

PATTERNS AND DRIVERS OF VIOLENT CRIMES IN NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Security challenges have continued to expand from the rural areas to the satellite towns in Niger State. The impact has continued to spread from displacement of rural population in the villages to the shortage of food supplies in the city, the situation is worsening. This study examines the pattern and drivers of violent crimes in Niger State, Nigeria. A library survey was used for literature review; the paper was anchored on Situational Action Theory (SAT). The study revealed that violent crimes in Niger State represent a multi-dimensional challenge with significant socio-economic, political, and psychological repercussions. The persistence of crimes such as banditry, kidnapping, herder-farmer conflicts, and urban crimes highlights the interplay of structural vulnerabilities, weak governance, and environmental degradation. These crimes undermine the state's economic development by disrupting agriculture, displacing communities, and deterring investments. The study concluded that the drivers of these crimes include, but are not limited to, poverty, unemployment, inequality, and corruption, reflecting systemic governance failures and inadequate institutional responses. As noted, Niger State's vast under-governed areas and porous borders facilitate the activities of criminal networks, while the proliferation of small arms exacerbates violence. Moreover, climate change intensifies competition for scarce resources, further escalating herder-farmer tensions. It recommends a concerted effort to address the root causes of violent crimes while simultaneously mitigating their impacts. To combat this rising insecurity, a holistic approach is necessary. Strengthening security infrastructure is paramount, including deploying well-trained personnel equipped with modern technologies.

Keywords: Patterns, Drivers, Violent, Crimes, Violent Crime

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there has been a significant rise in violent crime, most especially in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, a country in West Africa. Different

parts of Nigeria are currently experiencing different levels of violent crimes. These challenges include terrorism, Insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping, killings, armed robbery, arson, herder-farmer conflicts, attacks by unknown gunmen, ritual killings, extra-judicial killing, cybercrime, and cultism (Akinyetun, 2022; Aodu, 2022; Charles, 2021; Mosadomi, 2022; Nigeria Watch, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Olapeju & Peter, 2021; Usman & Singh, 2021). These violent crimes, often referred to as security challenges, have assumed an uneven geopolitical stance. Consequently, the persistent insecurity in Nigeria has taken varying forms across different geopolitical zones (Akinyetun, 2022). For instance, since 2009, the North East has been bedeviled by the Boko Haram insurgency, which metamorphosed into the Islamic State in West Africa Province and terrorism. The North West and North Central have been engulfed in banditry, ethno-religious killings, and herder-farmer conflicts. Southeast has been plagued with secessionist agitation, kidnapping, attacks by unknown gunmen, ritual killings, herder-farmer clashes, and banditry.

Notably, the Southwest has been experiencing a surge in various types of violent crime, including armed robbery, killings for ritual, kidnapping for ransom, banditry, and herder-farmer clashes. While the South-South region has been threatened by kidnapping, militancy (Akinyetun, 2022; Aodu, 2022; Nigeria Watch, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Olapeju & Peter, 2022. Niger State is one of Nigeria's largest states by landmass, strategically located in the north-central region of the country. It serves as a transit hub, connecting the northern and southern regions of Nigeria.

Despite its potential for development, the state has become a hotspot for violent crimes, which have escalated in frequency and severity. The World Bank (2020) highlights those states with high poverty rates and weak institutional capacity, such as Niger State, often experience heightened levels of violence. Niger State's vast rural expanse, coupled with limited security presence, provides an enabling environment for criminals and insurgents. This paper aims to provide a detailed examination of violent crime patterns in

Niger State, identify their underlying drivers, and propose actionable solutions to mitigate them.

Statement of the Problem

Niger State, the largest state in Nigeria by landmass, is strategically positioned as the agricultural and economic hub of the North Central region. Ideally, its vast arable land, rich mineral deposits, and diverse human capital should foster robust socio-economic development and peaceful coexistence. However, the state has increasingly become a volatile epicenter of violent crimes, transitioning from a relatively peaceful agrarian society to a hotspot for complex security crises (Amata, 2022). The contemporary security landscape is dominated by a surge in rural banditry, mass kidnappings for ransom, deadly farmer-herder clashes, and urban armed robbery, which have collectively disrupted the socio-economic fabric of the state (Mosadomi, 2022; Usman & Singh, 2021).

