



Boko Haram, Banditry and Kidnapping Nexus: Impact on Nigeria's Security

Augustine C. Osigwe, PhD, Terfa W. Abraham, PhD, Abubakar M. Saidu, PhD, Fadila Jumare, PhD, Christopher O. Ngara PhD, Rifkatu Nghargbu, PhD

*National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies, National Assembly
Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria*

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Summary

- Abuja, the federal capital is bordered by the states of Niger to the west and northwest, Kaduna to the northeast, Nasarawa to the east and south, and Kogi to the southwest. The security situation in these states is increasingly getting worse without any sign of reversing to normalcy in any time soon. This fact is supported by the recent cases of insecurity across the aforementioned states. Received evidence have shown that it is better and cost effective to be proactive than to be reactionary.
- The increase in the number of cases from Boko haram, banditry, and kidnapping attacks, are among the serious security challenges facing Nigeria with consequences for national development. Experience has shown that terrorist organizations traditionally align with criminal networks such as drug traffickers and money launderers to support their operations. This brief examines the link between Boko Haram, kidnapping and banditry and its impact on national security.
- According to the Nigerian Security Tracker, there were 1044 incidences of terror attacks by *Boko Haram* in the North-East region within 2009-2016, with diverse methods of attack in use. These included armed attacks; bombing and explosions, midnight/terror attacks; mass murder/suicide raid, assassination/murder, and abductions.
- The proportion of cases of persons kidnapped between January and June 2021 accounts for nearly 50% of all the kidnapped cases in Nigeria from 2014 to date. Whereas the earlier days of Boko Haram were characterized by the abduction of persons to bring themselves to the

limelight and get national and global attention, their fusion with bandits in the latter days has been characterized by hostage-taking for ransom. This has consequences for the nation's economic development. Addressing this triple threat that confronts the nation's security is therefore vital to fostering national development.

- It is necessary to conduct speedy and fair trials of those found to be Boko Haram activists or sponsors and letting the law take its full course. The National Assembly may, also enact an enabling law that would impose capital punishment for kidnapping in Nigeria. The Nigerian government may endorse a strict anti-kidnapping law, where kidnapping should be charged as a capital offense, with punishments based on the different types and levels of kidnapping. Community policing may be complemented with effective prosecution of offenders and the government at the local level must be given adequate powers to protect the local communities. There is a need to curtail the illegal flow of weapons as it creates a culture of violence and unstable society through criminal influence and illegal smuggling.

I. Introduction

The civil liberty and freedom that followed the transition from military to democratic rule in 1999 opened up the space for the expression of years of bottled anger and suppressed agitations by many segments of the Nigerian population. This development put to test the capacity of the Nigerian state to ensure effective social control and manage its economy and diversity. The effect of this no



sooner than later coalesced into the emergence of armed groups especially in the Niger Delta region where such groups kidnap foreign oil workers, initially, to draw international attention to the environmental and socio-economic plight of oil-producing communities,¹ and later for ransom. The successes of kidnapping activities which was more predominant in the South became an incentive for its spread to other parts of the country.

Although kidnapping and banditry mostly go together, deeper socio-economic malaise in recent years has also given rise to banditry across Northwestern states particularly, Katsina and Zamfara and shaping up to become full-scale insurgency.² The bandits are alleged to be primarily motivated by personal economic gains and survival rather than any political or ideological pursuits. Their original mission was to fight on behalf of herders in their disputes with farmers. However, the rogue elements amongst them also got involved in criminal activities such as cattle rustling, armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, pillage and attacks on gold miners and traders.³ They are organized into identifiable groups which are less cohesive and act autonomously sometime in rivalry with one another.⁴

Boko Haram which became known in 2012 in the Northeastern states of Borno and Yobe, is a terrorist group with links outside the country. It abhors western education and has as its ultimate goal the replacement of the current political order in Nigeria with an Islamic state. Thus, the group has sustained over a decade of guerrilla insurgency against the Nigerian state with multiple loss of lives and properties particularly in the North-east. Interestingly, despite the independent origin of the Boko Haram, kidnapping and banditry in different parts of the country, recent trends point to a

growing linkage between the tripods. It is noteworthy that the interests of the Boko Haram in expanding its base beyond North-east,⁵ the desire to create diversion from the pressure of military offensive in the North-east, and the need to expand fields of recruitment and financial gains from ransom payments and other activities like illegal gold mining⁶ appears to be fueling the spike in banditry and kidnapping across the country.

