

The changing contours of insecurity in Katsina: A threat assessment

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Abstract

Threats from armed bandits and kidnappers in Northwestern Nigeria are in different forms. The landscape of security challenges has changed since 2016, with the intensive war against Islamic insurgents in Northeastern Nigeria called Boko Haram has changed the contours of security challenges in Nigeria. The manifestation of different security threats has been on the increase and the armed bandits have continued to wreak havoc on communities and highways in different parts of Nigeria. The security challenge is now a hydra-headed monster, which if one head is cut, another head will develop in Nigeria. This article has assessed the current security situation and challenges that beleaguered some States in the Northwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria with a particular interest in Katsina State. The researcher evaluated secondary data on the performance of security personnel deployed to the conflict-affected areas in Katsina, State. The assessment covered January to June 2024. However, the data are classified information hence the identity of the personnel and persons who divulged the information cannot be revealed in line with the principles of anonymity in research ethics. The findings found that some of the armed groups in parts of Katsina State are kidnapping people to remove some vital organs from their bodies and sell them to those who traffic human organs. Based on the assessment, the affected Local Government Areas in Katsina State are categorized into four (4) based on the severity and magnitude of kidnapping, cattle rustling and ransacking of villages. Drawing from the findings, the researcher has developed policies and strategies to address the changing contours of security challenges in the affected areas and Nigeria.

As a tradition in threat assessment, the researcher has provided policy recommendations to achieve or implement the policies and strategies. The activities of the armed bandits and organ traffickers portend a grave danger now and in the future as many people would be involved in the business of human organs due to their lucrative nature. The government should develop strategies that will enable the rural communities not to be vulnerable to attacks from armed bandits. Armed groups who kill and kidnap residents at will for ransom and organ trafficking if not tamed will recruit new foot soldiers hence aggravating the situation. Addressing security threats can be achieved by deploying enough security personnel at the border between the Niger Republic and Nigeria. Security personnel should deploy electronic scanners and long-range cameras to monitor and arrest the influx of foreign and domestic dealers in human organs and weapons for appropriate punishment.

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1. Introduction

Threats from armed bandits and kidnappers in Northwestern Nigeria are in different forms. The landscape of security challenges has changed since 2016, with the intensive war against Islamic insurgents in Northeastern Nigeria called Boko Haram has changed the contours of security challenges in Nigeria. The manifestation of

different security threats has been on the increase and the armed bandits have continued to wreak havoc on communities and highways in different parts of Nigeria. The security challenge is now a hydra-headed monster, which if one head is cut, another head will develop in Nigeria. The threats posed by the marauding armed groups in Northwestern Nigeria are taking different shapes and colours. The landscape of insecurity is expanding, as some terrorist groups are aligning with the armed bandits in the Northwest and parts of Niger State. The alliance between the armed bandits and international terrorist organizations operating in the corridors of West Africa is a major security threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria. Amani Africa Report No. 13 [1] has succinctly summarized how all parts of Africa, have been affected by different forms of security threats. There is currently no longer a part of the continent where terrorist organizations are not active. As more and more regions run the potential of becoming the scene of terrorist operations, this global expansion keeps going. The threats from terrorist groups and organizations pose a great problem to humanity as terrorists and armed criminals resort to the use of sophisticated weapons against unarmed civilians. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism reported that there is a connection between the offenders' ideologies and the tools they employ in their attacks. While not all of these trends are as obvious, the majority of Jihadists use physical weapons (most often knives), the majority of right-wing extremist terrorists use firearms, and the majority of left-wing extremist terrorists commit arson or use fire bombs [7]. The annual threat assessment of the U.S. intelligence community [4] assessed the security threats in West Africa which Nigeria is included. The report stated that the stability of West Africa will be threatened by an explosive concoction of terrorism, inter-communal violence, and democratic regress. Recent illegitimate transfers of power in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, and Mali show the region's brittleness and, in some cases, the public's perception that their government is unable to manage rising insecurity or successfully provide services. Some of the still-powerful authorities are adopting autocratic, state-centric, and religious forms of government, concentrating security in important urban areas while handing over rural areas to jihadists [4].

