

Banditry in Nigeria's North West

Key Findings

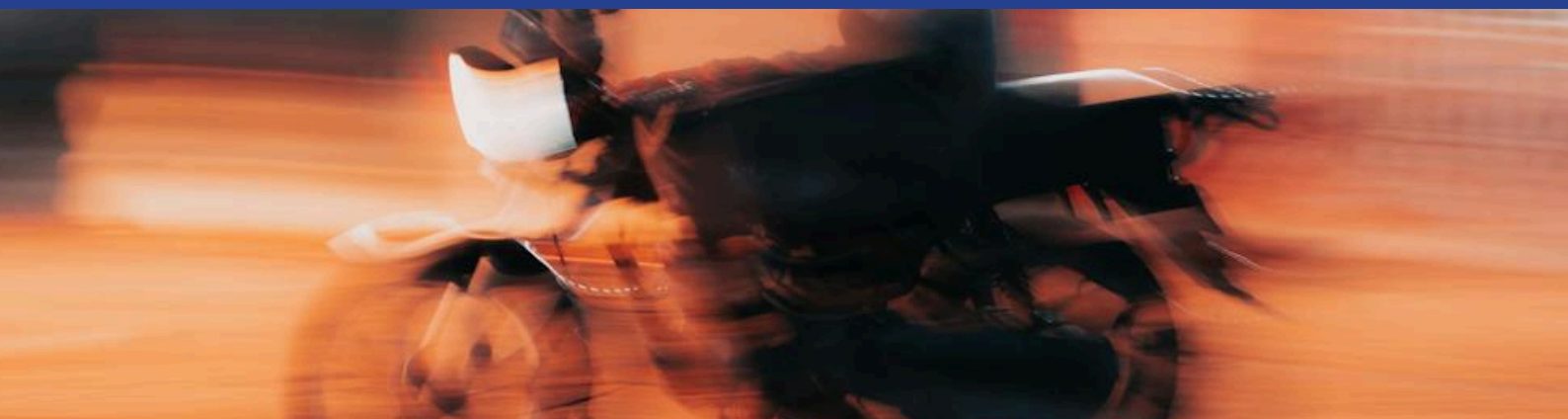
Banditry violence is rampant in Nigeria's North West and severely impacts local populations. This document highlights key findings from a survey conducted in early 2024 with almost 3,000 community members mainly in and around Jibia in Katsina State, Gusau in Zamfara State, and Illella in Sokoto State, providing insights into their experiences with and perceptions of banditry.

1 The phenomenon of banditry

Banditry is a top concern for communities in North West Nigeria. Among those surveyed, banditry was one of the most reported problems (mentioned by 70 per cent of respondents), second only to food insecurity (82 per cent). When asked about security threats specifically, respondents overwhelmingly named bandits as the biggest threat to their community (80 per cent).

Local populations see banditry as a distinct yet hard to classify phenomenon. Some of the frames that have been applied to banditry – particularly farmer/herder or Hausa/Fulani conflicts – do not fully align with local communities' understanding of banditry today. Simplistic categorization and narrow lenses for understanding banditry may contribute to inappropriate or insufficient policy and programmatic responses.

Communities perceive banditry as mainly financially driven. The surveyed community members overwhelmingly see financial gains as bandits' primary motivation, with 83 per cent saying they want money (as compared to power or revenge for a past injustice, each named by 5 per cent of respondents).



Communities are impacted by multiple, often organized bandit groups based outside their village or city. More than half of those whose communities experienced attacks believed that the bandits involved were part of organized groups, and most (85 per cent) said they came from outside their location. Yet, impacted communities rarely know who leads these groups, or what they call themselves, which may suggest frequently shifting group configurations and fragmentation, complicating responses.

Weapons are bandits' most distinct feature. When asked how they are able to identify bandits, more than half of respondents said by their weapons and 35 per cent mentioned motorcycles, while others said they would not know. The prevalence of weapons in the region combined with the unclear structure of bandit groups – or complete lack thereof – highlights the challenges for disarmament efforts.

2

The extent of violence and victimization

In recent years, bandit attacks have become more frequent and more violent. Of those whose communities experienced attacks, a majority believed they have increased in number and intensity over time. Further, almost a third reported weekly attacks, while 14 per cent said they have happened daily in recent years.

Victimization is widespread. Close to 15 per cent reported they had personally been attacked by bandits. A considerably larger share of respondents, 63 per cent, stated that a close relative had suffered a bandit attack.

Victimization experiences differ considerably with gender, age, and location. Men and boys were more vulnerable to attacks (20 per cent of them said they were personally attacked, compared to 7 per cent of women and girls). This is likely due to their comparatively higher involvement in livelihood activities outside which increases their exposure to attacks. Further, the types of violence reported also differ by gender, with physical violence and killings disproportionately affecting adult men, while women and girls appear to be especially affected by sexual violence (even though this likely remains underreported).



3

The wider impact

Banditry impacts mobility. Nearly half of survey respondents reported avoiding travel because of banditry. An inability to travel, even locally, has significant economic consequences for local populations.

Banditry negatively affects economic opportunities. Among those surveyed, 27 per cent indicated that their work had been disrupted by banditry. Those making a living from farming and herding were especially affected, which aggravates food insecurity in the region.

Banditry is driving displacement. One in five respondents reported having been forced to leave their community at some point because of banditry. Men reported the highest rates of displacement, in line with their increased exposure to attacks, which can lead to women being left as the sole breadwinners of their families as well as more vulnerable to certain types of bandit-perpetrated crimes such as sexual violence.

Banditry disrupts education. Almost a quarter of respondents said schools in their communities had been closed because of banditry in the month leading up to the survey. Banditry-related school closures have worsened the problem of low school attendance rates in the North West of Nigeria and may have long-lasting negative impacts on education and livelihoods.



These findings raise questions about how to respond to the banditry problem and improve the security of local communities. To help answer them, state-specific versions of this paper (translated into local languages) are being shared with community leaders in each survey location to facilitate discussions on how to address the violence and its wider impacts on mobility, education, and livelihoods.