

## **Youth Bulge, Rural Banditry and Ungoverned Spaces in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary Nigeria like most African states is challenged with problems associated with youth bulge that has affected her internal security negatively. The paper examines the impact of youth bulge and rural banditry on Nigeria's national security. It relied on documentary data as its methodology. It argued that the failure of the Nigerian state to harness potentials of her youths has exacerbated insecurity in the country most especially in the rural areas that hitherto use to be safest areas than urban cities. It recommends that the Federal as well as state governments must ensure that laws relating on demographic control be enacted or where it exists it should be enforced so as to reduce the level of youth bulge for effective planning and safety.

**Key Words: Bandits, Insecurity, Rural Banditry, Ungoverned Spaces, Youths, Youth Bulge**

### **Introduction**

Nigeria, currently is the most populous black nation in Africa and the 7<sup>th</sup> most populous globally, its population is 217, 436 196 million with 110, 104, 841 males representing 50.6% of the population whereas 107, 331, 404 are females representing 49.4% of the population, it has an annual birth rate of 4, 334, 116 representing 21, 351 births daily (Countrymeters, 2022) with a fertility rate of 5.144 births per woman (Macrotrends, 2022), the country has the highest population growth than the 10 most populous countries worldwide, its population growth rate is 2.5% per annum as against China's 0.3%, India 1.0%, USA 0.4%, Indonesia 1.1%, Pakistan 2.0%, Brazil 0.7, Bangladesh 1.0, Russia 0.2 and Mexico 1.1% (Business Day, 2022). Nigeria's population has exploded exponentially and with this sustained expansion it is projected that by 2023 its population will hit 236 million and 410 million by 2050 leapfrogging it from the 7<sup>th</sup> most populated country to 3<sup>rd</sup> after China and India (*Business Day*, 2022). The age distribution of Nigerians reveals that the country is having a greater number of youths than the ageing population signifying a youth bulge. There are 87,838,000 young people under the age

of 15 with 44,896,360 males and 42,943,785 females. 120,034,037 are between 15-64 with 61,235,769 males and 58,800,414 females. 6,696,690 are above 64 years with 3,235,696 males whereas 3,458,848 are females (Countrymeters, 2022).

Ordinarily, Nigeria's burgeoning population growth ought not to be a source of concern to many scholars, practitioners and development partners; this is because it has served as a means of propelling rapid development in countries such as China, Russia, and India among others. However, it became worrisome to many because of the high poverty and unemployment level and other negative socio-economic wellbeing of the populace that puts the country in bad light. For instance, the 2022 report released by the World Bank entitled '*A Better Future for All Nigerians: 2022 Nigeria Poverty Assessment*' noted that the number of poor people will hit 95.1 million this year. It further states that COVID-19 pandemic is responsible to driving over 5 million persons into poverty (World Bank, 2022). The prevailing socio-economic malady in the country connected with bad governance, corruption and misappropriation of funds, economic recession, Covid 19 pandemic, global rise in prices of food and energy largely attributed to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, high debt profile and loan servicing, dwindling revenue due to oil theft and restiveness in the Niger-Delta as well as socio-cultural factors and the character of the ruling elite are all pointers to a bleak future ahead of Nigeria where 3 meals per day is illusive for many families if not reversed the country is seated on more social explosive about to detonate. Nigeria is virtually under bandit's siege under different guise in several communities where the government fails to establish control largely in the rural enclaves. Rural banditry is accentuated by the presence of large pool of unemployed youths occasioned by the illicit proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) in the hands of non-state actors due to leaky boundaries, endemic poverty and get-rich-quick-syndrome among the vulnerable youths (Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduehie & Dariya, 2018).

