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## AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATION OF BANDITRY IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined audience perception of socio-economic implications of banditry in North Central Nigeria with a focus on Niger State. The study employ survey design and data were collected through well-structured questionnaire administered. The study was anchored with Agenda setting theory. A sample of 308 was selected using convenient sampling. Tables were adopted in the analysis. The study discovered that there is a significant effect of rural armed banditry on socio-economic activities in Niger State. Analysis suggests that respondents had a negative perception about the effectiveness of measures adopted by the Niger State government in terms of curtailing rural banditry in the state. It was discovered that poverty and illiteracy were the major causes of rural banditry in Niger State. Employment opportunities should be provided by the government; this will assist in reducing poverty, unemployment and the higher numbers of youths engaging themselves in drug abuse, and all forms of social vices in the society. Government at federal, state and local government level in Nigeria should collectively employ more security personnel and increase funding and motivation of existing officers.

**Keywords:** Audience, Bandits, Socio-Economic, Perception, Niger State.

### **Introduction**

One of the deadly groups causing a serious threat to the consolidation of democracy and good governance in Nigeria is banditry for almost a decade now. The northern parts of Nigeria have been struggling with the activities of bandits such as kidnapping, cattle rustling; rape, killing, looting and as well as arson (Akinyetun, 2022). Historically, kidnapping in Nigeria can be traced to the kidnapped of a foreign oil worker who was abducted in the Niger Delta Area around 2006 (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020). Though, the danger of banditry and abduction has lately become a continuous occurrence affecting the unity and existence of Nigerians residing particularly in the northern parts of the country (Akinyetun, 2022). Thus, it has become so obvious that the Nigerian government as well as foreign countries is now paying little or no attention to it. This is because the attacks carried out by bandits are often now underreported or sometimes not even reported by the media, despite that the attacks without doubt happens almost daily, irrespective of the measures adopted by the government. As such, one could argue that Nigerians are usually abducted, harass, killed and properties worth billions of dollars are daily destroyed by the activities of bandits.

Against this backdrop, the activities of bandits have continued to affect states like Niger, Katsina, Zamfara, Kaduna and Sokoto State. In this direction, citizens and communities have become homeless and living in tension, in fact, it has become almost impossible to sleep comfortable in these states at the moment. The above prompt the leadership of the Nigerian Senate led by Ahmed Lawal to asserts that the activities of bandits and its threats have caused a lot of insecurity which in turn affects the socio-economic activities of the Nigerian state, as a result foreign direct investment as well as potential investors are now scared of investing their monies in some parts of northern Nigeria (Umoru, 2019). Supporting the above trading economics and Central Bank of Nigeria(2020) observed that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has reduced in Nigeria from 1269.22 in 2017 to 959.52 in 2018, a additionally declined to 909.54 in 2019, which are credited to worsening uncertainty caused by bandits, Boko Haram and all kinds of insecurity in Nigeria (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020). Similarly, banditry have also affected the whole financial and economic activities in rural areas within the North Central and North Western States (Caleb, 2021). According to the National Bureau of Statistics around 80 million out of the predictable 200 million Nigerians are living in abject poverty, whereas the level of those unemployed is peaked around 33% which is now been increased by the daily attacks carried out by bandits and other groups in Nigeria (Adetayo, 2022). Ladan and Matawalli (2022). The unsettled crises and conflicts between farmers and herdsmen that moved from areas such as Paikoro, Kontogora, Shiroro, Munya, Rijau, Muye and Mashegu. Banditry in Shiroro LGA started since around 2017 and increased in 2020 especially during COVID 19 pandemic (Awwal, 2020). Presently, one of the major areas affected by banditry in Niger State is Shiroro, in this area a lot of attacks have been carried out where humans have been killed and properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed (Awwal, 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

No country can develop in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without the protection of human lives and existing properties in a country. The availability of human security provides people with the opportunity to legitimately search for a means of survival in a country without anxiety, harassment; the threats of lives and properties (Akinyetun, 2022). Studies have shown that security is the availability active measures to efficiently tackle insecurity with the use of experts. Contrastingly, the dangers of banditry have to some extent been curtailed by the Niger State government to some local government areas, so as to improve the security of people and the development of economic activities in the state. Yet, these dangers posed by bandits have continued to pose a major threat to the people in Niger State and the whole of Nigeria (Awwal, 2020).

