



**USMANU DANFODIYO UNIVERSITY,
SOKOTO**



UNIVERSITY SEMINAR SERIES

“I AM A BANDIT”
A decade of Research in Zamfara State
Bandit's Den

by

Dr. Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i

(B.A., M.A., PhD.)

Department of History

Faculty of Arts & Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

Thursday, 9th September, 2021



THE CENTRAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
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Titled:

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**'TAMABANDIT':
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Bandit's Den**

Delivered under the Chairmanship of
The Vice-Chancellor
Professor Lawal Suleiman Bilbis
BSC, PhD, FSAN, FNSBMB, FSES, FASI

by

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary rural insecurity, otherwise known as rural banditry started in Zamfara around 2011, as a traditional farmer-herder conflict or insignificant rural unrest, changing into full-blown conflict, engulfing most parts of the Northwest. Multiple factors account for the transformation of this conflict. Traditional rulers, politicians, security agencies, gold miners are among the notable actors in the conflict. The first criminal gang was formed by Kundu,¹ and Buharin Daji.² It grew from a single cell, mainly in operating in Zamfara in 2011, to over one hundred and twenty (120) gangs across six states in 2021.³ These gangs are basically associated with mass killing of innocent people, cattle rustling, kidnapping, gender based and sexual violence (GBSV) and other related human rights abuses. At the beginning they lived in the woods and mountainous areas, from where they unleashed terror on the rural and urban areas in the states. Some of the bandits have become very daring to the extent of operating from their respective villages.

Approximately, there are over 10,000 armed bandits operating across different parts of Zamfara state.⁴ These gangs have so far

¹ Kundu was originally from Kastina, and by extension Bakatsine. His parents migrated from unknown village in Kastina and settled in a village around Kastina-Zamfara border. The village is called Zeranya village in present Zurmi Local Government Area of Zamfara State,

² BuharinDaji Killed his master and mentor Kundu and became the supreme leader of the gang, until his death on March, 7, 2018 in an encounter with his fellow rival gang Dogo Gede, Buhari was responsible from the expansion of the group across different areas of the Northwest.

³ Their main areas of operations is the Northwest are the states of Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kebbi and Kaduna and Niger state in the North-central part of Nigeria.

⁴ Daily Trust Newspaper, Sunday, December, 25, 2016: Armed Banditry: Mixed Reactions trail peace dialogue in Zamfara. About one thousand armed bandits surrendered their weapons and renounced banditry in Zurmi Local Government Area. Oral Interview with one of the major stakeholders in the disarmament process put the number of bandits in Zamfara during this period to over five thousand. The reason according to him was that there were more bandits in Maru, Tsafe, and Shinkafi Local Government Areas than in Zurmi Local Government Area. These bandits were from different ethnic groups and some even from other neighbouring countries.

killed over 12,000 people and stole about 250,000 livestock from 2011 to 2021.⁵ About 120 villages destroyed while 50,000 people were either internally displaced or made refugees in the neighbouring Niger Republic. Since the outbreak of this violence, several attempts and mechanisms were put in place to arrest the situation, by both the state and non-state actors, but to no avail. The intent of this paper is to study the origin, operations and structure of armed groups in Zamfara state. It demonstrates with clear evidence the remote and immediate factors that led to the emergence and transformation of the groups and their operational tactics over time

⁵ A Comprehensive Brief on the on-going Peace Process in Zamfara State Submitted to Army War College Nigeria Course 3/2019 Participants by CP Usman Nagogo on 22nd October, 2019

Historical Context

Banditry is not a new phenomenon in Zamfara region, because it had historical antecedents in the area. Traditional praise singers and oral historians spoke on how the activities of the bandits affected trade and other economic pursuits in the pre-colonial period.⁶ Some traditional rulers around Dan-Sadaw area were accused of colluding with bandits in armed robbery and rustling around 1891.⁷

Historically, armed banditry was an organized cross-border crime. The Asebenawa, Tuaregs, Fulani and Gobirawa from both British and French territories formed the major culprits.⁸ Communities around Kwotarkwashi, Mada, Chafe and Dansadaw were direct accomplice to the crime.⁹ The hills of Kwotarkwashi and Chafe for instance, provided shelter to the criminals, from where they organized and executed their unwholesome activities, which often resulted into serious casualties. The difficult nature of the terrain contributed to this development by making the perpetrators untraceable.¹⁰ In fact, considerable part of the rustled livestock and stolen goods were usually taken to Niger Republic and Mali during this period.¹¹

The situation has, except for the use of sophisticated weapons and mass carnage not changed in the present. Substantial parts of the

⁶ Alhaji Bello Abubakar, 68 years, Birnin Ruwa Gusau, 19 September, 2016.

⁷ NAK: SNP:17: Sokprof. Security Report on Dan-Sadaw Area, 1913

⁸ NAK/Sokprof.No.41: Report for the Quarterly Year ending... Ibid

⁹ NAK/Sokprof.No.42: Report for the Quarterly Year ending, June, 30th, 1911 by Mc Allister, 1911. Also, young men of Tudunawa, Zongonawa and Tamawa who resides at the hill- top of Kwatarkwashi collaborated with the other people from Niger in carrying out rural banditry.

¹⁰ The presence of this gave the people an opportunity to carry out their raids and banditry, an informant confirmed that the hill covers a large area and accommodate the communities of Tofa, Sankalawa, Dubewa, Gulubba, Kurmi and Madauci who lived at the bottom of the hill.

¹¹ NAK/Sokprof.No.42: Report for the Quarterly Year ending, June, 30th, 1911...op cit

first class Emirs in Zamfara State are allegedly deeply involved in banditry'.¹² During the colonial period, the region was also confronted with a situation where bandits killed about 210 traders and made away with goods worth £165,000:00. As reported, this onslaught occurred in the Zamfara axis to victims from Kano on their way to the French territory.¹³ The attendant constant harassment, intimidation and raids on herdsmen and traders continued unabated around Kwotarkwashi as far back as 1911.¹⁴ These raids as reported by the Resident of Sokoto Province McAllister caused immeasurable damage to the economy of the Province.¹⁵

The Colonial government responded to this widespread menace of rural banditry by stationing armed policemen in all the strategic routes across Sokoto Province tasking them with the responsibility of ensuring security, as well as inventory of goods and livestock, with a view to also generating revenue through the collection of Caravan Tolls.¹⁶ Such cross-border disturbances had not been peculiar to only Zamfara or Nigerian areas alone but common to most colonial territories in West Africa as Addo observes:

Cross-border crimes in West Africa have been in existence since the colonial period. Initially, they were manifested in

¹² Committee's Report on Insecurity in Zamfara State. It contained valuable information on the origin and different facets of insecurity in the state. The 500 page draft report has a list of high level actors in this conflict. The above figure on death toll quoted in the report is for the entire period of the conflict from 2010- 2019.

¹³ NAK/PRO/FO/403-316: Consul-General Jago to the Marquess of Land owed (received October, 15 no.4. Africa) Tripoli, North Africa, October, 7th, 1901. A copy of this file is deposited in National Archives Kaduna and Department of History, Bayero University Kano.

¹⁴ NAK/Sokprof.No.41: Report for the Quarterly Year ending, March, 31st 1911 by Mc Allister, 1911

¹⁵ NAK/Sokprof.No.41: Report for the Quarterly Year ending ...ibid

¹⁶ E.A Speed, (ed) *Laws of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria*, Being the Schedule of the Statute Laws Revision Proclamation, 1910, Stevens and Sons, 1910,p.401

the form of individuals or groups of traders and businessmen and women smuggling goods across the borders, as well as transnational syndicates who engaged in the trafficking of drugs, arms and human beings, among other things, as means of livelihood. West African criminal networks are generally characterized by their flexibility and ability to take on different forms and mode of operations. The criminal enterprises in West Africa used similar techniques to that of legitimate traders and business people, typical of lineage-based societies.¹⁷

This trend continued to surface and resurface in the post-colonial period, rearing its ugly head in many dimensions especially with the outbreak of intra-state conflicts in West Africa, which began with Liberia in 1989. In fact, constant civil wars and insecurity across the sub-region have provided a pool of mercenaries for recruitment into rural and urban conflict in Nigeria.¹⁸ Anecdotal evidence in support of this statement is the discovery of about 1,497 illegal routes across different Nigerian borders which criminals use in the smuggling of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs).¹⁹ People living in the country-side often observed the movement of these SALWs through unlawful routes. Herdsmen of Nigerian origin and their Malian, Chadian and Nigerian counterparts used the same routes to circulate SALWs.

