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ETHNIC PROFILING AND COUNTERINSURGENCY: BIAS IN NIGERIA'S ANTI-BANDITRY AND ANTI-KIDNAPPING OPERATIONS

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the influence of ethnic profiling and counterinsurgency on anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States, North-West Nigeria. The study was guided by Labelling Theory and Critical Security Studies, which provided complementary perspectives for explaining how ethnic identities become associated with criminality and how security threats are socially and institutionally constructed. A qualitative documentary research design was adopted, using thematic analysis of nine scholarly, institutional, government, international, book, and credible media sources. Five themes emerged: ethnic profiling and threat assessment; intelligence gathering and community cooperation; operational effectiveness; human rights and social cohesion; and intelligence-led and community-centred security. Findings show that ethnic profiling may distort threat assessment, weaken community trust and intelligence sharing, divert attention from identifiable criminal networks, and undermine human rights and social cohesion. The study further found that banditry and kidnapping are multidimensional problems involving organised criminality, poverty, arms proliferation, resource conflicts, weak governance, and limited state presence. The study concludes that sustainable security requires evidence-based threat assessment, intelligence-led operations, inter-agency coordination, community participation, accountability, and attention to underlying socioeconomic conditions. Hence, the study recommends reducing reliance on ethnic categorisation and strengthening intelligence-driven and community-centred security practices.

Keywords: Ethnic Profiling, Counterinsurgency, Banditry, Kidnapping, North-West Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has experienced growing insecurity in recent years, with banditry and kidnapping becoming serious threats to national stability, economic development, and social unity, mainly in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States. Nigeria has experienced growing insecurity in recent years, with banditry and kidnapping becoming serious threats to national stability, economic development, and

social unity, particularly in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States. Banditry and related insecurity in North-West Nigeria have involved killings, abductions, attacks on communities, and other forms of criminal violence, while the resulting insecurity has contributed to displacement, disruption of livelihoods, and significant humanitarian needs among affected populations (International Crisis Group, 2020; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024). In response, the Nigerian government has relied mainly on military-based counterinsurgency and counter-banditry operations, including joint task forces, intelligence-led raids, and aerial operations. Although security operations have recorded some successes, the continued persistence of banditry and kidnapping in North-West Nigeria indicates that existing responses have not produced a sustained resolution of the insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2020).

One major apprehension is the growing use of ethnic profiling in security operations, where banditry is frequently connected with specific ethnic groups, specifically Fulani communities. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that insecurity in North-West Nigeria is multidimensional, involving weak governance, socioeconomic vulnerability, resource competition, rural violence, and organised criminal activity rather than ethnicity alone (International Crisis Group, 2020; Okoli & Lenshie, 2018). Ethnic profiling may weaken counterinsurgency by encouraging security agencies to rely on ethnic identity instead of credible intelligence. This can result in arbitrary arrests, harassment of innocent civilians, weakened community trust, reduced intelligence sharing, and inefficient allocation of security resources, eventually diminishing the effectiveness of security operations (Kilcullen, 2010; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023).

Institute for Economics & Peace (2024, 2025) carried out a study measuring the impact of terrorism; likewise, the International Crisis Group (2020) published *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem.* Okoli and Lenshie (2018), Nomadic migration and rural violence in Nigeria, explain how ethnic/nomadic identity can become associated with rural insecurity and violence. Okoli and Ugwu (2020), rural banditry in North-West Nigeria, provides evidence on the nature, evolution and drivers of banditry. Existing research has examined the organisation, drivers, and security implications of rural banditry in North-West Nigeria, highlighting the role of criminal networks, economic incentives, resource-related conflicts, and weaknesses in governance and security provision rather than reducing banditry to an exclusively ethnic phenomenon (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020).

However, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to examining how ethnic or identity-based perceptions may influence the conduct and outcomes of anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping security operations. While existing scholarship has substantially examined the causes of banditry, governance weaknesses, and security responses in north-west Nigeria, closer examination is still needed of how ethnic and identity-based perceptions shape the implementation and outcomes of security operations in affected communities (International Crisis Group, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2021). Against this background, this study examines how ethnic profiling affects operational decision-making, intelligence gathering, community trust, and the overall effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations in North-West Nigeria, to promote evidence-based, intelligence-driven, and community-centred security strategies.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Ethnic Profiling, Policing Bias, and Security Operations

Ethnic profiling refers to the practice by law-enforcement or security officials of relying on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin as a basis for subjecting individuals to heightened scrutiny, investigation, or control, rather than relying on reasonable suspicion or individualised evidence (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination [CERD], 2005). In policing, group-based assumptions can influence threat assessment and produce unequal enforcement (Goel et al., 2016; Smith & Alpert, 2007). In North-West Nigeria, although banditry is sometimes framed in relation to Fulani communities, the evidence indicates that the insecurity is not attributable to ethnicity alone. Rather, it is shaped by interacting factors, including rural banditry and organised criminal networks, competition over land and other resources, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and weaknesses in governance and security provision (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020). Ethnic profiling may therefore distort threat assessment and weaken the effectiveness of security operations.

Ethnic Profiling and Intelligence Gathering

Effective anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations depend on reliable intelligence concerning criminal actors, networks, movements, and activities. Intelligence-led policing emphasises systematic evidence collection and analysis rather than assumptions or stereotypes (Ratcliffe, 2016; Sherman, 1998). When ethnicity becomes a substitute for actionable intelligence, threat assessment may become less precise, and resources may be misdirected. Profiling may also weaken community cooperation if affected groups perceive security agencies as discriminatory, thereby reducing information sharing. Conceptually, the relationship can be expressed as: ethnic profiling

⟶biased threat assessment⟶reduced community trust ⟶reduced intelligence sharing ⟶

weaker operational effectiveness.

Ethnic Profiling, Community Trust, and Operational Effectiveness

Community trust is important to effective security governance and counterinsurgency because local cooperation can provide valuable intelligence and strengthen institutional legitimacy (Galula, 1964; Kilcullen, 2010; NATO, 2021; UNDP, 1994). Perceived ethnic discrimination may reduce confidence in security institutions, discourage information sharing, and increase social distance between communities and security agencies. Since banditry operates within rural communities, effective responses require accurate intelligence, community participation, inter-agency cooperation, and civilian protection. Ethnic profiling may therefore indirectly reduce operational effectiveness by damaging the relationships necessary for effective security operations.

Counterinsurgency and Anti-Banditry Operations

Counterinsurgency combines military, political, economic, social, and psychological measures to address armed violence and its underlying conditions (Galula, 1964; Kilcullen, 2010; NATO, 2021). Although banditry is primarily organised criminal violence, Nigerian responses increasingly employ military and counterinsurgency-style operations. Their effectiveness depends on accurate intelligence, threat identification, inter-agency coordination, community cooperation, and human-rights protection. Ethnic profiling may undermine these requirements when group identity replaces evidence-based identification of criminal actors and networks.

Banditry and Kidnapping as Organised Criminality

Banditry in North-West Nigeria encompasses kidnapping, cattle rustling, robbery, extortion, and attacks on rural communities. Research indicates that some bandit groups operate through organised criminal networks and are sustained by economic incentives, including ransom payments, cattle theft, and other forms of illicit accumulation (Okoli & Ugwu, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020). Kidnapping for ransom has become an important component of the criminal economy associated with banditry in North-West Nigeria, providing financial incentives that help sustain armed groups and related criminal activities (International Crisis Group, 2020). These characteristics demonstrate the need for security responses that identify criminal networks, financial structures, and individual perpetrators rather than relying on ethnic categorisation.

Identity Politics and Security Governance

Identity politics involves mobilisation around shared identities such as ethnicity, religion, or region. Critical security perspectives recognise that political discourse and institutional practices can shape how threats are constructed and understood (Buzan et al., 1998). In Nigeria, repeated associations between Fulani identity and banditry may contribute to perceptions that ethnicity is an indicator of criminality. Such narratives can reinforce profiling, weaken community relations, and make intelligence gathering more difficult. Ethnic profiling is therefore not only an individual discriminatory practice but also a broader issue of security governance.