Experience has shown that terrorist organisations traditionally align with criminal networks such as drug traffickers and money launderers to support their operations. According to the Centre for Security Studies⁷ (CSS), Islamist terrorist groups in particular use extorted ransom funds to finance a significant share of their expenses. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is alleged to have collected a total of \$89 million in such revenues between 2003 and 2012. Terrorist groups usually use proceeds of such crimes to recruit new members, procure weapons and communication equipment, maintain training camps, organise and execute attacks.

A troubling report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) in 2017, revealed an increasingly close collaboration between Boko Haram, kidnapers and Fulani herdsmen bandits operating in the North-west hiding behind unregulated open grazing.⁸ Kayode Fayemi, the executive Governor of Ekiti State and the Chairman of the Nigerian Governors' Forum (NGF), in March 2021, alleged that there is a direct link between insurgency in the North-east, banditry in the North-west, or kidnapping in the South-west; and that the proceeds are being used for Boko Haram operations in the North-east.⁹ Governor

¹ Ossanvo, W. and Okereke, D. (2019). Nigeria's kidnapping Crisis. ENACT. Retrieved from Nigeria's kidnapping crisis - ENACT Africa on 26/8/2021.

² Oguntola, S. (2020). Banditry and Boko Haram now Intractable. *The Nations* June 13. Retrieved from Banditry and Boko Haram now intractable - The Nation Nigeria (thenationonline.net) on 26/8/2021.

³ Mungadi et al (2020). Roadmap to Tackling Insurgency, Banditry and Kidnapping in the Northwest Region of Nigeria. *Journal of Xidian University* 14(10): 914-928.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ *YallAfrica* (2021). Strong Link between Boko Haram and Banditry in Nigeria Alleged. Retrieved from Strong Links Between Boko Haram, Banditry in Nigeria Alleged - allAfrica.com on 26/8/2021.

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ *Triangle News Magazine* (2021). Fayemi on Alliance of Evil between Boko Haram and Kidnapping Gangs. Retrieved from Fayemi on alliance of evil between Boko Haram and kidnapping gangs - Triangle News Online on 26/8/2021.

⁹ *News Express* (2021). Boko Haram Sponsors behind Banditry, Kidnapping, Says Fayemi. March 30. Retrieved from <https://www.newsexpressngr.com/news/120311->



Nasir el-Rufai of Kaduna State also corroborated Fayemi's position when he asserted that kidnapping operations by bandits are substantially funding Boko Haram activities in the North-east.

A recent United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) indicates that more than 1,000 children have been abducted by Boko Haram since 2013, including 276 girls from Chibok in Borno state and 133 from Dapchi in Yobe state.¹⁰ The group is also believed to have abducted several hundred people over the past five years in attacks on villages in North-east Nigeria as well as in neighbouring countries of Niger and Cameroon.¹¹ It is against this background that this brief explore the linkage between Boko Haram, kidnapping and banditry and its impact on national security.

II. Analysis of Security Situation in States Sharing Boundary with Abuja

Abuja, the federal capital is bordered by the states of Niger to the west and northwest, Kaduna to the northeast, Nassarawa to the east and south, and Kogi to the southwest. The security situation in these states is increasingly getting worse without any sign of reversing to normalcy in any time soon. At the moment, it is still uncertain whether there is link among the unscrupulous elements behind the ugly security situation in the aforementioned states. Thus, providing evidence to establish the link or otherwise, has become more relevant now than ever before. The reason being that in the event that there is link amongst the worrisome security situation in these states, invading Abuja, then becomes a matter of alignment among the elements behind the security situations in these states. Evidence of cases of insecurity in these locations have shown that insecurity from these states is fast spreading and almost approaching Abuja. For instance, Table 1 presents some of the recent cases of insecurity across the states that border Abuja.