Similarly, prior to the outbreak of rural violence in Zamfara the vigilante and other security operatives had intercepted such arms

¹⁷. P. Addo, 'Cross-Border Criminal Activities in West Africa: Options for Effective Responses', KAPTC Paper, No.12, May, 2006.

¹⁸. K. Aning, 'Liberia, Niger and Nigeria' In R. Moyes, (ed). *Explosive Remnants of War and Mines Other than Anti-Personal Mines-Global Survey, 2003-2004* London, Landmine Action.

¹⁹. F.C. Onuoha, 'Porous Borders and Boko Haram's Arms Smuggling Operations in Nigeria', Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies, Sept .2013.

transported through such routes.²⁰ The SALWs are often conveyed on camels, horses, donkeys and other related livestock in the name of legal or legitimate goods.²¹ In 2005, an estimated 4 million illicit arms were circulating in West Africa, out of which 1.5 million could be found in Nigeria.²² However, as at 2021, the number, ownership, use and sophistication of these weapons have tripled the 2005 figures. This is considering the increasing spate of violence in the country. Figure one below is the map of Nigeria showing the study area.

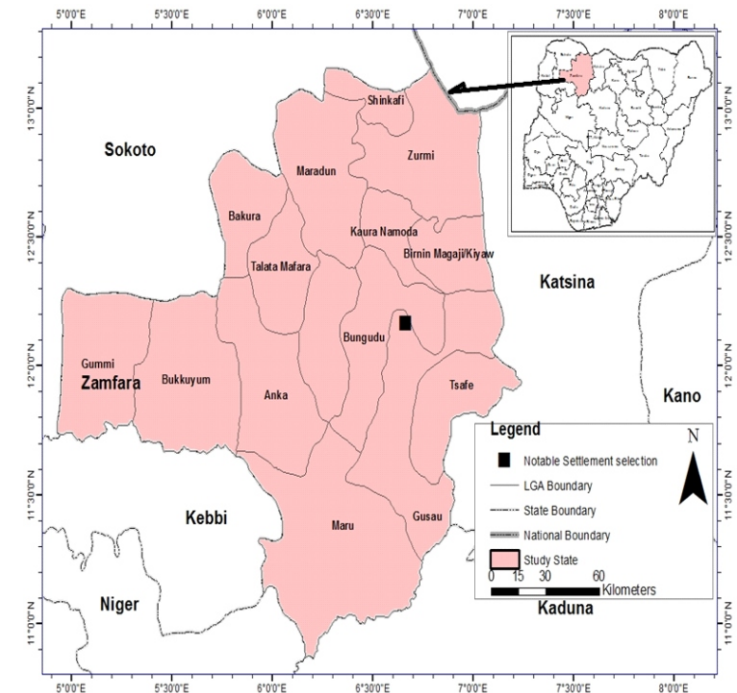


Figure 1:1 Map of Nigeria Showing Zamfara State and its Local Government Areas

²⁰ Alhaji Bello Danrani Bakura, Oral Interview at Iambar Bakura, 15th August, 2016

²¹. I. Abdullahi, 'Contextualizing the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Nigeria: The Untold Story': International Journal of Business and Law Research 3(1): 1-14, January- March 2015, SEAH Publications, 2015, www.seahipaj.org.

²². A. Ebo, "Small Arms Proliferation in Nigeria": (ed) Oiling the Violence: The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Niger Delta, Abuja. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2006

Factors and Actors

Contemporary armed groups first emerged around Dan-Sadau District, Maru Local Government area in Zamfara state. Several hypotheses have theories and school of thoughts evolved as to the reason for the rise of the criminal gangs in the area. The first is the speculation that says politicians in the state sponsored and armed some youth as political thugs to achieve their ambition in 2011.²³ The youth were abandoned after winning the elections, who then went into drug abuse, cattle stealing, robbery and later transformed into armed gangs attacking villages on motorbikes.²⁴ The first motorbikes used in the attacks were donations from politicians during elections campaign.²⁵ This explains the nexus between bandits and politicians in the state.²⁶ At the onset of conflict in 2011, authorities in Zamfara remained adamant, confused and unresponsive; thus adding flavour to the politician's connection to the conflict. Instead of strengthening the formal and informal security architecture in the state, the conflict was “sedated” and armed groups were lull to sleep through amnesty and state pardon.²⁷

The second narrative emphasized social grievance arising from the perceived deep rooted injustice against the pastoral communities.²⁸ The first armed group emerged with the name *Kungiyar Gayu* in Zamfara towards the end of 2011. Its initial aim as claimed by some of the founding fathers was to ensure the unity of the pastoralists and the struggle for social justice.²⁹

²⁷ On 18th December, 2016, the first set of the bandits about 1,000 of them surrendered their weapons and embraced peace in Zurmi Local Government. In a similar development, another group of bandits follow suit under the leadership of notorious Buharin Daji on 25th December, 2016.

²⁸ S.Y.B. Kura, 'Rural Terror, Cow and Governance: The Dynamics of Armed Banditry and Cattle Rustling in Zamfara', in Moses T. Aluaigba, (ed) Land Resource- Based Conflicts in Nigeria, Mambayya House, Kano, 2021, 255-292.

²⁹ Interview with Buharin Daji on 25th December, 2016 in Government House, Gusau Zamfara State

Their perception was that pastoral communities in the state were subjected to all forms of extortion, exploitation and deprivation from different agencies. They were denied justice mostly in the lower courts. When a pastoralist was involved in any squabble with a farmer, the case would usually delay unnecessarily. The accused Fulani, known to have a phobia for courts and their unwarranted justice delay, would be ready to bribe his way out of the court.³⁰ Cases involving the police were the worst according to an informant who said that both the judges and police were 'birds of the same feathers'.³¹

The Fulani man according to the narrative had become a source of income for the law enforcement agents.³² Allegations of extortion extend to hospitals, where access to healthcare is often accompanied by extortion and exorbitant charges.³³ Added to these is lack of access to education, veterinary services and animal



Dogo Gide



Late Buharin-Daji

³⁰ Alhaji Buba Sani, 53 years Interview in Badarawa village, June, 2017. According to him, Fulani accused person is often double charged by the lawyers, court clerks and even judges. Sometimes they pay for the adjournment of case and also pay another amount for the date the case will be fixed. A cases that ordinarily supposed to last for two months will end up prolonged to six or eight months for to collect bribe from the accused person.

³¹ Alhaji Buba Sani, 53 years Interview in Badarawa village...

³² Alhaji Muhammad Tukur Jabaka, 56 years, Interview , 17 February, 2018

³³ Tukur Abubakar Jangebe, Aged 56 ,Chairman, MACBAN

feeds. Grazing routes and reserves were mostly shared amongst politicians and traditional rulers in the state.³⁴

Third is the illicit mining argument which sees the rise of the conflict from the perspective of the struggle amongst the miners each with the aim of getting an upper hand in the competition.³⁵ Zamfara State is one of the few States in the Northwest blessed with huge gold deposits mostly exploited by foreign illicit miners, Chinese, Russians, and South Africans in collaboration with the local artisanal miners.³⁶ The foreign firms were accused of supplying arms to the locals against their rival group. There were reported cases of raiding and killings around some of the mining sites in the state around 2014/2015; implying that they were sponsored by competing groups. These atrocities were allegedly committed with the support of some traditional and political leaders within and outside Zamfara state.³⁷

Following this line of argument, the first set of armed groups according to sources was young boys from the forests of Dan-Sadau, Dan-Gulbi and Bagega; areas the major mining areas of Zamfara.³⁸ Helicopters were often seen in the areas exchanging weapons for gold. Whenever and wherever these helicopters were spotted in an area, in no short time there could bloodshed.³⁹ This is

³⁴ Muhammad Bello, 48 years, Chairman MACBAN, Shinkafi LGA, Zamfara State, August, 20, 2016.

³⁵ Bello S, Cattle Rustling in Zamfara State: A challenge to National Security and Economic Development, being a paper presented at a National Conference, Federal University, Gusau, Zamfara state.

