

## **BANDITRY AND CHALLENGES OF FOOD SECURITY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC**

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### **Abstract**

*One of the ravaging challenges that have plagued Nigeria particularly in the bid to achieve national productivity and food sufficiency is the spiraling cases of banditry. Banditry which is generally armed violence is principally driven by the criminal intent to steal and plunder. In Nigeria, Banditry takes the form of armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling and village raids. It is motivated by extremism, poverty and the quest for primitive accumulation of wealth. The victims of banditry are persons and communities in possession of material valuables among others. Since Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, the country has witnessed an accelerated rate of banditry which has undermine the authority of the Nigerian State. While the challenges of banditry in Nigeria are manifest on different sectors, this paper interrogates its most devastating effect, which is on food security. The paper adopts the Neo-Marxist theory of the state in post-colonial society for the interrogation of the character of the state in Nigeria and the scenario that has led to the escalation of banditry. It adopts a historical research methodology utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data collection. While the primary source of data collection was obtained through interviews from knowledgeable individuals in areas where banditry is on high rise, the secondary sources include among others scholarly publications, national dailies relevant to the topic. The paper finds that many years of the failure of the state is essentially responsible for the increasing number of non-state actors unleashing terror. The paper concludes that foundational causes of banditry be addressed. It also recommends the stimulation of the economy to trigger production, driven by technology and intelligence gathering to address the spiraling challenges of banditry in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Banditry, Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Agriculture, Food Security.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria has been plagued with diverse dimensions of insecurity, particularly in the fourth republic, which began on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999. These challenges of insecurity have threatened the corporate existence of the Nigerian state and have continued to frustrate attempts at achieving economic growth and national development. The country has spent resources that would have been used to provide social amenities aimed at improving the quality of life of the people in fighting insecurity. This has created infrastructural deficit, which further aggravates the frustration. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria, contagious effects (that is the emergence of such terrorist cartel) in neighboring countries, the burgeoning poverty and gross economic failure occasioning the unprecedented suffering of the vast of Nigerian people, widening inequality, galloping unemployment and the increasing case of hopelessness are among the leading causes of the heightening cases of

banditry, terrorism, hostage taking and kidnapping for ransom.

Banditry refers to the incidences of armed robbery or allied violent crimes, such as kidnapping, cattle rustling, and village or market raids (Okoli & Okpaleke, p. 355). 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 the former refers to banditries motivated by the imperative of material accumulation, 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. Since Nigeria's fourth republic began in 1999, most particularly a decade after, the country has been plagued with various forms banditry and violent extremism. After decades of persistent military dictatorship, perpetual peace has remained elusive. It was expected that democratic governance would give rise to peace, political stability, national cohesion and ethno-religious tolerance, but these have not

been achieved. Instead of peace and national cohesion, banditry has remained an abiding feature of Nigeria's insecurity. One of the most severe impacts of banditry is made manifest on food security. Food security encompasses four key aspects: availability, access, utilization, and stability of food at all times (World Food Summit, 1996, p.2). Food security refers to nutritional status of the individual household member that is the ultimate focus, and the risk of that adequate status not being achieved or becoming undermined. The latter risk describes the vulnerability of individuals in this context. In Northern Nigeria most especially the Middle-belt and Northeast, food security has been threatened by banditry. These regions are hitherto tagged as the food basket of the nation is gradually becoming a shadow of themselves. Farmers can no longer farm peacefully because incessant attacks perpetrated by bandits, these attacks has greatly reduced yield.

According to Ofem and Basse (2014, p.512), the recurrent issue of banditry as evidenced in the crisis between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in some parts of Nigeria remains one of the major threats to food security in the country. Oftentimes, farmers and cattle breeders are killed, kidnapped for ransom in their farms or while to the farms, a good instance of this was the assassination of the former Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshall Alex Badeh (Rtd.) on December 18, 2018, on his way to his farm on the Gitata-Keffi highway, in Nasarawa State (Nwezeh, 2020). Banditry has become recurrent decimal in the Northwestern region of Nigeria, for instance, Katsina, Zamfara, and Jigawa states have been known for bandit attacks leading to loss of life, in Jigawa State for instance, in 2015, more than seventy (70) cases of armed conflicts was recorded from the beginning of the raining/farming season. Banditry hinders efforts towards achieving agricultural food sufficiency and thwarts Nigeria's ambition to become a net exporter of agricultural products. The encroachment of these herdsmen into farms and farmers' misuse of cattle routes have continued to endanger violent clashes in several parts of the country thereby occasioning restiveness with

bourgeoning spate of internal displacements and worsening insecurity.