Boko-Haram-sponsors-behind-banditry-kidn on
26/8/2021.

¹⁰Ossanvo, W. and Okereke, D. (2019). Nigeria's kidnapping Crisis. ENACT. Retrieved from Nigeria's kidnapping crisis - ENACT Africa on 26/8/2021.

¹¹ Ibid.



Table 1: Recent Cases of Insecurity Across States Sharing Border with Abuja

S/N	Incident	Location	Date	Source
1.	Bandits Kill Nigerian Army Major-General, Former Provost Marshal Along Abuja-Lokoja Road, Kidnap Wife	Abuja-Lokoja Road	July 15 th , 2021	Sahara Reporters ¹²
2.	Terrorists regroup at the Nasarawa/Benue border from where they launch attacks on residents	Nasarawa–Benue Border	January 22, 2021	Premium Times ¹³
3.	According to the Niger state governor, Boko Haram terrorists now operates in Kaure - a community that is about two hours' drive from Abuja. The governor also stated that, "If care is not taken, even Abuja is not safe".	Niger-Abuja Border	May 1, 2021	Thisday Newspaper ¹⁴
4.	Kaduna govt. confirms attack on travellers on Abuja-Kaduna highway	Abuja-Kaduna highway	May 29, 2021	Premium Times ¹⁵

Source: Authors Compilation

¹² <http://saharareporters.com/2021/07/15/breaking-bandits-kill-nigerian-army-major-general-former-provost-marshal-along-abuja>

¹³ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/438008-boko-haram-carrying-out-attacks-in-nasarawa-governor-tells-buhari.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/05/01/chaos-as-boko-haram-bandits-spread-tentacles/>

¹⁵ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/464424-kaduna-govt-confirms-attack-on-travellers-on-abuja-kaduna-highway.html>



There is need for the relevant security agencies to gather intelligence to this effect before it becomes too late. A reinforcement of the criminal elements through a valid network across these states, will

3. Content and Trend Analysis of Boko Haram, Banditry and Kidnapping

Boko Haram

Boko Haram began as a local Islamic movement when a group of radical preachers infiltrated religious, social and political circles in the Northeastern Nigeria. The group does not call itself Boko Haram; its preferred name is the Jamaat-u-Ahli-Sunna-Lidda-Awati Wal-Jihad - "the organization committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad." Its founder, Mohammad Yusuf, was a preacher who rose to prominence in the early 2000s in the town of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state in Nigeria's North East region¹⁶.

Nearly 20 years later, the power that Boko Haram wields at the local level has continued almost unabated. Boko Haram is alleged to have flourished unchecked in Borno state before 2009, under political cover from the then state's governor, Ali Modu Sheriff. However, in 2009, security forces led a crackdown on Boko Haram, killing more than 700 members, including Yusuf. The group became more radical and deadly after that, taking on its current incarnation under Yusuf's successor, Abubakar Shekau¹⁷.

Boko Haram - which translates literally to "Western education is forbidden" - has, since 2009, killed tens of thousands of people in Nigeria, and has displaced more than two million others. Borno state has borne the brunt of the violence in the insurgency, with nearly 30,000 deaths reported from July 2011 to date (these can be attributed to Boko Haram, state actors, or sectarian actors). Adamawa state is second, with nearly 4,000 deaths reported. Other Northern states follow¹⁸. In 2015, at the height of its influence and control of territory, Boko Haram - was ranked the world's deadliest terrorist group by the Global Terrorism

portend a serious danger and doom to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Received evidence have shown that it is better and cost effective to be proactive than to be reactionary.