Relationship of the Present Study to Previous Research

Existing studies have provided important insights into the causes, manifestations, and dynamics of banditry in North-West Nigeria, including the roles of criminality, socioeconomic conditions, resource-related conflicts, and weaknesses in governance and security provision (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020). However, these studies focus primarily on the drivers and broader security implications of banditry, leaving scope for further empirical examination of how ethnic or identity-based perceptions may influence security operations and their treatment of affected communities. The present study extends this literature by focusing specifically on how ethnic profiling may affect threat assessment, intelligence gathering, community trust, human rights, and operational effectiveness in anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations. It therefore treats ethnic profiling not only as a discriminatory practice but also as a

potential operational problem that can distort threat assessment, weaken intelligence relationships, and undermine security effectiveness.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Labelling Theory and Critical Security Studies (CSS). Labelling Theory explains how particular ethnic identities may become associated with criminality and influence the treatment of labelled groups, while CSS explains how political, media, and institutional processes construct particular groups or issues as security threats. Together, the theories provide a framework for examining how ethnicised perceptions may influence security practices and the effectiveness of anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations.

Labelling Theory

Labelling Theory, associated principally with Becker (1963) and Lemert (1967), argues that deviance is shaped by social reactions and the application of labels rather than being an inherent characteristic of individuals or groups. Once a negative label is attached to a person or group, authorities and society may interpret subsequent behaviour through that label, increasing the likelihood of suspicion, surveillance, or control. Applied to Nigeria, the theory helps explain how the association of banditry with particular ethnic groups, especially Fulani communities, may produce ethnic profiling. When ethnic identity becomes a basis for suspicion rather than evidence of individual criminal conduct, affected communities may experience discrimination and reduced trust in security agencies. Such consequences may weaken community cooperation and intelligence gathering, which are important to effective anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations.

Critical Security Studies

Critical Security Studies challenges conventional approaches that view security primarily in terms of military threats and state protection. It examines how threats are socially and politically constructed. The securitisation perspective of Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) is particularly relevant because it explains how political and institutional actors can frame particular issues or groups as existential security threats requiring exceptional responses. In the Nigerian context, CSS provides a basis for examining how political discourse, media narratives, and institutional practices may frame banditry and kidnapping through ethnic categories. Such framing may influence threat assessment, security priorities, and operational decisions. When ethnic identity becomes incorporated into security narratives, complex problems involving criminal networks, governance weaknesses, poverty, and resource conflicts may be reduced to an ethnic security problem.

Theoretical Integration and Relevance to the Study

The two theories operate at complementary levels. Labelling Theory explains how ethnic groups may become associated with criminality and subsequently experience suspicion or discriminatory treatment, while Critical Security Studies explains how broader political, media, and institutional processes contribute to the construction of such security threats. Their integration allows the study

to examine both the production of ethnic labels and their influence on security practices, intelligence gathering, community relations, and operational decision-making.

Distinction from Previous Research

The study builds on existing research on banditry, insecurity, and security responses in North-West Nigeria by bringing an explicit focus on ethnic or identity-based perceptions into the analysis and by combining Labelling Theory with Critical Security Studies to examine how such perceptions may shape security practices and their consequences (Okoli & Lenshie, 2018; Okoli & Ugwu, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020). Rather than examining ethnic profiling only as a security practice, the study considers how ethnic identities become associated with criminality and how broader political and institutional processes construct security threats. This provides a more comprehensive explanation of the potential effects of ethnic profiling on intelligence gathering, community trust, operational decisions, and counterinsurgency effectiveness.

Justification for the Theoretical Framework

The combination of Labelling Theory and Critical Security Studies is appropriate because the study examines both ethnicised criminal identities and the construction of security threats. Labelling Theory explains the processes through which ethnic groups may become associated with criminality, while CSS explains how such associations can become embedded in political, media, and institutional security narratives. Together, they provide a coherent framework for analysing ethnic profiling and its implications for effective, intelligence-led, accountable, and community-oriented security operations in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative documentary research design to examine the influence of ethnic profiling on Nigeria's anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations. The design was appropriate because the study analysed existing scholarly, institutional, and policy documents rather than collecting primary data.

Sources of Data

Data were obtained exclusively from secondary documentary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters, government publications, institutional reports, international organisation reports, and credible media sources. Relevant materials from organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and International Crisis Group (ICG) were considered.

Document Search Strategy

Relevant documents were identified through searches of Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and AJOL. Keywords included ethnic profiling, banditry, kidnapping, counterinsurgency, security operations, Fulani and insecurity, and North-West Nigeria. Boolean combinations refined searches, and the review also consulted reference lists and institutional websites.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Documents were included if they addressed ethnic profiling, banditry, kidnapping, counterinsurgency, or security operations in Nigeria, particularly North-West Nigeria, and contained substantive evidence relevant to the research questions. Foundational theoretical and methodological works were retained where appropriate. Documents that were irrelevant, duplicated, lacked credible authorship or institutional responsibility, or focused exclusively on other countries were excluded.