The situation is not different in Nasarawa and Benue States, as communal clashes has led to persistent attacks farmers with serious casualties, farmers accuse herdsmen of farm land encroachment, the latter blame the farmers and members of their communities for rustling of their cattle. This mutual suspicion and trust deficit among these two groups of agriculturists will continue to hamper the Nigeria's desire for agricultural revolution. The ravaging crises between the marauding herdsmen and the helpless farmers appear to be strange in Nigeria, historically, herdsmen and farmers used to have a reasonably symbiotic relationship. While the cattle served as means of transportation for daily goods as well as manure to fertilize the fields for farmers; the herdsmen in turn obtained grains and other farm produce from the farmers. As farming expanded, it created a surge in demand for farmland, which in turn led to a sharp decline in available grazing land, this scenario occasioned the shrinking of the available space for herding thereby leading perennial flocks' encroachment upon the already cultivated fields have continued to deepened the herdsmen/farmers crises. Unfortunately, the friction has had adverse effects on food security in the country today. It is against this background that this study intends to examine banditry and challenges of food security in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

### **Methodology**

This paper adopts the qualitative method of research with occasional use of statistical tools. The qualitative research is a situation where a researcher attempts to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them in natural settings (Gabrielian, Yang, & Spice, 2008). Data for the paper were collected from secondary sources namely, published texts and journal articles, unpublished thesis, publications of the National Bureau of Statistics, UNDP database on the implication of banditry on the economy of Nigeria, and other website sources. The primary

information used in this paper came from the interview of some stakeholders, particularly those directly affected by the activities of the bandits. Some of the internet materials used for the analysis is the multidimensional poverty index. Bulk of the internet sources were accessed using the Google search engine.

This paper used the *ex post facto* research design. It involves the “control on a variety of variables measured in the post-test” (Leege & Francis, 1974, p. 79). It refers to a situation whereby a researcher examines the effect of a naturally occurring treatment after its occurrence. In other words, it is a study that attempts to discover the pre-existing causal conditions between groups. It is an examination of the X and Y variables. The X variable is the independent variable whereas the Y is the dependent variable. The variable X here is banditry whereas variable Y is food security. In a causal relationship, the analysis will focus on how much banditry has affected the drive for food security in Nigeria, particularly between 2015 and 2023, this is the period under review has witnessed heightened banditry attacks in Nigeria since the beginning of the fourth republic.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts two theories for its analysis. The neo – Marxian theory of political economy, which examines the nature of the state in post-colonial society by interrogating the inherent contradictions that have bedeviled the Nigerian state. The neo – Marxian theory of political economy is traceable to the writings of Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, Michal Kalecki, and Josef Steindl (Baran & Sweezy, 1966). This understanding of reality became prominent in the 1970s and 1980s and was used to discuss the various post – Marxist or radical perspectives that were not captured by the classical Marxian theory. In the Nigerian context, we often use it to explain the change in the dimension of exploitation, in which the state is used as the object of exploitation. This gives a new dimension to the understanding of the character of the state in post-colonial society where the state is used by the ruling political elites as the agent of primitive accumulation of values (Peter & Shaibu, (2021). In doing so, as noted by Peter and Shaibu (2021), the political elites do all it takes to perpetuate themselves in power as a means of ensuring continual control of state apparatus. One of the ways this is manifested is

in the conduct of flawed elections and the flagrant treatment of the people with highest display of impunity.

The failure of the state in Africa’s post – colonial society to engender development has continued to plague African countries in all ramifications. As rightly noted by Ake (2003), the challenge in Africa is not that development has failed, but that African leaders do not have development in their agenda. This justifies the stiffening of political development of the Nigerian state as Nigeria has not been able to conduct generally acceptable elections from independence to date. The implication of this tragedy of leadership failure occasioning worsening poverty, galloping inflation, widening inequality, and increasing unemployment, among have the Nigeria a fertile ground the emergence of several non – state actors, among which are the bandits, terrorist, militia groups, among others.

The paper also used the frustration and aggression theory to support the Neo Marxist theory of the state in post-colonial society to properly interrogate the scenario that occasioned the escalation of banditry and other forms of criminality in Nigeria. The frustration and aggression was propounded by John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O H. Mowrer, and Robert Sears in 1939. The major tenets and assumption of the theory was captured in a small monograph titled *Frustration and aggression*, this quickly attracted considerable attention from scholars of social and behavioural sciences. Major reformulations and strengthening of theory can be seen in the works of Berkowitzs (1983), Gurr (1970), Miller (1941) and Ritzer (1996).