³⁶ Anka, S.A. Emerging Issues in Zamfara Armed Banditry and Cattle Rustling: Collapse of the Peace Deal and Resurgence of Fresh Violence. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 6 (12), 2017 p. 161. It is important to note that gold from Zamfara is routinely smuggled out of the state to ready markets in neighboring Togo, Benin and Niger. From here, the gold finds its way to other markets across the world, with Nigeria benefiting next to nothing from the sale; and Zamfara maintaining its status as one of the poorest states in the country

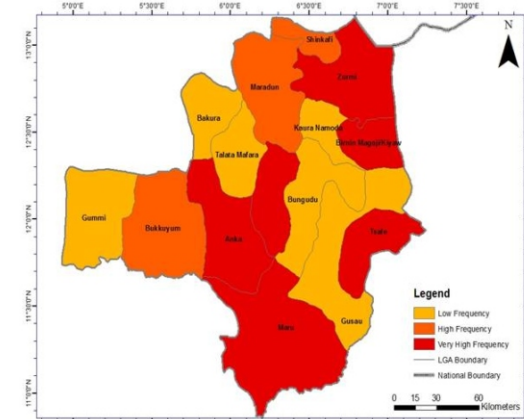
³⁷ Haidara M. 'Bad Leadership and its Impacts on Security Situation in Zamfara, Press Release by Zamfara State, Chapter of Northern Youths Assembly, 23rd August 2014.

³⁸ Anonymous traditional ruler from Anka Emirate, 25 August, 2021

³⁹ Bello Anka, Anka town, farmer and trader, 48 years, 25 August, 20121

the reason why observers pointed at the 'politics of gold mining' as a factor in the rise of the groups.⁴⁰ Another source claimed that 'there is 'cut-throat competition' amongst miners. Some of the attacks were partly instigated by traditional rulers involved in the illicit mining with a view to displacing their subjects'⁴¹ According to Desert Herald Newspaper:

The solid mineral resources in the state have been hijacked by highly placed people in the state including traditional rulers... mining has continued to arouse and attract local and international attentions with regard to mining and exploration of these vast deposits in the state...considering the fact that illegal mining is the main business of the traditional rulers and highly placed people in the state...who are always at loggerheads with other artisanal miners.⁴²



Map of Zamfara State showing frequency of banditry and cattle rustling by Local Government Areas.

⁴⁰ Bello Anka, Anka town, farmer and trader...ibid.

⁴¹ Anonymous miner in Bagega, 2016.

⁴² Desert Herald Newspaper, Zamfara 2016 ' Budget of the People: A Hard nut to crack for Governor Yari, 19th February, 2016

On the other hand some people see the armed groups-illicit miners' alliance as 'protective'.⁴³ Mining is naturally a peaceful economic venture. The miners could hardly operate under conflict situation; therefore, the miners pay money as 'protection levy' to the armed groups in return for protection and continued exploitation of the resource.⁴⁴ At the peak of the conflict in 2018, local and foreign miners were still found peacefully operating in the various deadly forests. There has never been record of either abduction or killing of these foreign illicit miners in the state. This is one of the reasons why the locals see the conflict as nothing but international conspiracy to displace and denying them access to their 'God-Given' natural resources.⁴⁵ The Federal Government's ban all mining operations in the state since 2018 could probably be in response to this concern. The State Government on its own part suspended some traditional rulers for allegedly supporting the armed groups and engaging in illicit mining activities.⁴⁶ Whether or not any or all of these hypotheses hold, one factor that contributed to the escalation of the conflict was the activities of non-state security operatives like the Vigilante Group of Nigeria, Yan-Banga and Yan-sa-kai.

The operations of Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN), pushed the armed groups out of towns and villages to the highly ungoverned spaces, where they established different camps in the numerous forests across the state. The VGN attacked, maimed and even engaged in extrajudicial killings of accused persons. Most of their

⁴³ Musa Umar, Maru town Oral Interview, 2, March, 2014.

⁴⁴ Anonymous village head in Dansadau Emirate, 20th February, 2016.

⁴⁵ Idem

⁴⁶ Desert Herald Newspaper, Banditry: Five Zamfara emirs, 33 district heads face dismissal. The committee set up by the Zamfara State Government to find solutions to banditry in the state has recommended the removal of five emirs, 33 district heads in its report submitted on Friday. 11, October, 2019

victims were unfortunately; Fulani; leading to the ethnic profiling of the pastoralists..⁴⁷ The *yan-sakai* are believed to have committed more atrocities than the vigilante group. The memory of how the *yan-sakai* used to storm Shinkafi market to gruesomely killed suspected bandits is still fresh in people's minds.⁴⁸ An informant confirmed that they had never seen a worst insecurity, where *yan-sakai* cut human beings into pieces in the market square and burnt the pieces into ashes without any fear.⁴⁹ It was only after the first and second public execution of the suspected bandits that the entire community frowned at the act.⁵⁰ Therefore, both the VGN and their *Yan- Sa-kai* supporters contributed to the escalation of the conflict.

Rise of Armed Groups

Historically, the first armed group evolved in 2011, led by Kundu and the notorious Buharin Daji both of Fulani background. They named the group *kungiyar gayu*, meaning an association of young guys, even though none of them was a youth.⁵¹ The public referred to them as *kungiyar barayin shanu*, (i.e cattle rustlers association) (CRA). It operated underground in the forests, but its real motive started to manifest itself in 2012, when cases of cattle rustling

⁴⁷ M. A. Rufa'i 'Vigilante Groups and Rural Banditry in Zamfara State: Excesses and Contradictions', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI) ISSN (Online): 2319 - 7722, ISSN (Print): 2319 - 7714 www.ijhssi.org || Volume 7 Issue 06 Ver. I || Jun. 2018 || PP.65-73*

⁴⁸ Yunusa Abdullahi, 50 years, Member of the MVG, Shinkafi Town, 18th September, 2016

⁴⁹ Bello Mai Dawa, 55 years Member of the VGN, Shinkafi town, 18th September, 2016

⁵⁰ Idem

⁵¹ According information, Kundu was 42 when he was killed by Buhari in 2014. Also Buhari was in-between the ages of 44-45 before he was ambushed and killed by Dogo Gide, on 7 March, 2021. The name Buharin Daji was coined by the residents of the state. It means "Buhari of the Forest", his real name was Buhari Tsoho.

began in the state.⁵² Members of the gang considered it as a cultural association aimed at the liberation of the Fulani from highhandedness of security agents, traditional rulers and politicians.⁵³ This is not to justify the use of arms by the bandits against the state and innocent citizens but to unveil their deep-rooted grievances.⁵⁴ The association was formed at a point when herders in the state were migrating to the neighbouring states, due to large scale encroachment and confiscation of the grazing areas.⁵⁵ Members of this association claimed that politicians and traditional rulers colluded in denying them access to the reserves.⁵⁶ Initially, its members were Fulani; creating room for ethnic profiling and the criminalisation of the Fulanis as cattle rustlers in the state. Such ethnic profiling was responsible for forcing many herders into the gang.⁵⁷ A repentant bandit claimed to have joined the gang due to constant harassment and intimidation by the security agencies because of his ethnic background.⁵⁸

At the onset, membership was restricted to the Fulani, especially during the recruitment exercise, 2011 to 2012. Recruitment was through conscription, use of cash and cows, promise for sex and leisure as well as intimidation of other Fulani people.⁵⁹ Since the

⁵² Tukur Abubakar Jangebe, Aged 56, Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, (MACBAN) Zamfara State, Interview Conducted at the State Government House Gusau, 13th. August/ 2014.

⁵³ Tukur Abubakar Jangebe, Aged 56, Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association, Zamfara State, Interview Conducted at the State Government House Gusau, 13th. August/ 2014.

⁵⁴ According to Jangebe, their people were denied access to pipe borne water, electricity and right to participate in elections. This view is also emphasized by Shehu Rekep, a bandit's leader in his interview with Abdulaziz- Abdulaziz of Daily Trust News paper.

⁵⁵ Abubakar Maradun, Oral Interview, 68 year, retired range manager, Zamfara state, 15, March, 2021.

⁵⁶ Interview with Buharin Daji on 25th December, 2016.

⁵⁷ Tukur Abubakar Jangebe, Aged 56, Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association...idem.