Selection of Documents

The initial search identified 17 potentially relevant documents. After removing duplicates and conducting title, abstract, and executive-summary screening, 13 documents remained for full-text assessment. Following application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 9 documents were selected for thematic analysis. The final corpus comprised scholarly works, institutional reports, government documents, books/book chapters, and credible media sources.

Area of the Study

The study focused on Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States in North-West Nigeria. These states were purposively selected because of the persistence of banditry and kidnapping, extensive security interventions, and the availability of relevant documentary evidence on insecurity, ethnic perceptions, community relations, and security operations.

Method of Data Analysis

The selected documents were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) thematic analysis. The analysis followed six phases: familiarisation, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition and naming, and production of the analytical account. Codes relating to ethnic profiling, threat assessment, intelligence gathering, community trust, human rights, and operational effectiveness were grouped into broader themes and interpreted through Labelling Theory and Critical Security Studies.

Trustworthiness of the Documentary Analysis

Credibility was enhanced through source triangulation, involving comparison of peer-reviewed research, government documents, international organisation reports, and credible media sources.

Greater analytical weight was given to scholarly and official sources, while contradictory evidence was considered rather than automatically excluded.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study relied exclusively on publicly available documents and involved no human participants, no primary participant data were collected. Academic integrity was maintained through accurate citation, faithful representation of sources, and careful distinction between documented allegations and established evidence.

Limitations of the Methodology

The study was limited by its reliance on secondary documentary evidence and therefore did not capture first-hand experiences of security personnel or affected communities. Documentary sources may also contain institutional, political, geographical, or reporting biases, while some security information may remain inaccessible for operational reasons. These limitations were addressed through systematic source selection, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, source triangulation, and comparative thematic analysis. The findings should therefore be understood as an analysis of available documentary evidence rather than a substitute for primary field research.

FINDINGS

The findings emerged from the thematic analysis of nine documents comprising scholarly works, government and institutional reports, international publications, books/book chapters, and credible media sources. The analysis identified five recurring themes concerning ethnic profiling, threat assessment, intelligence gathering, community–security relations, human rights, and the effectiveness of anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States.

Finding One: Ethnic Profiling Influences Security Threat Assessment and Operational Decision-Making

The evidence indicates that associating banditry with particular ethnic identities, especially Fulani communities, can influence perceptions of criminal threat and operational decisions. However, banditry and kidnapping are multidimensional problems involving criminal networks, weak governance, poverty, arms proliferation, resource conflicts, and limited state presence (International Crisis Group, 2023; IOM, 2023; UNDP, 2023). The finding therefore suggests that threat assessment based on verified intelligence, individual behaviour, and identifiable criminal networks is more appropriate than reliance on broad ethnic assumptions (Ratcliffe, 2016).

Finding Two: Ethnic Profiling Weakens Intelligence Gathering and Community Cooperation

The evidence suggests that perceived ethnic discrimination can weaken trust between security agencies and affected communities, thereby reducing willingness to share information. Since communities can provide valuable intelligence on criminal movements, networks, and suspicious

activities, diminished cooperation may constrain security effectiveness. This supports the importance of trust, inclusive governance, community participation, and institutional legitimacy in security responses (UNDP, 2023; IOM, 2023; OECD, 2023).

Finding Three: Ethnic Profiling Reduces the Effectiveness of Anti-Banditry and Anti-Kidnapping Operations

The analysis indicates that excessive reliance on ethnic categorisation can divert security attention from identifiable criminal networks and the structural conditions sustaining insecurity. Banditry and kidnapping are associated with organised crime, illicit weapons, socioeconomic deprivation, weak governance, and limited state presence (International Crisis Group, 2023; UNDP, 2023). Effective responses therefore require intelligence-led operations, targeted enforcement, inter-agency coordination, prosecution, institutional strengthening, and socioeconomic interventions (OECD, 2023).

