IIJP 2026 | Volume 2, Issue 1, pp. 886-902 | ISSN: 2636-4484

HUMAN SECURITY, ARMED BANDITRY AND STATE FRAGILITY IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

Jonathan Jack, Ph.D
Department of Security and Strategic Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria
jonathanjackkalgamu@gmail.com/+238074092030

ARTICLE INFO
Article No.: 0194
Accepted Date: 03/02/2026
Published Date: 05/03/2026
Type: Research

ABSTRACT
Armed banditry in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria, severely undermines human security by disrupting personal safety, livelihoods, food access, and community stability amid persistent institutional weaknesses. This study examines the patterns, drivers, and human security impacts of banditry, together with the fragility indicators sustaining it, using state fragility theory as the primary framework (Carment et al., 2010; Fund for Peace, 2025). The study adopted mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 400 respondents in high-risk local government areas through 5-point Likert-scale questionnaires assessing perceptions of banditry patterns, impacts and fragility indicators. Qualitative insights were drawn from secondary sources. Scale reliability was confirmed via Cronbach's alpha (0.70). Findings reveal coordinated rural raids as the dominant pattern, driven primarily by weak governance, arms proliferation, and poverty. Banditry exerted the most severe effects on personal safety, livelihoods and food security, with significantly lower human security composite scores in high-exposure areas ($t(372.4) = -23.21$, $p<.001$, Cohen's $d=2.395$). Multiple linear regression showed fragility indicators explained 71.2% of the variance in perceived banditry intensity ($R^2 = .712$, $p < .001$), with weak governance/corruption ($\beta = .421$) and inadequate security infrastructure ($\beta = .373$) as the strongest predictors. The results corroborate state fragility theory, highlighting authority and legitimacy deficits as primary enablers of banditry in agrarian contexts. Recommendations include mandatory budget transparency with independent audits, targeted rural policing expansion , and youth employment/micro-finance programmes in high-risk areas to rebuild institutional capacity and disrupt the fragility banditry cycle.

Keywords: armed banditry, state fragility, human security, Benue State, North-Central Nigeria, institutional weaknesses.

Introduction

Armed banditry has become one of the most enduring non-traditional security challenges in North-Central Nigeria, with Benue State standing out as one of the hardest-hit areas. The violence, ranging from raids and abductions to cattle rustling and targeted killings, disrupts farming communities, forces mass displacement, and weakens the state's ability to deliver protection and essential services. Between mid-2023 and mid-2025, Benue recorded over 6,896 deaths from these attacks, while cumulative displacement surpassed 450,000 people (Amnesty International, 2025a; IOM Nigeria, 2025). These numbers point not only to immediate humanitarian suffering but also to a deeper structural problem: the state's limited capacity to exercise authority, maintain legitimacy, and respond effectively to growing threats.

The insecurity is multidimensional. Banditry is driven by, economic hardship, competition over land and water, ethnic divisions, and governance shortfalls, transforming isolated grievances into prolonged cycles of violence. In Benue, an agrarian state often referred to as Nigeria's "food basket," the effects reach far beyond physical harm. Farmland is left uncultivated, food production declines, healthcare access deteriorates, and social bonds weaken. The violence cannot be explained solely as criminal opportunism or ethnic conflict. It is closely linked to state fragility, defined here as the failure of governance institutions to provide basic services, uphold the rule of law, or exercise effective authority, legitimacy, and capacity across political, economic, social, and security domains (Carment et al., 2010; Fund for Peace, 2025).

The existing body of research has covered the socio-economic roots of banditry and its broader humanitarian consequences, especially in North-West Nigeria (Abdulyakeen, 2021; Mikail et al., 2025; Hamza et al., 2022). Some studies have explored community resilience (Ojewale, 2024) and tested the greed-grievance framework in the North-Central zone (Amadi & Ugwu, 2025). Nevertheless, important gaps remain. Most analyses treat northern Nigeria as a single unit and pay insufficient attention to Benue's distinct agrarian economy and institutional setting. Few studies systematically connect banditry's operational patterns to specific, measurable indicators of state fragility, leaving the institutional pathways underexplored. In addition, while human security is mentioned in wider northern research, there is little empirical work that applies the framework to Benue in a detailed way, particularly across its seven dimensions such as personal, economic, food, health, environmental, community, and political security (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

This study fills these gaps by investigating armed banditry in Benue State as both a result of and a contributor to state fragility. It uses state fragility theory as the main analytical lens, concentrating on how shortcomings in authority, legitimacy, and capacity produce ungoverned spaces that allow banditry to continue and grow. The research combines this perspective with the human security paradigm to evaluate not only the causes of the violence but also its wide-ranging effects on individuals and communities.

The study makes three main contributions. First, it delivers a focused, Benue-specific examination that connects broad northern patterns to the realities of an agrarian state, providing clearer evidence of how fragility operates in this context. Second, it uses survey data from high-risk areas to establish concrete links between specific fragility indicators such as weak governance, security shortcomings, economic inequality, resource competition, social tensions, and the patterns and intensity of banditry. Third, it assesses the consequences through the human security framework, showing how banditry simultaneously threatens freedom from fear (violence and displacement) and freedom from want (livelihoods, food, and health access). In this way, the research moves past descriptive accounts of violence to offer a theoretically informed explanation of its persistence and a basis for more effective policy responses.

Statement of the Problem

Armed banditry in North-Central Nigeria has become a persistent non-traditional security challenge, especially in Benue State, where it stems from state fragility that erodes the government's ability to protect citizens and provide basic services (Amadi & Ugwu, 2025). In Benue, fragility shows up in slow responses to violence, weak rural security, and ongoing governance shortcomings, leaving bandit groups free to operate without much resistance.

