

# **Highway Banditry in Contemporary Nigeria: An Expository Study**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examined how very few parts of Nigeria are exempted from the menace of highway banditry, robbery and other violent acts. No fewer than 133 highways across the six-geopolitical zones in Nigeria have been identified as major flash points for banditry, kidnapping and other related vices. If one is travelling on some major highways in Nigeria, especially at night, chances are that one may be robbed, abducted, maimed or even killed by armed bandits. It is unfortunate that the bandits or highway marauders are most of the time armed with sophisticated weapons while sometimes dressed on police or army uniforms. The paper put forward that in the recent history of Nigeria, the major highways has become a place where bandits and killer herdsmen kill and maim commuters. The paper also outlines major hotspots of banditry in Nigeria, and also discusses how this ugly trend has become worrisome and made highway roads unsafe for commuters. The paper also discusses strategies to curb highway banditry in Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive methodology. It relied on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include oral information and testimonies. Newspapers and magazine reports were also used in conjunction with official records in government publications. Secondary sources include relevant books. The researcher also made use of direct observation method. All the information so gathered were subjected to historical evaluations.*

**Keywords: Banditry, Highway, Insecurity, Kidnapping, Police.**

## **Introduction**

Travelling through the major highways across the six-geopolitical zones in Nigeria could be an experience that offers passengers the rare opportunity to have a glimpse of very beautiful and natural scenery. Unfortunately, in the face of growing insecurity caused by highway armed bandits, robbers and kidnappers, travelling experience is worrisome. It could be recalled that not quite long ago, some tribal militias killed some innocent commuters on a road in Taraba State. Nigeria's recent history is replete with gory tales of highway horror and death as alleged armed herdsmen and robbers, abduct, rob and murder travelers. For example, in the Middle Belt region, along Benue and Taraba States, the major highway from Sankara axis comprising three Local Government Areas (LGAs) Katsina/Ala, Ukum and Logo LGAs have had to contend with issues of highway banditry, which occur on the over 150km stretch of Katsina/Ala – Wukari road linking Benue and Taraba states, including some roads linking the hinter lands in the states. Also, Wukari – Takum and Wukari Ibbi roads in Taraba state are notorious for armed banditry and kidnapping. Likewise, other dangerous spots of highway banditry and robbery in the North could be located in major roads along Katsina, Borno, Kaduna, Nassarawa and Zamfara states.

In the South West region, there are also dangerous spots of highway robbery and banditry along major roads in Osun, Ondo Ogun, Ekiti, Oyo, Lagos and Edo states; they are notorious for kidnapping. In the core Niger Delta region, highway banditry is more pronounced on East-West road axis and Ode Bride axis. Likewise, in the South East region, major roads from Ebonyi Enugu, Imo, Abia and Anambra states, there are hotspots for kidnapping and armed robbery. Highway banditry across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria is horrifying which could leave the travelers with bitter tales to narrate, if they are lucky enough to escape alive to tell their stories. Highway banditry connote the vices wickedly performed by gangster gunmen on the major roads as hijackers and road marauders made up of ethnic militias, ruffians and robbers that deprive commuters of their property and life. This roving brigandage and banditry along the Nigerian highways are perpetuated desperate out laws and men of the underworld that rob commuters of their property by force. This issue of

highway banditry is worrisome and a serious growing security challenge in Nigeria that the government and the security agencies need to address, before Nigeria becomes a lawless country that do not promote ease of doing business to both national and foreign interests. It is obvious that if armed herdsmen, robbers and bandits abduct, rob and murder travelers on the major highways in Nigeria, while the government and security agencies look the other way, it would give the country a bad name and image, and could equally discourage potential investors to come and invest in the Nigerian economy.

### **Overview of the Major flash points for Highways Banditry in Contemporary Nigeria.**

In the recent history of Nigeria, no fewer than 133 highways across the six geo-political zones in the country have been identified as major hotspots and flashpoints for banditry, kidnapping and allied criminal vices (Amaize and Dayo, 2019). Travelling on these roads at night without security may be dangerous because chances are that one may be robbed, abducted, maimed or even killed. In recent time, there is no week that people do not have bad experiences on these major highways in the hands of suspected herdsmen, armed robbers, kidnappers or ritualists. Investigation by Amaize and Dayo (2019) revealed about 11 spots across five states in the South East region, while 41 hot beds were found to exist in the South West geo-political zone. In the Nigeria Delta region, 28 major dangerous spots of highway robbery were taken note of. In the North West zone 20 dangerous roads and spots were noted where armed bandit deprives travellers of their belongings. Likewise, in the North central geo-political zone, no fewer than 33 volatile roads experience highway terror and banditry. In the North east region under the menace of Boko Haram terrorists, the major roads are notorious for banditry and kidnapping.