⁵⁸ Abubakar Abdullahi Buratai, 25 years, repentant bandit, Tudun Wada Gusau, 12, February, 2021.

⁵⁹ Tukur Abubakar Jangebe, Aged 56, Chairman, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association...idem.

gang was into cattle rustling, some herders joined so as to circumvent cattle rustling harassment from the members. It was alleged that some leading Fulani families in Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina states made donations of cash and cattle, while some expressed moral support and goodwill to the members to avoid bitter consequences.⁶⁰ However, making donations to the gang and/or asking a member of the family to join the gang did not shield the donors from the menace of the gang. Fulani were mostly the major victims of early cattle rustling in Zamfara. Larger part of the cattle belonged to them and they were coerced into the gang through the threat of rustling. The essence of this early phase of rustling was to exchange cattle for weapons, logistics and other essential goods.⁶¹

In the beginning gang members were mostly into rustling, robbery and other minor criminalities. The change in the pattern of operations started with the creation of *Yan-Sa-kai* and the intensification of the war against members of the gangs.⁶² As stated elsewhere, the *Yan-Sa-kai* had unlimited powers and support from their sponsors; hence, they could arrest, maim and kill an accused person without recourse to the law. The first incident that triggered change in the course of the conflict was the brutal killing of Alhaji Isshe, in Chilin, Dan-Sadau Emirate, Maru LGA of Zamfara State. He was killed by *Yan-Sa-kai* on 16th August, 2012 on the accusation of harbouring criminals and supporting rustlers.⁶³ The public murder of Isshe, was used as a justification for reprisal and mass killings of

⁶⁰ Interview with Sarkin Kudun Badarawa, 35 year, Badarawa village, September, 7, 2016

⁶¹ Alhaji Ardo Nashaware, 45 years, Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji, 22 August, 2021.

⁶² Alhaji Ardo Nashaware, 45 years

⁶³ Alhaji Sani Babbar Doka, 45 years, State Secretary, Yansakai, Zamfara state, February, 20, 2021. Alhaji Isshe was a decent and innocent Fulaniman, who command respect by all Fulani and non-Fulani people in Dansdau emirate. He was the head of one of the oldest Fulani clan in the Emirate. The killing of Isshe in the presence of some of his family members led to the adoption of banditry as part of the conflict strategies.

innocent people by the gang. Furthermore, late Isshe family mobilized fighters and extended invitation to the gang for reprisal attacks few days later.⁶⁴ Member of the gang multiplied in number, strength, power and weapons and even connections in 2013.⁶⁵ It also became more heterogeneous and transnational in 2016, constituting members from Niger Republic, Mali and Chad, mostly Tauregs with links to Sahellian rebels.⁶⁶

The infiltration of these foreign elements transformed the gang in several ways. New members were recruited, more weapons were introduced and fighters were trained in modern guerrilla strategies and tactics. Kidnapping and abduction for ransom was adopted as a new strategy in addition to cattle rustling. Large numbers of poverty-stricken youth across villages were used as informants supplying intelligence for awesome pecuniary rewards.⁶⁷ Furthermore, there was a change in the strategy of the violence from cattle rustling to the raiding of villages, kidnapping and other related Gender and Sexual Based Violence (GSBV) across Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina and Kaduna States. Most of the affected areas in Sokoto and Katsina share boundaries with Zamfara. This explains why the violence radiates around state borderlines.

Armed violence reached its climax in 2018 with the proliferation of more gangs. Thus, with the assassination of Buharin Daji during this period, new deadly cells surfaced. About 30 splinter gangs

⁶⁴ Alhaji Sani Babbar Doka, 45 years, State Secretary, Yansakai, Zamfara state

⁶⁵ Interview with an ex-bandit in Gusau, August, 20, 2021.

⁶⁶ Interview with Alhaji Nashama, armed bandits, 38 years, Gidan Kaso area, Birnin Magaji, LGA, Zamfara state, 22 August, 2021.

⁶⁷ Bello Musa Zurmi, 46 year Commandant Vigilante Group of Nigeria, (VGN) Zurmi Local Government Area, Zamfara State

emerged after the fall of Buharin Daji.⁶⁸ Buhari's son Aliyu Zakwai became a leader of another wing. Zakwai was not as notorious as his farther, but a major force to reckon with in Dansadau. After the introduction of amnesty by the incumbent government in Zamfara state in 2019, he accepted the programme and left the woods for a new life in the city.



Adamu (Aliero) Yankuzo

⁶⁸ Alhaji Sani Babbar Doka, 46 years, interview, Sabon Gida Area, Gusau, Zamfara state, 25th Febuary, 2021. Alhaji Sani is the state secretary of yan-sakai in Zamfara state. He has a better, deeper and clearer knowledge of the history of armed groups in Zamfara state.

Profile of Bandits

Armed groups have over time generated huge capital from many outlets, and spent handsomely in arms procurement and intelligent gathering.⁶⁹ Some members within the groups were notoriously associated with weapon suppliers. Alhaji Altine, Shehu Rekep in Zamfara and Musa Yellow Janbross in Kaduna used their international connections. Through their contacts across the Sahel, particularly Libya and Mali, they supply arms which were ferried across the ever-increasing porous borders located in the Northwest.⁷⁰ Beside these notable individuals, there are a couple of middlemen and retailers of arms across different forests in the region. An informant reveals that 'getting foodstuff in the camp is more difficult than acquiring an AK47'. Members could sell or even rent out weapon to someone but could not give him food to eat.⁷¹

Thus, the arm business is an industry of its own in the forests and camps. There are members that do not go out for operation, but only remain in the camps to rent out guns and sell ammunitions to members. Sometimes, this class of arm dealers made more money than the field fighters.⁷² Aging and incapacitated gang leaders could retire and became gunrunners or renters. That is enough to sustain them within the camp. Powerful camps and gangs like the one headed by Dan-Karami of Zurmi, Alhaji Auta of Birnin Magaji, Halilu of Chafe, Turji of Isa and Dogo Gide of Birnin Gwari have the financial capacity and connections to procure large number of weapons.⁷³ Each of these groups has in its

⁶⁹. Alhaji Sani Babbar Doka, 45 years, State Secretary, Yansakai, Zamfara state

⁷⁰. Interview with Commissioner of Internal Security, Kaduna State, Government House, 20th April, 2021

⁷¹. Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 45 years, GidanKaso, Birnin Magaji, 7th April, 2021

⁷². Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years, GidanKaso, Birnin Magaji, 7th April, 2021

⁷³. Field Work in Birnin Gwari, Zamfara and Sokoto states, March to April, 2021

possession more than 500 AK 47 or AK49 guns.⁷⁴ Some of the gangs like that of Gide, Mai-Taguwa and Turji owns more sophisticated weapons like RPGS and Anti-Aircraft.⁷⁵ Therefore, young and junior group members have free access to the weapons and could organize minor attacks, raids and kidnappings without the consent of the leaders.

Large scale operations were mostly and largely done or even led by the gang-heads. What is confounding about these bandits is that although they are united for the same purpose, they are paradoxically divided along difficult camps. Thus, the quest for more sophisticated weapons was not largely motivated by the fashion for attack and killings, but largely against other rival groups.⁷⁶ The deadlier a gang's weapons, the more fearful it becomes within the crime circle. Therefore, the dream of any gang leader is to acquire the latest modern firearms in order to instil fear in the minds of camp members and other competitors.⁷⁷ Arms procurement and inter-gang rivalry is a common feature of the groups. The competition and rivalry is borne out of jealousy, conflicting interest and lack of proper organizational structure.⁷⁸ This has over the years resulted in conflict and clashes from within and outside the gangs leading to the death of many members.⁷⁹ That notwithstanding, the gangs have devised a means of conflict resolution amongst themselves. All LGAs with substantial number of bandits have group or individuals, mostly elders that

⁷⁴ Interview with Commandant Kaduna State Vigilante Services, 20th April, 2021

⁷⁵ Alhaji Ardo Na-Shaware, 48 years, GidanKaso, BirninMagaji, 7th April, 2021

⁷⁶ Interview with Dan-Karami, Leader of Armed group in Zurmi LGA, Zamfara State

⁷⁷ .Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years, GidanKaso,...