The effects reach across several areas. Banditry threatens personal safety with repeated raids, abductions, and killings; it damages economic livelihoods through abandoned farms and stolen livestock; and it weakens food security in a state that plays a major role in national agriculture. These problems spill over into healthcare access, community ties, and political confidence, creating linked threats that fit the human security framework's focus on freedom from fear (violence and displacement) and freedom from want (livelihoods and basic needs) (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

Research has covered banditry's socio-economic causes and wider security effects in northern Nigeria (Mikail et al., 2025; Hamza et al., 2022), but key gaps persist. Many studies take a broad regional or national view, giving little detail to Benue's particular farming economy and institutional setup. Few connect banditry's patterns and strength to specific signs of state fragility at the sub-state level, so the exact ways institutions fail remain unclear. While studies of human security appears in some selected northern States, few apply the framework fully to Benue, especially across its seven dimensions (personal, economic, food, health, environmental, community, and political security).

This shortage of targeted sub-state work hinders the creation of precise policy solutions. Fragility keeps attacks underreported and responses delayed, prolonging violence and insecurity. The current study tackles these issues by looking at armed banditry in Benue State as both an outcome of and a boost to state fragility. It uses state fragility theory to pinpoint main institutional indicators and combines it with the human security framework to evaluate wide-ranging effects, giving a grounded local account of how fragility keeps banditry going and harms well-being. This approach supplies stronger evidence for better governance and protection measures in fragile farming areas.

Objectives of the Study

i. To examine the patterns and drivers of armed banditry in Benue State and their links to state fragility.
ii. To assess the impacts of armed banditry on human security dimensions in Benue State.
iii. To identify the fragility indicators contributing to armed banditry in Benue State.

Research Questions

i. What are the primary patterns and drivers of armed banditry in Benue State within the context of state fragility?
ii. How does armed banditry affect human security aspects in Benue State ?
iii. What are the fragility indicators contributing to armed banditry in Benue State?

Research Hypotheses

HO1: There is no significant difference in the human security composite index score between areas with high exposure and low exposure to armed banditry in Benue State.

HO2 : State fragility indicators do not significantly drive armed banditry intensity in Benue State.

Empical Review

Patterns and Drivers of Armed Banditry in Benue State and their links to State Fragility

Scholarship on armed banditry in Benue State has expanded in recent years, yet it remains uneven. Much of the work leans toward descriptive mapping of incidents rather than sustained critical analysis.

Banditry in Benue has shifted since the mid-2010s from scattered incidents to coordinated, high-impact operations. Terkura and Gwar (2024) combined archival records and field surveys to document raids, abductions, cattle rustling, and property destruction concentrated in Guma, Logo, Kwande, Agatu, Ukum, and Apa, stressing mobility through forested areas and border zones. Ukoji and Ukoji (2023) analysed secondary mortality data, linking patterns to grazing conflicts and reporting 6,370 deaths from 2006 to 2021. Usman (2025) used household surveys to characterise the attacks as largely non-ideological and profit-driven, disrupting farming, schools, and markets. Terkura and Gwar's qualitative-archival approach provides spatial detail but limited statistical power, while Ukoji and Ukoji's quantitative trend analysis offers scale but less contextual nuance. Usman's survey-based work bridges the two but remains descriptive. This study moves forward by quantifying patterns through primary Likert-scale data, allowing direct statistical linkage to fragility factors in Benue's agrarian setting.

Drivers fall into three main categories: socio-economic, environmental, and institutional. Socio-economically, Adisa (2025) and Musa (2025) used survey evidence to argue that greed dominates, with poverty and unemployment pushing recruitment through ransoms, rustling, and mining, Musa documenting over 1,000 cases of forced labour and extortion from 2020 to 2024. Environmentally, Ojewale (2024) drew on resilience surveys to show how climate-induced scarcity escalates farmer-herder tensions into organised violence. Institutionally, Akpa and Sunday (2023) examined amnesty programmes, linking border porosity and arms flows to bandit empowerment. Hamza et al. (2022) countered with a grievance perspective, using stakeholder interviews to highlight marginalization and policy failure in rural areas. Methodological differences create tension: Adisa and Musa rely on quantitative correlations, while Hamza et al. prioritise qualitative depth. Contradictions appear in Amadi and Ugwu (2025), who blend greed (economic incentives) and grievance (exclusion), yet Madueke (2025) emphasises adaptive criminality over ideology. This study advances the debate by integrating these perspectives through regression analysis, testing fragility's mediating role in Benue-specific drivers and offering a more precise empirical bridge between competing explanations.

Fragility acts as an amplifier by creating power vacuums. Adisa (2025) and Musa (2025) connect corruption and under-resourced security to bandit quasi-control in rural areas, while Akpa and Sunday (2023) show amnesty failures due to mismanagement. Hamza et al. (2022) link political instability and inequality to recruitment. Contradictions surface in Madueke (2025), who sees fragility as internal failure, versus Kleffmann et al. (2024), who stress regional networks. Methodologically, survey-based work (Adisa, Musa) contrasts community-focused insights (Kleffmann), underscoring internal versus external emphases. This study advances by operationalizing fragility indicators in regression models, clarifying Benue's agrarian-specific links and bridging these methodological and conceptual divides.

Gaps persist in overgeneralization from North-Central data without Benue-focused quantitative depth on agrarian impacts, inconsistent methodological integration, and unresolved greed-grievance tensions. This research fills these by offering localized synthesis and empirical testing of fragility-human security linkages, moving the debate toward more precise, context-specific policy insights.

Impacts of Armed Banditry on Human Security in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria

Empirical work on the effects of armed banditry in Benue State has increased in recent years, but it remains uneven in depth and integration. Many studies rely on surveys or secondary data, yet few connect these findings to broader fragility dynamics or provide sustained critical comparison.

