



ZAMFARA STATE IN HISTORY OF ITS CRISIS AND ARMED BANDITRY

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FEBRUARY 2021

Abstract

The area today called Zamfara state was one of the old Hausa cities like Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Gobir, and Zazzau. The people of the state have the years of struggle for autonomy but not until 1996 during the military administration of late General Sani Abacha who detached the state from Sokoto. The crisis attacks are routed in decade long completion over resources between herders and farming communities while most residents are involved in agriculture as the state slogan “farming is our pride”. Huge numbers of livestock have similarly been lost. The study adopts analytical and historical research. Moreover, the study has revealed the causes of its crisis and armed banditry in the state. Government reserved were evaded, encroachment of paths, unemployment and lot more. The study recommends the needs of federal and state intervention in conflict resolution and amnesty as well to put resolution and conclusion in other to reform the affected communities.

KEY WORDS: *Autonomy, Administration, Communities, detached*



1. Introduction

Nigeria has suffered through numerous hurdles as far as security is concerned. They include Niger Delta militancy, the Boko Haram misadventure, herders/farmers conflicts and most recently, banditry and intractable kidnappings for ransom in the Northern part of the country. Nigerians nurture a feeling of absolute disappointment and insecurity towards the constitutionally mandated body saddled with the responsibility of their security and welfare government. The ineptitude of the government towards the current ravaging security challenges is indeed worrisome. According to the United Nations, about 1400 lives were lost to banditry and kidnappings in the first quarter of 2019. About 685 kidnappings occurred in the same period costing families hundreds of millions of Naira hence rendering many of them financially impotent in this current harsh economic condition. This is coming at a time when the country is recovering from the agony of almost 27,000 (twenty thousand) deaths, more than 2 million displaced persons and a financial implication of more than N5 trillion in just four years (2016-2019) caused by the Boko Haram insurgency.

Northern Nigeria is now the new hub for banditry and kidnappings. The roads which are the most used method of transportation have become utterly unsafe. In roads like that of Niger, Kaduna, Abuja, Birnin Gwari, Zamfara and lots more, stories of kidnap incidences and armed banditry have become daily routine. By critically assessing the trajectory and history of insecurity in Northern Nigeria and even Nigeria at large, one will realize that the root causes hover around some factors which if not confronted heads on would continue to fuel these seemingly unquenchable crises. For more than two years, northwestern Nigeria has faced devastating attacks from armed bandits, particularly in the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, and Sokoto. Such attacks are driven by many overlapping factors, including

cattle rustling, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, illicit artisanal mining, youth unemployment, poverty, and inequality. This is further compounded by the weakened, stretched, and demoralized security services, which are deployed in thirty-five of Nigeria's thirty-six states and will soon enter the second-decade of their war against Boko Haram, one of Africa's deadliest terror groups. It is estimated that many of the armed bandits are of Fulani origin, as are many of the victims. Banditry, which includes armed robbery, murder, rape, and cattle-rustling, is present in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Senegal and Mali. According to a report from the West Africa Network of Peace building (WANEP), from January to December 2019, armed bandits were responsible for more than 1,000 civilian deaths in the Northwest. According to the Nigeria Security Tracker, this is greater than civilians killed by Boko Haram over the same period (though not greater than all those killed, which includes soldiers and Boko Haram members). The impact of these deaths has ripple effects across communities that will last generations. A committee set up to investigate the menace of armed banditry, headed by Mohammed Abubakar, a former inspector general of police, reported that in Zamfara state between June 2011 and May 2019, 4,983 women were widowed, 25,050 children were orphaned and more than 190,000 people were displaced as a result of armed banditry. The Nigerian security forces initially responded to this issue by increasing the deployment of the military and police to the troubled zones. These deployments were under several code names such as "Operation Puff Adder," "Diran Mikiya," "Sharan Daji," "Hadarin Daji," "Thunder Strike," and "Exercise Harbin Kunama III." But these operations have produced mixed results. While the security forces have successfully pushed back bandit attacks, destroyed several hideouts and killed or arrested

hundreds of bandits, attacks have continued. Against this backdrop, the governors of Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara, agreed on a peace deal with the armed bandits in 2019.