Finding Four: Ethnic Profiling Damages Human Rights Protection and Social Cohesion

Evidence from human-rights literature indicates that ethnic or racial profiling can expose individuals and affected groups to discriminatory treatment, disproportionate scrutiny, and arbitrary interference with their rights, thereby raising concerns about equality and impartiality in law enforcement (CERD, 2005; UNHRC, 2014). Consistent with Social Identity Theory, the association of an ethnic group with criminality may reinforce stereotyping and in-group/out-group distinctions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), thereby undermining social cohesion and security cooperation.

Finding Five: Intelligence-Led and Community-Centred Security Approaches Are More Sustainable

The evidence supports intelligence-led, accountable, and community-centred approaches to countering banditry and kidnapping. Effective responses to insecurity require accountable and rights-based security institutions, coordination among relevant authorities, meaningful engagement with affected communities, and measures that address the socioeconomic and humanitarian conditions that increase vulnerability, including poverty, displacement, limited livelihood opportunities, and inadequate access to essential services (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2024). Sustainable security therefore requires an integrated approach rather than reliance solely on coercive or military measures.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Discussion of Finding One: Ethnic Profiling, Threat Assessment and Operational Decision-Making

The finding indicates that ethnic identity may influence perceptions of security threats, particularly where Fulani communities are associated with banditry. However, the evidence also shows that

banditry and kidnapping result from multiple factors, including organised criminal networks, weak governance, poverty, arms proliferation, and limited state presence (International Crisis Group, 2023; IOM, 2023; UNDP, 2023). This creates a tension between identity-based perceptions and the multidimensional nature of insecurity. Intelligence-led approaches emphasise verified information, individual behaviour, criminal networks, and observable threats (Ratcliffe, 2016). The finding therefore suggests that ethnic profiling may weaken the analytical accuracy of threat assessment by substituting group identity for evidence of individual criminal conduct.

Discussion of Finding Two: Ethnic Profiling, Intelligence Gathering and Community Cooperation

The finding demonstrates that community trust is an important operational resource for intelligence gathering. Where communities perceive security institutions as discriminatory or exclusionary, their willingness to provide information may decline. This argument is consistent with international evidence emphasising accountable and inclusive governance, institutional effectiveness, and social cohesion as important components of effective responses to fragility and insecurity (UNDP, 2023; IOM, 2023; OECD, 2023). However, the evidence does not establish that ethnic profiling alone causes reduced cooperation, since fear of retaliation, previous experiences with security agencies, and institutional effectiveness may also influence community participation. The study therefore contributes by showing that ethnic profiling should be considered not only a human-rights concern but also a potential obstacle to obtaining community-based intelligence.

Discussion of Finding Three: Ethnic Profiling and the Effectiveness of Anti-Banditry and Anti-Kidnapping Operations

The finding suggests that an excessive focus on ethnic identity can narrow security operations by diverting attention from specific criminal actors, networks, weapons flows, and the structural conditions sustaining insecurity. Existing evidence identifies banditry and kidnapping as multidimensional problems requiring enforcement, intelligence, inter-agency coordination, institutional strengthening, and socioeconomic interventions (International Crisis Group, 2023; OECD, 2023). The finding therefore challenges approaches that rely heavily on ethnic categorisation and supports more targeted intelligence-led operations. Its contribution lies in demonstrating that the problem with ethnic profiling is not only discriminatory treatment but also the possibility of reducing the analytical scope and effectiveness of counter-banditry and counter-kidnapping operations.

Discussion of Finding Four: Ethnic Profiling, Human Rights and Social Cohesion

The finding links ethnic profiling with concerns about discriminatory treatment, disproportionate security scrutiny, and arbitrary interference with individual rights. These concerns are consistent with international human-rights standards on racial and ethnic discrimination in law enforcement and the administration of justice (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination [CERD], 2005; United Nations Human Rights Committee [UNHRC], 2005). Social Identity Theory further explains how repeated categorisation of an ethnic group as associated with criminality can strengthen in-group and out-group distinctions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Nevertheless, social fragmentation cannot be attributed exclusively to profiling because violence, displacement, resource competition, poverty, and existing communal tensions also contribute. The finding therefore extends the human-rights discussion by showing that ethnic profiling may also undermine institutional legitimacy and social cohesion.