⁷⁸ M.A. Rufa'i ' Inter and Intra Bandit Gang Rivalry in Zamfara Region' Being a paper presented Fourth National Conference Organized by the Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies on the theme Zamfara Kingdom Past and Present, Venue FIAS, 25th -28th

⁷⁹ Buharin Daji killed kundu in 2014, while Dogo Gide killed Buharin Daji on March, 7, 2018. Awalun Daudauwa was killed by a rival gang in 2021.

reconcile the gangs in case of conflict.⁸⁰ The mediators are mostly either repentant or active bandits. The repentant members, largely live in towns and villages, but very often visit the camps for the purpose of mediation. They constituted the first generation of armed groups, making heavy-weight individuals within the ranks of the gangs.⁸¹

Consequently, to minimize inter-gang squabbles, the entire Northwest was divided into bandits camps and each area/zone allocated to a particular leader. Niger and Kaduna states are Gide's territory; under him are smaller camps with loyalty and allegiance to individual leaders. Katsina was controlled by late Auwalun Daudawa and Dangotte Bazamfare, under them also are large numbers of mini gang leaders. Sokoto state, particularly the eastern part, is under the jurisdiction of Turji, while there are numerous leaders in Zamfara state. The table below shows major leaders of armed groups and their areas of operations in the Northwest.



Bello Turji

Leader of Shinkafi/Isa and Sabon Birnin LGAs



Dan-karami of Zurmi LGA

⁸⁰ Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years, GidanKaso,...

⁸¹ One of their mediation sitting in Gidan Kaso, Birnin Magaji LGA, Zamfara State. The sitting lasted for three (3) hours trying to mediate between Alhaji Auta of Birnin Magaji and his immediate neighbor Dan- Karami of Zurmi, who were both gang Leaders, the intervention made an impact by resolving a particular grievance that could have led to violent confrontation. Considering the members, arms and influence on each of the group, if the situation was allow degenerating many lives would be loss.

Table 1: Major Bandit leaders in the Northwest and their Areas of Operations

S/N	Armed Groups	Location	Crime
1.	Abubakar Abdallah (alias Dogo Gide)	Kaduna and Niger States	Kidnapping, Cattle Rustling Armed Robbery Gender-Based and Sexual Violence (GBSV). Has contact and connections with ISWAP and Boko Haram and was responsible for the kidnapping of 102 staff and students of Federal Govt. Girls College, Yauri on 18 th Jun, 2021. The students are still in his custody.
2.	Yellow Jan-Bros	Birnin Gwari Forest and Giwa Areas of Kaduna State.	Kidnapping, Cattle rustling, (GBSV) and village raiding. He was responsible for the kidnapping of 136 Islamiyya Students in Tagina village, Rafi LGA, Niger State on 30th May, 2021. The students were freed on August, 25, 2021.
3.	Tsoho Manjagara	Giwa Local Government, Kaduna State.	Kidnapping, Cattle rustling, Gender Based and Sexual Violence including assault, rape, forced prostitution, gang rape was killed in an encounter with the Nigeria Army, 18 th June, 2021 in Yauri LGA, Kebbi State.
4.	Alhaji Bodere and Ahaji Beleri	Sabon Birni, Giwa LGA, Kaduna State	Kidnapping, (GBSV) armed robbery and forced labour and wilful destruction of crops.
5.	Yellow Ashana	Sabon Garin Gyadam, Kaduna State.	Kidnapping and (GBSV).
6.	Ali Kawaje also called Ali Kachalla	Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State and Kagara LGA, Niger State	Forced displacement of communities or grazing reserves, mass killing, Kidnapping and GBSV. He is associated to the Shekau faction of Boko Haram.
7.	Alhaji Isiya, Buhari General and Gannaie	Kaduna-Abuja Highway, Kaduna State.	Killing, kidnapping, rape, Forced marriage and GBSV and forceful collection of farming and grazing levies from the communities.
7.	Alhaji Isiya, Buhari General and Gannaie	Kaduna-Abuja Highway, Kaduna State.	Killing, kidnapping, rape, Forced marriage and GBSV and forceful collection of farming and grazing levies from the communities.

8.	Alhaji Ado Aleru	Yan-Kuzo in Chafe LGA as well as some parts of Kastina and Zamfara states.	Killing, Kidnapping, GBSV, forced labour, negotiation with state officials in the payment of ransom as well as 'buying' of kidnapped persons from other kidnapers. Kastina State Government declared him wanted and fixed a price of N5 million for whoever knows his location, but surprised he is still found in Yan-Kuzo village attending different functions and ceremonies.
9.	Lanke, Umar Bengo, Yahaya, Kabir,	Dan Rumfa village in Jibya LGA	Kidnapping, killing, arm smuggling and armed robbery.
10.	Auwalun Daudawa	Safana, Dan -Musa and Batsari LGAs, Katsina State.	Cattle rustling, rape, kidnapping, attacks on villages and vigilante members. He was later killed by his fellow bandits in March, 2021 in Zamfara State.
11.	Dangotte Bazamfare	Along Katsina and Zamfara borders.	Killing of innocent citizens, kidnapping, GBSV, attack on villages, police and military outpost as well as child labour
12.	Alhaji Auta, Ardo Na -Shaware, Ardo Nashama and Alhaji Shingi.	Birnin Magaji LGA, Zamfara State	Cattle rustling , forced labour, attack on rival bandits camps
13.	Dankarami	Zurmi LGA, Zamfara State	Attack on police and military outpost s, kidnapping, rape, forced labour and armed robbery. He is widely known for his anti-security agencies sentiment.
14.	Alhaji Shehu Rekep and Alhaji Halilu	Tsafe, Maru and Anka LGAs, Zamfara State.	Kidnapping, GBSV, supply of arms and ammunition to the armed groups responsible for the recruitment and training of foot soldiers to other groups.
15.	Manu D. O	Birnin Gwari and Giwa Areas, Kaduna state.	Cattle Rustling and Kidnapping.
16.	Saleh piya-piya	Anchau, Kaduna State	Armed robbery, Kidnapping and cattle rustling.
17.	Bello Turji	Shinkafi/Isa & Sabon Birnin	Kidnapping, cattle rustling Force Labour & Gender and sexual base violence.

Compiled by the presenter from various field works in the zone



Alhaji Auta and his boys in Birnin Magaji

Source of Arms and Ammunition

One of the most puzzling questions that remain unanswered on rural insecurity is the sources of arms and ammunitions. Studies have shown that there are over 60,000 weapons in circulation in the Northwest.⁸² After a tour to some of the Bandits' den, Sheikh Ahmad Gumi, a retired army officer and Islamic cleric in northern Nigeria, provided an estimate of over 100,000 arms and ammunition in the hands of the bandit.⁸³ 'There are more weapons than cattle in Zamfara', said a bandit leader and owning a gun was more profitable than herds of cattle.⁸⁴ The figures above could be exaggerated, but the concern herein is not to debate on the validity of the figures or otherwise, but to provide an analysis of the sources, dealers, retailers and even users of the weapons. Considering the large number and membership of the armed groups, one could not doubt the estimated quantity of arms. Thus, weapons like anti aircraft guns, rocket propelled grenade tubes, general purpose machine guns, AK47, AK49, G3 magazines amongst several others are found across different camps in the state. Some of the camps like that of Turji, Halilu and Shehu Rekep used drones and CCTV cameras for surveillance and intelligence gathering. In one of the camps visited in Birnin Magaji, there was a local ICT expert stationed in charge of solar panels and monitoring of the CCTV. Besides, providing power to the CTTV, members of the gang used energy from the panel to charge their phones, lamps and other electrical appliances. Abdullahi Dandare, the local ICT man had lived in Lagos, Oyo, Kogi and Benue states, first a

⁸² John Campbell, "Not all violent problems require violent solutions: Banditry in Nigeria's North-West, retrieved at <https://www.cfr.org/blog/not-all-violent-problems-require-violent-solutions-banditry-nigerias-north-west> 11/26/2020.

⁸³ Interview with Dr. Ahmad Gumi, in his residence in Kaduna, April, 20, 2021.