Nigeria's vast ungoverned spaces most particularly in the North-West is progressively drifting into a foremost regional theater of violence, the north-eastern region has been inflicted by tremendous mayhem by *Boko Haram/Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP)* insurgents as well as the Southern Nigeria affected by numerous forms of banditry. In recent time, banditry has rendered many parts of the country as death-traps for inhabitants resulting in underdevelopment, as governments over time had to spend over 4.62 trillion in curtailing insecurity (Olufemi, 2015). As a problem, that initially seems to be a local mix-up between the pastoralist and farmers owing to land accessibility for farming and grazing, has transformed into an obstinate catastrophe. The 'banditry industry' spiraled between 2014 and 2019 elicited concerns, and assumed monumental proportion in the build up to the 2019 general elections and beyond. In Northern and Southern raging gangs of armed bandit's resorts to cruel attacks, abductions, killing, and raiding of villages, travelers, and cattle rustling. Government through security agents made tremendous effort in curtailing the menace, but the effort appears futile. It is in the light of the foregoing, that this paper examines the impact of youth bulge and rural banditry in Nigeria. The paper is divided into five sections. Section one is this introduction. Section Two conceptualised youth bulge, rural banditry and ungoverned spaces, it further dwelled on the theoretical framework of the study. Section Three analysed the relationship between youth bulge, rural banditry and insecurity in ungoverned areas in Nigeria. Section Four placed emphasis on incidences of rural banditry in the six geo-political regions in the country. The last section concludes the paper and offered recommendations.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The first coinage of the term 'youth bulge' was attributed to a German social scientist, Gunnar Heinsohn in the mid-1990s. It is a common observable fact in many emerging

nation-states. According to Lin (2012) youth bulge means a demographic pattern where majority of the population is composed of young adults and children. Schomaker (2013) defined it as a condition whereby a huge chunk of the population is between 15-24 years and constitute 20% in addition to 0-14 years constituting over 30% (known as 'children bulge') which is a credible indicator of future youth bulge. The term is often utilized in explaining a state of affairs where there are a raising number of youths in relation to other age groups. Nigeria, for instance, has large youth populations that are politically excluded coupled with negative socio-economic that serve as a driver of insecurity. Youth bulge therefore is a condition where the youth group's population in a country far outweighs other age groupings due to increased birth rate, declining infant mortality and overall improvement in health or uncontrolled birth rate.

The concept of banditry evolved over time and varies from one society to another. For instance, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European and American societies, a bandit is viewed as a freedom fighter whose aim was to ensure the freedom of the oppressed from the oppressor or the lower class or colonised from the colonising forces through violent and non-violent means (Warto, 1994). According to (Okoli, 2014) banditry entails the deployment of threat or intimidating targets, with the intention to kill or rob the victim(s). Uche & Iwuamadi (2018) see the phenomenon of rural banditry in Nigerian society in recent times as an upshot of perpetual violence in rural areas in the last decade with its attendant traumatic impact including loss of lives and property, forceful displacement of locals and creating havoc. Thus, the menace of rural banditry undermines the security, peaceful coexistence and the overall development of societies. Rural banditry can be perceived as the operation of non-state actors largely in ungoverned spaces in remote or isolated areas where government fails to exert full control or provide adequate security.

On the other hand, the term ungoverned space(s) is the integration of two concepts, with 'ungoverned' literally connoting insecure and 'spaces' denoting areas be it land or the cyberspace. There is no unanimity on what the concept ungoverned spaces entails among scholars and practitioners in the field of security studies hence, it is a disputed terminology. According to the United States Department of Defence, ungoverned space is a place where the state is incompetent or unresponsive to effectively control or manage its security (OUSD, 2007). Rabasa (2007) defines it as a part of the whole abdicated by government. The abdication of a part is willingly or by duress relieving the government of its control of the part thereby rendering the area comparatively anarchic. Similarly, Clark & Mansour (2013) defined ungoverned spaces as 'safe havens' under the occupation of non-state actors, it is an area where they have established their presence, concentrated, strategise, finance, conscript, indoctrinate and unleash mayhem on innocent lives. In other words, the concept of ungoverned space(s) can be regarded as any part of a country both land and cyberspace where the government have failed to fully supervise or discharge its constitutional role of protection of life and property of the citizens. These spaces could be forests, bush, villages, highways, farms, coastal areas, cyberspace and any other spaces that the state is unable to effectively man whether in urban or rural areas.