Discussion of Finding Five: Intelligence-Led, Accountable and Community-Centred Security Approaches

The fifth finding indicates that sustainable responses to banditry and kidnapping require a combination of intelligence-led enforcement, community participation, institutional accountability, civilian protection, and measures addressing socioeconomic vulnerability. This emphasis is consistent with broader international approaches that recognise the importance of accountable governance, effective institutions, civilian protection, and community resilience in responding to insecurity (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2024). However, community-centred security should complement rather than replace professional law enforcement, given the potential for communities to face intimidation, retaliation, misinformation, and local power imbalances. The study therefore contributes by proposing an integrated approach in which security decisions are based on verified intelligence and individual criminal responsibility while maintaining community cooperation and institutional accountability.

Overall Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, the five findings demonstrate that ethnic profiling has implications beyond discrimination, affecting threat assessment, intelligence gathering, operational effectiveness, human rights, institutional legitimacy, and social cohesion. Although ethnicity forms part of the social context of insecurity in North-West Nigeria, the evidence indicates that banditry and kidnapping cannot adequately be explained through ethnicity alone. The study therefore supports a shift from identity-based suspicion towards evidence-based, intelligence-led, accountable, and community-engaged security practices. This approach provides a more comprehensive basis for addressing criminal networks while reducing practices that may undermine trust and cooperation between security institutions and affected communities.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of ethnic profiling on the effectiveness of anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States using thematic analysis of nine documentary sources. The study concludes that ethnic profiling can undermine security effectiveness when ethnic identity replaces credible intelligence and individualised threat assessment. It may also weaken community trust and intelligence sharing, while diverting attention from the complex drivers of insecurity, including organised crime, weak governance, poverty, unemployment, arms proliferation, and rural marginalisation. The study further concludes that ethnic profiling poses risks to human rights, institutional legitimacy, and social cohesion. Consequently, effective and sustainable security requires intelligence-led, evidence-based,

accountable, and community-centred approaches that distinguish criminal behaviour from ethnic identity. Strengthening community cooperation, protecting civilian rights, improving intelligence coordination, and addressing the socioeconomic and governance conditions underlying insecurity are essential to achieving lasting security in North-West Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

i. Strengthen Intelligence-Led Security Operations: Security agencies should rely on credible intelligence, verified information, behavioural indicators, and evidence rather than ethnic identity when identifying security threats. Continuous training in intelligence-led policing, information analysis, and evidence-based threat assessment should be strengthened.
ii. Discourage Ethnic Profiling in Security Operations: Security institutions should establish clear operational guidelines prohibiting the use of ethnicity as an independent basis for identifying suspects or assessing security threats. Security personnel should be trained to distinguish between individual criminal responsibility and group identity.
iii. Strengthen Security-Community Relations: Security agencies should establish and strengthen community engagement mechanisms in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna States. Regular dialogue with traditional leaders, community organisations, youth groups, civil society organisations, and other legitimate community representatives can improve trust and facilitate intelligence sharing.
iv. Improve Accountability and Human Rights Protection: Appropriate mechanisms should be established to investigate allegations of discrimination, arbitrary detention, harassment, and other abuses associated with security operations. Security personnel found responsible for misconduct should be subjected to appropriate disciplinary and legal procedures.
v. Improve Inter-Agency Intelligence Coordination: Relevant security agencies should strengthen mechanisms for sharing, analysing, and verifying intelligence concerning banditry and kidnapping. Better coordination can reduce duplication, improve threat assessment, and support more targeted operations against criminal networks.
vi. Address the Structural Drivers of Insecurity: Anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping measures should be accompanied by interventions addressing poverty, unemployment, rural marginalisation, weak infrastructure, displacement, and limited access to basic services. Such interventions can reduce the socioeconomic vulnerabilities that criminal groups may exploit.
vii. Strengthen Community Resilience: Government and development partners should support affected communities through livelihood programmes, education, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and other resilience-building interventions, particularly in communities experiencing displacement and repeated attacks.
viii. Promote Evidence-Based Security Policy: Government should encourage continuous research and systematic evaluation of anti-banditry and anti-kidnapping operations to determine which strategies produce sustainable improvements in civilian protection, intelligence gathering, community trust, and crime reduction.

ix. Adopt an Integrated Security Approach: Nigeria's response to banditry and kidnapping should integrate law enforcement, intelligence, justice, governance, development, and community-based interventions. A coordinated approach is more likely to address both the immediate manifestations and the underlying conditions of insecurity than reliance on military or coercive measures alone.

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