The authors argued that individuals are motivated to achieve their life ambitions and fulfil their destiny, but when these expectations are thwarted, frustration sets in. According to this assumption, the occurrence of aggression behaviour presupposes the existence of frustration; and the existence of frustration does not always lead to aggression. However, the argument may have failed to differentiate between instigation to aggression and the real incidence of aggression, but this paper acknowledges that frustration generates inquiries to various types of consequences, which may include instigation to certain kind of aggression. Aggression may develop as consequences of having been exposed to an

extremely frustrating condition sufficient to provoke the experience of hopelessness.

We can therefore forge a clear merger between the two theories for the purpose of explaining the interface between banditry and food security in the Nigeria's fourth republic. It can be argued the character of the state in Nigeria's post-colonial society led by the unproductive and parasitic political elites created enough grounds for frustration, which is expressed in various forms of criminality that have become a norm in Nigeria. The failure of the State especially in Nigeria's fourth republic is the manifestation of armed banditry that has crippled the quest to achieve food security, that failure has also triggered frustration amongst the citizenry to take laws in to their hands without reproach, these nucleus relationship has heightened the conflictual scenario that birthed various forms of food insecurity and its multiplier effects.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### ***Banditry and the Challenges on Food security***

The term 'food security' involves adequate production and distribution of food items to those who desire it (Global Hunger Index, 2019, p.4). Since Nigeria began its fourth republic, banditry has become a major feature of its insecurity problems. The plague of banditry is a serious threat to food security in Nigeria. The prolonged crisis of banditry in Nigeria over the years under review (2015-2023) has given rise to a heightened food insecurity concerns and one of the most dreaded humanitarian crises in sub-Saharan Africa. FAO (2016) reports that Banditry and other forms of crime has led to extensive displacement and high levels of food insecurity, already communities have absorbed large numbers of people fleeing violence, which has placed considerable pressure on fragile agricultural and pastoral livelihoods, while insecurity severely disrupted markets and food availability. Steady decline of food production occasioned by incessant attacks on farmers by armed bandits has led millions of people to severe food insecurity with some areas having seen no food production in the last eight years, this is coupled with poor access to markets, high prices of staple foods, low incomes, depleted household food stocks, and the adoption of extreme coping strategies. According to Nigeria Joint Livelihood and Market Recovery Assessment (2017), banditry

have caused severe food insecurity, citing major cereals produced in the studied area (Middle-belt, North-East, North-West Nigeria) whose production levels declined amidst armed banditry include maize 49%, millet 40%, cowpea 32%, groundnut 31%, sorghum 30% and rice 12%, prior banditry these crops production were at 80% production rate. Further reports claimed that 50% percent of farmers had to completely abandon farming because of fragile security system, reasons range from fear of personal safety, tax/levies imposed by bandits, restrictions by the military, lack of accessible roads as the roads and bridges were destroyed linking communities to farmland (Northeast Nigeria Joint Livelihood and Market Recovery Assessment, 2017). Similarly, FAO's crop prospects and food situation reports claimed that 2.8 million people are in severe starvation and highly insecure by food (FAO, 2021). MO-Ibrahim foundation, a renowned African NGO reports that, over 4.7 million people need food assistance and some 400,000 children are at imminent risk of starvation (Mo-Ibrahim Foundation, 2016).

#### ***Low Harvest***

One of the challenges of food security posed by banditry is low harvest (Beetseh, Abubakar and Nongo, 2021, p.145), this has indeed impacted food production, as a good number of the states known for massive production of crops have been recording low harvest. For instance, getting yam from states like Benue and Taraba, which are predominantly yam producing states has become a difficult task, this is because of the incessant clashes between grazers and farmers, which has forced majority of the farmers to abandon their farms, and it is the same story for onion, beans, soybeans, and millet among others. Investigations also showed that the rising cost of cattle is not unconnected to the displacement of livestock farmers in some of the States worried about these endless onslaughts, farmers and other stakeholders have cried out to government and relevant authorities to tackle this problem, which is an antidote to food crisis in the country (Ofem & Bassey, 2014, p.512).