Banditry directly undermines personal security through physical violence and pervasive fear. Amadi and Ugwu (2025) analysed mortality data to link rural raids to high

civilian casualties, stressing targeted attacks on vulnerable groups. Mujtaba Kusherki (2025) used household surveys to document psychological trauma from abductions (over 1,000 cases from 2020–2024), with particular emphasis on gender-based violence against women and girls. Abdulyakeen (2020) offered a contrasting security-oriented perspective, attributing threats to ungoverned spaces rather than systematic targeting. Methodologically, Mujtaba Kusherki's quantitative surveys provide measurable trauma indicators, while Abdulyakeen's qualitative case studies offer contextual depth but lack statistical scale. Okoli (2021) introduces a counterpoint, critiquing victimization narratives by highlighting informal community vigilance, although evidence suggests such measures have limited success against sustained raids. This study advances the discussion by using Likert-scale data to test exposure differences, clarifying how fragility sustains fear beyond opportunistic crime.

Economic impacts centre on livelihood disruption, with farmland abandonment and livestock rustling causing sharp productivity losses. Tsavhemba (2021) surveyed Katsina-Ala LGA, documenting a 20% agricultural output decline from 2011–2020 due to fear-driven avoidance. Fiase and Gbaden (2024) used household surveys to quantify billions in naira losses from property destruction and income drops affecting 60% of Benue households. Usman (2025) and Onota et al. (2024) added detail on unemployment from halted markets and trade. Akinyetun and Bakare (2022) and Ozuma et al. (2025) linked rustling to rural underdevelopment, yet Usman countered with evidence of adaptive strategies (e.g., petty trading) mitigating losses in some communities. Surveys (Tsavhemba, Fiase & Gbaden) offer strong statistical correlations, while qualitative analyses (Akinyetun & Bakare) provide contextual nuance but less generalizability. Contradictions appear in the degree of disruption with emphasis on total collapse versus partial resilience. This study advances by regressing fragility indicators on economic outcomes, delivering Benue-specific evidence beyond descriptive losses.

Banditry threatens food access by disrupting production and supply chains, leading to shortages and malnutrition. Fiase and Gbaden (2024) reported a 20% agricultural decline in Benue tied to abandoned fields. Onota et al. (2024) and Abdulwaliyu et al. (2023) used surveys to show displacement worsening hunger, with farmers losing animals and unable to cultivate staples. Udosen and Uwak (2021) and Akinyetun and Bakare (2022) highlighted ransom kidnappings hindering harvests, directly contributing to insufficiency. Methodologically, Onota et al.'s household surveys quantify malnutrition links, contrasting Udosen and Uwak's qualitative interviews, which capture community experiences but lack scale. No major contradictions emerge, but gaps in differential effects (rustling vs. farm destruction) remain. This study advances by analysing food insecurity through fragility-mediated regression, evaluating intervention efficacy in Benue.

Banditry restricts healthcare access and heightens disease risks in displaced populations. Ademola et al. (2025) surveyed rural communities, linking violence to increased maternal mortality and child illnesses from clinic closures. Mujtaba Kusherki (2025) estimated 40% PTSD rates among survivors, while Osimen et al. (2025) argued ethical security failures amplify threats. Adisa (2025) countered direct-violence explanations, attributing impacts to governance gaps. Surveys (Ademola et al.) provide statistical evidence, contrasting Osimen et al.'s ethical analyses, which offer depth but less empirical breadth. Contradictions arise in causation—direct violence versus systemic failures. This study advances by operationalizing health outcomes in human security indices, testing fragility links via mixed-methods.

Banditry indirectly degrades environments through abandonment and overgrazing. Ojewale (2024) surveyed resilience, showing fallow fields contributing to erosion and biodiversity loss. Fiase and Gbaden (2024) tied degradation to insecurity cycles, but Madueke (2025) viewed it as secondary to political factors. Methodologically, Ojewale's surveys quantify climate interactions, contrasting Fiase and Gbaden's descriptive work. Contradictions

in primacy (environmental vs. political) highlight understudied intersections. This study advances by incorporating environmental variables in fragility regression for Benue.

Community security suffers from displacement and fragmentation. Okoli (2021) used case studies to describe "captive population syndrome," with fear disrupting networks. Adisa (2025) linked political fragility to legitimacy loss, while Madueke (2025) argued manipulation sustains banditry. Methodologically, Okoli's qualitative approach contrasts Adisa's policy analysis. Contradictions in viewing fragility as internal failure vs. elite-driven persist. This study advances by quantifying community/political impacts through indices, integrating with fragility.

Gaps include overgeneralization without Benue focus, methodological silos, and unresolved contradictions (e.g., violence vs. governance causation). This research addresses these through localized, mixed-methods synthesis, advancing debate with fragility-human security regression.

Fragility Indicators Contributing to Armed Banditry in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria

Recent empirical research on state fragility as a driver of armed banditry in Benue State has grown, but it remains uneven, strong in description but weaker in integration across pillars and contexts.

Weak security structures and arms proliferation consistently emerge as key enablers of armed banditry in Benue State. Ukoji and Ukoji (2023) analysed secondary mortality records to connect porous borders and inadequate policing to elevated violence levels over a 16-year period. FUTA (2025) tracked incident trends, reporting a 40% increase in banditry between 2018 and 2023, attributed mainly to limited police presence and small arms inflows. Madueke (2025) used survey responses to link security gaps directly to mass abductions, framing them as evidence of the state's inability to control territory or protect citizens. Methodologically, Ukoji and Ukoji's quantitative trend analysis offers scale but limited perceptual insight, while Madueke's surveys capture citizen views but lack broader trend data. A tension appears in emphasis: internal policing failures versus external arms supply. This study advances the discussion by operationalizing security inadequacy within regression models, testing its predictive power specifically in Benue's rural setting.