The core problem lies in the escalating frequency, geographical expansion, and sophistication of these violent crimes, which have dangerously outpaced the state's security and institutional response mechanisms. Criminal syndicates have exploited the state's vast, unpoliced forest reserves such as the Kamuku and Kainji forests, transforming them into operational havens for kidnapping, illegal mining, and arms stockpiling (Akinyetun, 2022; Hamza, 2021). The consequences of this unchecked violence are devastating thousands of residents being internally displaced, agricultural activities have been paralyzed, leading to severe food insecurity, and billions of Naira have

been lost to ransom payments and capital flight (CLN Foundation, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2020). Furthermore, persistent violence has eroded public trust in formal law enforcement, prompting the proliferation of unregulated vigilante groups that occasionally exacerbate communal tensions (Bello, 2020).

Despite various kinetic military operations, amnesty programs, and peacebuilding initiatives deployed by the federal and state governments, violent crimes in Niger State continue to mutate and thrive. This paradox suggests that current interventions are largely reactive and fail to address the deep seated, intersecting drivers of the crisis. While existing literature has extensively documented general insecurity in Northern Nigeria, such as the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-east or general banditry in the Northwest, there is a distinct paucity of comprehensive empirical research focusing on the unique, localized patterns and multidimensional drivers of violent crimes specific to Niger State (Aodu, 2022; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Specifically, the complex interplay between Niger State's unique topography (ungoverned spaces), climate induced resource scarcity, extreme youth unemployment, and the proliferation of small arms require a localized, context specific investigation (Muhammad, 2021; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021).

Without a nuanced understanding of how these structural, environmental, and institutional variables interact to fuel criminality within this specific

geopolitical context, policy responses will remain fragmented and ineffective. Therefore, this study is necessitated by the urgent need to critically examine the contemporary patterns and underlying drivers of violent crimes in Niger State. By identifying the specific socio economic, political, and environmental catalysts of this violence, the study seeks to provide actionable, evidence-based frameworks for sustainable conflict resolution, security sector reform, and the restoration of human security in the state.

Conceptual Clarification

Crime

Crime, according to Henslin (2008), is the violation of rules that have been written into law. Igbo (2006) defined crime as an intentional act or omission in violation of criminal law (statutory and case law), committed without defense or justification and sanctioned by the state as a felony or misdemeanor. Crime is a social problem; this is because it is undesirable to society, and the inherent nature of crime has posed a threat to society and to the individuals who live in that society. Provide more conceptual for crime. At least 3 to 4 different views

Violence Vs Violent Crime

To understand violent crime, one must first distinguish between "violence" and "crime." Violence is a broader concept that encompasses any intentional use of physical force or power that results in injury, death, psychological harm, or deprivation (Krug et al., 2002). However, not all violence is criminal (e.g., state-sanctioned military action or self-defense). Violent crime occurs when the use of

force or threat of force violates the statutory criminal laws of a given jurisdiction. From a legal and statutory perspective, the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program defines violent crime as offenses that involve force or the threat of force, specifically categorizing it into four primary offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2020). From a sociological perspective, scholars define violent crime not just as a legal breach, but as a severe violation of social norms that disrupts social cohesion and inflicts physical and psychological trauma on victims. Igbo (2009) conceptualizes violent crime as an intentional act or omission that results in bodily harm, psychological trauma, or death, committed without legal justification and sanctioned by the state as a severe felony. From a public health perspective, the World Health Organization views violent crime as an epidemic that stems from systemic social failures, emphasizing that the intentional use of physical force against others is deeply rooted in socio-economic inequalities, marginalization, and environmental stressors (Krug et al., 2002).

Patterns of Violent Crimes in Niger State

Violent crimes in Niger State are characterized by their diversity in nature and their uneven geographical distribution. These crimes include:

Banditry

Banditry is one of the most prevalent forms of violent crime in Niger State, particularly in rural areas such as Shiroro, Rafi, and Munya local government areas (LGAs). Reports from the CLEEN Foundation (2021) show that bandit groups frequently raid villages, steal livestock, and displace residents, leading to significant economic and social dislocation. Additionally, a report by ACAPS (2021) highlights that Niger State is part of the larger banditry-

affected Northwest region, which accounted for over 1,000 deaths in 2021 alone.