According to Governor Aminu Bello Masari of Katsina, negotiation was the best way to achieve lasting peace in the North West. The agreement involved disarmament, the release of kidnapped victims, and an amnesty for the bandits. But the agreements did not last. While there was a lull in attacks toward the end of 2019, the attacks have picked up again in 2020. One state governor recently admitted that the bandits had reneged on the terms of their agreement. Following the apparent failure of the governors' peace deal, Nigeria's chief of army staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai said recently that dialogue is not a good military option for tackling banditry, kidnapping, and other heinous crimes currently bedeviling the North-West. General Buratai's admonition is telling. Whether it is dispersing protests, responding to separatist agitations or, as in one particularly brutal case, responding to the obstruction of General Buratai's convoy, the penchant that violent problems require violent solutions is ingrained in the psyche of the Nigerian security forces. The resort to shallow and poorly conceived peace deals is an age-old failure of the Nigerian security and political establishment.

2. Conceptual Frame Work

- a. **Crisis:-** The English word "crisis" was borrowed from the Latin, which in turn was borrowed from the Greek κρίσις krisis 'discrimination, decision, crisis'. The noun is derived from the verb κρίνω krinō, which means 'distinguish, choose, and decide'. In English, crisis was first used in a medical context, for the time in the development of a disease when a change indicates either recovery or death, that is, a turning-point. It was also used for a major change in the development of a disease. By the mid-seventeenth century, it took on

the figurative meaning of a vitally important or decisive stage in the progress of anything, especially a period of uncertainty or difficulty without necessarily having the implication of a decision-point. Crisis is often linked to the concept of psychological stress and used to suggest a frightening or fraught experience. In general, crisis is the situation of a "complex system" family, economy, and society. And crisis is categorized into eight. Natural disaster, Technological crisis, Confrontation, Malevolence, Organizational Misdeeds, Workplace Violence, Rumours and Terrorist attacks/man-made disasters.

- b. Armed Banditry:-** Armed Banditry is a type of organized crime committed by outlaws typically involving the threat or use of violence. A person who engages in banditry is known as a bandit and primarily commits crimes such as extortion, robbery, and murder, either as an individual or in groups. Banditry is a vague concept of criminality and in modern usage can be synonymous for gangsterism, brigandage, marauding, and thievery.

3. Methodology

The study adopts analytical and historical research. The Approach of this Study is Qualitative and Descriptive. A carefully empirical Data were extracted from Books, magazine articles, journals publications and online materials.

4. Historical Over-View of Zamfara State

The area today called Zamfara state was one of the old Hausa city-states like Kano, Katsina, Gobir, Kebbi and Zazzau. The earliest inhabitants of Zamfara were said to have been hunters and giants. They established their first settlement at Dutsi which was the first capital of Zamfara. It extends up to the bend of River Rima to the north west and River Ka in the south west. Zamfara Kingdom was established in the 11th century and

flourished up to 16th century as a city-state. Its capital has shifted with the fortunes of the kingdom from place to place like Dutsi and Birnin Zamfara. In the first half of the 18th century, its then capital Birnin Zamfara, was destroyed by the Gobir Kingdom and a new capital was established in Anka by the second half of the 19th century. Zamfara had many centers of commerce and scholarship that attracted many scholars like the Yandoto city. It became part of the Sokoto Caliphate after the 1804 jihad by Usman Dan Fodio. In fact, Usman Danfodiyo settled in Sabon Gari where Sarkin Zamfara Abarshi had already established a garrison headquarters during the early days of his Jihad as a base from where fought Gobir and Kebbi. The people of Zamfara have over the years struggled for autonomy, it was not until 1996 that the then military administration of the Late General Sani Abacha detached the Zamfara State from Sokoto State. With an area of 38,418 square kilometres, it is bordered in the North by Niger republic, to the South by Kaduna State. In the east, it is bordered by Katsina State and to the West by Sokoto and Niger States. It has a population of 3,278,873 according to the 2006 census and contains fourteen local government area. At the wake of British colonialism, the emerging town of Gusau became an important commercial and administrative center with road and rail networks passing through it. With the creation of states during the Gowon Administration, Zamfara Kingdom became part of the then North West state and later the Sokoto State.

