpetually the product of a breakdown of the power structures providing political supports for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic forms of internal violence. It is the collapse of state institutions, especially the police and judiciary with resulting paralysis of governance, a breakdown of law and order, and general banditry and chaos. Not only are the functions of government suspended, but its assets are destroyed or looted; and experienced illegal movement of people or across the borders.

A failed state is characterized by the following negative factors such as weak governance, endemic corruption, poor health care and educational systems, rising criminality, failing human service and industrial infrastructure (Kinnan et al, 2011). According to Longley, a failed state is "a government that has become incapable of providing the basic functions and responsibilities

of a sovereign nation, such as military defense, law enforcement, justice, education or economic stability." Even when a state seems to function very well, but loses its citizens/indigenes' trust, it has failed. Without mincing words, Nigeria is a failed state. Power lies not in the hands of Nigerians but their visionless and greedy politicians. Despite Nigeria's rich human and material resources, Nigeria is still very backward in terms of development. Every sector in Nigeria is underdeveloped. The multi-challenges confronting Nigeria can be linked to the problem of leadership. Plato's theory of justice is significant to understanding the dynamics of leadership and good governance. In his famous work, *The Republic*, Plato x-rays justice as the right ordering of the state, with every man keeping his appointed place. In Nigeria, incompetent and visionless persons are the ones controlling the helm of affairs. Leadership positions and appointments are influenced by nepotism, ethnicity, corruption, religious and party affiliations. Political office is a call to service and not lordship. It is not an office of wealth accumulation to the detriment of the nation. It is no man's birthright or personal belonging but an office of honour and privilege to serve humanity. It is so disheartening that Nigerian political leaders see themselves as demigods. Most times, one is tempted to declare Nigeria "a nation beyond saving". Indeed, Nigeria has fallen and its leaders do not know the country has fallen and they do not even want to know that the country has fallen.

EXISTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF ARMED BANDITRY ON NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

Consequently, regardless of the type of abduction or kidnapping and the motive for its action, the psychological and financial implication of the act can be rather devastating, both for the victims and their associated family. The psychological state of the abductees is very important but it is being destroyed because of the traumatic experience while in captivity. The family members of the victims (students) are also traumatized, which may take a very long time for them to be psychologically stable again. One of the common effects of the abduction is the unforgettably traumatic for those affected, and the lack of contact for many parents with their children during the period that they are under captivity.

According to an interview conducted by Samuel Kaalu, a Communication Specialist, UNICEF Nigeria on 3rd September 2021 with Ibrahim Mustafa, a father to 18 years old abductees Fatima, his only daughter, quoted:

My daughter was brutally abducted by gun-toting men at her school in Kebbi State, where she has been studying in the last six years. What hurts me and my wife most is that Fatima was abducted on the last day of term, just when school was about to

close, and we were already expecting her arrival home," said Ibrahim. He continues "the most painful thing is that we've not been able to speak with her since her abduction," said Ibrahim. "When my wife got the news, she fainted, "She's been in and out of hospital since then. She does not eat. All she asks me every day is, when is her only child coming home? I wish I had an answer," he said, fighting back tears. We want Fatima back. I don't think we did anything wrong by sending our daughter to school said Ibrahim.

This is because the left-behind parent will not know the children's whereabouts and how they are faring (Freeman, 2006).

Iwara, (2021) noted that the 12-year-old Boko Haram insurgency and the more recent rise in armed banditry have combined to displace over 2 million people and forced the closures of an estimated 600 schools particularly in north-west Nigeria. Parents have also withheld their children from schools with frequent wave of kidnappings of students. These armed bandits in convoys of motorcycles and trucks have made midnight assaults on government and religious boarding schools, killing staff who resist and even executing children to enforce their demands. Schools and universities in the region have been repeatedly targeted by these kidnapers.

Caleb (2021) believes that education deprivation in the north-west region has been exacerbated by armed banditry, due to the mass displacements in affected communities. However, the escalation of banditry contributed to a high number of out-of-school children in the region. Out of the 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria, 30 percent are in the North-West (Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, Kebbi, and Kano) even Niger States in the North Central region (Caleb, 2021). Besides, insecurity in the communities had a negative impact on young boys and girls, as school activities in vulnerable areas were disrupted. The few existing schools were unable to operate properly for fear of kidnap of students or attacks and killing by bandits. Parents prevented their children from attending schools due to insecurity on major roads. This in turn increased the job turnover of teachers in these communities.