The paper utilised the youth bulge theory as theoretical framework. The youth bulge theory was propounded by Gunnar Heinsohn (1990) who is a German sociologist and an economist. The theory assumes that most past social upheavals are having outside activates (like fast climatic changes or other disastrous changes of the atmosphere) the utmost part of mass murder in societies are largely attributed to the increase in large pool of youth bulge, as well as European colonialism, 20<sup>th</sup> century Facism, Darfur crisis, the Palestinian unrest in 1987-1993 and 2000 to contemporary terrorism. Surpluses in

particularly young adult male inhabitants inevitably result into social instability, warfare and terror campaigns as the 'third and fourth sons. Additional advocates of the theory are the U.S. Political Scientist Jack Goldstein & Gary Fuller.

Thus, the unbridled bourgeoning of Nigeria's population and the deterioration in human security in many parts of the Nigerian society accounts for the snowballing of occurrences of rural banditry in the country. The Nigerian youth are frustrated due to poverty, unemployment or underemployment despite the country's abundant wealth. Many youths in the country have been denied the opportunity to realise their potentials due to massive mismanagement of funds by the governing and ruling elites. The overall outcome is the presence of great number of jobless youths that are susceptible to being radicalised (Ajaegbu, 2012). This is partly responsible for the incidences of religious violence, including *Boko Haram/ISWAP*, where destitute youths (Almajiris) are essentially the culprits. Similarly, the socio-economic denial by the leaders also provides the moral justification for the existence of insurgency challenging the Nigerian State, seen as largely corrupt and inept (Adetoro, 2010).

### **Youth Bulge, Rural Banditry, Insecurity and Development: The Nexus**

There is a complex correlation between youth bulge, armed banditry, security, development and ungoverned spaces. Any human society that is having vast ungoverned spaces and experiencing pervasive youth unemployment is susceptible to banditry activities like kidnapping and hostage taking, cattle rustling and farmers/herders' conflicts, arm robbery, gang rape, communal clashes, illegal mining activities and so on. There is no civilisation that can accomplish sustainable development in an atmosphere characterised by violence and uncertainty. Security is a requisite recipe for guaranteeing human existence and development. The youths are the most energetic and form the

fulcrum of the development of the economy. The neglect of this category of class of the population will certainly be an incubator for hatching insecurity and general lawlessness. According to Goldstone (1991) the youths frequently play a famous part in political violence and the prevalence of a 'youth bulge' is linked with political crisis. The core argument why youth bulge generate prospects for violent behaviour depends on the large number of idle persons that constitute the bulge. Relative to the preceding age group, the number of prospective rebels raises. Giving that large youth cohorts elongated the confines of social institutions like the labour market, youth bulge is capable of producing additional disgruntled persons (Urdal, 2004). In addition, a country with large pool of unemployed youth is at risk for the reason that these exposed groups are inclined to committing evils such as terrorism, abduction, theft, murder, thuggery, commercial sex, and drug abuse among others. More so, nearly all violent demonstrations, protests and insurrections and quite a lot of mob attacks resulting to meaningless wasting of lives and material goods as well as mayhem in several societies like the Arab spring and in other climes are organised by the youths (Usman, 2015).

Majority of the widespread armed clashes concerning African youths and without doubt Nigeria are conterminously connected to unemployment and poverty. Urban violence is equally characterised by rural-urban drift among the youths and rural violence are opportunistic crimes related with lack of government presence in ungoverned spaces. The migration of youths to urban areas in search of good life in cities plus the hassle and bustle of urban life and the inability to fulfill desired wishes and aspirations predisposes them in engaging in criminalities in order to make ends meet. One impact of rural violence within the context of rural banditry in Nigeria most especially within the north western part is the closure of several schools within the region. For example, almost 5,000 schools both public and private were closed down in Kaduna State due to banditry and frequent

kidnapping of school students in the state and other states in the area (Smart, 2021). The forceful shutting down of schools in the region has rendered many students out of school thereby depriving them access to education. Their deprivation to having access to education in the region may force many to drop out of school which if not properly managed may expose the youths to other forms of crime and criminality thereby worsening Nigeria's national security.