In this assessment of security threats in Katsina State and its neighboring States in the Northwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria, the researcher evaluated the current situation in Local Government Areas that are under constant attacks. Incidence of kidnapping, cattle rustling, and ransacking of villages by armed bandits. This threat assessment attempts to explain why some areas than others, are more vulnerable to attacks by the armed groups operating in the affected areas and the consequences of such attacks, killings, and population displacement. Additionally, this article also explored an emerging type of crime by the armed groups operating in Northwestern Nigeria to source money to buy weapons and food. This type of crime is unknown to many researchers and organizations interested in security studies and policy as well as border studies. The sales of captives by armed groups to human traffickers at the international frontiers between Nigeria and the Niger Republic as well as the Benin Republic is attracting the attention of security experts and social researchers in Nigeria and other parts of Africa. This is because reputable research organizations like The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in their report on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Risks Arising from Migrant Smuggling [2] did not include the sales of kidnapped victims to those who are into the illegal transactions in organ harvesting. The FATF report [2] revealed that there have been instances of migrant smugglers using their opportunities to commit other crimes, some of which are directly related to but not necessarily implied by migrant smugglings, such as forgery, the corruption of border agencies and other public institutions to aid in travel, and even the administration of addictive drugs to control and exploit their victims. These additional crimes include the trafficking of illegal drugs, theft, harassment, sexual assault, blackmail, human trafficking, robbery, murder, and the exploitation of labour. Because this crime is transnational, migrant traffickers can also smuggle products, drugs, and weapons.

However, Scheper-Hughes [6] documented how a terrorist group in Syria had engaged in the illicit business of selling the organs of human beings they captured during the war and along the US and Mexican border by drug cartels. When police and government officials raided the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Yemen in 2012, they found 8,200 body parts that had been stored there. The government acknowledged that the practice of harvesting body parts without permission had become the norm that it was illegal and unethical, that it

needed to be acknowledged, that families needed to be compensated, and that the bones, tissues, organs, and other body parts needed to be identified and returned to the families of the victims.

To carry out this assessment, the researchers assessed secondary data from security operatives and residents of the villages affected by the insecurity in Katsina and the neighboring Zamfara States. Assessing the security threats and situation of Katsina State alone would be insufficient without including some parts of Zamfara State because of their proximity and similarity of their population composition. Military personnel, the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Immigration Service, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking Persons (NAPTIP), and residents of the affected communities provided valuable information for this assessment.

2. Current security challenge in Katsina state

Local Government Areas of the State are categorized based on their level of security threats or challenges (Fig. 1). The magnitude of the security challenge in Katsina varies from one Local Government Area to another. Based on the classification below, all the Local Government Areas located that are along the Kamuku forest which runs from Birnin-Gwarin Kaduna State to Jibiya LGA in Katsina are classified as areas with a severe and high threat of attacks of armed bandits or kidnappers. In this document, those LGAs are referred to as corridors of violence because the forest has become a haven for terrorists and armed groups.