Some of the school Children are sexually abused as a result of kidnapping hence exposes them to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Aside of the victims been sexually assaulted, other form of sexual molestation of kidnapped school's children is that the abducted under age victims are often subjected to forced marriage with older husbands like the case of Chibouk girls. According to Clark (2004), the child brides are married to older, more sexually experienced men with whom it is difficult to negotiate safe sexual behaviours, especially when under pressure to bear children.

There are also reports of some of the student abductees being pregnant while in captivity and after their release from captivity. In a press conference held in Gusau, the commissioner of police reported that 97 victims, including babies, and women who are

nursing and pregnant were rescued unconditionally in Zamfara's Shinkafi and Tsafe districts (Wilson, 2022). It was reported that on February 19, 2018 Boko Haram abducted 110 school girls of Government Girls' Science and Technical College, Dapchi, Yobe State. On March 21, 2018, 104 of the abductees and 2 other children were released but only Leah Shaibu was not released till date because she bluntly refused to convert to Islam. Some people are of the opinion that she is dead while others say, she is now married and pregnant for one of the Boko Haram commanders (Wikipedia).

Another visible impact of armed banditry in the North West involves internal displacement of community residents. According to a 2019 report issued by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Nigerian Government, over 200,000 persons were internally displaced in several communities of Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto States between January-August 2019. Majority of these IDPs were women, children and the elderly taking refuge in neighbouring Republic of Niger, Cameroun and Chad (Caleb, 2021) Reports obtained from the Zamfara State Government revealed that banditry led to an estimated 22,000 widows and 44, 000 orphans in Zamfara State since 2011

Foreign and local investments and businesses are badly affected due to the security challenges in Northern Nigeria. No sensible and business-minded person will want to invest in a hostile environment. Foreign investors in the affected areas have left and indigenous investors have their business threatened. In addition, markets are not blooming in northern Nigeria as they used to. This has resulted into high cost of living. Health condition of abducted students is another area of concern. Abductors do have carnal knowledge or unprotected sex at will with their female victims which may result to them contracting HIV or any sexually transmitted diseases.

CONCLUSION

Insecurity in northern Nigeria is a painful reality as many have lost their lives and many displaced due to the security situation in the region. Therefore, this paper concludes that for any proper solution to arrest security situation like that of banditry in the study region, a multi-dimensional approach must be taken that would address both the symptoms and root causes of banditry and kidnapping and as well as the problems that create the enabling environment for their operation. Hence, all hands must be on deck to combat insecurity no matter what form it manifests. Based on the findings and facts presented above, the following recommendations are made to checkmate threats of armed banditry and school abductions in northern Nigeria:

- The federal government should take the safe school Initiative programme founded in May 2014 in Abuja during the World Economic Forum on Africa (WEFA)

very seriously. The program is meant for the safety of schools by providing adequate security.

- Lack of employment in Nigeria remains a monumental challenge and the north-west region where banditry remains active is considered amongst the worst affected. Therefore, in creating employment opportunity in the region the youths can be engaged and direct their ways from criminal activities.

- Bad governance must end and the common good of all should be top priority alongside functional institutions to be established to combat armed banditry and school abductions in northern Nigeria.

- There is a need for an existential and humanist approach to life in Nigeria. Humanity precedes or surpasses religion; human lives count and should be preserved at all cost.

- Nigerian government should frequently sensitize Nigerians on security challenges and measures.

- Nigerians should be more pragmatic than religious in dealing with security challenges in the country.

- Non-governmental organizations should also participate in the fight against armed banditry and school abductions through awareness creation programmes.

- Appropriate sanctions to armed bandits and abductors if caught. The rule of law must be duly observed.

- The government should try as much as possible to improve school enrolment in the region to address the issue of mass illiteracy in the area and enhancement of educational literacy programme to intensify the Almajiri educational system for imbuing proper skills and training.

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