Similarly, bandit attacks have impacted negatively on the existing economic activities

in the state, cultural activities and also the political development of the state and as well as the psychological aspects of the state. The above have made many people to become restless and because of lack of job, a lot of people now engage in social activities like banditry, kidnapping, and stealing (Muhammed & Umar, 2021). The governments have employed different strategies and measures to tackle insecurity in the state, however, all efforts to tackle these dangers are become futile daily. For example, Niger State has come up with different measures and policies to tackle insecurity, unfortunately, the activities of bandits have continued to affect the existence of the state (Muhammed & Umar, 2021). This study is designed to interrogate audience perception of socio-economic implication of Banditry in North Central Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

- i. What are the causes of rural armed banditry in Niger State
- ii. What are the effects of rural armed banditry on the socio-economic activities in Niger State?
- iii. What are the measures put in place by the Niger State government to curtail the level of rural armed banditry attacks on socio-economic activities in Niger State?
- iv. How effective are the measures put in place by the Niger State government to curtail the level of rural armed banditry attacks on socio-economic activities in Niger State?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is audience perception of socio-economic implication of Banditry in North Central Nigeria. Specifically, the study is designed to achieved the following:

- i. To find out the causes of rural armed banditry in Niger State
- ii. To ascertain the effects of rural armed banditry on the socio-economic activities in Niger State
- iii. To identify the measures put in place by the Niger State government to curtail the level of rural armed banditry attacks on socio-economic activities in Niger State
- iv. To ascertain the effectiveness of the measures put in place by the Niger State

government to curtail the level of rural armed banditry attacks on socio-economic activities in Niger State

## Conceptual Review

### The Concept of Banditry

There is no single universally accepted definition of banditry. Hence, the concept is defined differently by scholars, around geographical region and within a specific timeframe. Be that as it may, banditry is a derived from the term bandit which refers to the unlawful armed group threatening a group of persons and destroying their properties. The term is linked with the creation of smaller groups and gangs, who usually adopt the use smaller arms and weapons to destroy live and properties of people in a community. To this end, banditry can be defined as a criminal group setup deliberately to gain personally. In his contribution, Egwu (2016) view banditry as a practice of cattle theft and animals from people who rear animals or stealing of animals from their ranches. In this direction, the activities of bandits include kidnapping, rustling of cattle; drug abuse and the open killing of people in an area dominated by agricultural activities (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018), Shalangwa (2013) defines banditry as the practice of marauding and attacking people by a group of persons that are armed with the aim of killing or harming an individual. Nevertheless, where the term banditry is linked to rural, it usually means a group of local outlawed who engages in unlawful actions which includes looting of rural areas, abduction and the rustling of cattle for deadly accrual of wealth. Therefore, bandits are groups threatening and depriving people in the rural areas or travelers of their important properties which includes merchandise, cash, sheep, cattle as well as camel. These groups usually work within local areas and rural borders with the primary supports of those residing in local areas and as well as those who are employed by the states to protect live and properties in an area (Abdullahi, 2019). The phenomenon of banditry, which lately becomes popularized in Nigeria, is birthed by continued attacks and conflicts in local communities for almost a decade. The above have led to the destruction of lives and properties in areas like Zamfara, Niger and Kaduna States which have caused the displacement of people.

### Socio-Economic Development

According to Ake (2001), development is a multi-dimensional concept and centered on the activities of man in a society. This deals with the act of providing empowerment to the people who resides in a country so they can utilize their ideas and further use the available natural resources around them to earn a living (Ake, 2001). As observed by Abah and Nwokwu (2017), development means the transformation of social, economic and political activities in a country. Thus, development is continuum and a

process of social-cum economic development in a country. Development is often measured by lots of factors such as life expectancy of the people, life expectancy, literacy and levels of employment, and above all the gross domestic product.

Hence, economic development comprises of progress in providing health care facilities, basic education and better standard of living in a society (Belshaw & Livingstone, 2012). The meaning of the term “development” becomes obvious and precise with the understanding of the term “economic growth”. Economists usually sees economic growth as the increase over time in a country's real output per capita. However, other methods can be utilised, output is most suitably evaluated by the gross national product (GNP). The above means that economic growth is evaluated by the increase in a country's per capita GNP. Economic growth is therefore sustained level of production possibilities measured as an increase in the real GDP over a specific period. Rapid economic growth maintained over a number of years can transform a poor nation into a rich one, as has been the experiences of Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and other Asian economies (Bade & Parkin, 2020).