Index, ahead of the Islamic State group (ISIS). Figure 1 captures violence against civilians, explosions and remote violence unleashed by Boko Haram in Nigeria.

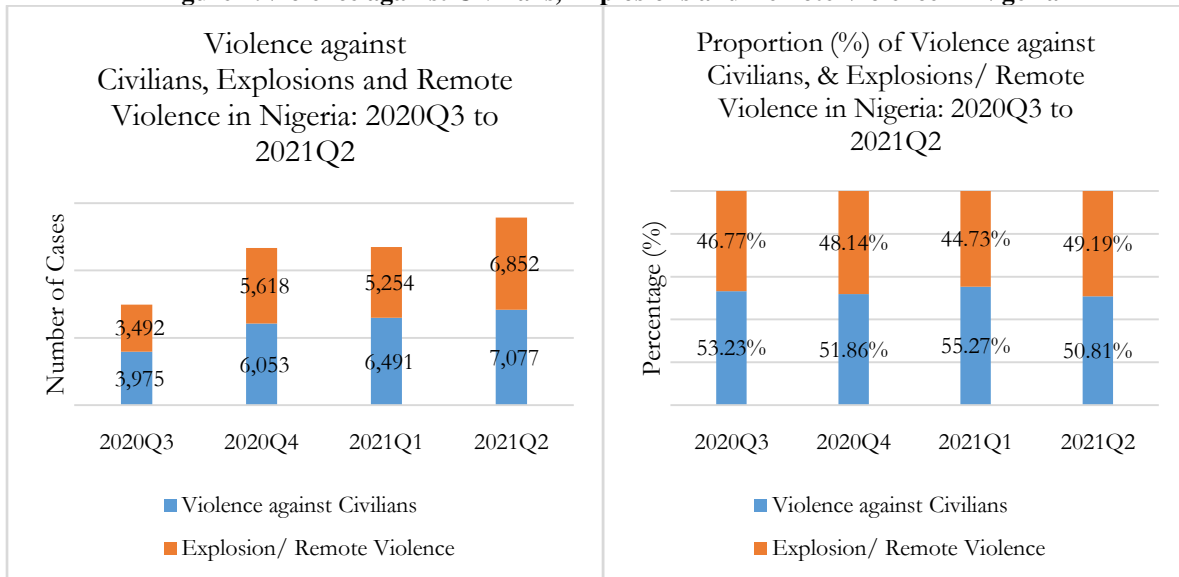
¹⁶ Afzal (2020) From "Western Education Is Forbidden" To the World's Deadliest Terrorist Group

¹⁷ Afzal (2020).

¹⁸ John Campbell, "Nigeria Security Tracker," Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>.



Figure 1: Violence against Civilians, Explosions and Remote Violence in Nigeria



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), 2021

Three popular narratives have been used to explain the existence of Boko Haram and these are:

- ✚ The “lack of education” narrative: This narrative holds the view that lack of education explains terrorism and the rise of Boko Haram;
- ✚ The al-majiri narrative: This narrative explains the existence of Boko Haram as al-majiris - children educated in Islamic seminaries (some analysts say there are 10 million such children in Northern Nigeria) – who serve as Boko Haram recruits;
- ✚ The “tearing up certificates” narrative: This narrative is hinged on the view that University students in Northern Borno and Yobe, after listening to Mohammad Yusuf’s sermons in which he railed against Nigerian institutions, tore up their certificates saying their education was useless as it did not help them get jobs, and joined the movement. This “tearing up certificates” narrative, of course, posits that the educated joined Boko Haram, and contradicts the lack of education and al-majiri narratives about the dominant source of recruits for the group. The notion that the unemployed join Boko Haram fits with all three narratives, though those who postulated it most often linked it to the al-majiri or lack of education.

