

WHO ARE THE BANDITS? WHY FULANI HERDERS TURN BANDITS AND KIDNAPPERS IN ZAMFARA STATE, NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates reasons and factors which influences the Fulani herders to turn to bandits and kidnappers. To identify the identities of the bandits based on tribes and their impacts in the banditry businesses (Who are the bandits?) and to assess the consequences of Banditry *on non-bandits* Fulani Herders. The study employs both primary and secondary sources of data. It also utilizes Routine Activity Theory to **conduct the study**. Bad-Governance, illiteracy, injustice, access/proliferation of weapons, quick way of getting money etc., are the reasons why Fulani herders, turned to bandits and kidnappers. It also finds that bandits are collection of many tribes across Nigeria and even foreigners, the innocent Fulani herders suffers harassment, intimidation, threat, attacks and often time kill as retaliation. The government needs to stand to her responsibilities. Awareness and campaign on not taking jungle justice among the societies are needed. Individuals, private and public investments in water conservation, and cattle value-chain development can help to curb driving and exacerbating factors of land disputes, which birthed the bandits.

Key words: Bandits, Fulani Herders, Kidnappers, Northern Nigeria and Zamfara State.

INTRODUCTION:

Banditry is one of the security challenges which has dominated public and academic discourse in Nigeria in recent times. The challenge mainly affects the north-western states and some states in the north-central. It influenced the socio-economic development of all the affected states. It has been reported that the damages caused by bandits in recent times are more than that of Boko-Haram in comparison. Whether the assertion is true or not, the fact remains the same that bandits have turned many areas in the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kaduna, and Niger states into ungoverned spaces, where they control and determine many things more than the legitimate Nigerian or states governments. Therefore, armed bandits in Zamfara State are serious criminals who need to be dealt with; they maim, attack, abduct, rustle cattle and other valuables, destroy properties and even kill. In this regard, the Fulani tribe is the most suspected culprit of the activities in the most affected areas in Zamfara State and Nigeria.

However, based on the videos published by media and security outlets of the arrested bandits in Zamfara State, most of the culprits are Fulani tribesmen with others, including Hausas and many other tribes in Nigeria and beyond. They mainly claimed that the leaders of their gangs were Fulanis living in the bush, Rugas, and established camps. Therefore, the thrust of this paper is to interrogate the **ethnic** identities of armed bandits, the factors responsible for Fulani herders

turning into bandits and kidnappers in Zamfara State. The paper examines and identifies the factors which influence Fulani herders to join banditry and explored the effects of armed banditry on innocent herders, in Zamfara State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Researchers, newspapers, media outlets, think tanks and activists believe that most kidnappers and bandits in northern Nigeria are Fulani herders. From many studies and the physical arrest of the bandits, majority of them are Fulani tribesmen. Herdsmen terrorists are now beatified as Fulani bandits and have turned north-western Nigeria into a terrorist playground. Thus, it is imperative to investigate and re-examine the reasons and factors which influence Fulani herders to turn to bandits and kidnappers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To identify the factors which influence Fulani herders to join banditry and explore the consequences of Fulani bandits on other innocent Fulani herders in Zamfara State.

METHODOLOGY:

The study uses field survey research design, where both primary and secondary data sources are employed. The primary data were collected using the following survey instruments: interview, focus group discussion and observation. While the secondary data were from documentary sources, this includes police records, bandits interview by the police on video, prison service records on prosecuted or arrested bandits under prison custody, media chats, newspapers, and interviews with bandits or residents by media outlets like BBC, Channels TV etc., Videos posted on social media, during the attacks or when arrested, and information gathered from published and unpublished works, such as books, journals, government gazettes, relevant materials from the internet.

Target Population and the method of obtaining data from them

- **General Public:** population including male and female cutting across all residents living in the study area - information obtained through FGD.
- **Arrested bandits in Prisons; bandits under police custody** - information here was obtained through interview using purposive sampling techniques
- **Repentant bandits** - information obtained through interview, using snowballs techniques
- **Police and Civil Defense PROs-** information here was gathered through interview using snowballs sampling techniques of the mixed methods.
- **Vigilante and Yan-Sakai,** and the kidnapping victims using FGD through multi-stage sampling technique.
- **Fulani herders who are not bandits-** Fulani leaders/Ardos, milk hawkers, and other Fulani during the market day for security reasons - information obtained through interview using snowballs sampling techniques

These categories of people are directly connected or linked with the issues of our study. Thus, we used purposive selection. The data generated were analyzed through mixed method of analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

On the scholarly conception of banditry, attempts to offer explanation **was done in many ways.** The concept is vague in the modern usage, it can be synonymous for gansterism, marauding brigandage, and thievery, for instance. According to Cambridge dictionary, bandit is

“a thief with a weapon, especially one belonging to a group that attacks people traveling through the countryside” (Cambridge advanced learner, online 2021). Thesaurus Dictionary, summarizes, the concept of banditry as “the activities or practices of bandits” (thesaurus, 2021). To Wikipedia, banditry is a type of organized crime Committed by outlaws typically involving threat or use of violence. A person who engaged in banditry is known as a bandit, and primarily commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, either as an individual or in group.