#### **Review of Related Studies**

Nwagboso (2012) examined security challenges and economy of the Nigerian State (2007-2011) The research utilised the theory of Relative Deprivation as its theoretical framework. Similarly, content analysis was used for the study. Findings showed that security challenges in the country are linked to bad governance as leaders have failed to tackle factors such as inequality, the level of poverty and unemployment and unequal distribution of scarce resources between other tribes which have led to crimes and continued agitation in Nigeria. The study suggested that government should formulate and practically implement policies that will address poverty, unemployment and inequality. Achumba (2013) conducted a study on insecurity situation in Nigeria and its impact on business investment, operations and sustainable development. The work used content analysis to investigate the issues raised. The study discovered that insecurity in Nigeria is primarily caused by security system, poverty, lack of job, ethnic cum political conflicts a border that is porous and above all the failure of government to provide infrastructure and access to basic education

Ewetan and Urhie (2014) assessed the pertinent issue of insecurity in Nigeria and its impact on socio-economic development. The research content analysed. The study discovered that insecurity is increasing daily which have caused a threat to humans and destruction of properties. It was also discovered that insecurity affects economic activities and peaceful coexistence of a county. The study suggested that the authority should create employment and motivate the security personnel in Nigeria

Adeleke (2013), conducted a study on insecurity: A threat to human existence and

economic development in Nigeria. Content analysis was used for the study and it was discovered that power the shift of power from the northern hegemony to a minority geo-political zone of South-south was responsible for some insurgent groups rising against the state; other factors that account for insecurity in the country include – intra/interparty rancour, porous boundaries, unemployment, job racketeering and illiteracy; that insecurity is harmful to general wellbeing of the people; it has led to destruction of businesses, properties and closing down of businesses. The research argued that government should give dialogue a chance through convocation of a conference of major ethnic and minority groups to make decision on a more peaceful way forward for Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The agenda setting role of the press, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be overemphasized. Nothing sets agenda in the minds of individuals like the media; that is to say, the mass media, due to its daily glamour, level of attractiveness; and its strong ability to convince the general public daily, helps to inform, enlighten, and provide the platform for interaction, dialogue, and engagement amongst conflicting parties in the society. In the light of the above, this study will be anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory of the mass media. The term “agenda” refers to a list, plan or roadmap of things to be considered. Agenda setting means the practical ability of the mass media to mentally mirror the world to their target audience.

To this study, agenda setting can be view as the way the mass media set the order or significance of trending issues, especially as related to news reportage. To this end, Asemah (2011) state that, when we say that the media set agenda for the public, it simply means that the mass media, whether electronic or print, have the ability to choose and focused on certain topics, thereby causing the public to perceive these issues as very significant. Agenda setting theory claims that the mass media have a strong influence on their target audiences, in the aspects of what stories and events to consider newsworthy and the level of prominence and space to give them. It is important to state that the crux of the model is the salience transfer. Salience transfer here deals with the ability of the press to transfer issues of significance from their news media agendas to public agendas, which inevitably and undeniably becomes an issue for public discuss. Hence, through mass media slowly selection and display of the news, editors and news directors, etc, serves as a precursor towards changing our attention; and influence our perceptions of what are the most significant issues of the day. Suffice to say, this ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda practically has come to be called the agenda setting role of the mass media.

Agenda setting theory claims that issues that receive serious attention on the national

news become the topics that the viewing public considers to be most important. The theory is relevant to the study in the sense that the mass media set agenda for the public to follow and have the ability to influence what people think about daily. Thus, since the mass media can set agenda for the public to follow, it becomes imperative to state that the media in Niger state can use their news coverage, documentaries and peace -building programmes to set an agenda towards peace-building in the state.

### **Method and Data**

The study employed survey design. A research survey design is a logical and systematic plan prepared for directing a research study. A research survey design is the type in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analysing data from few people considered to be representative sample of the entire population (Emaikwu, 2019).

The total number of the population size of this study would be the residents of Minna metropolis, which is approximated at 443, 592 (Niger State Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The population of the area would be used for the study, since Minna is the state capital and it comprises of literate and semi-literate persons, individuals of high and low economic status and people who cut across the major and minor tribes in Niger. Hence, findings from the population can be generalised for the entire state.

The usefulness of a sample size for a study cannot be overemphasized; as such, Ohaja (2013) justified the use of TaroYamane 's formula for researchers in determining the sample size from a given population. In this direction, Okoro (2015, p. 69) claims that "the choice of a sample size should be sufficient to assure the investigator that the sample will be representative of the population from which it is drawn. Against this backdrop, using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size for a population of 443,592 is 382 respondents

**The research adopted a convenient sampling procedure.** Convenience sampling method is a non-probability. The study employed descriptive statistical tool used for describing and summarising the data derived from the questionnaire using tabulation, frequency distribution and percentages.