In the North Central region of Nigeria, different states, particularly Niger State, have been brutally attacked by bandits. The past seven years have seen Niger State fall under the control of bandits, with 18 of the 25 local government areas experiencing persistent attacks (Amata, 2022; Mosadomi, 2022). These bandits raided several villages, farms, correctional centers, schools, hostels, highways, etc. Their attacks have resulted in numerous deaths and kidnapping for ransom, which has become common in affected locations. A family with loved ones in captivity will be forced to sell off all their property to secure the release of the victim (Lawal, 2022).

Bandit activities include kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, burning homes, shooting, killing, raping, raiding, and robbing villagers and tourists (Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), 2020; Mac-Leva, 2021; Mohammed, 2021; Usman & Singh, 2021). Consequently, banditry is one of the violent crimes that have harmed the security of the communities, the development of the country, and the peaceful coexistence of the citizens and residents. The activities of bandits have had a profound impact on the security and resources of the country (Charles, 2021). Their activities have posed a major security threat as villagers no longer feel safe in places, they once called home (Lawal, 2022). Thus, the activities of bandits have posed a serious threat to the livelihoods of rural dwellers (Usman & Singh, 2021). The current situation in Niger State is causing significant harm to the well-being of its residents, and it is having negative consequences on economic development of the State and Nigeria at large. Banditry is rising in the State and other parts of the country, which has serious implications for food security, human security, and national security (Akinyetun, 2022).

The rampant banditry across the country has resulted in many deaths, destruction of property, displacement of people, desertion of communities, loss of billions of naira in ransom payments, interruption of children's education, and a host of their negative consequences. (Aodu, 2022; Mosadomi, 2022; Usman & Singh, 2021).

Data from the ICIR's Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) indicates that from 2022, January to March 1,308 people were killed in violent attacks, while 1,333 people were kidnapped across Nigeria by bandits (Abolade, 2022). From the data, Niger state reported the highest number of deaths from insecurity in the country, with 787 deaths in 90 days. This implies that eight people died from violent attacks each day in the first quarter of 2022 in Niger State. The bandits seem to have a reprehensible mission of wiping out the entire population of these communities (Mosadomi, 2022). Long ago, these bandits operated in isolated communities with little or no law enforcement. Today, the gangs have come out in full force, attacking communities indiscriminately without regard for whether there is any security personnel nearby or not (Mosadomi, 2022). Kindly edit this paragraph very well

Banditry which began slowly through cattle stirring in the Shiroro local government area of Niger state in 2015, has become out of control and has spread to other local government areas of the State (Mosadomi, 2021). As a result of this, inhabitants across Niger State communities have been experiencing a surge in attacks by bandits in recent months. This is causing serious problems for the residents of these communities (Mosadomi, 2022). In the process, bandits slaughtered many men, women, and children like livestock while demanding huge ransoms from those who let go of their lives and property. Since the outbreak of the banditry in Niger State, 10,000 members of different communities have been displaced (Mosadomi, 2022).

Since 2021 there have been rising violent attacks by bandits across communities in Niger state. For instance, in 2021, February 42 people were abducted by bandits for ransom in Kagara; among them were 27 students (Abankula, 2021). The bandits capped their reign of impunity by kidnapping over 200 Tegini Islamiyya School, Niger State students in 2022, June (Abankula, 2021; UNICEF, 2021). On 2022, January 11 thirteen people were killed in an attack by bandits in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State. Again, on 2022, January 14 five vigilante members were killed when bandits attacked local markets and some communities in the Shiroro local government area of the State (Umoru, 2022). Be mindful of gaps between one word to another.

Bothered by the recent and persistent bandit invasion across communities in Niger state, the former Governor of the State, Abubakar Sani Bello while in office raised the alarm in 2022, January that 18 of the 25 Local Government Areas of the State had been attacked by bandits and seven of these local government areas such as Shiroro, Munyan, Rafi, Mashegu, Mariga, Lavun, and Paiko had constantly almost completely overrun by bandits. He thus called for a concrete effort to deal with the threat posed by the bandits (Amata, 2022; Mosadomi, 2022). The senate was perturbed by the increasing cases of banditry in Nigeria, especially in Niger State, and the massive killings and reckless destruction of property that has been happening. They passed a resolution on the issue on 17 January, 2022 and appealed to the Federal Government to declare a full-fledged war on bandits as they are now considered terrorists (Umoru, 2022). Sequel to the demand of the senate to curb banditry, especially in Niger state, the Federal Government gave the matching order to the chief security officers of the Nigeria security apparatuses to deploy security personnel to the affected localities to flush out the bandits. Before then, the state government made concerted efforts to end banditry in the State by granting amnesty to the bandits and setting up vigilante groups to secure

the communities (Maishanu, 2022; Mohammed, 2021). Despite these efforts toward addressing banditry in Niger State, the spates of banditry have astronomically increased. The bandits now strike mostly during the daytime, and despite being challenged by security agents, they continue to operate with impunity (Mosadomi, 2021).