Conflicts are usually associated with humongous cost implications, the cost of restoring peace and rebuilding damaged communities and livelihood in a volatile state will certainly engulf a large quantum of funds that ordinarily should have been earmarked for other developmental purposes (Manu, 2016). For instance, Governor Babagana Umara Zulum of Borno State, states that *Boko Haram* insurgents in the state demolished over 5000 classrooms, 800 municipal buildings, as well as local government secretariats, prisons and traditional rulers' emirate councils. They equally ruined over 713 energy supply lines and 1600 water sources. The peace building assessment conducted by the World Bank, in conjunction with the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) estimated that more than \$6.9 billion property worth was lost due to insurgency in the entire north-eastern region with Borno State accounting for over two-thirds of the incurred losses (*Premium Times*, 2022).

### **Youth Bulge, Rural Banditry and Ungoverned Spaces in Nigeria: An Exploration**

The North-Western region of Nigeria overtime has been a cesspool of violence and synonymous with general unrest, virtually all the states in the region are affected by rural banditry. In Sokoto State for instance, armed bandits invaded Amarawa village in Ilela



local council in March 2021 and killed 10 villagers leaving many persons with gunshot wounds and abducted a businessman (HassanWuyo, 2021a). On 1 September 2021, bandits stormed Kaya village in Zamfara State, they abducted 53 male and 20 female students of Government Secondary School Kaya (Akhaine & Adeniyi, 2021). Similarly, in Kaduna State, Fulani militia on 25 April 2021 invaded the village of Libere Gari in Kalla ward of Kajuru Local Government Area and whisked away the Village Head, his wives and 16 children with over 67 persons in adjoining village of Adara (HassanWuyo, 2021b). Another form of rural banditry in the region is the reprisal attack by the outlawed *Yan Sakai*, a vigilante group in Sokoto State who are predominantly Hausas attacking the Fulani communities that are believed to be perpetrating banditry in the state. On 7 October 2021, the outlawed group attacked and murdered 11 Fulani's who came to observe the weekly market in order to buy food and other household needs. Among those killed is a chief Imam and his children while many escaped with gun wounds at Mamande village in Gwadabawa local council (Berker, 2021).

Cattle rustling most especially attributed to the nature of open grazing and transhumance activities in large swath of ungoverned forests are equally on the rise the region. For instance, on 13 October 2012, bandits attacked Muslim worshippers in Dogo Dawa village in Kaduna State firing gun shots and stabbing several victims and proceeded to village Imam's house and killed him (*BBC News*, 2012a). Similarly, bandits in March 2021 attacked Damaga village in Zamfara at night on motorbikes where they shot sporadically leading to the death of about 31 villagers and carted away with cows, sheep's, goats and chickens and kidnapped several travelers (*Africa News*, 2021).

Farm attacks and the demand for payment before farmers can access their farms have resulted in farmers deserting their farmlands for fear of being attacked thereby aggravating the challenges of poverty, unemployment and food insecurity. For instance,

on 1 December 2020, armed bandits during day time invaded the villages of Tashar Bama, Dogun Muazu and Unguwar Maigayya of Sabuwa Local Government Area of Katsina State, killing over 7 farmers, a nursing mother and abducted over 30 locals (Bello, 2020). Similarly, on 15 October 2021, armed bandits attacked Buruku and Udawa villages in Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State and killed several farmers (*Vanguard*, 2021). Moreso, armed bandits on 28 March 2022, using improvised explosive devices derailed an Abuja-Kaduna train conveying 362 passengers along Katari and Rijana villages and shot death over 9 persons and abducted several passengers (*BBC*, 2022b). Bandits and other gangs impose almost a million naira 'harvest tax' on farmers in several villagers in Zamfara, Kaduna and Katsina States before they can harvest their farm and in some instance despite making such payments, they are kidnaped for additional money or crops stolen. A farmer in Kurmi village in Maru Local Government Area of Zamfara State noted that the bandits in the first part of the month of November 2020 imposed N800,000 tax on farmers before they harvested their farms and nearby villages of Duhuwar Saulawa, Duhuwar Maikulungu, Baudi, Zagadi, Doka and Tungar Makeri (Ejikeme, 2020). The North Central too in recent times is synonymous with insecurity due to the activities of restive youths that have eroded the peaceful coexistence the region was known for. The zone became engulfed with insecurity such as the farmer/pastoralist feud most especially in Benue and Nassarawa States, cattle rustling, farm attacks and theft and highway banditry among others. Cattle rustling have become a norm. The activities of cattle rustlers in Niger State operating in rural communities in Lapai, New Bussa, Kagara, Gurara, Kafinkoro forest have resulted in the rustling of over 4,000 cattle out of which the police have recovered 1,048 cattle, 135 sheep and goats (Madugba, Nnabugwu, Binniyat, Akinyemi, Mosadomi, Nanlong, & Duru, 2015). In a similar vein, in October 2015 about 30 cattle rustlers raided Allawa village killing five villagers and razed down several shops

