

BOOK REVIEW

Al Chukwuma Okoli and Saliou Ngom, eds. *Banditry and Security Crisis in Nigeria*. London: Routledge, 2024. xi + 273 pp. Preface. Contributors. Figures. Tables. Acknowledgments. Index. \$153.00. Hardback. ISBN: 9781032395258.

Eric Hobsbawm's 1969 seminal work, *Bandits*, defines social banditry as a "pattern of criminality associated with violence and terror involving a gang or 'gangs of outlaws' attacking people with the aim of stealing, plundering, pillaging, looting, and killing." Cited widely in *Banditry and Security Crisis in Nigeria*, Hobsbawm's definition doesn't capture the scope, scale, and essence of the social banditry that blossomed in Nigeria's Northern region since 2011. The geography of banditry in Nigeria situates that region as the "epicenter" of banditry (36). Encompassing seven of the country's thirty-six states (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara) this "tranquil region suddenly burst into flames of insecurity" (180). *Banditry* explores the linkage between banditry and Nigeria's current security crisis. It argues that banditry is "the most critical dimension" (4) in that crisis.

The book is divided into three parts with a total of seventeen chapters. The first part has seven chapters. They primarily address the connections between banditry and the herder-farmer crises in the Sahel, the nexus between climate change and manifestations of violence (herder-farmer conflicts, banditry, and communal crises), banditry factors in Nigeria's north-west region, and the strategic logics of bandits. Part One closes with a discussion of the common nodes in the banditry crisis in the northern region. With six chapters, Part Two offers insights into the incidence and dynamics of banditry. The chapters discuss identity as a variable of violence in the banditry crisis, the humanitarian consequences of banditry, its manifestations, and effects on human lives in banditry-affected regions, its implications for human security and development, its connections with the herder-farmer conflict in central Nigeria, and finally its gender dimensions. Part Three explores the strategic implications and policy recommendations for fighting banditry. While Chapters Twelve, Thirteen, and Fifteen discuss the effectiveness and challenges of the Nigerian government's responses to curb banditry and strategies such as community policing and the use of drones, Chapters Fourteen and Sixteen expand the debate to the Sahel region and the common efforts to tackle banditry in that region.

Using a variety of materials including primary and secondary sources, and oral interviews, *Banditry* builds on and expands banditry studies in Nigeria. That scholarship analyzes banditry through various frameworks including the climate-diversity perspective, the un(der)governed spaces, the crime-terror prism, and the Fulani militancy/extremism. Engaging with these analytical lenses, the book complicates the existing narratives by looking at the

complication of Nigeria's banditry crisis and the factors of complication identified as "communitization, jihadization, transnationalization, and hybridization" (12). As *Banditry* fits comfortably with recent other works such as Usman A. Tar and Bashir Bala's edited book, *Rural Violence in Contemporary Nigeria: The State, Criminality and National Security*, it attempts to fill in the gap in that scholarship by looking at these "under-explored" (2) facets of banditry.

At the core of the book is the complexity of banditry. As the authors explained, the current banditry crisis is a "worrisome menace," (201) and an "ignoble monster" (184) to the point that it tarnishes Nigeria's continental and global images. Using various frameworks deeply rooted in the social sciences (collective security theory, resource scarcity theory, failed state theory, frustration theory, failed security theory, and objectification theory), the authors use banditry to draw attention to a broader national security crisis. Although they acknowledged its existence before the creation of the Nigeria state, they show how the type of banditry that appeared in 2011 "evolved from rudimentary and isolated roots" (227) and from "a less organized and less violent prototype of bandit experience" (242) to a banditry that "has come full circle by 2021" (8). Given its scope, scale, and many dimensions (cattle rustling, village raids, kidnappings, highway attacks, attacks on schools and vulnerable institutions), drivers (sociological, political, economic, and environmental), typologies (organized, armed, rural, urban, maritime, cattle, mercenary, etc.) combined with Nigeria's porous borders, ungoverned forest spaces, and poor law enforcement, Nigeria's banditry crisis is so complex, complicated, and threatening that it has overshadowed the Boko Haram insurgency. This prompts the Nigerian government to declare bandits as "terrorists" in tackling this burning issue. Yet, the authors contend that this state's response blurs the line between bandits, terrorists, and militant insurgents as these groups are linked, influence, and reinforce each other. By placing the banditry crisis in Nigeria within the context of wider security challenges in the Sahel region "a land of opportunities as it is of challenges" (239), the book broadens our understanding of banditry in Africa.

Banditry is an ambitious and timely book. Its findings and conclusions have implications in the fight against banditry in Nigeria but also the Sahel region. Given its characterization as a "complex national threat" (268), we wished the contributors addressed occurrences in other parts of Nigeria to better understand its impact on the country's security crisis. The Fulanization of banditry to problematize it as discussed in many chapters provides a simplistic analysis that may stigmatize the Fulani and should be taken with precaution, as highlighted by the editors of the book and the authors of Chapter Seven. Despite these shortfalls, readers will finish the book having a better grasp of the phenomenon of social banditry in Africa as well as of the subsequent security issues it causes.

Dior Konate 

South Carolina State University
Orangeburg, SC, USA

dkonate@scsu.edu

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