⁸⁴ Abdullahi Abubakar Buratai, 27 years, interviewed at Sabon Gida, Zamfara state, August, 25, 2021.

pastoralist and later engaged in the sales of electronics, before coming back home to join the bandits in their den.⁸⁵ In those places he learnt the rudiments of ICT. Thus, members of other less powerful gangs often travel a long distance to see and if possible take pictures beside the newly imported weapons. Therefore, the bandits could clearly tell which amongst the leaders is stronger, because the power of a gang is measured by the level of its sophisticated weapons.⁸⁶ Discussion within most criminal circles is on how and where to get the latest weapons as well as on which recalcitrant gang or community to test it.

As stated elsewhere, arms trade is also a means of generating income to a cross section of the gangs. Significant percentage of their illicit income is spent illicitly, on drugs, women, betting, buying of latest phones and other ostentatious goods.⁸⁷ A repentant bandit stated that 'the business could make one a millionaire today and a pauper tomorrow'. So much is also spent on either the purchase or renting of sophisticated arms used in operations. Most arguments on the source of weapons revolve around the 'porous border thesis and the inability of the security to man the over 1,950 official borders. There is absolute shortage of manpower and officers want to be posted to lucrative borders. The armed smugglers mostly used these minor entries for the supply of arms into the country.

Moreover, the small numbers of officials at the border posts in some cases were accused of conniving and facilitating the movements of arms into the country. This could be part of the reasons why the incumbent Controller-General of Nigeria

⁸⁵ Abdullahi Dandare, 32 years, Kukiya village, Binin Magaji LGA, Zamfara state, August, 23, 2021.

⁸⁶ Abdullahi Abubakar, AKA, Buratai, 27 years, 25 August, 2021, Damba area, Gusau, Zamfara state.

⁸⁷ Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years, GidanKaso,...

Immigration Service issued an order in 2020 that 70% of his workforce should be deployed to the borders, which has yet to take effect. Thus, the wider assumption is that arms supply in Zamfara is majorly from the Nigeria- Niger borders located around Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina axis. This is a plausible assumption as there are some border communities within these states with substantial number of individual gunrunners, whose main role is to simply move arms across the borders.⁸⁸ Some of these illicit traffickers are well-known in their communities, while others remain unknown. Calamity could befall any community that expose these suppliers to security agencies. Since the Nigerian security operatives have complained of grossly inadequate personnel in addition to proving incapable of defending the people from the rural war-lords, the best thing is to observe 'conspiracy of silence' for peace to reign in the villages. There is also the used of women and children as couriers of arms along the border. "It is very difficult to get a woman arm courier, but if you have any they are the safest and easiest ways of cross-border arms movement.⁸⁹ Depending on the distance and terrain, an AK47 rifle is transported into a nearby village from the border at the rate of N20,000, while a bag containing 100 rounds of ammunition at the cost of N5,000. Thus, transporting the ammunition is much easier due to its size and could be divided into different portions, what the locals called *Geron Hajiya*.⁹⁰

Moreover, the criminals, particularly the so-called 'repentant' criminals, have dislodged the multiple agents and became either importers or local transporters of arms. An informant that spent

⁸⁸ Interview with anonymous Immigration Officer at Border Post in Zamfara state, 18th November, 2018

⁸⁹ Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years, Gidan Kaso,...

⁹⁰ Interview with anonymous bandit in Zamfara state, 40 years, 23, August, 2021

five years in banditry around Dan-Sadau area stated that 'I have wasted five years for nothing, had it been I knew I could have been a gunrunner earlier.'⁹¹ There is more money, peace and pride to be in the arm supplying chain'.⁹² While some of the members argued that it is by far more lucrative to join the two businesses together, because it's of dual benefit'.⁹³

Some of the leaders specialized in arms supply, training of bandits as well as attacks on innocent people. Shehu rocket, Halilu in Sububu forests and Ali Kachalla of Dansadau were experts in this regards.⁹⁴ They have an independent supply chain and largely imported weapons beyond their needs. Shehu Rekep is connected to Malian, Chadian and Libyan rebels from where he gets most of his supplies.⁹⁵ Together with his friend, Halilu has an absolute monopoly of arms supply in Zamfara state. Most of the bandits in the state get their arms from either of the two groups.⁹⁶

So far, the three gangs led by these leaders, are the most powerful and notorious in the state. The next groups that relied on them to some extent for arms are Turji in Isa and Sabon Birni, Dankarami of Zurmi and Gidan Jaja as well as Alhaji Auta of Birnin Magaji. One of the main challenges that affect effective arms trade amongst the bandits is the internal rivalry, which continues to widen the division amongst them.⁹⁷ The smaller gangs are differently affiliated to the stronger gangs, for guidance, supervision and supply of both arms and fighters, when

⁹¹ Interview with anonymous bandit in Zamfara state..

⁹² Interview with anonymous bandit in Zamfara state

⁹³ Interview with a repentant bandit leader, 32 years, 25 August, 2021

⁹⁴ Abdullahi Abubakar, AKA, Buratai, 27 years, 25 August, 2021, Damba area,

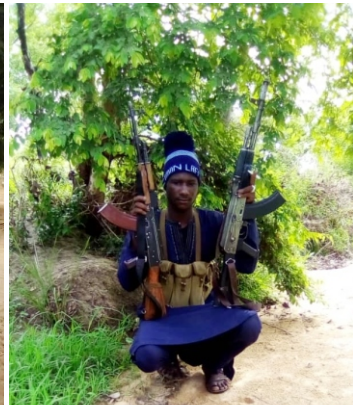
⁹⁵ Alhaji Sani Babbar Doka, 45 years, State Secretary, Yansakai, Zamfara state

⁹⁶ Abdullahi Abubakar, AKA, Buratai, 27 years, a repentant bandit from Dangulbi area, Zamfara state.

⁹⁷ M.A. Rufa'i 'Inter and Intra Bandit Gang Rivalry in Zamfara Region' Being a paper presented Fourth National Conference Organized by the Faculty of Arts and Islamic....



**Aliyu Zakwai the Son of
Buharin Daji**



**Lawali killed by Bandits
in 2019**

confronted by a superior rival gang or security operatives.⁹⁸

This cold relationship is what is partly flaming the fire of the armed groups. For instance, there is no love lost between Dankarami of Zurmi and Alhaji Auta. In any event of threat against either of these groups, each would rather fight alone than seek support from the other gang, in spite, of the closeness and proximity to each other. A 'repentant bandit' stated that the whole banditry is becoming less interesting because of the engagement and involvement of young boys who don't have a sense of maturity in the nefarious acts.⁹⁹ The young boys are so desperate and in hurry to either wage an attack or become independent leaders. That is why the older ones decided to maintain and dominate the arms supply chain.¹⁰⁰

Most worrisome about the issue of banditry is that there were attempts by *Boko Haram*, ISWAP and *Ansaru* to forge an alliance with the bandits. *Boko Haram* for instance started the move

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Abdullahi Abubakar, AKA, Buratai, 27 years, a repentant bandit...

¹⁰⁰ Abduaziz Abdulaziz, interview with Shehu Rekep Daily Trust newspaper.



**Dongon-Baro and Bello Atto of
Dangulbi Area**

around 2014.¹⁰¹ In 2018, *Boko Haram* fighters from the Northeast were sent by the Shekau faction to support bandits in the Northwest. Eventually they became integrated with the bandits and abandoned the course of *Boko Haram*.¹⁰² The reason is that banditry is not ideologically based and gives freedom to individual fighters. Moreover, there is what

may called bountiful wealth in banditry.¹⁰³ Dogo Gide, later forged an alliance with *Boko Haram* in the last quarter of 2019. Thus, from his base in the forest of Wawa in Niger state, Gide was recruiting members for this group and ensuring the group has stronghold in Zamfara state.¹⁰⁴ In the light of this, assistance is often given to armed groups in Zamfara in form of fighters and equipments. Alhaji Shehu Shingi from Zurmi, is the major *Boko Haram* link with the bandits.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Alhaji Shehu Shingi, 43 years, Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA, Zamfara State, 22, August, 2021

¹⁰² Alhaji Shehu Shingi, 43 years, Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA..., he mention names of those fighters that came from Maiduguri in 2018. Alhaji Shingi has direct relations with Boko Haram.

¹⁰³ Alhaji Shehu Shingi, 43 years, Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA. ...

¹⁰⁴ Alhaji Sani Babbar Doka, 45 years, State Secretary, Yansakai, Zamfara state

¹⁰⁵ Alhaji Shehu Shingi, 43 years, Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA. ...