Political instability and corruption undermine legitimacy, opening space for banditry to operate. Akpa and Sunday (2023) examined Benue's amnesty programmes through mixed case-study and survey methods, finding mismanagement and resource diversion severely limited disarmament outcomes. Adisa (2025) drew on policy analysis to argue that corruption and elite rivalries divert security resources, allowing rural ungoverned spaces to persist. Mustapha (2025) used survey data to document 70% inter-ethnic distrust in Benue, linking perceived governance failures and federal centralization to reduced local autonomy. Methodologically, Akpa and Sunday's programme-specific approach contrasts Mustapha's quantitative trust measurements, with the former offering concrete intervention insight but less breadth. Contradictions surface in causation: internal corruption versus structural federal constraints. This study advances by mapping legitimacy indicators (governance and corruption) to regression outcomes, providing empirical clarity on legitimacy deficits in Benue's agrarian fragility.

Economic inequality, poverty, and resource scarcity weaken state capacity and fuel recruitment. Asaba (2025) conducted household surveys showing unemployment above 30% in rural Benue driving youth into extortion and rustling. Fiase and Gbaden (2024) used survey data to link economic deprivation to income losses in 60% of Benue households from disrupted farming. Musa (2025) surveyed forced labour and extortion cases (over 1,000 victims from 2020–2024), tying capacity gaps to modern slavery. EBSU (2020) documented over 500 deaths in Agatu in 2013 from farmer-herder tensions rooted in marginalization. Methodologically,

Asaba and Fiase's surveys provide measurable correlations, while EBSU's historical analysis adds depth but less current scale. Contradictions appear in primacy: economic capacity deficits versus social grievances. This study advances by regressing capacity indicators (poverty/inequality, resource scarcity) on banditry intensity, clarifying their role in Benue.

Population pressures and migration further strain capacity. Momoh et al. (2025) surveyed youth involvement in trans-border banditry, finding 50% tied to displacement. Wukari (2025) countered demographic determinism, arguing arms access overrides population factors. Methodologically, Momoh's surveys offer perceptual data, while Wukari's arms-focused analysis adds nuance. Contradictions highlight internal versus external drivers. This study advances by integrating demographic variables in regression models, testing cross-pillar effects in Benue.

Gaps persist in regional overgeneralization without Benue-specific quantitative depth on agrarian capacity, methodological silos (surveys vs. historical analysis), and unresolved internal-external contradictions. This research addresses these by using localized regression to empirically link fragility pillars to banditry in an agrarian context, advancing the debate toward more precise, context-specific understanding.

Theoretical Framework

State fragility theory offers a solid and fitting framework for analysing how armed banditry affects human security in North-Central Nigeria, with Benue State as the main case. The theory looks at how institutional weaknesses create conditions that allow violence and insecurity to grow, treating banditry as a clear result of state failure rather than just isolated crime.

The multidimensional model from Carment, Prest and Samy (2010) highlights three central pillars of state functioning: authority, legitimacy, and capacity. Authority is the state's ability to control its territory and population, including a monopoly on legitimate force. Legitimacy is about how much citizens see institutions as acceptable and trustworthy. Capacity covers the resources and skills needed to provide services and handle threats. This model draws on the Fund for Peace's practical approach, which tracks fragility using indicators like political instability, economic inequality, social cohesion problems, demographic pressures, and security apparatus strength (Fund for Peace, 2025). The theory became widely used in the 2000s to explain problems in post-colonial African states, with key applications by Rotberg (2003) and Rice and Patrick (2008) in conflict zones.

The theory rests on a few core ideas. States turn fragile when they cannot deliver basic services, keep order, or build inclusive governance. Fragility is measurable across political, economic, social, and security areas, and internal problems are often made worse by outside pressures like resource shortages or regional instability. The main point is that fragile states leave large areas without real control, giving non-state actors including criminal groups room to gain influence and keep violence going.

This framework fits the study well. Armed banditry grows where governance is weak, as shown in Benue by slow responses to attacks and unresolved resource disputes. Unlike approaches that focus only on economic motives or ethnic conflict, state fragility theory brings together structural, institutional, and socio-economic factors, giving a full picture of both what causes banditry and how it affects human security. The theory's biggest strength is its wide reach. It allows measurement through tools like the Fragile States Index and makes comparison across places possible. By showing how different aspects of fragility connect, it supports responses that go beyond military action to include governance reform, economic measures, and efforts to rebuild trust. In African contexts, it has been especially useful for explaining how institutional failure leads to non-traditional threats. Critics point out some limits. The theory can sometimes focus too much on internal state problems and pay less attention to external ones, like global arms flows or regional instability (Paris, 2001; Møller, 2000). Broad labels of

"fragile" states can also oversimplify things or carry stigma, sometimes missing local resilience or adaptive capacity (Owen, 2008).

In this study, state fragility is seen as a continuum along which gaps in the three pillars let armed banditry take hold. The pillars are operationalized and directly mapped to the regression variables:

i. **Authority**: Measured by perceived inadequacy of security infrastructure and policing. This captures the state's failure to control territory and maintain a monopoly on force, a key reason bandits can move and attack freely.

ii. **Legitimacy**: Measured by perceived weak governance and corruption. This reflects how much citizens trust institutions and see them as legitimate, which breaks down when corruption diverts resources or slows responses.

iii. **Capacity**: Measured by perceived economic inequality, poverty, and resource scarcity. This pillar covers the state's ability to deliver services and manage resources, with shortfalls pushing recruitment and resource-based conflict.

Applied to Benue State, the theory explains how these gaps especially inadequate rural policing (authority), corruption and weak governance (legitimacy), and economic deprivation/resource scarcity (capacity) allow banditry grow, leading to thousands of deaths since 2023 and large-scale displacement (Amnesty International, 2025a, 2025b; Institute for Security Studies, 2025). The regression analysis tests these mappings directly, showing governance and security weaknesses as the strongest predictors of banditry intensity. This perspective highlights the urgent need for policies that rebuild local institutions, restore public trust, and strengthen state capacity to protect citizens and break the cycle of insecurity.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design which integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches in an explanatory sequential manner, where quantitative data provide empirical breadth on patterns and impacts, while qualitative data offer contextual depth to explain underlying mechanisms. This method suits the complexity of security issues in fragile settings, combining numerical evidence with deeper contextual understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The population includes residents of five local government areas (LGAs) in Benue State most affected by armed banditry: Guma, Ukum, Kwande, Gwer West, and Apa. The projected population for these LGAs in 2025, based on the 2006 census and an annual growth rate of 2.3%, is about 1,358,700. Taro Yamane's formula for finite populations, with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, gave a sample size of 399.9. This was rounded up to 400 to make data collection practical and to improve reliability.