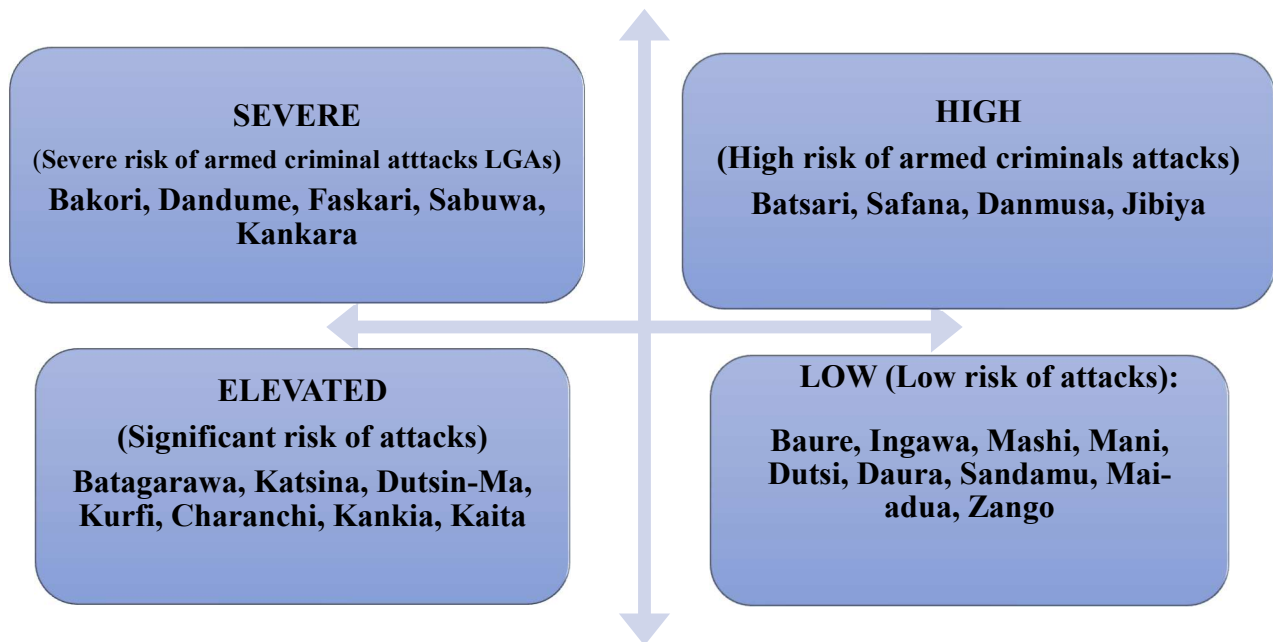


Figure 1. Level of security threats

2.1 Causes of insecurity

There are multiple causal factors of security challenges in different places in the world. Some of the causal factors are context-specific or unique to a particular place. In the context of Katsina State, some of the causes are as follows.

2.1.1. Root causes

The causal factors that triggered some people in Katsina and other parts of Northwestern Nigeria to take up arms against the citizens and security agencies are multi-dimensional. However, armed banditry, kidnapping and cattle rustling are not the same as other violent conflicts in Northeast (Boko Haram), farmer-herder conflict in Central Nigeria and secessionist movement under the Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and Eastern Security Network (ESN) in Southeast Nigeria. In Katsina State, areas that are beleaguered by security

challenges have a history of traditional cattle theft among the nomadic groups who are known for animal husbandry. The cattle rustling has continued unchecked for decades and the nomadic Fulani started running out of their livestock which is their major source of livelihood and an indicator of social status in the society. As time went by, the children of the herders grew up without livestock for herding and formal education that would enable them to have formal employment as a means of livelihood either in the villages or in the town apart from herding livestock. In summary, the proximate causes of armed violence and kidnapping are:

- (a) Depletion of livestock in the possession of the nomadic groups.
- (b) Lack of formal education and vocational training in the rural areas to provide alternative livelihood options for the children of the nomads and farmers. Over the decades, all tiers of Government (Local, State, and Federal Government) in Nigeria have not anticipated the impending danger of neglecting the nomadic population who live in the forest and bush without livestock and formal education.

2.1.2 Proximate causes

One of the proximate causes of security challenges (Fig. 2) in some parts of Katsina State and some neighboring States of Kaduna and Zamfara is the existence of the forest which harbors criminal elements. From Kaduna State to Katsina and Zamfara, all the Local Government Areas that the forest passes through them, are the worst hit by the activities of the armed criminals, terrorizing the residents and the commuters. In this document, all the LGAs in Katsina State that Rugu Forest passes through are classified as "Severe Risk Areas". The criminals find it easy to move from Niger State to Kaduna via Birnin Gwari to Katsina to Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi State without plying the highway. This has made it difficult for security agencies to track their movements, identify their location, and know their identity.