Arm Renting and Prices

Indeed it is a daunting exercise to establish the exact price of arms used by the groups. This is because the end users have no direct access to the main area of supply, due to either lack of knowledge or fear of interception by the security personnel. This added to the price of arms not only in Zamfara but affected states in the Northwest.¹⁰⁶ The bandits have no option than to buy weapons at exorbitant prices. At the point of interviews, most of members of the armed groups could hardly tell the price of weapons used.¹⁰⁷ This is largely quantified and valued by either cattle or full-grown bull. Therefore, heads of cattle and an approximation of their age are often used to determine the price of a gun in rural Zamfara.¹⁰⁸ On the average, some gave out 2 to 3 heads of cattle for AK49 or their price equivalent. Some of the dealers and retailers collect cattle in return for arms. Those that accept cattle, mostly Fulani retailers have the chances of getting more customers and huge profit margins than who only exchanged for money.¹⁰⁹

At any rate, if an ordinary non-bandit would acquire an AK47 at the rate ₦500,000 a bandit, particularly Fulani will get it at a higher price of ₦650,000 simply because of his desperation and illiteracy.¹¹⁰ The price of a German made AK47 before the border closure in Zamfara ranged between ₦500,000- ₦600,000 depending on the suppliers.¹¹¹ Igbo retailers seem to put higher prices, but with the border closure in 2019 and increase in exchange rate, the price increased to between ₦750,000 and

¹⁰⁶ Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years, Kaura Namoda, 17 June, 2019

¹⁰⁷ Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with Bandits in Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA, Zamfara State

¹⁰⁸ FGD in Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA...

¹⁰⁹ FGD in Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA...

¹¹⁰ Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years, Kaura Namoda, 17 June, 2019

¹¹¹ Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years...

₦850,000.¹¹² After, the year 2020, most of the groups began to use AK49, which at the moment cost about ₦1.2 million in the forest.¹¹³ During this period the use of rocket launcher, RPGs and APGs became common amongst the dominant gangs.

The conflict has in recent times made some gang leaders very rich through the illicit business of arms and banditry. They often have multiple profits from the arms, their usage and sale of cattle, mostly stolen from the people which are exchanged for weapons. Bandit leaders have acquired large herds of cattle through this illegal means and most of the herds are transported to the Middle Belt and the southern part of the country. In some cases, the herds were moved to Niger Republic and beyond.

It is important to stress that the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) free movements of persons and animals across the member states has also facilitated not only the movement of arms but also rustled livestock across different borders. Some of the gunrunners prefer to exchange guns for cattle due to issues of security. Afterwards all the livestock collected could easily be moved across the Nigerian borders for either sale or exchange for weapons. This is what according to repentant bandits keeps the business relevant and booming over time.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Anonymous Source, 53 years in Gusau, Zamfara state, 20th February, 2020

¹¹³ FGD in Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA...

¹¹⁴ FGD in Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA...

The procurement of these deadly weapons is not meant to fight the Nigeria security but also instill fear in the minds and hearts of their fellow cohorts. The power of a gang is largely determine by leadership and weapons. Therefore, amongst the armed groups, it do not make much sense to acquire and hire arms, but to as well engage in arm raise with others, so to scare your enemies away. The increasing number of gang members and the corresponding demand for operations tools led to proliferation of gun retailers.¹¹⁵ Most repentant bandits and even non-bandits that rents weapons to young bandits.¹¹⁶ There is fixed price to each category of gun. Members could collect an Ak47 or Ak49 for daily use and return back after a particular mission.¹¹⁷ The rented gun could be also used for days or even weeks, each has a price . With the use of rented gun young bandits have over time acquire their personal tools.¹¹⁸

An informant stated that he was renting at the initial stage but later acquired his own personal gun and became a unit leader. The problem of rented gun is that besides it out-datedness, most have been overused by either the renters or other users. Therefore, most of the young boys started as foot soldiers under a particular leader or depended on the rented equipments.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, there are large number of youth who mostly lived in the pastoral settlements (Rugga) and villages that are ‘part-time bandits. The groups are more dangerous that the full-time gun carrying members, because they are the main guys that patronizes these gun renters.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Alhaji Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years...,

¹¹⁶ Alhaji ‘Ardo Na- Shaware, 48 years...,

¹¹⁷ Abdullahi Abubakar, AKA, Buratai, 27 years, a repentant bandit from Dangulbi...,

¹¹⁸ Abdullahi Abubakar, AKA, Buratai, 27 years, a repentant bandit from Dangulbi...,

¹¹⁹ FGD in Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA...

¹²⁰ FGD in Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA...

They mostly collect at night and return back in the morning after accomplishing a mission. Some of them also subscribe to a particular group not as active but passive members, who only participated in an attack and retire home after the mission.¹²¹

Moreover, there are powerful gang leaders with monopoly control of arms and its usage. In this case two categories exist in Zamfara. The first is the gang leader with large number of arms which he gives out as trust to members.¹²² With this, members are often mobilise when the need arise. This leader could be surrounded with very few members for protection, while the rest were loosely spread across different areas.¹²³ The essence is not to attract so much public and security attention, but still maintain large followership. The second has an absolute monopoly control over the weapons. In this case, there are specific places where the weapons are often kept, and put to use when the need arises.. This category has a loose membership that spread across different villages, *ruga* and even towns. in some cases, like in Birnin Magaji, the leader may decide to stay along with his members but no trace of arms or ammunition could be found with them, but every member knows where these arms or ammunition could be found with them, but every member knows where these arms are safely kept in the case of emergencies.¹²⁴ The main differences between the two is that the former promoted high level of uncoordinated attacks, while the later instill certain level of ‘discipline’ in the conduct of the crime. In actual sense, both are same and equal, because the intention is virtually the same.

¹²¹ Interview with a repentant bandit in Tudun Wada Gusau, 13th March, 2021. He said he was not a gang member but a bandit that operate from his village in Dansadau area. Bello started his life as an informant later became a passive bandit.

¹²² This is like Alhaji Auta of Kukiya, he owns all the tools in his camp and determines what to do with it.

¹²³ FGD in Kukiya village, Birnin Magaji LGA...

¹²⁴ FGD in Kukiya

Gender Dimension

The involvement of teenage boys, girls and even married women in the conflict complicated further the situation further. As earlier stated, some of the attacks and kidnappings were carried out by the boys without the consent of their elders. Also, the young girls in the midst of these delinquent boys offered different services in the perpetration of the crime. Besides providing intelligence, they as well served as cooks and guards to the abductees either in the kidnapping den or *ruga*. It is important to note that it is not all the time that kidnapped persons are kept in the forests, in some instances they are meant to stay in either the pastoral camp, *ruga* or houses built by the bandit leaders in the forest. Dankarami, Halilu and Ahaji Shehu Shingi all have such houses designated for the abductees. In those areas young armed girls were in charge of looking after these victims.¹²⁵

Similarly, the girls also participate in attacks against either an opposing gang or recalcitrant village. They are equally involved in long distance attacks. The people of Sabon Birni and Isa in Sokoto state, reported the presence of women in the midst of the attackers. In some instances, girls lead the operations. During the attacks on Garki, Dan-Aduwa, Kurzari and Katuma in Sabon Birni on 27th May, 2020 girls who were suspected to be members of the gang were spotted.¹²⁶ Moreover, most affected villages in Zamfara denied Fulani women access to their homes, on the apprehension that they could be spying for the bandits. The people of Badarawa, Kurya and Gidan Jaja lamented the role of such young and old Fulani women selling milk and butter, as some of them are either related to the bandits or employed as intelligence gatherers.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Zainab Abdullahi, 19 years, wife of a bandits, Gusau, 25th August, 2021

¹²⁶ Rufa'I, M.A, (2021), 'Armed Groups and then Reprisal Attacks in Sabon Birni District of Sokoto State': *Lambar: Journal of the Military and Peace Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 1.

¹²⁷ Sarkin Kudun Badarawa, Interview...

Like any other member of the gang, women also received their own fair share in every successful attack, in cash and cattle as proceeds or 'booties of war'.¹²⁸ Also, bandits' wives keep and service the guns before or after operations. Suwaiba from Dangulbi area knows how to service and even use AK49, because her husband always left the gun in her possession when there was no impending attack.¹²⁹ Quite a number of house wives who supported and accepted their husband's involvement in this misdeed, have basic knowledge of arms usage and maintenance.