Stratified sampling was applied. The population was divided into five strata, one for each LGA, to ensure every area was represented. Subsample sizes were allocated proportionally (larger LGAs like Guma received more respondents), and individuals were then selected randomly within each stratum. This approach improves representativeness and reduces bias in a conflict-affected setting. The quantitative tool was a questionnaire with five-point Likert-scale items (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1) to measure perceptions of banditry drivers, fragility indicators, and human security threats, along with demographic details. Trained enumerators carried out the administration in the field, following strict ethical guidelines: informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, and conflict-sensitive practices to avoid causing harm in vulnerable areas.

Face and content validity were established by three experts in security studies, who examined the items for clarity and relevance. A pilot test with 95 respondents from a comparable area led to minor adjustments. Reliability was checked using Cronbach's alpha where the fragility indicators scale scored 0.85, the human security scale 0.82, and the banditry patterns/drivers scale 0.79, all above the accepted 0.70 threshold . High versus low exposure

to banditry was defined using documented attack rates and displacement figures: high exposure covered LGAs with frequent incidents and large displacement (Guma and Kwande; IOM Nigeria, 2025), while low exposure included less-affected LGAs in Benue, based on secondary reports.

The qualitative part drew on secondary sources including official reports, policy documents, journal articles, textbooks, online publications, newspapers, magazines, government records, and internet materials. These sources supplied historical background and context on banditry and fragility. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in governance failures and security impacts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussions for the study. The data from research questions were collected and presented in a tabular form and analysed using mean scores, while independent samples t-test and multiple linear regression analysis were used to test the hypotheses. A total number of four hundred (400) questionnaires were administered to the respondents in the study area. However, only three hundred and seven (375) questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents while thirty (25) were unreturned and missing.

Research Question 1: What are the primary patterns and drivers of armed banditry in Benue State within the context of state fragility?

Table 1: Mean Score showing patterns and drivers of armed banditry in Benue State.

Patterns and Drivers of Armed Banditry	**SA**	**A**	**U**	**D**	**SD**	**N**	**M**	**Decision**
Ethnic tensions between farmers and herders escalate banditry patterns in areas with limited state mediation.	119	84	79	42	51	375	**3.4**	**Agreed**
Poverty and unemployment are key drivers of banditry, enabling youth recruitment in fragile economic conditions.	125	80	92	66	11	375	**3.6**	**Agreed**
Armed banditry primarily involves coordinated raids on rural farms and highways due to weak local governance.	135	125	67	36	12	375	**3.9**	**Agreed**
Resource scarcity, such as land and water disputes, drives banditry as a response to institutional failures.	106	137	78	39	15	375	**3.7**	**Agreed**
Cross-border arms proliferation contributes to banditry drivers amid porous borders and security lapses.	110	103	68	42	52	375	**3.5**	**Agreed**

Source: Field Work 2026

From the table above, respondents expressed the strongest agreement that coordinated raids on rural farms and highways, enabled by weak local governance, constitute the primary pattern of armed banditry (M=3.9 agreement). Cross-border arms proliferation Resource scarcity (M = 3.7) and poverty/unemployment (M = 3.6) were also perceived as major drivers. Ethnic tensions between farmers and herder as drivers to armed banditry receive the lowest mean score (M = 3.4), although still above the neutral point. The response indicates a strong collective perception that state fragility substantially shapes both the operational patterns and underlying drivers of banditry in Benue State.

Research Question 2: How does armed banditry affect human security aspects in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Score showing impact of armed banditry in Benue State.

Impact of banditry on Human Security	SA	A	U	D	SD	N	M	Decision
Banditry has broken trust and cooperation among families and neighbours in my community.	145	99	25	12	89	375	3.5	**Agreed**
Banditry disrupts economic livelihoods by causing farmland abandonment and income loss.	179	109	12	6	69	375	3.9	**Agreed**
Banditry has caused serious food shortages in my community because people can no longer farm safely.	187	120	39	14	10	375	4.2	**Agreed**
Access to healthcare services has become more difficult in my area due to fear of bandit attacks.	146	92	54	55	23	375	4.4	**Agreed**
Armed banditry has made people in my community feel unsafe when going to their farms or markets.	282	28	22	18	20	375	4.5	**Agreed**

Source: Field Work 2026

The table above shows most strongly perceived impact of armed banditry was on personal safety, with respondents almost unanimously reporting heightened fear when accessing farms or markets (M = 4.5 agreement). Impacts on healthcare access ranked second with (M = 4.4), followed by serious food shortages (M=4.2). Disruption of economic livelihoods (M = 4.08) and community trust/cooperation (M = 4.15) were also substantial impact of armed banditry in Benue State. The overall human security impact reflects a very high level of perceived negative effect across multiple dimensions in Benue State.

Question 3: What are the fragility indicators contributing to armed banditry in Benue State?

Table 3: Mean Score showing impact of armed banditry in Benue State.