### **ata Presentation**

Three hundred and eighty-two copies of the questionnaire were distributed (382). 308 copies were retrieved and validated for further analysis, making 80.6 percent response rate.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variable		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	146	47.4
	Female	162	52.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	18-21	149	48.4
	22-25	2	.6
	26-30	67	21.8
	31-35	90	29.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Work Status	Unemployed	114	37.0
	Employed	88	28.6
	Self-Employed	106	34.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Level of Education	None	8	2.6
	Graduate	182	59.1
	Undergraduate	118	38.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2023**

Table 1 shows that the study was dominated by female participants (52.6%), while males had 47.4 percent proportion of representation. Participants were young many were between the age of 18 to 21 (48.4%), followed by those who were between the ages of 26 to 30 (21.8%). Many of them were unemployed (37%), followed by those who were self-employed (34.4%); while 28.6 percent were employed. Majority of the respondents were literate, 59.1 percent were graduates, while 38.3 percent were undergraduates.

**Table 2 Causes of Rural Banditry in Niger State**

Variables	Strongly Agree Freq. (%)	Agree Freq. (%)	Undecided Freq. (%)	Strongly Disagree Freq. (%)	Disagree Freq. (%)	Mean $\bar{x}$
Poverty	50 (16.2)	67 (21.8)	108 (35.1)	38 (12.3)	45 (14.6)	3.13
Illiteracy	37 (12)	65 (21.1)	113 (36.7)	57 (18.5)	36 (11.7)	3.03
Frustration	42 (13.6)	47 (15.3)	106 (34.4)	50 (16.2)	63 (20.5)	2.86
Lack of job	33 (10.7)	42 (13.6)	119 (38.6)	53 (17.2)	61 (19.8)	2.39
poor governance	23 (7.5)	55 (17.9)	97 (31.5)	93 (30.2)	40 (13)	2.77
<b>Average Overall Mean</b>						<b>2.83</b>

**Source: Field Survey 2023**

Table 2 shows that poverty is the cause of rural banditry in Niger State with a mean score of  $(\bar{x}=3.13)$ . Illiteracy is the cause of rural banditry in Niger State with a mean score of  $(\bar{x}=3.03)$ ; frustration is the cause of rural banditry in Niger State with a mean score of  $(\bar{x}=2.86)$ ; lack of job is the cause of rural banditry in Niger State with a mean score of  $(\bar{x}=2.39)$  and poor governance is the cause of rural banditry in Niger State with a mean score of  $(\bar{x}=2.77)$  This suggests that poverty and illiteracy are the major causes of rural banditry in Niger State.

**Table 3 Effects of Rural Banditry on socio economic activities in Niger State**

	SA	A	D	SD	U	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	
Loss of lives and properties	103 (33.4)	193 (62.7)	5 (1.6)	-	7 (2.3)	4.3
Affecting agricultural activities	80 (26)	219 (71.1)	6 (1.9)	-	3 (1)	4.2
Affecting buying and selling of goods	77 (25)	221 (71.8)	7 (2.3)	-	3 (1.0)	4.2
<b>Average Overall Mean</b>						<b>4.2</b>

**Source:** Field Survey 2023

Table 3 indicates that rural banditry has affected loss of lives and properties in Niger State  $(\bar{x}=4.3)$ , it was also discovered that rural banditry affects agricultural activities in Niger State  $(\bar{x}=4.3)$  and that rural banditry has affected buying and selling of goods in Niger State  $(\bar{x}=4.2)$ . This analysis suggests that rural banditry has a negative effective on socio-economic activities in Niger State

**Table 4 measures put in place by the Niger State government to curtail the level of rural armed banditry attacks on socio-economic activities in Niger State**

Variables	VGE	GE	SE	LE	VLE	Mean $\bar{x}$
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	
Close down of markets	93 (30.2)	203 (65.9)	8 (2.6)	-	4 (1.3)	4.2
Banning of gathering	38 (12.3)	33 (10.7)	64 (20.8)	61 (19.8)	112 (36.4)	2.43
Banning of motor cycles and tri-cycles	30 (9.7)	33 (10.7)	61 (19.8)	76 (24.7)	108 (35.1)	2.35
Closing down of schools	27 (8.8)	29 (9.4)	66 (21.4)	66 (21.4)	120 (39)	2.28
Employing more security personnel's	29 (9.4)	24 (7.8)	63 (20.5)	66 (21.4)	126 (40.9)	2.23
<b>Average Overall Mean</b>						<b>2.5</b>