2. Kidnapping for Ransom

Kidnapping has become a lucrative criminal enterprise in Niger State, with incidents targeting both high-profile individuals and ordinary citizens. According to SBM Intelligence (2021), the frequency of kidnappings in Niger State has increased significantly, particularly along major highways. Victims are often held in forested areas while ransom negotiations take place. For instance, the Tegina school abduction in 2021 drew national attention, with over 100 students held captive for weeks (Premium Times, 2021).

Farmer-Herder Conflicts

Conflicts between farmers and herders are a recurring issue in Niger State, driven by disputes over access to land and water. A study by International Alert (2020) found that population growth and climate-induced changes have intensified competition for arable land, leading to violent clashes. Areas such as Paikoro and Lavun LGAs have been heavily affected, with thousands displaced as a result (Vanguard, 2022).

Inter-communal Clashes:

Ethnic and religious tensions in Niger State have sometimes led to violent clashes between communities. Disputes over land and other resources, especially between farmers and herders also referred to as pastoralists, frequently result in deadly confrontations. According to Adetoro (2019), environmental degradation and resource scarcity have heightened long-standing grievances, sparking repeated violent conflicts (Olaniyan, 2020). These clashes have become more frequent as desertification and climate

change reduce available land for farming and grazing (Akinyele, 2019; Ojo & Ojebola, 2021). A new and more dangerous phase to the issue is the "new factors assumed to underpin conflicts, such as political, religious and ethnic drivers," (Erundu & Nwakanma 2018, 16) which have continued to threaten the country's security and stability.

In recent years, the herders' conflict against the farmers has become more coordinated and sophisticated. Given the incessant, offensive, and destructive attacks of the herders on their victims, the Global Terrorism Index (2015) has ranked the Fulani's herdsmen as a militant group. Not only this, but the Fulani's herdsmen also became the fourth most deadly terror sect in the world after the Boko Haram, ISIS, and al-Shabaab, in that order (Independent 2015; Global Terrorism Index 2016). The Fulani herdsmen are said to have murdered several thousands of people, especially in the central and the southern parts of the country. Herders recently have claimed far more lives than the Boko Haram insurgency, such that, in the first half of 2018 only, more than 1,300 casualties were recorded in the violence involving herders and farmers, while hundreds of thousands are being displaced, a situation which has continued to sharpen ethnic, regional, and religious divides in Nigeria (Olagbaju & Awolusi 2019).

Urban Crimes

Urban centers like Minna, Suleja, and Kontagora face challenges such as armed robbery, burglary, and gang-related violence. Urbanization studies conducted by the United Nations Habitat Program (2020) indicate that the rapid population growth in these cities has outpaced infrastructure development, contributing to unemployment and rising urban crime rates.

Extremism and Terrorism

Niger State has experienced spillover effects from the activities of extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province

(ISWAP). Reports by the Global Terrorism Index (2021) confirm that extremist incursions into Niger State's border communities have increased, with Shiroro and Munya LGAs being particularly affected. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2022) has documented widespread displacement caused by these attacks.

Drivers of Violent Crimes in Niger State

The persistence of violent crimes in Niger State can be attributed to a combination of socio-economic, political, environmental, and historical factors:

1. Poverty and Economic Inequality:

Generally, the socio-economic conditions of Nigerian citizens are appalling. Several socioeconomic challenges are currently facing Nigerians, such as poverty, unemployment, deprivation, inequality, marginalization, and lack of access to basic amenities. Although the national challenges facing the northern states are significant, they are primarily experienced by the North. (Akinyetun, 2022). In the northern region of Nigeria, banditry and kidnapping have become an attractive way of making money due to weak governance and high levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality. This has led to people turning to banditry as a way to make a living, which has led to increased crime (Muhammad, 2021).