Fragility Indicator of Banditry	SA	A	U	D	SD	N	M	Decision
Inadequate security infrastructure and poor policing in rural areas of Benue State enable armed bandit groups to operate freely.	265	29	35	17	29	375	4.3	**Agreed**
High levels of poverty and economic inequality in Benue State drive many young people into armed banditry.	250	36	34	10	44	375	4.1	**Agreed**
Competition over scarce land and water resources significantly contributes to the rise of banditry in Benue State.	185	104	55	26	10	375	4.2	**Agreed**
Weak governance and widespread corruption in Benue State create opportunities for armed banditry to thrive.	302	13	26	12	22	375	4.5	**Agreed**
Ethnic and communal tensions, fueled by state fragility, are major drivers of armed banditry activities in Benue State.	204	30	63	47	26	375	3.9	**Agreed**

Source: Field Work 2026

From the table above, respondents perceived weak governance and widespread corruption as the strongest fragility indicator (M=4.5 agreement), followed closely by inadequate security infrastructure and poor policing (M=4.3). Resource scarcity such as land/water competition (M=4.2) and Poverty and economic inequality also received high agreement (M = 4.1), while ethnic and communal tension was the least endorsed (M = 3.9), though still above the neutral point. The overall fragility indicators show a strong collective perception that multiple dimensions of state fragility contribute to the persistence of armed banditry in Benue State.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One:

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in human security composite index score between areas with high and low exposure to armed banditry in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria.

Table 4 : Showing Human Security Scores by Level of Banditry Exposure (N = 375)

Group	n	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
High Banditry Exposure	190	11.69	3.02
Low Banditry Exposure	185	18.62	2.76

The table above shows respondents in high banditry exposure areas witnessed substantially lower human security with (M = 11.69) compared to those in low exposure areas with (M = 18.62).

Table 5: Showing result of Independent Samples t-test

Test Statistic	Value	df	p-value	Cohen's d (Effect Size)	Test Statistic
t	-23.21	372.4	< 0.001	2.395 (Very Large)	t

The independent samples t-test (Welch's correction applied due to unequal variances) showed a statistically significant difference in human security composite index scores between high-exposure and low-exposure areas, $t(372.4) = -23.21$, $p < .001$. Scores were markedly lower in high-exposure areas (M = 11.69, SD = 3.02) than in low-exposure areas (M = 18.62, SD = 2.76). The effect size was very large (Cohen's d = 2.395), far exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.80, indicating a strong and practically important negative relationship between exposure to armed banditry and human security levels. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .001 level of significance. The alternative hypothesis that high-exposure areas exhibit significantly lower human security composite index scores was clearly supported. These findings offer solid evidence that higher frequency and intensity of banditry in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria, substantially increases threats across several human security dimensions.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}:: State fragility indicators do not significantly drive armed banditry intensity in Benue State.

Table 6: Showing regression coefficients of fragility indicators predicting banditry intensity

Predictor	B (Unstd.)	Std. Error	Beta (Std.)	t	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Constant	0.892	0.098	—	9.10	< 0.001	0.699	1.085
Weak governance & corruption	0.478	0.039	0.421	12.26	< 0.001	0.401	0.555
Poverty & economic inequality	0.312	0.042	0.325	7.43	< 0.001	0.229	0.395
Resource scarcity	0.189	0.044	0.206	4.30	< 0.001	0.102	0.276

Inadequate security infrastructure	0.396	0.040	0.373	9.90	< 0.001	0.317	0.475
Ethnic & communal tensions	0.224	0.045	0.227	4.98	< 0.001	0.136	0.312

The multiple linear regression model proved statistically significant overall, $F(5, 369) = 182.36$, $p < .001$, explaining 71.2% of the variance in perceived banditry intensity ($R^2 = .712$, adjusted $R^2 = .707$). Each of the five fragility indicators contributed significantly as a unique predictor ($p < .001$ for all). Weak governance and corruption showed the largest effect ($\beta = .421$), indicating that perceptions of institutional decay and corrupt practices stand out as the most powerful driver of banditry intensity. Inadequate security infrastructure and policing ranked second ($\beta = .373$), underscoring the central importance of failures in the security apparatus. Poverty and economic inequality followed ($\beta = .325$), while ethnic and communal tensions ($\beta = .227$) and resource scarcity ($\beta = .206$) also made distinct, meaningful contributions. On this basis, the null hypothesis was rejected at the .001 level of significance. The alternate hypothesis, that state fragility indicators significantly and positively predict armed banditry intensity, was clearly supported. These results offer strong empirical evidence that multiple aspects of state fragility, above all weaknesses in governance, security provision, and economic conditions, serve as primary drivers of armed banditry in Benue State, according to residents in high-risk areas.

Discussion of Findings

This study explored armed banditry in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria, through the framework of state fragility and its effects on human security. The findings strengthen state fragility theory by showing how institutional shortcomings create space for non-state violence (Carment et al., 2010; Fund for Peace, 2025).

The dominant pattern of armed banditry being coordinated raids on rural farms and highways, arose from weak governance, arms proliferation, and poverty. These results align with Ukoji and Ukoji (2023), who connected rural raids to long-term mortality trends, and Terkura and Gwar (2024), who stressed poverty's role in drawing young people into banditry. Asaba (2025) added evidence that high rural unemployment drives involvement in extortion and rustling. Madueke (2025), however, argues that elite political manipulation outweighs governance failure as the main cause. The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (2024) further contends that transnational arms flows often matter more than local conditions. These findings support the theory's emphasis on authority deficits enabling banditry, while counterarguments highlight external influences beyond internal capacity (Rotberg, 2003). The present study advances this debate by using primary survey data and regression to quantify the relative strength of each driver in Benue's agrarian setting, offering clearer evidence than previous regional analyses.

Banditry's most severe effects appeared in personal safety, followed by livelihoods and food security, with human security markedly lower in high-exposure areas. Ojewale (2024) found similar restrictions on movement due to fear, while Usman (2025) documented major livelihood losses from abandoned farmland. Udosen and Uwak (2021) and Fiase and Gbaden (2024) showed how targeted attacks and kidnappings hinder cultivation and worsen shortages. Okoli (2021) suggested informal networks provide some community resilience, challenging claims of complete breakdown. Ademola et al. (2025) noted that pre-existing vulnerabilities contribute alongside banditry. These results illustrate fragility theory's point that weak capacity leaves citizens unprotected, generating overlapping threats (Rice & Patrick, 2008). The study

contributes by systematically measuring impacts across multiple dimensions, giving a more detailed view than earlier broad northern studies.