However, Zamfara is a state in northwestern Nigeria. Its capital is Gusau and its current Governor is Bello Matawalle, a member of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Until 1996, the area was part of Sokoto State. Zamfara is populated with the Hausa and Fulani peoples. Major groups of people are the Zamfarawa mainly in Anka, Gummi, Bukkuyum

and Talata Mafara Local Governments areas. Gobirawa populated Shinkafi Local Government. Gobirawa actually migrated from the Gobir Kingdom. Burmawa are found in Bakura and Fulani peopled Bungudu, Maradun, Gusau and are scattered all over the State. In Tsafe, Bungudu and Maru Local Governments are mainly Katsinawa, Garewatawa and Hadejawa. While Alibawa people are found in Kaura Namoda and Zurmi.

- i. Climate:-** The climate condition of Zamfara is tropical with temperatures rising up to 38 °C (100.4 °F) and above between March to May. Rainy season starts in late May to September while the mild season known as Harmattan lasts from December to February.
- ii. Local Government:-** Zamfara State consists of fourteen (14) Local Government Areas. They are, Anka, Bakura, Birnin Magaji/Kiyaw, Bukkuyum, Bungudu, Chafe (Tsafe), Gummi, Gusau, Kaura Namoda, Maradun, Maru, Shinkafi, Talata Mafara and Zurmi.
- iii. Demographics:-** Zamfara State is mainly populated by Hausa and Fulani people, with some members of Gwari, Kamuku, Kambari, Dukawa, Bussawa and Zabarma ethnic communities. Others include the Igbo, Yoruba, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv.
- iv. Language:-** Hausa is the official language of the state. Other main languages spoken in Zamfara are English, French, Fulfulde, Arabic; minority populations also speak languages like: Yoruba and Igbo. The Kainji languages C'Lela and Gwamhi-Wuri are spoken in Gummi LGA. Ut-Ma'in is also spoken in the state and in Kebbe, Sokoto State. Major languages are Hausa and Fulani.
- v. Economy:-** Agriculture and gold minning are the main occupations of the people of the state and the central source of income. Irrigation is required for cereals and legumes hence its

slogan "farming is our pride". And also Home Of Shari'ah. In 2009, gold mining became a greater source of income in Zamfara State as worldwide gold prices rose dramatically.[6] High concentrations of lead in the ore from which gold was being extracted led to a lead poisoning epidemic in the state, requiring national and international intervention to remediate affected areas and provide medical care to children with severe lead poisoning.

- vi. Religion:-** Islam is the principal and major religion of the state. Zamfara was the first state in Nigeria to introduce Sharia law during the regime of Ahmad Sani Yerima, the former Governor of the state. Christianity also has many adherents. The original native religions also remain but they have the fewest followers. These religions are mainly practiced in ancient settlements like Dutsi and Kwatarkwashi.

5. Zamfara State From Puritan Trove to Armed Banditry

Nigeria's Northwest is gradually becoming another major regional theatre of violence, much like the Northeast where Boko Haram terrorists have wreaked havoc in the past ten years. A problem, which initially appeared as localized disputes between herders and farmers over access to land, has morphed into an intractable crisis posing a major threat to national and regional security. The level of rural banditry escalated between 2014 and 2019 attracting a lot of attention, while assuming increased political undertones in the run-up to the 2019 Nigerian elections. In Zamfara and parts of neighboring Katsina state in the Northwest, rampaging gangs of armed bandits have engaged in violent acts, attacking, abducting, killing, and robbing villagers and travelers, and engaging in cattle rustling. Although sometimes exaggerated or underestimated by some political actors, casualty figures are quite alarming. The former Governor of Zamfara state, Abdulaziz Yari, is reported to have said that nearly five hundred villages and thirteen thousand hectares of land have been devastated, and two

