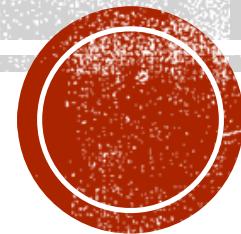


TIT-FOR-TAT VIOLENCE, COMMUNAL GRIEVANCES, AND THE BANDITRY CRISIS IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

James Barnett and Dr. Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i

Institute of African and Diaspora Studies (IADS), UNILAG

April 20, 2022



KEY OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

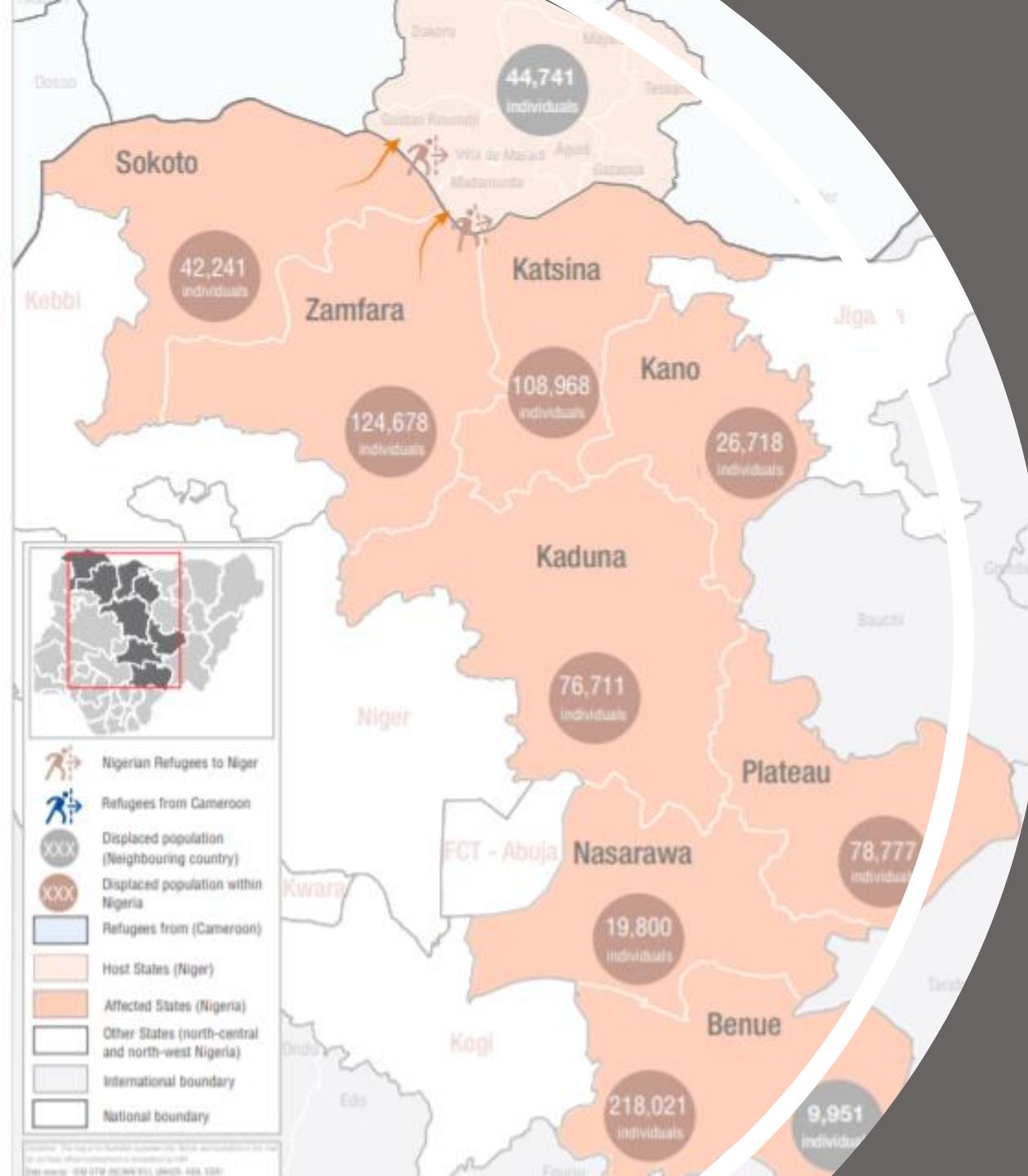


- Understand multifaceted nature of crisis in North-West and North-Central Nigeria
- Bandit-terrorists: How did they arise? Who are they fighting?
- How and why does banditry escalate?
- Why have efforts to eradicate banditry fallen short?