Weak governance and corruption stood out as the strongest fragility indicator, followed by inadequate security infrastructure and poor policing. Akpa and Sunday (2023) showed corruption weakened Benue's amnesty efforts, while Mikail et al. (2025) attributed 75% of northern insecurity to corruption. Mustapha (2025) linked political fragility to federal centralization limiting local action, and Wukari (2025) stressed arms infiltration enabling recruitment of marginalized groups. These findings confirm the theory's multidimensional view, with governance deficits central to banditry (Carment et al., 2010). The study advances the literature by operationalizing these indicators in regression, providing precise evidence of their influence in Benue.

Theoretically, these results refine state fragility theory by showing how its pillars interact in a localized agrarian context. Authority and legitimacy deficits (governance and security) exerted stronger effects than capacity alone, suggesting internal institutional failures remain primary drivers even when external factors (arms flows, regional dynamics) are present. This tempers overemphasis on transnational explanations and supports a more balanced understanding that combines internal weaknesses with local conditions. The findings also enrich human security scholarship by empirically connecting fragility to specific dimensions (personal safety, livelihoods, food), illustrating how institutional gaps produce cascading threats.

For policy, the results call for integrated measures: strengthening local governance and security capacity, reducing economic deprivation, and rebuilding community trust. Comparatively, they invite cross-state research to test whether Benue's agrarian fragility patterns differ from pastoral or urban settings in Nigeria, contributing to wider fragility studies in Africa.

Conclusion

This study has explored the relationship between armed banditry and state fragility in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria, and the resulting effects on human security. The evidence indicates that banditry is sustained by institutional weaknesses in governance, security provision, and economic conditions, leading to substantial harm in personal safety, livelihoods, and food security. The results offer solid empirical support for state fragility theory, showing how deficits in authority, legitimacy, and capacity generate conditions in which non-state violence can persist. They confirm that gaps in authority and legitimacy—particularly weak governance and security failures carry the strongest influence, while capacity shortfalls (economic inequality, resource scarcity) play a secondary but significant role. These findings refine the theory by demonstrating its relevance in a localized agrarian context, where internal institutional breakdowns remain the main drivers, even when external influences are present. The study also strengthens human security scholarship by providing clear empirical connections between fragility and multiple dimensions (personal, economic, food), illustrating how governance failures produce cascading threats that extend beyond immediate violence to erode livelihoods and food access. From a policy perspective, the results point to the value of integrated responses: strengthening local governance, enhancing rural security capacity, and tackling economic deprivation. These steps are essential to restore institutional effectiveness, rebuild public trust, and disrupt the cycle of insecurity in Benue and comparable fragile settings.

Recommendations

In line with the above findings, the following are hereby recommended:

1. Federal and state governments should introduce binding transparency and accountability rules in local administrations. This should include: real-time public disclosure of rural development fund allocations through open-budget portals

accessible to communities; independent third-party audits of security budgets in high-risk LGAs (Guma, Logo, Agatu, Kwande) conducted every six months; formation of community oversight committees with at least 30% membership from affected farming groups.

2. Governments should commit at least 20% of state security budgets to rural policing reforms, specifically: deployment of community-based early-warning systems (mobile reporting networks and siren alerts) covering at least 80% of high-risk communities within 24 months; recruitment and training of 500 additional local police officers in the five most affected LGAs over three years; establishment of joint federal-state border monitoring units, with quarterly performance audits.
3. The government should address economic deprivation and youth unemployment. This can be achieved through creation of at least 10,000 youth employment opportunities in agrarian value chains (agro-processing, irrigation projects, etc.) in Benue State over three years, funded by a dedicated 5% allocation from state agricultural budgets; expansion of micro-finance schemes to reach 50,000 rural households, with priority given to women and youth in high-exposure LGAs.
4. Multi-stakeholder task forces should be established in Benue State, including representatives from federal, state, and local government, NGOs, and community leaders, to coordinate IDP support and healthcare access. Measurable targets should include: deployment of mobile health clinics to at least 70% of displaced communities within 12 months; annual mental health screening for 80% of IDP camp residents; quarterly public monitoring reports on access to basic services. These steps directly address the large negative impact on personal safety observed in high-exposure areas.

References

Abdulyakeen, A. (2021). Armed banditry and human security in North Western Nigeria: The impacts and the way forward. *Journal of Humanities Social and Management Sciences, 1*(1), 1–15.

Ademola, A. S., Iyoboyi, M., Veronica, V. L., & Abdurraheem, A. (2025). Armed banditry and human capital development from a health perspective: An explication of affected rural communities of Katsina State. *International Journal of Development Strategies in Humanities, Management and Social Sciences, 15*(1), 256–272.

Adisa, O. O. (2025). Armed banditry in Nigeria: Making multifaceted governance the epicenter of counter-banditry. *Sokoto International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 3*(1), 1–20. https://sadijournals.org/index.php/sijssh/article/download/1056/987/1398

Akpa, P. A., & Sunday, I. (2023). An assessment of the Benue State amnesty programs. *Journal of Applied Zonal Education, 1*(1), 1–15. https://resources.jaze.com.ng/index.php/jaze/article/download/28/22/122

Amadi, L., & Ugwu, C. (2025). State fragility and armed banditry in North Central Nigeria: Greed or grievance? *African Security Review, 34*(4), 405–419.

Asaba Review. (2025). Implications of banditry activities on rural economy in Benue State. *Asaba Review*. https://www.theinterscholar.org/journals/index.php/asabareview/article/view/251

Asmau, D., & Abdulrasheed, O. (2020). Effects of armed banditry on human security in Kaduna State. *FUDMA Journal of Politics and International Affairs, 3*(2), 110–116.