thousand eight hundred and thirty five people killed between 2011 and 2018. It is also estimated that there are at least ten thousand armed bandits and cattle rustlers operating out of eight major camps in Zamfara state. Also, some reports put the number of children orphaned as a result of such attacks at forty four thousand since 2010. In Anka Local Government Area of the state, over sixteen thousand people have been internally displaced.

Ungoverned Spaces and Rural Banditry

Zamfara State is mostly surrounded by forests (with little or no government presence) from where bandits launch their attacks on outlying towns, highways, and villages. The Rugu, Kamara, Kunduma, and Sububu forests have become major hideouts for criminals. Worse still, with a fragile state system and waning public confidence in police and state security institutions, the allegiance of defenseless rural communities is gradually shifting toward informal, armed groups and local vigilantes. There are widespread allegations of corruption against state security operatives, police, judges, village heads, and even some vigilante groups. The public institutions responsible for offering protection and delivering justice are unable to bring bandits to justice due to inadequate resources and widespread extortion. The bandits are so brazen that they notify villages ahead of attacks, and impose illegal tolls on farmers seeking to gain access to their farms. The irony is that despite enormous amounts being invested in military and security operations, the security situation seems to be deteriorating. Between January and April 2019 a number of operations by the Nigerian Army, such as Operation Harbin Kunama, Operation Diran Mikiya, and Operation Puff Adder, was carried out in the bid to tackle banditry in the Northwest. The Government of Zamfara alone has spent over N17 billion funding military and security operations in the state.² However, the armed bandits seem to be expanding the scope of their operations

beyond Zamfara and into the neighboring states. On April 11, 2019, the Governor of Katsina state, Aminu Bello Masari, spoke of how bandits were taking over parts of the state, killing people and destroying property with impunity.

Competing Narratives

There are competing narratives regarding the causes and nature of the problem of armed banditry in Zamfara and neighboring states. Some view the conflict as one of the effects of climate change, particularly decreasing amounts of rainfall, on the “scarcity” of arable land and pastures. The drop in rainfall over the years translates into the scarcity of water, which in the context of a rapid population growth rate places pressure on land, and fuels intense conflicts between pastoralists and farmers whose livelihoods and survival are based on access to land. Another school of thought associates the growing insecurity with state failure due to corruption, the collapse of institutions of governance, de-industrialization, growing poverty, and a culture of impunity that pervades state and local governance in Zamfara state. Still on the issue of insecurity, some observers explain the instability in Nigeria’s Northwest in terms of porous borders and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. They argue that arms have found their way into the region from the Maghreb following uprisings in North Africa and countries of the Sahel, including post-Gaddafi Libya. Protagonists of a natural resource curse trace the conflict to competition over “gold deposits,” pitching those engaged in illicit gold mining against local communities, as well as certain big-time mine owners believed to have strong links with government. Yet, there are those who believe the conflict is spiritual, and the problem facing the region is the result of a “test from God.” Typical of the thriving culture of conspiracy theories in Nigeria, the narrative that is gaining wider currency in both policy and public circles is the view that the escalation of rural banditry is

the handiwork of the political opponents of the ruling party, who lost out during the 2015 and 2019 elections. The Nigerian Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Buratai, claims that the government is in possession of strong evidence pointing to certain politicians as those sponsoring rural banditry. Buratai was quoted as saying, “I want to believe and rightly so that with the fallout of the just concluded elections, there are politicians who saw their defeat as a means of revenge, sponsoring these criminal activities and even banditry, clashes between herders and farmers. While some of the narratives may or may not be true, the responsibility of securing the lives and properties of the citizens remains that of the government.