and houses and flee into the bush in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State (Madugba, et al, 2015). Furthermore, cattle rustlers stole cows belonging to Abdullahi Adamu 'm' of Binchim village in Bassa local council of Plateau State. The rustlers were later apprehended with seven cows in a J5 vehicle following a tip-off to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) operatives in Bukuru, Jos South on June 20, 2019 (Abraham, 2019). Farm attacks and the demand for payments before farmers can have access to their farms in the North Central by armed bandits is another area of insecurity in the region. For instance, many villages in Mariga Local Government Area in Niger State are under siege by armed bandits operating in the area. The bandits have absolute control over most villages and they determine the estimated harvest a farmer may likely harvest utilising their moles and demand a payment of a percentage before they grant them permission to harvest (*Saharareporters*, 2020).

Highway banditry most especially in north central Nigeria is on the increase as the roads are no longer safe and commuters prefer to seek for alternative routes in order to avoid attacks as irate youths engage in bushwhacking and killing selectively across ethno-religious divides. One of such cases of highway banditry is the killing of a retired Army General Alkali along Abuja-Bauchi Road on 3 September 2018 (Toromade, 2018). He was attacked and killed by irate youths of Dura-Du District and robbed of his belongings and his remains buried in a shallow grave, while his car pushed into a pond (Toromade, 2018). Investigations, led to the draining of the pond by the Nigerian army as revealed by Major General Augustine Agundu on 1 October 2018, announced the removal of the General's car and four additional cars (Salaudeen, 2018). The unavoidable is that this dastard act have been ongoing for several years and are perpetrated by criminally-minded youths in cohort with the villager's bushwhacked commuters on Abuja to Bauchi Road, they profile, kill and push their victims' cars into the pond as a reprisal attack on Hausa/fulani

neighboring villages (*Daily Trust*, 2018). Similarly, on 14 August 2021, Irigwe youths in Gada-Biyu in a gridlock in the outskirts of Jos, Plateau State, attacked and killed 25 Muslims and injured many more that were returning to Ondo and Ekiti States after celebrating the yearly Zikra (prayer session) organised by Sheikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi in commemoration of the new Islamic year of *Muharram*. The attack occurred two weeks after the youths killed 2 persons and set ablaze two trucks at the same spot while they were transporting cows (*Daily Trust*, 2021).

North Eastern Nigeria in the past one decade have been overwhelmed by general insecurity ranging from the activities of *Boko Haram*/ISWAP insurgents, robbery, ethno-religious clashes, farmers/herder's conflict and so on. The *Boko Haram*/ ISWAP insurgents exploited on the vicious circle of poverty and unemployment in the region to conscript and radicalise many youths. The exploits of the sect as at end of year 2020 according to the UN stood at 350,000 deaths and displacing millions from their abodes (Tanko, 2021). The sect overtime has conducted raids on both urban and rural communities for terror financing operated a sophisticated covert network of cattle robbers and wholesalers within the Sambisa forest (Onwuzuruigbo, 2019). They have also engaged in several farm attacks aimed at sourcing for food. The sect members on bikes on 27 November, 2020, invaded Koshobe village near the state capital of Maiduguri and tied 110 workers on a rice farm and subsequently cut their throats and abducted almost 15 women (Paquette, 2020). Also, on 29 November 2020 *Boko Haram* executed 43 farmers in Zabarmari village in Jere Local Government Area of Borno State (Bello, 2020). More so, farm theft most especially during harvest time is very pronounced in several rural communities in the region. For instance, the farm of Malam Buba Musa a Maize farmer at Bembal Village in Gassol Local Government Area was harvested during the night hours by thieves few days to his planned harvest time (Jonathan, 2016).