To Okoli and Okpaleke (2014), Banditry refers to the incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village or market raids. It involves the use of force, or threat to that effect, to intimidate a person or a group of persons in order to rob, rape or kill While on the Economic or political interests motivate banditry. The former refers to banditries motivated by the imperative of material accumulation while the latter has to do with those driven by the quest to rob, to assault or to liquidate a person or a group of persons based on political or ideological considerations (Okoli and Ugwu, 2019).

Therefore, banditry denotes all sort of crimes commit by criminals which include but not limited to kidnapping, cattle rustling, armed robbery, villages and market raids etc. that is plan and carried out by bandits. In a nutshell, banditry is the activities of criminals who commits crimes to extort valuables from public and often killed.

THE ORIGIN OF FULANI-HERDER BANDITRY IN ZAMFARA STATE

Ladan and Matawalli (2020), argues that, historically, banditry has existed and operated in different parts of the world since the 19th century when bandits riding mostly on horse backs move from their hideouts to attack villages and then retreated back to their hideouts. To that end, the origin of banditry in Zamfara state is not a new phenomenon, it has been there even before independence of Nigeria, some traditional rulers around Dan-Sadau area were accused of colluding with bandits in armed robbery and rustling around 1891 (Rufa’I, 2021). But Fulani banditry in Zamfara state is a new birth; it started as the result of the persistence of the contemporary herder-farmer conflict in the state.

OE Watch Africa Commentary (2019), the killings in Zamfara occur because the illicit gold smuggling industry attracts traffickers linked with armed bandits and criminals in the state. These armed bandits raid villages to steal livestock or kidnap women, children and village leaders to ransom them back to their families, If the ransoms are not paid, the hostages will be harmed or killed’ (OE Watch Africa, 2019). The activities of bandits have cause serious damage to the people and growth of these areas or states.

While Crises Group Africa reports, (2020), reports that, the Conflicts between farmers and herders, sparked by disputes over land and water resources, the report argued that the conflict between herder and farmer have long been part of life in northern Nigeria, but have reached critical levels in recent years. Historically, these conflicts were small-scale disputes that were mediated and resolved by community-level authorities. But recently, the conflicts have been exacerbated by several factors like: Changes in climatic and environmental conditions, amid rising demographic pressures. Controversial government policies allocating land to farmers (including the allocation of large expanses to elite farmers), In Zamfara state, the government decided to clear large forests and grazing reserves in the Kuyambana forest and in parts of the Maru and Zurmi local government areas. This action disrupted life in Fulani hamlets, some centuries old, limiting the availability of pasture for their livestock. which resulted to encroachment on, and blockage of, livestock grazing routes, and created conditions for increased trespass on farmlands by herders and more demands for compensation for damaged crops.

Herders protested the compensation they had to pay for damaged crops, and complained that farmers, district heads, police and courts were colluding against them in a corrupt process. The stage was set for more deadly confrontations and injustice.

Therefore, criminally motivated attacks spread when young men in many predominantly Hausa communities increasingly mobilised themselves into vigilante groups, referred to as Yan Sa Kai (volunteer guards), to protect their villages. In so doing, they became a source of insecurity themselves. Armed with locally made guns, machetes, clubs and other crude weapons, they meted out harsh sanctions to real or perceived perpetrators of robberies and raids. The vigilantes particularly targeted many town-dwelling Fulani who, because of their ethnic affiliation with the cattle-herding Fulani in the forests, were accused of complicity in criminal activity. Sanctions included arbitrary arrests, torture, indiscriminate confiscation of cattle and extrajudicial killings, with suspects sometimes hacked to death in markets and other public places. Sometimes vigilantes burnt down Fulani settlements, forcing the victims to flee into the forests. The vigilantes' activities and atrocities further aggravated relations between Fulani herders and the predominantly Hausa farmers.

In parallel, Fulani formed militia groups, known as Yan-Bindiga (gun owners) to protect themselves and their cattle and to avenge vigilante atrocities. A former leader of one of the militia groups, Hassan Dantawaye, said: "We decided to kill at least 50 people whenever one of us was killed". These groups raised funds for arms acquisition from a combination of community contributions and a range of other activities allegedly including kidnapping for ransom.