Non-state Security Actors

The breakdown of authority at the local and state levels has created the enabling environment for the emergence of a complex informal security sector in Zamfara. Competing and rival armed and criminal gangs operate freely in the state in the name of vigilantism. Lacking in security training, the groups are accused of criminal acts ranging from violent robbery, unlawful confiscation of properties of both bandits and their victims, and human rights abuses. Unless something is urgently done to strengthen the legitimacy and capacity of state institutions and non-state actors, including traditional authorities to address issues of corruption and widespread poverty, the security situation may likely continue to deteriorate. It is also important for the state to address the deep-rooted grievances that drive conflict in the region, as well as other neighboring states. There are reports indicating that armed banditry has crippled the local economies of the Northwest with food production, pastoralism, and animal husbandry dropping by about fifty per cent. Rural banditry by all accounts is undermining security, peace, and development in Nigeria’s northwest. While the unfolding crisis could be linked to a set of factors, the threat to security in a region already

reeling from the effects of a decade-long Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast cannot be over-stated. More in-depth studies are needed to identify and address the roots of the crisis of state legitimacy and governance affecting the region, including the security of its borders—and most importantly, the rights, dignity, and safety of its peoples.

Over the last decade, more than 8,000 people have been killed – mainly in Zamfara state – with over 200,000 internally displaced and about 60,000 fleeing into Niger Republic. Livestock and crops have been decimated, further depressing human livelihood indices that were already the country’s lowest. The violence is aggravating other security challenges: it has forced more herders southward into the country’s Middle Belt, thus increasing herder-farmer tension in that region and beyond. About 23,000 people have fled the upsurge in violence, stated the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) thus increasing to 60,000 the numbers who have fled in the last year ongoing attacks by armed groups in the Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara States. The situation in the region is a cause for concern, particularly in view of the rise of criminal groups operating in Nigeria. This is the whole point of UNHCR’s presence in the region,” said Alessandra Morelli, UNHCR Representative in Niger. The crisis has also triggered a humanitarian challenge. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. In September 2019, a joint assessment mission by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, citing local government authorities’ estimates, reported 210,354 persons displaced from 171 towns and villages in the northwest. Of these, 144,996 were in Zamfara state, 35,941 in Sokoto and 29,417 in Katsina. The violence has also exacted a severe toll on families and children. In Zamfara, the government

reports that about 44, 000 children have been orphaned as a result of violence in the last decade.

Roots of the crisis

The attacks are rooted in decades-long competition over resources between herders and farming communities. While most residents of Zamfara State are involved in agriculture the state motto *“farming is our pride”* cows are valued by the herder communities who have been accused of being behind a wave of attacks. Pastoralists and farmers in Nigeria have been on the rise. This social conflict has traditionally consisted of disputes over natural resources and is often presented as a conflict between settlers and nomadic people.

However, what began as conflict between pastoralists and farmers over land has recently developed into rural banditry with heavy human and economic cost, ranging from the sexual assault of women and girls, attacks on villages, to cattle rustling, amongst others. However, herders have repeatedly rejected the allegations saying that they too are victims. Isa Hussein, 41, argued that he was forced to flee his abode in Anka after bandits stole 12 of his cows and robbed him of all his savings, destroyed or rendered inaccessible in Zamfara since the crisis began. Huge numbers of livestock have similarly been lost: from 2011 to 2019, about 141,360 cattle and 215,241 sheep were rustled in the state, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG). In addition to displacement, the violence has hampered agricultural activities and heightened the risk of acute food insecurity. Livelihoods have been disrupted, fear and insecurity among the population have increased, and IDPs and host communities are competing for scarce resources such as water, land and food. Protection concerns are

heightened for women, children and the elderly, while security, food and WASH are priority needs in affected areas.