Banditry violence

Banditry violence is a major concern and insecurity which has affected many all over the country especially in Zamfara, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto, Kebbi and Katsina states. About 21 million people living in these states have been affected. The violence has affected about 35 out of 92 local government areas in the 4 States¹⁹. Banditry and kidnapping for ransom on commercial scale which became rampant spreading across all the 36 States began in 2011 as farmer/herder conflict and then increased from 2017 to 2018 to include cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, sexual violence and killings. Many of the armed bandits are allegedly Fulani who have joined gangs involved in cross-border armed robbery and cattle-rustling in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Senegal and Mali²⁰. Some of these Fulani who joined the gangs have lost their cattle and as a way to survive resorted to highway robbery and cattle rustling²¹. Thousands of Nigerians irrespective of their social class or economic status have fallen victim of kidnapers to pay millions of Naira in ransom for their freedom. In the North-western States of Zamfara, Katsina

¹⁹

<https://www.acaps.org/country/nigeria/crisis/north-west-banditry>

²⁰ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/51c95bd04.html>

²¹

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/253631>



and Kaduna, hundreds of people including women and children have been abducted and others killed by bandits.

Kidnapping

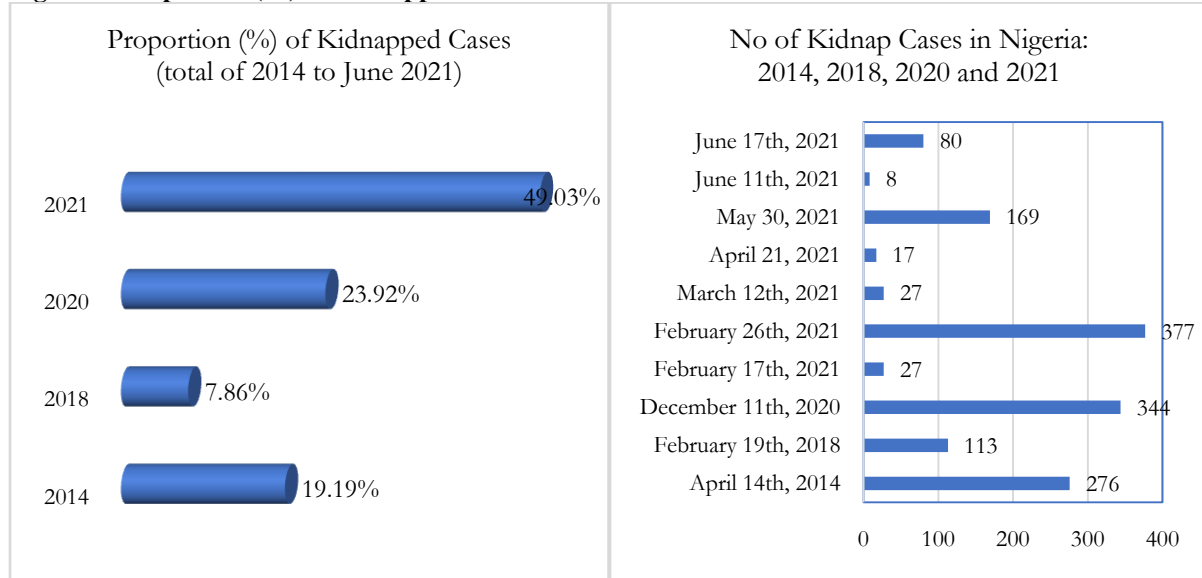
Until 2006, kidnapping cases in Nigeria were common around the Niger Delta region and mostly amongst the oil producing communities. Rising attacks by Boko haram terrorists and the other armed bandits including activities of pirates around the Gulf of Guinea led to the rise of the kidnapping cases across the country. According to the Nigerian Security Tracker, there were 1,044 incidences of terror attacks by *Boko Haram* in the North-East region within 2009-2016, with diverse methods of attack in use.²² These included armed attacks; bombing and explosions, midnight/terror attacks; mass murder/suicide raid, assassination/murder and abductions. In addition, there exist preponderance of criminal activities such as kidnapping and abductions for ransom and piracy in the Niger-Delta region, land grabbing in the South West region, human trafficking, armed robbery, and assassinations, amongst others. Terrorism continues to pose a major threat to national peace and security and undermines the core responsibility of governance. The motivations, financing, methods of attack and choice of target of terrorism are constantly evolving.