Over 42% of Niger State's population lives below the poverty line (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Poverty makes communities vulnerable to recruitment by criminal groups (World Bank, 2020). Besides the issues of border porosity, and proliferation of arms, the states in the northern region are leading in terms of unemployment and poor people in Nigeria and these two variables are triggers of criminality and social problems that the region is facing (Feyisipo, 2021). For instance, Zamfara, Jigawa, and Sokoto each have poverty rates of 74%, 87%, and 87.7%. (Abdulrasheed, 2020). These conditions in this region make crime and banditry more likely to occur. Thus, Alao et al. (2015) Link banditry, terrorism, and other criminal acts in the

northern region of Nigeria to poverty is understandable. Nevertheless, it should be noted that not all forms of criminality are associated with poverty; it has been argued that economic deprivation can influence people to resort to illegal means to meet their daily needs. However, the prevalence of poverty, widespread unemployment, poor governance, and poor service delivery in the northern region of Nigeria has been attributed to the increase in illegal activities, making the youth susceptible to involvement in crime and criminalities (Akinyetun, 2022).

Niger State suffers from high levels of poverty and unemployment, particularly among youth, driving many into criminal activities such as banditry and armed robbery. A report by SBM Intelligence (2022) found that high youth unemployment rates correlate strongly with increased crime levels in Niger State. Illiteracy rates also remain high in rural areas, limiting access to opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty and violence (UNESCO, 2020).

Ajaero and Onokala (2020) point out that economic hardship, especially in rural areas, makes individuals more vulnerable to criminal recruitment, as farming and other traditional livelihoods are increasingly threatened by insecurity. Yusuf (2021) adds that the lack of meaningful employment opportunities for young people in Niger State further exacerbates the problem, pushing many into crime as a means of survival (Olaniyan, 2020).

2. Weak Governance and Security Infrastructure

Inadequate Security Presence: Niger State's vast size and difficult terrain make effective policing challenging (CLEEN Foundation, 2021). Corruption: Transparency International (2021) highlights corruption within law enforcement agencies as a major hindrance to crime prevention. Judicial Inefficiency: The slow pace of judicial proceedings undermines public trust and deters effective law enforcement (SBM Intelligence, 2021).

3. Environmental Factors

Climate Change: A study by UNDP (2021) found that climate change has exacerbated resource scarcity, intensifying farmer-herder conflicts. Droughts and desertification have reduced arable land, heightening tensions. Geographical Features: The forested areas of Niger State, such as the Kainji National Park, provide cover for criminals and insurgents (ACAPS, 2021).

4. Cultural and Historical Factors

Ethnic and Religious Tensions: The diversity of Niger State's population has occasionally led to violent clashes, especially in areas with long-standing disputes over land and resources (International Alert, 2020). Resource Control Disputes: Historical grievances over land ownership have been a consistent driver of violence (Vanguard, 2022).

5. Technological Factors

Criminal groups have increasingly used modern technology, such as mobile phones and encrypted messaging apps, to coordinate operations and evade detection (SBM Intelligence, 2022).

6. Under Governed Spaces

Under-governed or ungoverned spaces are zones, territories, or areas that lie beyond the reach of the government and create a large threat to safety measures and stability in Nigeria (Akinwale, 2022). In other words, under-governed space refers to an area where the State control is insufficient due to the topography and remoteness which constraints the State's security agencies to curtail the activities of non-state actors that threaten the peaceful cohabitation of the society (Usman & Singh, 2021). There are various ungoverned spaces in the northern regions of Nigeria. These ungoverned spaces and vast forests that have served as a safe haven for criminals are other critical factors that have exacerbated banditry (Hamza, 2021). The prevalence of undergoverned spaces where the government's control is inadequate and ineffective is a major cause of the scourge of banditry (Ojo, 2020). In some areas of the country, the government's control is minimal or nonexistent, but they are governed differently from larger communities.

Bandits and other criminal gangs overrun these poorly governed territories because of their isolation, which allows for the continuation of a collection of illegal business activities. This is why illegal economic activities are so common in these areas. Such areas are characterized by cattle rustling, illegal mining, human trafficking, piracy, kidnapping, and raiding. There are many large forests in various parts of Nigeria. Some of these forests are in the Rumah/Kukar Jangarai, Kamuku, Balmo, Katsina, Kaduna, Bauchi, and Kano states. (Akinyetun, 2022). These vast unregulated forests make them ideal for hiding, and police and military forces have difficulty penetrating the rough terrain (Muhammad, 2021).

Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

Nigeria has seen an increase in the flow of small arms and light weapons from neighboring Sahelian states since the fall of Ghadaffi's regime in Libya. This has led to the weapons ending up in the hands of non-state actors, such as terrorists and bandits (Gaye, 2018). The movements of these arms into Nigeria were enabled by the porosity of Nigeria's land and sea borders. The borders are porous and poorly guided; hence, they remain the channel for the small and light weapons being trafficked into the country for operations by bandits and other armed groups (Egbejule, 2022). Thus, under-policed Nigeria's borders have aided the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among bandits and criminal groups (Muhammad, 2021). The porosity of Nigeria's borders has increased the influx of arms and weapons from the neighboring African countries, thus increasing the opportunities for crime and criminalities throughout the country. In addition, the availability of vast forests in northern regions and the increasing illegal arms trade make it easier for criminals to get weapons. Again, the socioeconomic conditions in the northern region of Nigeria make the youth particularly vulnerable to being recruited into criminal activities (Akinyetun, 2022).

Illegal Mining Activities

Another reason violent crimes in Niger State is the illegal mining activities. This is not limited to the state alone but to other states in the northwest and north-central parts of the country. Illegal mining is a major issue in Niger, Zamfara, Katsina, and Kebbi states and it has caused much bloodshed over control of minefields. This has led to the deaths of thousands of people. (International Crisis Group, 2020). In addition, due to the displacement caused by the conflict, the region's people have to resort to banditry to make ends meet (Ogbonnaya, 2020). Weak Security Apparatus The inadequate and lack of rural security coupled with the protection offered by a vast unregulated forest in most states in the North, especially Niger State, has provided the conditions for banditry to thrive (Eyikomisan et al., 2021). In addition, the Nigerian police are understaffed and poorly equipped, making it difficult to protect the population and promote security in undergoverned areas. This major factor encourages criminality in these areas (Akinyetun, 2022; Ojo, 2020). Thus, the Nigerian security agencies are inadequate and understaffed and they lack the equipment and resources to effectively combat banditry in rural areas (Muhammad, 2021).

Impact of Violent Crimes on Economic Development

Economic Disruption: The escalation of violent crimes in Niger State has had far-reaching consequences for its economic development. The most direct impact has been on agriculture, which is the backbone of the state's economy. Persistent farmer-herder conflicts have led to the destruction of farmlands, displacement of farming communities, and loss of livestock, severely affecting food production (Adelaja & George, 2021). According to the International Crisis Group (2018), violence in rural areas has caused many farmers to abandon their farms, leading to food insecurity and a decline in agricultural output. The primary economic activity in Niger State agriculture has been severely disrupted by violent crime. Farmers fear going to their fields, and livestock theft has devastated rural livelihoods (Adamu & Abdullahi, 2019). According to Bello (2020), this disruption contributes to

food insecurity, as both production and access to markets are hampered by the constant threat of attacks. Ajaero and Onokala (2020) also point out that the economic dislocation caused by banditry has pushed many families into poverty, further perpetuating cycles of crime.

In addition to agriculture, violent crimes have disrupted other sectors of the economy, including trade, transportation, and tourism. The state's road networks, which connect the northern and southern parts of Nigeria, have become dangerous due to the rise in highway robberies and kidnappings. This has hindered the movement of goods and services, increased the cost of transportation and leading to price hikes for basic commodities (Akinyemi & Adedokun, 2020). Investors are also reluctant to invest in sectors such as mining, which has huge potential in Niger State, due to security concerns. The mining industry, which could contribute significantly to economic growth, has been stunted by fears of attacks on mining sites by armed groups (Fayemi, 2020).

The rise in violent crimes has also strained the state's fiscal resources, as significant portions of the budget are diverted to security operations and compensation for victims of violence. Rather than focusing on development projects, the government is compelled to allocate funds for the maintenance of security personnel and rehabilitation of displaced persons. This misallocation of resources has slowed the pace of infrastructure development, which is crucial for economic growth (Ibrahim, 2019). Moreover, violent crimes have exacerbated the unemployment problem in Niger State. As businesses close down due to security risks, jobs are lost, leading to higher levels of unemployment. Youth, who make up a significant portion of the unemployed, are particularly vulnerable to being recruited into criminal activities, thus creating a vicious cycle of violence and underdevelopment (Adamu & Umar, 2022).