In a nutshell, this is the genesis for the establishment of Yan-Bindiga (a Fulani, militia group). However, the above mentioned are some of the reasons why Fulani formed herder allied armed group to protect themselves from the attacks of the vigilantes in Zamfara state. But the allied armed group and many Fulani tribesmen turned to bandits and kidnappers, why? Therefore, there are more to this, because from the need to protect themselves from attacks, they now turned the need for security to business opportunity through banditry.

While Anka (2017), argues that, the history of cattle rustling and armed banditry in Zamfara started since around 2009 but it became out of control in 2011 especially after the general elections. The causes of these unending conflicts are many even though people disagreed on causes to a varying extent. While many links the scenario to long term human conflicts between Fulani herders and farmers due to struggle of ownership of farm land and grazing areas, others see it as direct effect of reaction against socio-political and economic marginalization of the Fulani by their Hausa counterparts. According to Rufa'I (2021), Contemporary rural insecurity, otherwise known as rural banditry started in Zamfara around 2011, as a traditional farmer-herder conflict or insignificant rural unrest, transforming into full-blown conflict, engulfing most parts of the North-western states. Mohammad and Alimba (2015), argued that other criminals disguised as Fulani to commit banditry, painting the tribe black as criminals. While Okoli in a contrary opinion said that "The north-central area has been afflicted by herdsmen militancy, which has plunged the region into dire humanitarian crisis (Okoli and Ogayi 2018)". The northwestern region has recently been enmeshed in the rapid upsurge of rural banditry along its international frontiers as well as the forested interior (Okoli and Ugwu, 2019).

In this respect, most of the researchers attached the origin of Armed banditry in Zamfara state to herder farmer conflicts along. But none of the researches shows that the rural armed banditry which started as mis-understanding between herders and farmers is hijacked by criminals or the herders have turned to real criminals from herding to banditry. A lot has been written politicizing the rural insecurity or attached its persistence to the used and abandoned

political thugs in the state, the unemployed youth who find it easier to earn a living etc., while others believed that banditry is Hausa and Fulani war that has been there for long. Therefore, it is important to re-examine the root cause of armed banditry and the reasons why Fulani herders turn to bandits as well as its consequences in Zamfara state.

THEORETICAL FRAME: ROUTINE ACTIVITY THEORY

This theory was formulated by Laurence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979. It studies crime as an event, highlighting its relations to space and time and emphasizing its ecological nature and implications. It holds that crime is likely to occur when there is a convergence of *opportunities/targets to commit a crime*, *motivation to commit the crime*, and *absence of a capable guardianship to prevent crime*. The absence of guardians could be the solution to the factors and drivers which pushed Fulani herders into banditry. The motivated offender and attractive target are closer. Ransom and other benefits of banditry are the motivational factors that attract other people to the crime. Meanwhile, additional opportunities for the bandits exist in Zamfara apart from the claimed self-security, which led to the formation of Fulani gangs to counter maltreatment and injustice. The group saw another opportunity in kidnapping, cattle rustling, village raids, mine raids, robbery. Crime can be perpetrated by anyone who has the opportunity in terms of capability and availability of vulnerable targets; therefore, herders and any other person could be bandits.

HYPOTHESIS

Mishandling the non-violent herders and the jungle justice committed by either public or vigilante/Yan-Sakai could only worsen the situation as other people may join banditry out of frustration

FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCES FULANI HERDERS TO JOINED BANDITRY AND WHY?

Table 1.1 Factors which Influences Fulani Herders to Joined Banditry

Source	Major Factor	Minor factors	Why they Attack
Summed from Interview	Failure of the Traditional Methods of Resolving Herder-Farmer Conflict		In the olden days, a conflict between herders and farmers has been there since the beginning of agriculture is resolved first between the herder and the farmer. When they could not resolve an issue between them, they resorted to local authorities. The process of resolving these conflicts was like a pyramid and passed through stages that hardly failed.
		Yan-Sakai by the Hausa Farmers Communities to Protect	The formation of <i>Yan-Sakai</i> by the Hausa farmers communities to protect themselves and their crops from countering herders distortions was among the significant factors that pushed Fulani herders to turned into bandits. This means the government failed to stand to its responsibilities of protecting citizens' lives and