Most of these flash point of highway robbery and banditry occurrence across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria show that there is inadequate security agents in these hotspots to prevent and check highway robbery. It is unfortunate to note that security personnels arrive robbery scene after suspected criminals must have

concluded their crime; as if the robbery act was masterminded between the security agents and the bandits. However, a further breakdown of highway banditry in Northern Nigeria parts accusing finger to the following groups: Boko Haram, killer herdsmen, banditry, kidnapers, ritualists and rapists. In Katsina state, some major roads are now deserted for fear of attacks by armed bandits and kidnapers. Such roads include Jibia, Gurbi, Kaura Namoda, Dutsinma, Kankara, Sheme, Faskari, Musawa, Matazu, Charandi – Kaakia, Kusada, Dandume, Sabuwa, Sheme, Kankara and Dutsinma. Funtua highway roads are avoided by many motorists between 6pm and 6am. Likewise the major highway roads from Katsina and Zamfara states are most dreadful (Amaize E. and Dayoj, 2019)

Likewise, in Kaduna State, virtually all the sections of the Kaduna/Abuja Express roads are being terrorized by bandits and kidnapers. Other roads that are dreadful are Bienin Gwazi-Kaduna Road; Kaduna – Saminaka Jos Road, Kaduna – Kachia Road; Kagarko – Jere Road; Birnin Gwari – Kagara – Tegin Road; Sarkin Power – Birnin Gwari Road and Minna Lambata – Diko – Kaduna axis. In Nassarawa State, trips on the following roads are often done with tight security, such as, Shendam Road, Obi/Keena/Awe Road, Akwanga/Keffi Road, Keffi/Nasarawa Toto – Gadabuke Road, and Akwanga/Abuja Road. (Amaize E and Dayo, J. 2019)

In Niger State, the roads identified as hotspot of kidnapers and bandits include: Suleja – Lambata, Bida Road; and Roads in Kushaka, Kurebe, Pandagazi, Gidigori, Kusheri, Koregi, Alawa, Kwaki, Bataro, Chububa, Shafa, Kauri, Zazzaga in Rafi LGA. In Zamfara State, highway roads under the siege of marauders and bandits include: Gusau – Magani – Dansadau, Kuceri – Danjibga-Keta- Wanke, Kaura-Namoda-Moriki-Shinkafi, Zurmi Jibia – Katsina, and Talata Mafara / Jsafe Roads. In Sokoto State, Roads in Issa and Rabah LGA are dangerous as a result of banditry and robbery. In the Middle Belt region, especially. In Benue and Taraba States, the Sankera axis comprising three LGAs, Kastina Ala, Ukum and Logo LGAS, are hotbed for highways Marauders and bandits. (Amaize E and Dayo J, 2019).

In the South East geo-political zone, highway road under the threat of armed bandits include: Enugu State axis – Enugu – Ugwogo – Nsukka Road, Nsukka – Adani – Onitsha Road, 9<sup>th</sup> Mile – Nsukka – Makurdi Road; Enugu – Onitsha Express Road, particularly at Ugwu-Onyeama valley, and Enugu Portharcourt Road. Many of these roads have lonely hotspot, bushes and isolated forest environments where kidnapers enslave their victims, to demand ransom from their relations. It is important to note that many arrests of members of different kidnap gangs identified as “Malaysia Boys” and “Ndi Ishiawo” have been made in these areas. Likewise, suspected herdsmen were also said to have been responsible for the cases at Ugwu-Onyeama along Enugu-Onitsha Road. Other roads in the South-East geo-political zone where kidnapers often operate are in the Ebonyi State axis, which include, Enugu-Abakaliki Expressway; Abakaliki-Afikpo Expressway; Amasizi-Okigwe Expressway; Ivo-Oso Edda Road and some roads linking the interiors in the state.