Other impacts of violent crimes in Niger State

Psychological Trauma: Victims of violent crime suffer from long-term psychological effects, including trauma, fear, and anxiety. Families who have experienced kidnappings or displacement face severe emotional distress, which undermines community cohesion. Adamu and Abdullahi (2019) highlight the long-lasting psychological toll on victims, contributing to a cycle of fear and insecurity in affected communities (Oyewole, 2021). The rise in vigilante groups as a response to crime further reflects the breakdown of trust in formal law enforcement (Bello, 2020).

Erosion of Trust in Government: Violent crime has further eroded public trust in both the government and law enforcement in Niger State (Yusuf, 2021). Residents feel abandoned by authorities, who have been unable to provide adequate protection or deliver justice for victims. This erosion of trust has led to the rise of vigilante groups in some communities, where local residents take the law into their own hands, leading to further instability (Ojo & Ojebola, 2021).

Theoretical Framework: Situational Action Theory

This study tries to explain the pattern and drivers of violent crimes in Niger State using Situational Action Theory (SAT). Situational action theory was developed by Per-Olof Wikström in 2004 and since then, it has been used to help explain how people respond to different situations (Wikström, 2020). The theory focuses on the motives behind terrorism, banditry, insurgency kidnapping, and armed robbery. It tries to explain why people become motivated to commit crimes, considering the effects of ecological, criminological, sociological, and behavioral factors. Agreeing with Wikström (2020), crime is an activity that breaks the law and may be a result of the transaction between an individual's introduction to criminal environments and the penchant for culpability, that's, an individual's time in an unsupervised or ineffectively administered space and level of self-control decide the event of a crime. According to situational action theory, crime is usually motivated by an

individual's sense of right and wrong in the context of the situation. People are responsible for their actions, but the causes of their actions are situational. Criminal behavior is the result of a decision made after considering various options and factors in a particular situation. According to this theory, a crime is committed when an individual believes it is the right thing to do in the current situation and/or does not apply common sense when making decisions (Wikström, 2020). In this way, the rise in banditry in Niger state and other states within the northern region of Nigeria is inferable to the effects of adverse socioeconomic conditions on the people there. The setting is characterized by repeating social disquietude. Therefore, negative choices result from interaction with the setting, which leads to criminal activity (Akinyetun, 2022). Kindly reset the typing formats as gaps are seen in between words.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Violent crimes in Niger State represent a multi-dimensional challenge with significant socio-economic, political, and psychological repercussions. The persistence of crimes such as banditry, kidnapping, herder-farmer conflicts, and urban crimes highlights the interplay of structural vulnerabilities, weak governance, and environmental degradation. These crimes undermine the state's economic development by disrupting agriculture, displacing communities, and deterring investments. The drivers of these crimes' poverty, unemployment, inequality, and corruption reflect systemic governance failures and inadequate institutional responses. As noted, Niger State's vast under-governed areas and porous borders facilitate the activities of criminal networks, while the proliferation of small arms exacerbates violence. Moreover, climate change intensifies competition for scarce resources, further escalating herder-farmer tensions. These challenges require a concerted effort to address the root causes of violent crimes while

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To combat this rising insecurity, a holistic approach is necessary. Strengthening security infrastructure is paramount, including deploying well-trained personnel equipped with modern technology. This should be complemented by governance reforms to reduce corruption and improve the efficiency of law enforcement and the judiciary. Addressing socio-economic disparities is equally crucial; targeted interventions to reduce poverty, create employment opportunities, and provide education and skill-building programs can help curb criminal tendencies among vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to manage environmental resources sustainably. Policies should prioritize conflict-sensitive approaches to land and water management, while fostering dialogue between conflicting groups. International cooperation is also critical in tackling the proliferation of small arms and securing Nigeria's borders. Lastly, community-led initiatives should be encouraged, as local actors are best positioned to identify and resolve issues specific to their areas. Vigilante groups, when properly monitored and supported, can complement formal security efforts. By adopting a multi-faceted strategy that addresses the socio-economic, environmental, and governance-related drivers of violent crime, Niger State can chart a path towards lasting peace and sustainable development. While the challenges are daunting, a combination of robust policymaking, international cooperation, and grassroots participation holds the potential to restore stability to the state and improve the well-being of its residents.

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