There are equally several cases of communal clashes in villages across the North-Eastern region. One of such clashes is between the Waja and Lunguda settlements in Gombe and Adamawa State. The conflict over land between the two warring communities resulted in the demise of several individuals and the burning of Momsurmi, Boshikiri, Zakawon and Burti villages, a lot of animals killed and foodstuffs destroyed on June 2, 2020 (Hammangabdo, 2020). Similarly, in July 2018, almost 73 people were killed and over 50 villages razed down and over 2,000 persons displaced as a result of communal clash between the Hausa-Fulani and Yandang villages in Lau local council of Taraba State (*Punch*, 2018). In Taraba State communal clashes over land dispute on 6 July 2017, between Yelwa (Fulani village) and Mesamari (Mambila Village) villages in Sardauna Local Government Area of the state resulted in the death of 5 people while several houses were burnt down and many people displaced (Tyopuusu, 2018). A communal clash over farmlands between Waja and Lunguda communities in Balanga Local Government Area in Gombe State has remains a recurring dispute. For instance, Nyuwar a Lunguda community came under attack on the 13- 18 April 2021, 26 - 27 July 202, 8 February, 2022 and the latest attack that occurred on Friday 3 June, 2022 were some Waja youths attacked numerous Lunguda farmers in Nyuwar village and environs thereby killing an individual and set ablaze several houses in Pandi village (Michael, 2022). In a related development, the activities of Farmers/herders and ethno-religious cum ethno-tribal clashes leading to reprisal attacks are equally pronounced in the region as both parties are engaged in series of attacks and reprisal attacks leading to loss of lives and properties. Fulani herdsmen invaded and killed 45 villagers and many more unaccounted for in Kikan village of Numan local council in Adamawa State (Yusuf & Agbakwuru, 2017). In November, 2017, Bachama militia invaded Fulani settlements in Shafaran, Shawal, Gumara, Kikam and Kadamti villages killing almost 45 fulani women and children in

Numan Local Government Area of Adamawa State (Jaafar, 2017). In a series of reprisal attacks intended to avenge carnages against the Fulanis in the 'Numan Federation' by Bachama militia and their cohorts in environs, Fulani herdsmen in June 2018 invaded Dowaya village in Demsa Local Government Area of Adamawa State in a night raid killing over 21 people mostly women and children (Ojowe & Livinus, 2018).

South-South Nigeria like most regions of the country is also challenged by the activities of restive youth ranging from issues related to cultism, gang rape, car snatching, farm attacks and the activities of marauding herdsmen among others. For example, herdsmen invaded the villages of Avwon, Agadama and Ohoror in Uwheru kingdom in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta and killed 14 persons (Ebiri, Okafor, Sony Neme, Akpan-Nsoh & Osahon, 2020). In Bayelsa State, a marauding herder attacked and hurt an 18-year-old boy by name Kohgi Nation in a bush in Osuan Otuoke village in Ogbia Local Government Area on 20 February 2022 (Lawal, 2021).

Cultist and criminal gang activities are on the rise in the South-South. In Rivers State, almost 49 persons died as a result of hostilities in several localities in Khana Local Government Area between April and September 2019. Also, a gang of criminals attacked Bere village on 9 April 2019, killing 9 persons and went further Kaani-babe village in and killed 20 other persons in the state (Ebiri, 2019). Similarly, cult clashes between Iceland and Deybam cultists have led to series of attacks on villagers in Rivers State. On 4 August 2019, 3 persons were killed as a result of violent clash between the two-rival cultist groups in Bodo community, in Gokana local government area (Ebiri, 2019). Apart from cult clashes the South-South is equally infested with communal clashes among rival neighboring communities. On 6 January 2021 communal clash between Abankang and Alok communities in Ikom local council of Cross River State resulted in the death of four people and the displacement of many locals (Una, 2021). Similarly, in Delta State renewed

communal hostilities between the Emede and Igbiide clans in Isoko South local council that resulted in the death of 5 people on 6 January 2021 (*Vanguard*, 2021). More so, decades long of hostilities over boundary delineation between Ugbo village, in Arochukwu of Abia State and Ikpanya in Ibiono Ibom in Akwa Ibom State has claimed several lives. The recent attack on 29 March 2021 witnessed the death of over 7 persons and the burning of several houses which resulted in the missing of four persons and a girl gang raped in Ikpanya by Ugbo youths (Tolani, 2021).