### **The Challenge and Menace of Highways Banditry**

Global studies have confirmed these realities even though the Nigerian leadership continues to live in denial. The 2019 global Peace Index puts Nigeria at 148, and indicates that a country with such a positive peace deficit provides fertile ground for increased militarization, domestic conflict and insecurity, which include banditry, terrorism and kidnapping. Peace cannot reign without justice. Unfortunately, our reality today in Nigeria is that injustice is reigning over and above all else. These are the causes of widespread menace of highways banditry and kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria. Some government officials like Vice President Osibanjo (2019) downplayed kidnapping and its allied vices on Nigeria because the government is too far away from the people. Moreso, top government officials travel in convoy with security escorts. Government officials are advised to travel by road unaccompanied by escorts like other Nigerians to test if kidnapping is real. (Mike Ozekhome, 2019).

Highway kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria is a heart touching tale that is worrisome. Dr. Adole Omole (2019) a senior Lecturer at Baze university, Abuja,

narrates his traumatic experience after he was captured by some gunmen on the highway around Ajaokuta, while travelling from Abuja to his village in Benue state. The university don claims he spent four days in the kidnapper's den before he was released, after his family paid N2million ransom to the kidnappers. While Dr. Adoyi Omale (2019) was in the kidnapper's den, the kidnappers said that the difference between them and security operatives was that while they were ready to die, security people were not. They accused him and others of eating their cows and getting fat to their detriment. Why many people engage in kidnapping is to get rich quick; their motive is criminality and economic factor. Likewise, Shinfika (2019) said his travail with kidnappers started when he was abducted by a 20-man gang on the road from Shinfida to neighboring Gurbin Baure on a market day as he went to sell his farm produce; 12 bags of sweet potatoes. The gang later sold him Shinfika for N250,000 to another group. Before he was released after serious torture, N1 million ransom was paid by his relatives. They counted the money to ensure it was complete before he was freed.

Likewise, three members of Urhobo Traditional Council, amongst who were Chief Lagos, Chief Johnson Ojakovo, Omonigho Akpofure and Chief Julius Owanrieta, said they were kidnapped by suspected herdsmen between Ofosu and Ugbogi town along Ore-Benin Expressway on Monday, April 8, 2019. They were said to be traveling to Delta state to attend a meeting with Ukoko Rivie of Urhoboland at Olomu in Ughelli South LGA. When the incident occurred. The Chiefs were grateful to the Ohworode of Olomu Kingdom for acting urgently which led to their release; as he met the demands of the kidnappers by payment of the ransom. (Oseji, 2019)

Highway kidnapping in Nigeria makes family relations to undergo psychological trauma or human brutal pain. It is a sin that causes death, suffering and frustration in many families. Highway banditry disrupts economic activities and scares away national and foreign investors in Nigeria. Highway banditry is an illegitimate business that transfers the wealth of good people into the hands of criminals. It derails and relegates the Nigerian economy, into deplorable, as hardworking people are frightened to invest in the economy. Highway banditry and kidnapping are terror and

oppressive based. It makes criminals to exploit the rich. It is an illegal business that brings shame and ill-gotten money that attracts curses to many families in Nigeria. Highway banditry and kidnapping are scandals that give Nigerians bad name and reputation abroad. During offensives launched by the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) in its bid to rid the highway roads of those it described as road bandits and kidnapers, such exercises usually results in the killing of innocent citizens; the outcome is often worrisome to the Nigerian state.

### **Strategies to avoid Highways Banditry in Contemporary Nigeria**

This paper outlines strategies and tips to avoid being a victim of kidnapers and bandits, which include:

- (a) A traveler should have a travel plan or route plan to make sure he avoids the hotspots if it is possible.
- (b) A traveler should ensure that there is no stopping on the way or at any crowd incident spot which he should come across to avoid kidnapers and bandits, (Labo, 2019)
- (c) If a traveler is travelling with kids, he should get all the basic needs like water, sweet, biscuit at home before the journey to avoid unnecessary stopping at hotspots of kidnapers.
- (d) A traveler's car or vehicle windows and doors must at all times be wound up and watch out for vehicles that may be trailing behind. If you notice any, slow and stop at any safe haven or police check points. When the vehicle passes you, you could continue your journey, but if you want to draw the police attention you should do so immediately to play safe from kidnapers.
- (e) A traveler should avoid lonely routes or dry routes. This occurs when one's vehicle appears to be the only vehicle on the road, hence, one may have to be very suspicious of possible trouble on the highway.
- (f) A traveler should avoid using expensive cars when travelling along hotspots and routes so that you do not attract kidnapers and bandits, since they are after high profile people without adequate security to protect them.