		Themselves and their Crops	properties and find the solution to domestic conflict when it arises.
	The Revenge of Raids		<p>The research also found that farmers formed armed groups (<i>Yan-Sakai/vigilante</i>). They take revenge when their farms are destroyed, hold livestock hostage, injure or sometimes, if the herders do not run, they torture or even kill.</p> <p>Herders form armed groups, taking revenge when their livestock are attacked with theft or their Rugas are attacked, or any of their members are injured.</p> <p>The revenge of raids by farmers formed by Yan Sakai and the revenge of attacks by herders (claiming security for themselves) has contributed immensely in pushing herders to bandits in Zamfara State more than the farmer-herder conflict.</p>
		Impatient Nature of Fulani herders	The impatient nature of the Fulani tribesmen pushed many to banditry because sometimes attacks are not by bandits group but a particular Fulani herders family who are hurt by others to go and revenge more especially when a member of the family has been killed.
	Bad Governance and Corrupt Practices of Officials and Injustices	Injustice	Fulani herders complained of injustices from the police, magistrate and even traditional rulers. Whenever there is a case that involves herder, the authorities extort the herder too much. Sometimes they regret accepting their invitation as justice will not serve. This also triggered the bullet
		Selfish Interests	The herders' armed group that was formed to counter vigilante now becomes full-blown criminal organizations that deviated from their original purpose to kidnapping, robbery, cattle rustling, etc. when they see the opportunity.
	Membership of		Membership of the Fulani Vanguard was

	the Fulani Established Vanguard		initially open to only Fulani tribes. However, other Fulani herders still didn't trust or joined them. Still, they later recruited non-Fulani members, especially when they turned to full-time kidnappers and bandits. In this respect, they terrorized all, including Fulani herders who were against their new business.
		Forced Members hip	When no member of a family joins them, their livestock is in danger. Therefore people join it for security. Those who do not have many cows see it as an opportunity to own many. Some among the Fulani community view them as heroes. Thus, a 30-year old man can have as many as four wives.
		Illiteracy	Most Fulani herders are illiterates. Not only can they not read or write, but they don't have access to either western education or Islamic education. As such, they hardly know the moral values and the value of others but their cows. They put more importance on their cows than even their wives and children.
	Insecurity and Porous Nigerian Border Lead to Easy Access to Weapons		Since the Libyan and Boko-Haram uprising, there has been too much movement and access to small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. When you join banditry, you quickly get a weapon, you can hire it, buy it with cash or kind like using cows, etc
		Success of Others	Many joined banditry when they see bandits succeeding in the business and people are paying the ransom; so it becomes a quick way of getting money and cows.
		Frustrati on and Inheritan ce	Herders joined banditry when their cows are stolen and they become frustrated. While others become bandits when their parents are killed on raids or operations.
		Women	Some youth joined banditry when they want to marry a lady and she has many suitors, but if you are a bandit nobody can compete with you.

Source: Physical interviews with prosecuted, published videos, phone interviews with repentant, and police interrogations, 2021

The table above shows the foundational factors which pushed Fulani to un-ending war. Conflicts between herders and farmers have been there since the beginning of Agriculture, but the two parties have been managing each other and when they could not resolve an issue between them they resort to local authorities, the process of resolving these conflicts was like a pyramid and pass through stages, but when these processes failed it come along with many consequences.

The table shows that one of the factor that triggered the bullet of crises which help the birth of the bandits was the formation of Yan-Sakai by the Hausa farmers communities to protect themselves and their crop as they claimed the herders turn violent when they destroyed crops or been taking to police or courts, as such Yansakai and vigilante was formed to counter herder's destructions. This simply means it was the government failure to stand to her responsibilities of protecting citizens life and properties as well as find solution to domestic conflict when arises.

The table also shows that Revenge of raids by farmers formed armed group, called Yan-Sakai and the vigilante, and the Revenge of raids by herder formed armed group (claiming security for themselves), the Inpatient nature of Fulani-herders, Bad-governance, Injustice, Failure of the dialogue, Selfish interest, nature of Membership of the Fulani established armed vanguard, the Forced membership, Illiteracy, and Porous Nigerian border, access to weapons, Success of others, Frustration and inheritance and finally issues of Women. These are the factors in summary which pushed Fulani herders to Banditry in Zamfara state and beyond.

These findings were also corroborated with interview with some of the informants as:

“Organised Fulani raids began on Hausa villages from around 2014 in an escalation of what had been more localised conflicts. In self-defence, vigilante groups formed with the backing of the state government, but their revenge was often indiscriminate, turning towns into no-go areas and driving some Fulani communities into the forests (interview with informants, 2021).”

However, with the Vigilante and Yan-Sakai, there is allegations that sometimes they do things to scared the herders which in turn triggered the bullet of violence in between, therefore, there many factors some of which the major factors are mentioned above, that exacerbated the Fulani herders to completely turned violent.