The South-East is today one of the most volatile regions in Nigeria, it is confronted with the challenges of banditry associated with restive youths that are agitating for the secession of the region, herdsmen/farmers clashes and cattle rustling, highway banditry, gang rape among others. One of the worrisome is that of Fulani herdsmen horrifying several villages in the region. On 6 April 2019, herdsmen unleashed terror on farmers' communities in Anambra West Council of Anambra State killing several men and assaulted many females they held as hostages in Nkanu (Okoli, Ujumadu, Okutu, Nwaiwu, Odu, I. & Alozie, 2020). In another related development, herders in May 2021, attacked Obie Aku farm camp in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area in Enugu State killing many farmers and injuring many more (Njoku, 2021). Moreso, a reprisal attack was conducted on 17 February 2021 on Oba a Fulani area in Idemili Local Government Area, by the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) that resulted in the killing of six Fulani children (Adebayo, 2021). In a farm attack in Imo State, on 10 February 2021, a farmer was decapitated by ritualist where they took off some of his body parts in Orodo, Mbaitoli, community (*Vanguard*, 2021).

Gang raping in the South-East have equally become an issue of concern to many people in the region. For instance, in October 2014, Ngozi (surname withheld) an 11-year-old girl was raped by a 35-year-old Onyekachi Nwankwo and his gang in a village in Ehume

in Obowo Local Council Area of Imo State on her way to a popular market in Onuimo Rescue Market, Umungwa, Obowo in order to purchase household needs (Nkwopara, 2014). Similarly, on 21 June 2018, a 17-year-old girl was gang-raped and murdered by six young boys in an unfinished one building in Ogwugwu village, *Oba*, in the Idemili South Local Government Area of Anambra State while on her way to buy food (*Garri*) for dinner (Okafor, 2022).

Highway banditry in flashpoints along villages and thick bushes in the South East is a recurring challenge affecting people going about their legitimate search for daily breads. The Enugu-Onitsha expressway way is always associated with the activities of robbers who rob passengers of their belongings. Masked armed robbers on 20 April 2009 robbed passengers very close to Okwe village junction, in Ugwuoba, Enugu State (*Daily Trust*, 2009). In Imo State, bandits on 18 September 2021, attacked and killed a student of the Marist Comprehensive Academy, Uturu, Donald Edeh and 3 others injured while motorists and passengers that run into the bush for safety were robbed of their possession in Ihube village in Okigwe Local Government Area of the state (Uzoaru, 2021). Land dispute is equally a pronounced source of conflict spanning across the entire South Eastern Nigeria. One of such disputes is the over twenty years land dispute between two villages in Oba Community, in Idemili South Local Government Area of Anambra State. The attack in May 2022 between the village of Ezelle Mbana and Umuezegbute family resulted in the destruction of over 50 residential buildings and 70 fences, belonging to the people of Ezelle Mbana, Oba village and their tenants (Nwaiwu, 2020). In Abaomege and Ishinkwo communities in Ebonyi State, conflict over a piece of land in May 2022, resulted in the demise of more than 230 locals in the two localities. The protracted land dispute has paralysed socio-economic activities as the locals from both communities were deprived access to their farmlands, schools, churches and so on due to fear of the



unknown (Okah, 2022). In most recent times the activities of Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in some villages are worrisome. The members of the militia group have overtime raided several police stations in many states in the region and retire to their safe haven in the forest. For instance, they attacked and murdered some policemen at a checkpoint in Obeagu Awkunanaw village in Enugu State and retired a secret camp at Akpawfu village in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, they were raided by the security forces which resulted in the killing of many IPOB/ESN members on 23 July, 2021 (Chukwu, 2021).