Another proximate cause of the security challenges is the proliferation of lethal weapons in the West African Sub-region since the fall of Mu'ammar Gadhafi in 2011. Niger Republic which has a boundary with the Federal Republic of Nigeria is one of the destinations of weapons and fighters from Libya, Chad and Mali. Therefore, weapons and fighters from the neighbouring countries of Libya have citizens who participated in the war in Libya, Mali, or Chad and have been using the Niger Republic as a transit route to Nigeria. This is because a large segment of the border between Nigeria and the Niger Republic is unmanned and hence exacerbates or transforms the existing security challenge in Nigeria. The skills and techniques that armed criminals displayed in Northern Nigeria from 2009 to 2022 indicate that the majority of them had undergone some illegal forms of weapons training either inside or outside Nigeria. In this regard, the smuggling of weapons and ammunition to different criminal groups in Nigeria has led to the formation of an illegal cartel which in this document are referred to as conflict merchants or entrepreneurs, that is, those who are into the business of selling weapons and ammunition. Some of these merchants import their contraband goods from foreign countries by smuggling them to Nigeria and selling them to criminals. Some assist the kidnappers with information about people to be kidnapped or assist them in negotiating ransom with the relatives of the kidnapped persons. It has been observed that security challenges have provided an opportunity for the cartel of merchants or entrepreneurs to get money.

3. Results

The assessment of the threat posed by the security challenges in some parts of Katsina is discussed below.

3.1. From kidnappers to human vendors: changing contours of insecurity

Terrorist organizations worldwide devise different methods to raise funds to finance their activities (Fig. 3). From engaging in drug trafficking, money laundering, money courier, illegal mining and engaging in import and export of goods to donations from their sympathizers. However, kidnapping and rustling of livestock in Katsina State is taking a different path which is new in the area. Kidnappers in some parts of Katsina State are

no longer demanding ransom from hostages and their relatives again. Some of the kidnappers or hostage takers are selling their victims to international syndicates who are in the illegal business of organ harvesting.

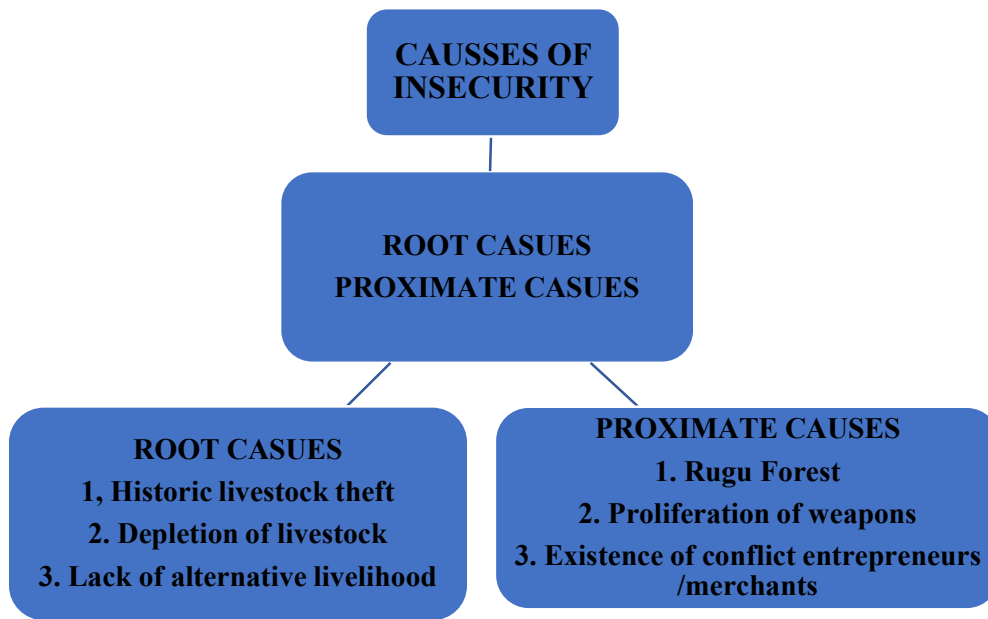


Figure 2. Causes of insecurity in Katsina State

The syndicates are operating between the Niger Republic and the Nigerian border, buying people who are kidnapped in Katsina, Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi and Niger States. This horrific situation is not known to the majority of the security operatives and political leaders in the affected places. This constitutes the most horrendous security threat as it changes the contours of security challenges in the entire Nigeria. The security challenge started as a traditional warfare of stealing livestock among the nomadic groups and metamorphosed into a conflict between pastoral groups (farmers) and herders. It has now moved beyond farmers-herders conflict to hostage-taking or kidnapping people for ransom to the senseless killing of people before they kidnap and steal food items and livestock. As most of the communities were running out of livestock, the armed bandits also changed their demands after taking a hostage to put levies on farmers before they were allowed to work in their farms in pre-, during and post-harvest periods. The majority of the farmers in the areas are subsistence farmers whose farm produce when sold, cannot settle the amount levied on them. In realization of the shattered economic life of the people in the affected areas, they had no means to pay the ransom, the terrorists resorted to the selling of human beings to willing buyers.