Reasons for the low harvest is because of the constant killing and kidnapping of farmers, seizing of their farmlands, and burning of their produce in some cases (Beetseh, Abubakar and Nongo, 2021, p.146). The killing of farmers is one of the most devastating challenges posed on food security. Food production has reduced to a

great extent because of the constant killing of farmers who are the ones carrying out the food production, most families experienced food insecurity when the head of the households are dead, these farmers are heads of households who are married with children and their death adversely affects the other family members in terms of food supply, most of the people killed by the bandits in many villages are either farmers or cattle herders whose death means their families and dependents suffered from food shortage at the family level, in some cases the families of the deceased farmers or herders have no option than to move to internally displaced persons camps where their source of food could be guaranteed for some time by the government (Beetseh, Abubakar and Nongo, 2021, p.146).

In cases where farmers are not killed, they were kidnapped when they go to the farm to work. In case where farmers were kidnapped, they were taken to the forest and will not be released till large sums of moneys are paid as ransom (Ofem & Bassey, 2014, p.512). This payment of ransom impoverishes the farmers and as the case maybe such farmers will have no option but resort to the selling of their properties including their farmlands to get money to pay ransom.

Bandits are reported to chase farmers out of their farms when they saw them working there. As the bandits were well armed, they run after the farmers on their motorcycles with the intention to hurt or kill and the farmer has no option than to run since the farmers were not armed. The bandits also seize the farmlands owned by the farmers. In such cases, the bandits use the farmlands as grazing fields for the large number of cattle they acquired illegally through cattle rustling activities. In some areas where the bandits have not seized the farmlands, they are said to drive their cattle into the farmlands to eat up crops that have started to germinate after the first rains were recorded (Ajiye, 2018, p.610).

During large scale attacks that involve large number of bandits which lasted for some hours, the bandits engaged in the burning of local grains silos (called rumbu in Hausa language) thus creating a shortage of food for the villagers. These grain silos contained foodstuffs that were stored by the farmers which could last for many months. In some cases, the grain silos were raided and the food stolen by the bandits creates a food scarcity in the households. The bandits also burgled local shops that sold

foodstuffs and stole the food items which also contribute to shortage of foodstuffs and its scarcity even in the local shops of the villages. Example here includes the attack on Dankar and Tsauwa villages of Batsari LGA of Katsina on the 14th of February 2020 (Beetseh, Abubakar and Nongo, 2021, p.142).

### **High Cost of Food**

Closely related to the above is the issue of high cost of food. The problem of banditry has posed as a challenge to food security as it has led to a hike in the prices of foods. In most States across Northern Nigeria, it was revealed that the cheapest crate of egg now retails at N1, 800, almost double the price just before the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 (Interview with Tosin Daramola). A single tilapia fish goes for N1000 while a kilo of chicken retails at between N1, 600 and N1, 800. The prices of fruits and vegetables have also skyrocketed beyond the reach of many. Beans, which used to be one of the cheapest sources of food protein, now retails at N700 per derica, with many families unable to afford the price (Interview with Tosin Daramola). Blessing Francis, a primary school teacher and mother of three children, said that the situation had gotten out of hand, revealing that in a bid to make ends meet, she had to cut out many foods from the family's daily menu. She particularly stated that:

*One egg is now N100. Meat and fish is now something we eat maybe once a week. Most of the time, I cook concoction rice for them to eat, with nothing else. I don't add anything to garnish the rice most times because everything is so expensive. But what can I do? Last year, I could cook a pot of stew with N1, 000 but now, that will only buy pepper; things are going from bad to worse.*

The high cost of food has also been attributed to the fear of transporters going to move food produce from farms to markets in towns and cities. This fear is born out of the attacks that some of their colleagues has faced in the course of carrying out their transport activities. It was revealed bandits usually hang around local trade routes that are found along roads linking rural markets where buyers and sellers of foodstuffs pass through especially on market days. The bandits block such routes to intercept

the vehicles with the traders inside. They snatch foodstuffs intended for sale at the markets; money meant for the purchase of foodstuffs or even kidnapped the transporters and traders.