CONCLUSION

In summary to all, to truly record tremendous success, the government must start by building trust with local communities vulnerable to attacks by bandits. They should set up early warning and response systems, working with vigilantes and community leaders on the ground. And they should begin to address the structural inequalities that drive people to violence, like poverty, a lack of education and opportunity, and government mistreatment. The military in particular should redirect its attention to controlling the trafficking in small arms and light weapons, specifically by patrolling porous national borders. Our borders are still very porous and we have not been able to secure them effectively. If we can strengthen the security at the borders, banditry will reduce drastically. We have to deploy closed circuit cameras, drones and other technologies at our borders to enhance maximum security. Banditry is not a problem that will be solved through the barrel of a gun.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is very pertinent to the government at all levels to rise up to the occasion. Most especially Nigeria president who happened to be a retired Army General, security is his area of core competence from his training and orientation. Currently, the major goal of this administration in this region should be fighting this menace of banditry and insecurity because without security, no meaningful development can take place. Take the case of Zamfara for example. Few months back, It was reported by the media at a point in time, that gold mining is at the heart of the senseless killings in the area and that traditional rulers, top politicians and even policemen are benefiting from the crime being committed against the people. Government

must take the necessary steps to ensure that those found culpable of involvement in these crimes are punished to serve as deterrent to others. There is even information that some of these people involved in kidnapping for ransom were herdsmen who were victims of cattle rustling.

- In order to have a long term solution to this problem, governments at all levels must create jobs for our teeming unemployed youths, the security services is short staffed and underpaid, government should find a way of recruiting more men into the security services in line with global best practices and reduce the number of idle hands in our society.
- Another thing to look at is the alarming rate of poverty and the slow rate of economic growth is a contributory factor to this social menace and people have resorted to violence and other criminal behaviour in order to make ends meet. The lack of faith in our criminal justice system has also provided an avenue for aggrieved Nigerians to take laws into their own hands by resorting to the use of jungle justice. The fact still remains that the service chiefs have given in their best which in actual sense with what is happening in the northern region the best is not enough. There is the need for reinjection of people with new ideas, fresher perspectives to come and address the issue. According to Albert Einstein the real definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over aging and expecting different results.” It is a well known fact that all the service chiefs we have in this country are due for retirement and be replaced with capable hands. Sanity must be restored to our criminal justice system and allied institutions, then the killings and the banditry can finally become a thing of the past. One would have expected President Buhari who is a former general to be well

equipped with strategies to tackle the insecurity facing this nation or at least, command his service chiefs to victory in this fight but the reverse is the case.

The ongoing banditry across the country especially Zamfara and environs is a very sad story. Many lives have been wasted, properties destroyed and communities ravaged. Our security chiefs have failed us and so has the government of this administration. With the level of insecurity in the country, many gangs have seized the opportunity to terrorize and wreak havoc on the ordinary citizens. Many Nigerians who cannot afford bodyguards have become victims of this menace and if not quickly fixed, this will consume the nation.

What we need at this point is very simple and not limited to the following:

- Most of the security challenges in Nigeria are rooted around lack of political will, bad governance, unstable economy, illiteracy, corruption, large economic gap and ineffective post insurgency peace building strategies. The government needs to be proactive in setting effective poverty alleviation strategies and economic policies that would ensure citizen-based development. For crimes to be properly controlled, our educational sector needs a thorough overhaul to create an educational system that must guarantee jobs at the end through curriculums that would ensure graduates being job providers rather than job seekers.
- There is need for a holistic review of the nation's security framework. The centralized system of defense and policing has proven to be ineffective in a country like Nigeria. Community policing strategies should be adopted so that policing of a particular region would be the responsibility of the indigenous people of that region who have the knowledge of the region's peculiar challenges, local inhabitants, culture, and geography and can proffer peculiar solutions that would be commensurate with the region's

insecurity dynamics. There should not be need for any police officer to be posted to anywhere other than his state of origin for effective citizen-focused security.

- There is need for government to convene a grand security summit targeting Northern elite, traditional rulers, politicians, political parties, regional advocacy groups, security experts of Northern Nigeria to come to the table and rigorously discuss security in-depth and come forth with a realistic and consensus-based strategy of tackling this decimating menace. The government should open her doors to inter-party collaboration with the aim of curbing this menace.
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