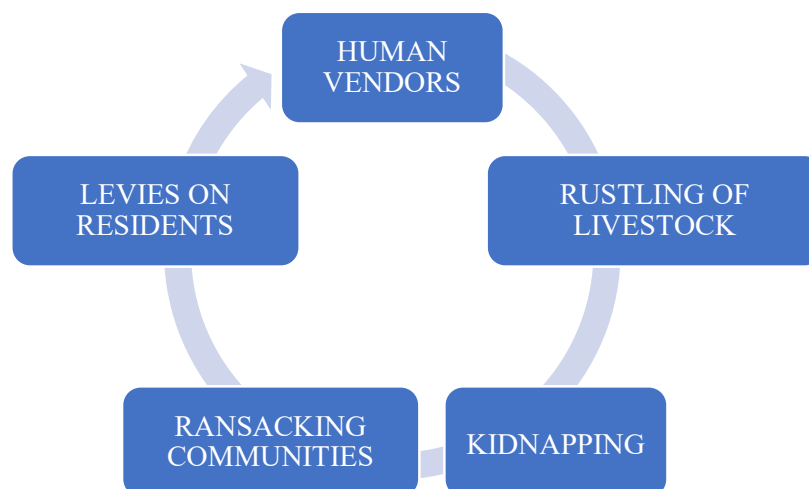


Figure 3. Methods to raise funds for terrorist organizations

Existing literature and research findings in areas where terrorist groups and other criminals operate in Nigeria and other parts of Africa have not documented the dramatic shift from kidnapping people for ransom to selling them to criminal cartels who are in the business of organ harvesting in Asia and Europe. For example, Idris [3] stated that Nigeria is a supplier and route of human traffickers. Nigerians from rural and conflict-affected areas are victims of trafficking, as are those from neighboring nations like Benin who are transported to Libya (and Europe) via Nigeria. Boko Haram has earned a bad reputation for kidnapping women and children for forced marriage, sexual enslavement, and domestic service. Examples include the kidnapping of 276 girls from a school in Borno State in May 2014 and 110 students from a school in Yobe State in 2018. In the work of Idris, selling human beings to human traffickers who are into the illegal business of organ harvesting is not mentioned because, at the time he conducted the research, such a problem had not started.

This current situation in States in Nigeria such as Sokoto, Katsina, Niger, Zamfara, and Kebbi is fast turning to what happened in some countries like Syria, Yemen, Mexico, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The terrorists and other non-state actors fuelling insecurity in Northwestern Nigeria have now realized that community members can no longer meet their huge amount for ransom after they kidnapped their relatives hence exploring a more lucrative avenue for sourcing money to finance their illegal activities as well as feeding and procurement of weapons. Organ trafficking in conflict-ravaged areas had started in other countries before kidnapping for ransom and the sale of organs became a new trend of sourcing funds by the criminals operating in the areas assessed in this article. Scheper-Hughes [6] revealed that Boris Wolfman (also known as Volfman) was detained in Istanbul in December 2015. He had been recruiting Syrian refugees to sell their organs to foreign transplant tourists who would be treated in one of the many private transplant facilities in Turkish hospitals. Indicted for organizing illegal kidney transplant procedures in shady clinics in Kosovo, Azerbaijan, Sri Lanka, and other locations for foreign transplant patients willing to pay upwards of \$100,000 for an illegal transplant with a kidney from an unnamed trafficked person, Wolfman was a wanted man in Israel. Wolfman was regarded as cruel by both transplant tourists and kidney buyers. He belonged to a global network of organized crime that operated on a global scale. Early on, it was quite simple to find new immigrants to Israel who were eager to live there but in need of assistance. These immigrants were mainly refugees from nations like Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania that had experienced economic collapse. Brokers visited new arrivals and assisted them in obtaining residency and even citizenship in Israel in exchange for their willingness to aid the country by selling a kidney in a foreign clinic for several thousand dollars.