Another interview some of these Fulani bandits they are not herders originally, even if they herd they do not have their own cows, they are herding to be paid either with cow or ship pending on the length or duration they spend herding on mutual agreement between them and the cow owners, therefore when this banditry came they on their own or join hands with other criminals to rustle cattle and kidnap for ransom” (Interview with informant in Maru, 2021). A repentant bandit says, “claims to have joined the gang due to constant harassment and intimidation by the security agencies because of his ethnic background”

IMPACTS ON NON-VIOLENT FULANI HERDERS

Table 2.1 Impacts of Fulani-Herder Turning Bandits on Non-Violent Fulanis

Source	Consequences	Impacts
Summed from Interview	Harassment, intimidation and abuses	➤ The non-violent Fulani herders face harassment, intimidation, and abuses, attack, hate and people do not trust them.
	Hate and	➤ They are often attacked and even killed by Yan-Sakai and

	Attack	the Hausa communities as retaliation.
	People do not trust them	➤ These make life very difficult to this category of herders.

Source: interview with Fulani Ardos, FGD with other fulanis including milk hawkers and few middle age, 2021.

The table above examined the consequences of Fulani bandits on other Fulani herders (the non-violent ones), it was discovered that the non-violent Fulani herders faces, harassment, intimidation, and abuses, attack, hate and people do not trust them. This make life very difficult to these categories of herders.

According to the bandits strike a village called Kalgo 10 kilometers away from Talata Mafara on the 12 September, 2021 where they slaughtered one of the Yan-Sakai/Vigilante commander, in the night, the following the day, the Yan-Sakai members out of frustration launched attacks against all the fulanis they see around Talata-Mafara, they block road bring out Fulani and killed, it was believed that most of the victims of this attack are innocent Fulani who may not necessarily be from Zamfara state”

In another interview, the interviewee said,

“During the market day they cannot conduct their business well, sometimes if there is rumor of bandits’ attacks somewhere they have to leave the market for their own good”

In another interview, which sounds similar to the view of above respondent reveals that

“When vigilantes and Yan-Sakai are coming to the market during the market day, you have to choose either to leave safe or to stay at your own risk”

In an interview, a victim, (non-violent Fulani-herder) confesses that Drivers became reluctant to carry or drop passengers in the out sketch of town as they use to, in fact when you stop them once they realized you are Fulani herder they will go. Therefore, the fulanis faces serious challenge in their daily conduct as the result of Fulani bandits.

In this regard, it’s evident that non-violent Fulani herders faces challenge from the acts of other fulanis who turned bandits. Therefore, they are harassed at all angle of life which stopped many of them from going to either weekly market or travel unless necessary. As the matter of fact this forced some of the non-violent herders to resort to violence.

However, the Zamfara State government has relaunched the mismanaged amnesty programme. The government promised to give cows rather than money for every rifle or AK47 returned this time around. Alongside the order to dismantle the Yan-Sakai and the vigilantes to resolve the conflict, it also failed, forcing the government resort to the use of force.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study considers the findings of the study to formed part of the conclusions. Therefore, the above exploration gives a clear analogy of who are the bandits? And why Fulani herders turned bandits in Zamfara state, Northern Nigeria. As such the following are summarized as major findings of the study which are here presented in itemize format as:

- In Zamfara state, Bandits are Fulani herders, although not all herders are bandits
- The Failure of the Traditional Methods of Resolving Herder-Farmer Conflict, was the major factor that pushed Fulani herders to banditry
- Bad Governance, Corrupt Practices of Officials and Injustices are among the factors that pushed Fulani Herders to Banditry
- Government of Zamfara State has launched the use of force to address banditry and it has recorded a huge of success.

- But the effects of government measures on citizens can never be underrated.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Government should continue to seek resolution of the foundational conflicts between herders and farmers that have been the engine of banditry in Zamfara State, including through negotiated settlements built upon previous disarmament efforts.
- Government should build schools and employ qualified teachers to teach Fulani herders formal education to lessen the effect of illiteracy.
- The traditional way of resolving herder and farmer conflict must be revived and introduced like traditional rulers. Government should improve the system of justice and restructure the security agents and the judiciary.
- Awareness and social programmes should be organized between the Fulani herders (the non-bandits) with the Hausas communities to rework the relationship again. Lastly, Awareness from local authorities on the importance of tolerance ‘we must therefore understand our differences.’
- Finally, the government should ensure the arrested or suspected bandits are tried in the courts to avoid people taking justice in their hands as the executions by Yan-Sakai and the vigilante contributed to the conflict in the State.

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