**Source:** Field Survey 2023

Table 4 shows that the respondents argued that the close down of markets by the Niger State government is one of the measures adopted by the state to curtail rural banditry to a great extent ( $\bar{x}=4.2$ ); respondents observe that the banning of gathering by the Niger State government is one of the measures adopted by the state to curtail rural banditry to a little extent ( $\bar{x}=2.43$ ); respondents asserts that the banning of motor-cycles by the Niger State government is one of the measures adopted by the state to curtail rural banditry to a little extent ( $\bar{x}=2.35$ ); respondents indicated that the closing down of schools by the Niger State government is one of the measures adopted by the state to curtail rural banditry to a little extent ( $\bar{x}=2.28$ ) and respondents observe that the employment of more security personnel by the Niger State government is one of the measures adopted by the state to curtail rural banditry to a little extent ( $\bar{x}=2.23$ ). This analysis implies that there are very little measures put in place by the government to curtail banditry in Niger State.

**Table 5: Perception of the Effectiveness of measures put in place by the Niger State government to curtail the level of rural armed banditry attacks on socio-economic activities in Niger State.**

	SA	A	D	SD	U	Mean
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	( $\bar{x}$ )
The banning of public gatherings is very effective	27 (8.8)	49 (15.9)	95 (30.8)	60 (19.5)	77 (25)	2.64
The close down of market is very effective	23 (7.5)	48 (15.6)	97 (31.5)	66 (21.4)	74 (24)	2.61
Employing more security personnel is very effective	-	-	-	1 (0.3)	307 (99.7)	1.00
<b>Average Overall Mean</b>						<b>2.1</b>

**Source:** Field Survey 2023

Table 5 indicates that respondent opined that the banning of public gathering is not effective ( $\bar{x}=2.64$ ). They disagreed with some of the following items that: the close down of schools as a measure of curtailing rural banditry is not effective ( $\bar{x}=2.61$ ), that the employment of more security personnel has not been very effective ( $\bar{x}=1.00$ ) This analysis suggests that respondents had a negative perception about the effectiveness of measures adopted by the Niger State government in terms of curtailing rural banditry in the state.

### Discussion of Findings

It was discovered that there is a connection between banditry and socio-economic activities in Niger State. The above is in tandem with Nwagboso (2012) study that showed that security challenges in the country are linked to bad governance as leaders have failed to tackle factors such as inequality, the level of poverty and unemployment and unequal distribution of scarce resources between other tribes which have led to crimes and continued agitation in Nigeria.

Likewise, Achumba (2013) discovered that insecurity in Nigeria is primarily caused by security system, poverty, lack of job, ethnic cum political conflicts a border that is porous and above all the failure of government to provide infrastructure and access to basic education. Additionally, Ewetan and Urhie (2014) stated that insecurity is

increasing daily which have caused a threat to humans and destruction of properties. It was also discovered that insecurity affects economic activities and peaceful coexistence of a county. The study suggested that the authority should create employment and motivate the security personnel in Nigeria

The study discovered that the measures devised by Niger State government to curtail Armed banditry have no significant influence on reduction of rural armed banditry. Thus, Musharafa and Adeniyi (2018) argued that government should give dialogue a chance through convocation of a conference of major ethnic and minority groups to make decision on a more peaceful way forward for Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

This study reveals that banditry poses a grave threat to the economic activities in Niger State and Nigeria at large, predominantly in the area of agricultural activities, cattle farming and buying and selling of goods in the local areas, and market operations. In line with the negative impact of banditry and its effects on the economy the Nigerian government have come up with measures to end this menace, however, the activities of bandits have continued to affect peaceful coexistence, lives and properties of the people at the moment. In the light of the above, this study argued that government must put in square pegs in square holes and also the media must objectively report issues related to insecurity in Niger State and Nigeria at large.

### **Recommendation**

- i. The Nigerian government should make sure that the demand and supply chains, comprising of the operational routes, markets, networks, syndicates, and infrastructures of cattle rustling, are thoroughly known and rip to pieces to do away with the criminal practice of cattle rustling and to promote Nigeria's food security.
- ii. Additionally, government at all level in Nigeria should invest in security and also work with other relevant stakeholders particularly in areas battling with banditry in northern parts of the country
- iii. The use of dialogue should be promoted by all stakeholders, these should include farmers, cattle farmers and government in the rural areas.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Access to the internet at a point in time to source for related materials for the paper was the key limitation of the paper and also inadequate power.

### **Suggestion for Further Studies**

The following studies are recommended for communication researchers along this path.

1. Audience perception of media coverage of Banditry and kidnapping to socio economic development in Nigeria.
2. Audience perception of media coverage to security measures of Banditry in Niger state.

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