Furthermore, kidney trafficking in Syria has always been a problem for the poor and members of ethnic minorities. Selling kidneys to the destitute was a last resort before the wars that destroyed the nation; it was an unsightly but common practice. Today, kidney smugglers traffic Syrian migrants and accept them into prison facilities. Raad, a 19-year-old Syrian refugee, and his six siblings left Aleppo for Beirut, Lebanon. He was approached by Abu Hussain, a kidney hunter, there. Hussain, like Boris Wolfman, had kidney runners find recently arrived refugees and offer them money and assistance with immigration authorities in exchange for selling a kidney. What could be more advantageous than trading a kidney for a temporary visa? Similar to Turkey, Lebanon has long been a destination for thousands of transplant tourists, many of whom are from the Persian Gulf. The kidneys needed by transplant patients were previously supplied by Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon before Syrians started filling this void. Syrian refugees are today's new, cheaper, and more desperate bait [6].

Unlike slavery, servitude, prostitution-related exploitation, or sexual exploitation, "removal of organs" is different from the other prohibited types of exploitation in that it is not an activity that is necessarily exploitative. The 2000 Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, along with the 2002 Additional Protocol thereto on the transplantation of organs, prohibits profiting from the sale of the human body and its parts as well as "organ and tissue trafficking." This prohibition is in addition to the Palermo Protocol [5].

Based above discourse, engaging in trade in human organs by the terrorist groups in Nigeria indicates the existence of another means of getting funds to run their activities. This is corroborated by the -- Terrorist organizations may gain from human trafficking in a variety of ways, including the ability to continue their terrorist actions through human resources, tactical agility, and ideological reinforcement. Men, women, and children are trafficked to work for terrorist organizations in a variety of capacities. In addition, women and girls are trafficked to serve as combatants' sexual payoffs [5].

4. Way/means to address the current challenges

This threat assessment covered January to June 2024. It takes a team effort and contributions from numerous national and international organizations, including law enforcement agencies, the military, the intelligence services, the financial sector, the diplomatic service, and health organizations to effectively combat terrorism. Organization, cooperation, and coordination are essential to success. Therefore, kidnapping and other forms of armed violence in Northern Nigeria are not an exception. Table 1. Presents policy and strategy to address security challenges.

Table 1. Policy and strategy to address security challenges

Policy	Strategy	Short-term (1 year)	Medium-term (2 years)	Long-term (4 years)
Education (Formal & Informal)	Establishment of schools for nomadic and farmer's children	Establishment of Primary Schools	Construction of Houses for Head Teacher & Teachers in the respective villages	Establishment of Junior & senior secondary schools.
Deployment of Security operatives	A holistic approach in the fight against the armed bandits. Combined operations across States facing security challenges in the Northwest & Niger State	Prosecute the arrested criminals to serve as a deterrence to other criminals.	For those who surrendered their weapons willingly, the Government Liaises with the National Directorate of Employment for vocational training.	Establishment of Police Outpost and NSCDC Office in villages to ensure the presence of security in remote areas.
Digitalize all inter-state Roads in Katsina State	Digital Roads	Digital roads with a camera-powered solar system will enable security agencies to track & monitor vehicular movements in the entire state simultaneously.	Availability of modern electronic gadgets for security surveillance and monitoring.	The government should have a Mass Surveillance document for the State. This enables any time when new security personnel is deployed to Katsina State will have a working security document.
Non-kinetic Approach	Dialogue with the criminals	Identify authentic leaders of the armed groups and their locations.	Involvement of Miyetti Allah Kautel Hore, Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders & JNi as the mediators between Government & armed groups.	Resettlement of the displaced persons. Identify the victims & quantify the damage for compensation.