It is also important to state that not all women accepted this act; hence since their husbands have adopted this way of life, the weapons are normally kept elsewhere far away from home. In the course of interview, some of the women claim ignorance of their spouse's nefarious behaviour while some of the women disclosed that their hands were given for marriage to the bandits directly.



Abdullahi Buratai Repentant Bandit

¹²⁸ Zainab Abdullahi, 19 years, wife of a bandits...

¹²⁹ Suwaiba Usman, 22 year, wife of an ex-bandit, interviewed in Gusau, 20th March, 2021

The essence is for protection and safety; the moment one gives his daughter out to a bandit leader or any of his strong members, one's security and that of his livestock are guaranteed. There are cases where parents will demand for the divorce of their daughter from a non-bandit so that she could be given to a notorious bandit. An active bandit who is 22 years old stated that he has three (3) wives one he initially married in 2016, and two others offered to him by people in need of protection.

This explains why most of the bandits are polygamous, not because they are ready for it but due to the fact that there are many people willing to offer them young girls for marriage. A young repentant bandit of 22 years called Abdullahi alias Buratai has four wives, mostly given to him by some rich pastoralists from his village due to his notoriety and the level of power he exerted over his fellow cohorts. According to him 'considering his poor parental backgrounds nobody could think of given him wife in the community, but his involvement in banditry has given him a 'new prestigious' position and status.' Some members of the gang join for the simply reason of getting back their lost lovers. It is very common in the rural Fulani setting to see two or more persons competing for a girl. In an event one lost out, he could join the gang to kill the person that married the girl.

These practices are commonly found in the remotest rural areas worst hit by the insecurity. Thus, not all attacks on villages are meant to kill innocent people; some gangs around Dansadau, Magamin Maitarko and Dangulbi areas organized attacks and village raids to satisfy sexual urge. This is mostly done by gangs with few members with specific target of their victims. The aim of this attack is mainly for the rape of young teenage girls. An interaction with a member of such gang, demonstrates that some

pseudo marabouts often ask them to rape virgin girls if they want a certain charm to work. The option is either to rape them at the scene or kidnapped for rape. The act of rape has a long history in some areas of the state, according to an anonymous, District Head, (2016)

Banditry has also been associated with rape and other related violence against women and children. Before banditry went out of hand in 2016, some village and district heads, recorded rape cases. As early as 2011, girls sent out to fetch firewood or cut grass in the nearby bush usually come back howling as a result of either individual or gang rape by unknown persons. In 2012 alone, over fifty (50) cases were recorded in one district. The number is not exact, some affected parents often keep silent, to avoid social rejection against the victims. In view of this, in October, 2012, women and girls were banned from going to the bush alone for whatever reason.¹³⁰

It is also important to stress that woman and children form part of the major victims of the conflict. There is an increasing number of this category of vulnerable group as widows and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the state.

¹³⁰ Rufai, M.A, (2019) *Rural Women and the Trauma of Banditry in Zamfara State a paper presented at the First International Conference on Women and Gender History, on the theme: Women, Gender and History in Northern Nigeria, 23-25,2019.*

Conclusion

Armed bandits are becoming more sophisticated in strength, tactics and connections. It is no longer doubted that the gangs have trans-national networks with similar gangs across different parts of the West African sub-region. This is demonstrated with the contacts and connections with different terrorist organizations within and outside the country. This year the bandits are celebrating a decade (2011-2021) of unabated and irrational acts of cattle rustling, maiming of innocent souls, kidnapping and gender based violence. They have grounded the once prosperous rural economy and subjected the masses to social penury. A lot of energy, time and resources were invested by both state and non-state actors in the fight against rural banditry. Unfortunately, the more the efforts, the stronger and deadlier they become, due to the involvement of multiple 'invisible factors and actors' benefiting from the conflict. Interestingly, Nigerian security agencies are now addressing these rural terrors 'in the best language they understand'. The new approach to rural insecurity if maintained and sustained will crush the ranks of these bandits. Already, some of the bandits have started succumbing to military pressure, some of the gangs pleading and calling for negotiation. Reports coming from the field demonstrated that most bandits are abandoning their motorbikes due to the policy of shutting-down all filling stations around the bandits' zones. This policy alone is enough to end rural insecurity in the region, because no attack could be carried out without logistics and fuel is critical to the running of these motorbikes.



Gang of Two (Buratai & Bello)



Young Wing of Birnin Magaji Bandits



Group Photograph of Some Bandits in Birnin Magaji

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Appendix:

Table 2: List of Some Major Bandit leaders in Zamfara state Maradun LGA

S/N	Leader	Location	Members
1.	Sama'ila	Bayan Dutsi	150
2.	JimmoFadama	Bayan Ruwa	80
3.	Simoli Jaya	Bayan Ruwa	65
4.	Sahabi	Bayan Ruwa	250
5.	Na'akka	Bayan Ruwa	180
6.	Aminu Jajani	Bayan Ruwa	120
7.	Sani Ba-ruwanka	Dagwarwa	135
8.	UbanKafirai	Dagwarwa	250
9.	Maibokolo	Dajin'YarTunniya	300
10.	HarunaZango	Dammaka	280
11.	Muntari	Duddubi	310
12.	Boyi	Duddufi	210
13.	Turji	Fakai	500
14.	Nakyalla	Filinga	213
15.	Najana	GidanBisa	96
16.	Sitanda	Gwari	156
17.	Dullu	Sububu	138
18.	Halilu	Sububu	1,200
19.	Maiduna	Tankyalla	216
20.	Gwaska	Tungar Kolo	76
21.	Kabiru 'Yankusa	Safrar Kade	185
22.	Karamin Gaye	Tungar Miya	242
23.	Dansa'adiya	Tsakanin Dagwarwa da Badako	48
24.	Danshehu	Kudo	140
25.	Mati	Kudo	165
26.	Danbello	Kudo	98
	Dansadau Emirate		
27.	Danmakaranta	Arewaga Madaka	460
28.	Dogo Gyade	Dajin Babar Doka	2000
29.	Damana	Dajin Cebi	1500
30.	Ali Kacanla	Madada	1600
31.	Malam	Yammacin Cebi	900
32.	Bulaki	Gabas ga 'Yargaladima	1200
33.	Ciyaman	Gabas ga 'Yargaladima	900
34.	Dahe	Gabasga 'Yargaladima	257
35.	Kawu	Gabas ga Dansadau	723
36.	Ado Lalo	GabasgaDansadau	350

37.	Bulak	Gabascin Cebi	520
38.	Janburos	Gabascin Madada	800
39.	SaniBica	Gabascin Madaka	180
40.	Danbagobiri	Yamma ga Cebi	235
41.	Nagala	Yamma ga Mairairai	750
42.	Ali Kanen Nagala	Gabasga Mairairai	220
43.	Zahiru	Tsakanin Gandaya da Mairairai	175
44.	Maigariyo	Kudu ga Burwaye	56
45.	Yalo	Close to Burwaye	85
	Zurmi Local Government		
46.	Kachalla	North of Mayasa	1200
47.	Maidaji	North of Labunde	1500
48.	Dankarami	Tsanu	750
49.	Turji	Fakai	2500
	Birnin Magaji Local Governments		
50.	Alhaji Zaki	Rugu	85
51.	Yalo	Rugu	60
52.	Hassan	Rugu	28
53.	Maidaji	Rugu	40
54.	Kachalla	Rugu	58
55.	Shinkafi LGA		
56.	Atarwatse	Dajin Mashema	200
57.	Danmakwado	Kamarawa and Bafarawa	550
58.	Nagona	Between Bafarawa zuwaSurdufu	200
	Tsafe Local Government		
59.	Idi	Guga	100
60.	Baba Yayi	Guga	100
61.	Juuli	Kwankwanba	100
62.	Tukur	Munahaye	90

Source: The above table is drawn from different communities close to the various camps. Also members of the vigilant groups and *yan-sakai* from the areas were contacted in the generating the lists. Victims of kidnapping and young boys who offer different services to the bandits also provided information about the operations, membership strength and nature of diverse cells in their localities. Even with that the figures are not exact, rather mere approximation. The list of leaders could be correct while their foot soldiers mostly roamed from one camp to another.