UNDERSTANDING THE SCALE OF BANDITRY

- Immense humanitarian crisis
 - As many as 20,000 dead since 2011
 - Roughly one million displaced
 - Up to one million children out of school
- Most geographically dispersed security challenge in Nigeria today
- Polarizing issue, fuels ethnoregional and ethnoreligious divisions
- Strains Nigeria's limited security resources



THE ORIGINS OF BANDITRY

- Farmer-herder conflict
- Injustice by traditional rulers, police and judiciary
- Formation of gangs and demand for justice
- Criminalisation of the gangs
- Cattle stealing and rustling
 - Intergenerational trade: “Bandit families”
- Escalation of violence in Zamfara, Sokoto, Katsina, Kaduna & Niger states





THE FIRST GANGS

- The first gang emerged around 2011 in Zamfara under Kundu (Kanuri man in Zurmi), with his friends Mani wargage, Fitari, and Bami-yarma.
- Kundu trained Buharin Daji and Dankarmi in 2012. Buhari later killed Kundu
- These gangs recruited and trained their fellow kinsmen into what they called “Fulani liberation movement”
- Many Fulani families were cajoled or coerced into this “movement”
- Excesses of vigilante militias and *Yan Sakai* forced Fulani youth into the forest
- Our porous borders, foreign miners and local gun runners facilitated the easy acquisition of arms and ammunitions
- Buharin Daji oversees the spread of rural banditry in the northwest

TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY-BASED SECURITY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- Communities have long policed cattle rustling on their own
- *Yan Tauri* and *Yan Banga* vigilantes dating to pre-colonial era
- Vigilantes subsumed into semi-formal umbrella group, Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) after 1999
 - State VGN chapters supported by governors
- Traditional conflict-resolution: Village head and *ardo* discuss land-use disputes, farmer-herder issues





(IN)JUSTICE AND VIGILANTISM: ORIGINS OF THE *YAN SAKAI*

- Many communities unhappy with formal Vigilante groups and corrupt/inefficient criminal justice system
 - State governments fail to support Vigilante
 - People believe government complicit in banditry
- Some Vigilante members leave outfit, start anti-bandit militias without state support
 - Groups known as *Yan Sakai* ("volunteer guards")
- No central command or control, *Yan Sakai* form spontaneously





POLITICAL SPONSORSHIP AND ETHNICITY: GROWTH OF *YAN SAKAI*

- *Yan Sakai* need sponsors
 - Traditional leaders, businessmen
 - Opposition politicians in period of Gov. Yari (2011-2019) step forward for political reasons
- *Yan Sakai* are diverse
 - Dominated by Christians of Dakarawa in Zuru, southern Kebbi
 - Zamfara and Sokoto: mostly Muslim Hausa
- Only unifying feature of *Yan Sakai*
 - They are anti-Fulani

YAN SAKAI AS CONFLICT ACTORS AND CONFLICT DRIVERS



- Adversary of bandits—or herdsmen?
 - Since mid-2010s, Bandits overpower *Yan Sakai* in most confrontations
 - Dushka >> Wagila
- Explicitly anti-Fulani militia, no oversight or training
 - Many *Yan Sakai* engage in *de facto* ethnic cleansing, attack ordinary herders rather than bandits
- Bandits claim to take up arms to protest/defend against *Yan Sakai* profiling, violence



“CRIMINAL” OR “ETHNIC” CONFLICT?

- Criminal motivations and intercommunal conflict coexist on spectrum in northwest Nigeria
 - Salience of one or another ebbs and flows over time
 - Bandits fight other bandits and Fulani
- “Bandit warlords” = Gangsters with political authority and a constituency
 - Bandits seek to maximize profit, power, prestige
 - Act as *de facto* sovereigns in many areas
 - Grievances against *Yan Sakai* closest thing warlords have to “ideology” to justify banditry and build legitimacy with (some of) their subjects/constituents





TIT-FOR-TAT VIOLENCE: CASE STUDIES

- Killing of Alh. Isheyyi, Zamfara (2012)
 - *Yan Sakai* used to settle personal scores
 - Killing of a Fulani elite sparks disproportionate reprisals, banditry crisis decidedly ethnicized
- Tangaza and Goronyo, Sokoto (2021)
 - *Yan Sakai* respond to influx of bandits from Zamfara by killing local herders & Fulani IDPs
 - Bandits retaliate against Hausa civilians
 - *Yan Sakai* retaliate...
- Bandits are not Robin Hood, but *Yan Sakai* offer bandits **pretext** to act in “self-defense”

STATE RESPONSE AND DILEMMAS



- Vigilantes are crucial partners for security forces, but might do more harm than good
 - Military-Vigilante relations vary across NW
- Governors ban *Yan Sakai*, but this simply produces *Yan Sakai*-VGN convergence
 - *Yan Sakai* merge with or subsume local VGN, operate with tacit state backing
 - Bandits no longer distinguish b/w “vigilantes”
- VGN groups complain support from state governments doesn’t materialize
 - Corruption, political showmanship undermine security response in NW

CONCLUSION

- Transition into CJTF model?
 - Pseudo-centralized command-and-control
 - Closer collaboration with military
 - Ethnic character of *Yan Sakai* poses obstacle
- Need for comprehensive DDR
 - Previous peace deals fall short
 - No trust between *Yan Sakai* and bandits; each feels other is favored
- So long as state security forces are inadequate to face challenge of banditry, vigilantism and militias will fill the void
 - Rogue bandits produce rogue vigilantes produce rogue bandits produce...





FIELDWORK WITH VIGILANTES