The proportion of cases of persons kidnapped between January and June 2021 accounts for near 50% of all the kidnapped cases in Nigeria from 2014 to date (see Figure 2 and Table 2). Whereas at the earlier days of Boko Haram was characterized by abduction of persons to bring themselves to lime light and get national and global attention, their fusion with bandits in the later days have been characterized by hostage taking for ransom.

²² UNDP (2018). National Human Development Report 2018.



Figure 2: Proportion (%) of Kidnapped Cases



Source: Premium Times, 2021

Source: Premium Times, 2021

Table 2: Major Cases of Kidnap in Nigeria in 2014, 2018, 2020 and 2021

Date	Description	No of cases
April 14 th , 2014	276 students at government girls secondary , Chibok, Borno State	276
February 19 th , 2018	113 school girls at government girls secondary and technical college, Dapchi, Yobe state	113
December 11 th , 2020	344 schoolboys at government science secondary school, kankara, katsina state	344
February 17 th , 2021	27 students at Government science college, Kagara, Niger state	27
February 26 th , 2021	377 students at Government girls secondary school, Jengebe, Zamfara state	377
March 12 th , 2021	27 students at Federal college of forestry mechanization, Afaka, Kaduna state	27
April 21, 2021	17 students at Green field university, Kaduna state	17
May 30, 2021	169 pupils at Salihu Tanko Islamic School, Teginia, Niger state	169
June 11 th , 2021	8 students at Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic, Zaria, Kaduna state	8
June 17 th , 2021	80 students at Federal Government College Birnin Yauri, Kebbi State	80

Source: Premium Times, 22 June 2021²³

²³ <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/469110-timeline-seven-years-after-chibok-mass-kidnapping-of-students-becoming-norm-in-nigeria.html>



3. Tracing the link among Boko Haram, Banditry and Kidnapping

Report²⁴ shows that Boko Haram has been actively building alliance with bandits as part of its expansionist agenda unnoticed by the security agencies. One important scenario was when Boko Haram faction leader Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility in December 2020 for the mass abduction of more than 300 school boys in Katsina State, North-west, Nigeria. The incidence was however not taken seriously since the abduction was carried out by bandits, especially in a region where Boko Haram was not thought to be present. The report by Institute for Security Studies (ISS) research²⁵ shows that Boko Haram did not only participate in the abduction but established that there is a link between the group and bandits before the incidence. There were three major motivations for establishing the link: the interest to expand Boko Haram base beyond the North-east to North-west, North-central and other parts of the country; to establish an Islamic state that goes beyond the North-east as well as recruitment and financial gains from ransom payments. As part of the motivation for expansion was to create a diversion of attention of the security agencies by creating threats to security in other parts of the country so as to reduce pressure from these security forces.

The ISS report also confirms the link between Boko Haram, bandits and Fulani herders through an internal video message that was sent to Fulani in 2014 which shows how Shekau was seen expressing gratitude to fighters in Katsina State and other unspecified locations. These continued in Niger and Zamfara states even after six (6) years.

4. Areas for Legislative Consideration

It is necessary for the Legislature to pass laws to effectively deal with the issues of Boko Haram, banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. The National Assembly may, as a matter of urgency, enact an enabling law that would impose capital punishment for kidnapping in Nigeria based on the different types and levels of kidnapping. Community policing may be complemented with effective prosecution of offenders and government at the local level must be given adequate powers to

protect the local communities. Other Strategies include:

- ✚ It is necessary for the House Committees on Judiciary and Justice to ensure that speedy and fair trials of those found to be Boko Haram activists or funders are conducted to and let the law take its full course. Law enforcement and coercive capabilities must be fully employed to checkmate and restore the state's coercive power over the bandits to achieve their required operations.
- ✚ There is need for the senate committee on National Security and Intelligence to scale up intelligence gathering capabilities of security agencies, particularly human intelligence to enable them have easy access to bandits. Human assets may be planted inside the cells of bandits to collect intelligence of when they are going to operate. This will enable security agencies to prevent banditry from happening rather than using force to kill people when the incidents are already happening.
- ✚ The House and Senate Committees on Police Affairs may recommend to the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) to provide the new security outfits established by the police with vehicles and communication devices as well as ensure synergy in their relations with other security agencies in order for the community to be reporting any suspicious movement about kidnappers' hideouts. In order to reduce the capability of Boko Haram, there is need to improve the professionalism and competence of the NPF and the Armed Forces.
- ✚ The Senate Committee on National security & Intelligence may ensure that a presentation and feedback mechanism between the communities and the leadership of the security formations at the local government level, at the state level and at the National level may be considered. Root cause analysis may be conducted at the lower level such that the Senate Committee on National security & Intelligence may consider a bottom-top approach to understanding the differences between banditry and kidnapping in each

²⁴<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/boko-haram-teams-up-with-bandits-in-nigeria>

²⁵<https://issafrica.org/iss-today/boko-haram-teams-up-with-bandits-in-nigeria>



of the states concerned. This requires a tactical synergy between grassroots vigilantes and the state security operatives. The State and Local governments may be empowered to lead this process and be the faces of the fight against Boko Haram.

- ✚ In addition, the Senate Committee on National security & Intelligence may work closely with the community formations and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to assist the NPF in identifying those who have taken it upon themselves to interface or dialogue with the criminals in order to implement its operational action plan. This will enable the NPF to see who is involved, where they are and deliberate on the best way to address security issues in the country.
- ✚ The Senate Committee on Establishment and Public Services may consider scrapping Institutions and agencies of government that are not useful so that more attention and funding can be channeled into rapidly expanding the size of the members of the security agencies to improve the chances of better policing of borders, escalating intelligence gathering and rapid deployment in many theatres simultaneously.
- ✚ International dimension to banditry and insecurity may be strictly considered because insurgency and insurgents are all over the country's borders such as Chad, Niger and Mali. In this respect, the House Committee on Internal Affairs may develop strategies to control the country's porous borders.
- ✚ There is need for the Senate and House Committees on Defense to contain illegal flow of weapons, to ensure that the kidnapping industry is stopped from all sources of financing and small arms that is very widespread within the industry. Also, Senate and House Committees on Industries may develop supervisory and monitoring mechanisms for the local black-smith throughout their production process so that any weapons produced by them will not end up in the wrong hands or with criminals and kidnapers.

5. Conclusion

Boko haram, banditry and kidnapping are among the serious security challenges facing Nigeria and have since become a threat to national security. Banditry manifested and took a large scale in almost all the northwestern states of Nigeria. The bandits are alleged to be Fulani who compete for resource and land use and thus engage in bitter fights and retaliations. However, the rogue elements amongst them also got involved in criminal activities such as cattle rustling, armed robbery and kidnapping for ransom. Boko Haram is an Islamic sect which became prominent in 2009; originally in Borno and Yobe States and later spread to almost all the six North-eastern States. The group has as its ultimate goal - establishing a true Islamic state and has sustained over a decade of guerrilla insurgency against the Nigerian State with multiple loss of lives and property, particularly in the north-east. Recent studies point to a growing linkage between Boko Haram, kidnapping and armed banditry. There is need for National Assembly as a matter of urgency to enact an enabling law that would impose capital punishment for kidnapping in Nigeria. The National Assembly may enact a strict anti-kidnapping law, where kidnapping should be punished with capital terms. Community policing may be supported and financed to complement police force. Effective prosecution and speedy trials of offenders may also be encouraged. Governments at the local level must be given adequate powers to protect the local communities.