### **Malnutrition**

As banditry forces thousands of residents in various parts of the country to flee their homes and live in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, the lives of the children are being further endangered by malnutrition. Findings from different parts of the country showed that many families have cut down their consumption of foods that are rich in protein, a very crucial dietary component needed by children to grow and develop well, due to the high cost of purchasing those food items (Onifade & Osinowo, 2019, p. 13). In a recent report, the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) ranked Nigeria as the country with the highest-burden of malnutrition in Africa and the second highest in the world. The global agency, in the report that analyzed 91 countries, including Nigeria, disclosed that one out of every three children in the country was stunted and one of every 10 children was wasted for not eating the right food combinations. "Close to 17 million Nigerian children are undernourished, meaning they are not getting the food or nutrients they need to thrive and grow well, leading to irreversible developmental harm (Baje, 2021). Among these numbers, millions are young children who are not being fed diets adequate for their growth and development (Baje, 2021). In another report, the UN agency stated that malnutrition was the biggest threat to child survival and development in various regions of the country; especially the northeastern part (Mohammed, 2017, p.9). According to UNICEF, children with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) have a nine times higher risk of dying than well-nourished children. Data from UNICEF, nutrition partners and state governments showed that about 10,165 children died from SAM in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states between January 2017 and July 2021. The devastating impact of banditry on food security is felt on malnutrition among the children and their mothers. The IDP camp is home to 9,958 households with a total population of 50,226, out of which 10,045 are children under five years. In the camp were three young women, all breastfeeding their frail-looking babies while waiting to be screened to access nutritional services. The sight of these children could make one break

down in tears; they looked very thin for their ages and the outline of their ribs was visible. Their mothers were not looking healthy either. And it was gathered that about 1,495 children in the camp who had SAM were admitted and treated between January and September 1, 2021.

According to a health worker in the camp, food donation to the IDP was not regular and most of the women have their food preferences. It was revealed that most of the women in the camp preferred their local food. So, instead of cooking the rice, beans and other food items they receive from donors, they exchange them for their choice foods, which is usually wheat and maize. Some of them sometimes sell the foodstuff and use the proceeds to solve other problems.

According to Aisha Nasir, "Government is not doing enough for the camp. People here need food; even some of the mothers are malnourished. The International Red Cross Society (ICRC) used to supply food to the camp but has stopped since last year. The State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) once in a while brings food items but it is not regular".

Aisha also stated that the baby was her sixth child and that her husband was a successful farmer until they were displaced from their home. She lamented that the major challenge at the camp was hunger, confirming that the ICRC, which used to supply food to the camp, stopped some years back. She further lamented that her family barely eat two meals in a day, adding that food supplies from the SEMA were not enough for the number of households living in the camp. She particularly pointed out that:

"We survive by going to the farm and picking some grains which we sell N30.00 and use the proceeds to buy food for our families. Though life in the IDP camp is not easy, I would rather live in the camp than go back to the community and suffer bandit attacks, she said.

Salamatu Usman, a mother of four and petty trader, said she knew that her children were suffering but she could not help the situation. She particularly averred that:

"I am a daily trader and we feed along that line. Whatever I make in a day will determine how we eat that day. Food is very expensive these days. Some foods that we used to savor have now become luxury. These days, I'm not looking at a balanced diet, but what will fill each person's stomach that is not too expensive.

It is you that knows which food is balanced or not," she said.

### Conclusion

Banditry and challenges of food security in Nigeria's fourth republic is endemic, findings of this paper has brought to limelight banditry and the challenges of food security in Nigeria's fourth republic. The ultimate challenge of food security caused by banditry is that in areas where banditry is high, an average farmer is afraid of going to farm. If farmers are not assured of their safety, there is no way they would want to keep producing food. In such a situation, food becomes scarce, thus making its prices to increase. This is not to forget the damage to the ecosystem caused by the various pollutions carried out by the bandits. In all, banditry has posed serious challenges not only to food security but to other sectors of the Nigerian society. Considering the current state of affairs, there will be no confidence and commitment of citizens to national issues and by extension, underdeveloped economy. The economic and financial impact is about the most critical area that the ever increasing cases of kidnapping has negatively affected and still affecting Nigerian citizens as well. Where insecurity looms as has been the case with many parts of the country in recent times, virtually every economic and commercial activity will be grounded. Foreign and domestic investors only invest in the economy considered safe, friendly and fairly stable, because it require stable and conducive environment for economic activities to thrive, an unfavorable environment discourages potential investors, as they struggle to forecast the future of their investment.

Citizens, government at all level(s) should return to the drawing table to chart ways of curbing banditry through dialogue, involvement of the traditional rulers and youths in the community. Through dialogue, differences between farmers and herders would be resolve amicably, traditional rulers' involvement would bring government closer to the people by providing leadership, and involvement of the youths in vigilante groups would not only curb banditry but decline the rate of youth's restiveness.

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Interview with Blessing Francis, 43, Teacher, Ikorodu, Lagos.

Interview with Salamatu Usman, 41, Trader, Kaduna.

Interview with Tosin Daramola, 40, Trader, Ikorodu, Lagos.