Eradication of illiteracy among the nomadic groups was one of the rationales behind the establishment of the National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) in Nigeria. However, for more than three decades,

from 1989-2022, there has been no presence of the Commission's activity or projects in the rural areas of Katsina State where armed banditry has become the order of the day. The government needs to liaise with the NCNE in collaboration with the State Universal Basic Education (SUBEB) to ensure that the children of the nomadic groups are not out of school. This will enable the children to acquire skills and knowledge to survive in the ever-changing 21st century.

5. Conclusions

The security situation in the areas assessed showed that part of the survival imperatives by the armed bandits and kidnappers is the use of hybrid methods of raising funds for their activities. They collected ransom for hostage-taking and also, sold the victims to internationally organized syndicates of organ traffickers operating in West Africa. The destination of human organs from West Africa is mostly Asia, particularly India and China. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in Nigeria has expressed concern over the number of people who were kidnapped and later disappeared at the hands of the kidnappers. Before 2022, different armed groups were operating in Northwestern Nigeria, stealing livestock that is known as cattle rustlers. The criminals were not eliminated by the authorities concerned and grew hydra-heads hence the cattle rustlers developed or established a connection with existing criminals along the international boundaries between Nigeria, Niger Republic, Republic of Benin, Chad and Cameroon.

Similarly, the existence of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Nigeria known as Boko Haram which later established a working alliance with ISIS has made it easier for the criminal groups to access weapons. The fall of Mu'ammar Gadhafi as the leader of Libya led to the spread of weapons and fighters who fought in support of the former Libyan leader. Previous studies have shown that there are different cartels of international criminals who are in the business of migrant smuggling. The main purpose of migrant smuggling is to provide an illicit service, which the migrants pay for and thereby authorize. However, human trafficking makes use of compulsion, trickery, and other tactics to compel someone to be exploited against their will. The involvement of the armed bandits in the acts of organ trafficking and exchange of captives for weapons has added another dimension to the existing fragile situation. Human beings are not killed to remove their organs instead of ransom collection.

The threats posed by the armed bandits in their connection with Islamic Jihadists and organ trafficking cartels portends a grave danger not in the Northwest alone but in other parts of Nigeria. The States which are located at the border between the Niger Republic and Nigeria are the most vulnerable and easy prey to these criminals because the Niger Republic serves as an easy exit point and route to enter Libya on the road to Europe or Asia, where they sell such human organs for transplant. This assessment has opened a fresh perspective in dealing with the security threats in Katsina State and other affected States in Northwestern Nigeria. With this problem on the ground, the Government and security operatives will have to deal with a complex situation where armed bandits kill people sporadically, for ransom and organ trafficking.

Policy recommendations are the following:

- 1) **Protect the communities:** The government should develop strategies that will enable the rural communities not to be vulnerable to attacks from armed bandits and terrorist groups who kill and kidnap residents at will for ransom and organ trafficking. This can be achieved by deploying enough security personnel at the border between the Niger Republic and Nigeria. The security personnel will check and arrest the influx of foreign and domestic dealers in human organs for appropriate punishment.
- 2) **Policy of communication:** The target beneficiaries of the government policy regarding security strategy should be well-communicated through community engagement with the affected persons and their stakeholders. This will enable the target persons to accept or embrace the policy initiated. The government should utilize the potential of Islamic preachers, traditional rulers and community leaders of both farmers and herders to deliver the gospel of peace and its benefits.

- 3) **Funding of security:** Funds meant for security should be judiciously used to ensure that security agencies are properly remunerated. Both Federal and State Governments should support security agencies with modern operational gadgets, facilities, and equipment to enable them to protect the lives and property of the citizens.
- 4) **Performance evaluation unit:** Tracking of results in line with the policy and strategies designed. This Unit would serve as a watchdog that will monitor and assess the performance of people charged with the responsibility of protecting the citizens doing their work. Through termly performance reviews, Government or security agencies can detect or identify any personnel who deserve commendation and otherwise. This unit will become a very important component in the implementation of the security policy and strategy of the Government. Hence it will also enable the Government not to deviate from its setup goals.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that they have no known financial or non-financial competing interests in any material discussed in this paper.

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