The south-western part of Nigeria is today one of the most relatively peaceful regions in the country. However, the zone is not devoid of some security challenges related to youth restiveness. For example, on 12 January 2021 Wole Agbola, a farmer was captured in a bush in Aba-Odo village in Oyo State and he was found death after a payment of 2-million-naira ransom to his abductors. In another farm attack on 14 February 2021, 3 farmers were murdered by raiding herders while going to farm in Ijugbere village in Owo, Ondo State (*Vanguard*, 2021a). Closely related to cases of farm attacks are communal clashes between Fulani and Yoruba communities over land ownership in some villages in the South-West leading to attacks and reprisal attacks. For instance, on 2 February 2019, Tiamiyu Adeyanju, was murdered in an attempt to stop a herdsman from allowing his cattle to drink water from a communal stream in Oyo State, this development led to the razing down of many Fulani settlements which resulted in retaliatory attacks that led to the ransacking of Agbegun, Monde and Oniyanrin villages in Afijio Local Government Area of Oyo State (Adedayo, 2019). Armed bandits believed to be Fulani herdsman on 15 July 2021 attacked Igangan community in Ibarapa North local council, were they disguised as officers of the Nigerian Custom Service attacked the community and killed 4 persons including an Amotekun corps (Kabir, 2021).

Highway banditry mostly perpetrated in villages and bushes are on the increase in the region. For instance, bandits on 7 January 2021 murdered a driver and flee into the bush and abducted his boss along Ise/Isua/Akoko highway in Ondo State (Dada, 2021). Similarly, on 16 January 2021, Dr Amos Arijesuyo a Deputy Registrar of Federal University of Technology Akure was killed by armed robbers along Ilesa-Akure Highway on his way back to Akure from Ibadan (Akingboye, 2021). On March 21 2021, bandits kidnapped a mother and her three children in Elegbaka on their way to Imoru from Lagos to attend a yearly age grade ceremony and took them into the bush. The abductors later released the mother and held her children with them, where they demanded for 50 million ransoms before they would be released (Gbadamosi, 2021). The region has over the years witnessed several cases of gang raping. One of such cases was the raping of a pregnant woman in May 2020 by Laolu Omogunwa a commercial biker in a bush at Ago Akingboye village in the Irele Local Government Area of Ondo State that resulted in miscarriage (Aderele, 2020). Similarly, on 3 November 2020, a food seller, Mrs. Wumi Babatope was raped to death at a mining field near Afon village in Osun State in the nearby village of Afon (Bamigbola, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

The paper examined the impact of youth bulge and rural banditry in Nigeria. It argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between youth bulge, rural banditry and insecurity in the country. It further argued that the propensity of violence and wanton annihilation and demolition of material goods, cattle rustling, kidnappings and hostage taking are due to the prevailing youth bulge as a result of neglect and inability to harness their potentials into productive venture by the ruling and governing elites aided in intensifying criminality in ungoverned spaces has further compounded the living condition of the populace. The paper recommends that the state governments must ensure that laws

bordering on birth control measures be enacted or where it existed it should be enforced in order to give room for effective planning and security. The governments most particularly those of the northern region should also ban *Almajiri* systems in their respective states and ensure that the *Almajiris* are trained in different skills aimed at making them self-reliant. Concerted effort must be geared toward improving student enrolment in schools so as reduce the menace of out of school children and the *Almajiri* phenomenon in the country. This can be achieved by making education free and mandatory for all. This will further create awareness and reduce the stem of illiteracy and lack of creativity among the teeming youths. The security operatives should be provided with modern sophisticated military hardware's and equipment's needed to curtail, intercept and thwart rural banditry in the north-western region. The government should reintroduce grazing fields, cattle paths and ranching that were encroached upon as a result of development and population explosion. This will further assist in reducing farmers/herder's conflicts and cattle rustling in the country. Ranching will further promote agricultural production and reduce farmer's herder's conflict and enable the security to checkmate the incursion by the herders from the Sahelian belt and ensure proper management of the borders and curtail the circulation of illicit arms in the country. The Center of Small Arms and Light Weapons under the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) should intensify effort aimed at reducing the quantity of illicit arms circulating in civilian hands across the country and her neighbors. This can be achieved through effective synergy between the Center and other sister security agencies in collaboration with community leaders and relying on human intelligence from credible informants deployed in areas suspected to be trafficking weapons and synergy with neighboring states.

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