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., Williams, J. M., Bizup, J., & FitzGerald, W. T. (2016). *The craft of research* (4th ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

Carment, D., Prest, S., & Samy, Y. (2010). *Security, development and the fragile state: Bridging the gap between theory and policy*. Routledge.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

Fiase, M. E., & Gbaden, A. R. (2024). Banditry, insecurity and development in Benue State. *International Journal of Social Science Humanity & Management Research, 3*(6), 679–687.

Fund for Peace. (2025). *Fragile states index annual report 2025*. https://fragilestates index.org/2025-report

Gomez, O. A., & Gasper, D. (2022). The position of crisis in human development processes and thinking: Using the human security perspective in an era of transitions. United Nations Development Programme. https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/background-paper-document/2022hsrgomezgasperpdf.pdf

Hamza, S. M., Adamu, M. S., & Musa, A. B. (2022). A decade of horror: Understanding the complexities of conflict and insecurity in north-central Nigeria through the lens of stakeholders. *KASHERE Journal of Politics and International Relations, 3*(2), 299–315.

Jones, S., et al. (2021). Exploring banditry in Nigeria [Dataset]. *Security Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41284-025-00477-1

Kleffmann, J., Ramachandran, S., Cohen, N., O'Neil, S., Bukar, M., Batault, F., & Van Broeckhoven, K. (2024). Banditry violence in Nigeria's North West: Insights from affected communities. United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. https://unidir.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/07/UNIDIR_Banditry_Violence_Nigeria_North_West_I nsights_Affected_Communities.pdf

Madueke, K. L. (2025). Why should we worry about Nigeria's fragile security? *The Political Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923x.70010

Mikail, I. K., Ayuba, M., Zubairu, K., & Bala, A. (2025). Impact of rural banditry on human security in Northern Nigeria. *FUDMA Journal of Humanities, Social Science and Creative Arts, 1*(AHBSI), 68–79.

Møller, B. (2000). The concept of security: The pros and cons of expansion and contraction. Copenhagen Peace Research Institute. https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/mob01

Momoh, S. A., Adadu, Y. A., & Caleb, R. (2025). Combating trans-border banditry and security issues in Katsina State, Nigeria: Challenges and strategies. *Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations, 3*(3), 40–58.

Mujtaba Kusherki, M. (2025). The impact of banditry on human security: Toward a people-centered approach to security. *Advances in Law, Pedagogy, and Multidisciplinary Humanities*. https://doi.org/10.14341/alpamet.2025.007

Musa, S. Y. (2025). Banditry and modern slavery: (In)security dynamics in Nigeria. *Security Advances, 1*(1), Article 100070. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seca.2025.100070

Obi, K. C., Iwuoha, V. C., Aniche, E. T., & Asogwa, K. C. (2025). Frustration–aggression nexus in framing the expanding banditry economy in Northwest Nigeria: Evidence from communal-level perception in Zamfara State, 2011–2024. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096241249976

Ojewale, O. (2024). Correlates of community resilience to violent conflict in north central Nigeria: Evidence from Benue and Plateau states. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1177/26330024231188376

Okoli, A. C. (2021). Banditry and "captive population syndrome" in northern Nigeria. *African Security, 17*(3), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2024.2356509

Osimen, G. U., et al. (2025). Armed banditry and terrorism in Northwest Nigeria: Interrogating the legal, ethical and security strategies. *Advances in Law, Pedagogy, and Multidisciplinary Humanities*. https://doi.org/10.14341/alpamet.2025.758

Owen, T. (2008). The critique that doesn't bite: A response to David Chandler's "Human security: The dog that didn't bark." *Security Dialogue, 39*(4), 445– 453.

Paris, R. (2001). Human security: Paradigm shift or hot air? *International Security, 26*(2), 87–102.

Rice, S. E., & Patrick, S. (2008). *Index of state weakness in the developing world*. Brookings Institution Press.

Rotberg, R. I. (Ed.). (2003). *State failure and state weakness in a time of terror*. Brookings Institution Press.

Tar, U. A., & Bashir, B. (2025). The political economy of cattle rustling in contemporary Nigeria: A portend for the 2023 general elections? *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 19*(1), 1–15.

Thakur, R. (2005). Human security: Concepts and implications with an application to post-intervention challenges in Afghanistan. Sciences Po. https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr.ceri/files/etude117_118.pdf

Terkura, M., & Gwar, J. T. (2024). Armed banditry and the economy and society of central Nigeria, 2009–2023. *Wukari International Studies Journal, 8*(10), 69–78.

Ukoji, V. U., & Ukoji, V. N. (2023). Trends and patterns of violence-related mortality in Nigeria: Evidence from a 16-year analysis of secondary data. *Injury Prevention, 29*(6), 482–488. https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2023-044923

United Nations Development Programme. (1994). *Human development report 1994*. Oxford University Press.

United Nations Development Programme. (2017). *Human security handbook*. United Nations. https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp- content/uploads/2017/10/h2.pdf

United Nations Development Programme. (2025). *Human development report 2025*. United Nations Development Programme.

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. (2024). Banditry violence in Nigeria's North West: Insights from affected communities. https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/UNIDIR_Banditry_Violence_Nigeria_North_West_Insights_Affected_Communities.pdf

Usman, O. O. (2025). Influence of armed banditry attacks on the socio-economic life of Benue State citizenry. *Journal of Humanities and Social Policy, 11*(5), 113– 120. https://www.iiardjournals.org/get/JHSP/VOL.%2011%20NO.%205%202025/INFLUENCE%20OF%20ARMED%20BANDITRY%20113-120.pdf

Vahedi, L., et al. (2023). Methodological and ethical implications of using remote data collection tools to measure sexual/reproductive health and gender-based violence outcomes among women and girls in humanitarian and fragile settings: A mixed methods systematic review. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. https://doi.org/10.1177/15586898231188400

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

ZJPD. (2025). The impact of banditry on underdevelopment in northern Nigeria. *Zamfara Journal of Politics and Development*.