- (g) A traveler should avoid making a particular route a routine; always look for alternative routes as your instinct directs you, by the grace of God.
- (h) A traveler should avoid very early or late movements, for example, starting a trip by 4am and coming back late by 11pm or more, can be dangerous.
- (i) A traveler should keep information about his trips confidential and personal so that they can avoid kidnapers and bandits. (Labo, 2019)
- (j) A trekker should always walk by foot with a partner and instinctively alert across hotspot axis to avoid bandits on the highways.
- (k) A trekker should never be distracted by headphones, telephones or others, if at high risk areas. To ensure adequate alertness.
- (l) A traveller should always exercise caution when entering or leaving ones car in high risk areas. Keep your spare keys away to avoid bandits.
- (m) For a traveler whose vehicle develops faults or has flat tyre, it is advisable to keep moving until one gets to a safe place to avoid kidnapers or bandits. (Labo, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The Police and the Nigerian army should deploy drones in the hotspot of highway kidnapper and robbers to fish out bandits terrorizing the nation's highways. The government and the security agencies must fishout the financiers of highways banditry and kidnapping across the six-geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Look at the case of suspected kingpin Evans, his arrest has significantly reduced the cases of kidnapping in the Lagos – Ibadan axis. Some wealthy people maybe behind this banditry in Kaduna, Kogi, Kaduna and Zamfara roads. Security agencies must tackle the brains behind this criminal activity and neutralize them. Moreso, the hot spots that are notorious for kidnapping should be subjected to serious air and road surveillance. Furthermore, the government has to curb the challenge of unemployment of the youths in the country so that there won't be ready supply of foot soldiers to kidnapers and bandits on Nigerian highways.



Furthermore, the government should check the flow of illicit weapons into the hands of kidnappers and bandits. Nigerian youths should be careful to stop the menace of highways banditry and kidnapping. These social vices are product of the society, so what gave rise to these ills should be corrected. The Nigerian state must embrace the value of justice and fairness in the true sense for real peace, progress and development. Bad portions of the roads should be repaired so as not serve as functional extortion sites for criminals.

### **Recommendations**

This paper has come forth with the following recommendations to curb highway banditry in contemporary Nigeria, which include:

Highway banditry is now everywhere in contemporary Nigeria and it is the responsibility of the government and its security agencies to put an end to it. In the hierarchy of needs, apart from food and shelter, the next is security. If any government cannot protect travelers on the highway, it means the government and the security agencies are not doing their job. Government at all levels should protect men and women travelling from one geo-political zone to the other in the country for their business before talking about industrialization and the need to attract foreign investors in the country. Commuters are lamenting everyday on Nigeria's highways because of insecurity. The government and the security agencies need to address this problem. Federal government should deploy drones, CCTVs in forest and highways. This technology will boost security of life and properties in each geo-political zones; it will help boost the morale of troops engaged in various assignments across the highways in the country.

The issue of highways banditry in Nigeria is really worrisome. The government should also equippe and empower community neighbourhood vigilante groups in various communities to help police to fight highways banditry. This is because whenever highway robbery is on-going and the police are told, they either claim not to have fuel or to be short of personnel. Equipping the community vigilante would help the police to do their job. (Agbo, 2019). Thus, the government should

reinvigorate the local vigilante groups because they know all the nooks and crannies of the communities better than the Police.

Nigeria's population is growing geometrically, instead of the government to adequately plan, it folded its arms. The effect of this growing population is unemployment, that commenced in the early 1980s as graduates end up not getting jobs. It is these unemployed youths that are engaged on highway banditry most often. The government and the private sector should create employment opportunities to engage the restive youths that are highway bandits. A hungry man is an angry man. Nigeria needs a more proactive solution to fight insecurity. In other climes, governments pay the unemployed to prevent them from embracing crime. The government should make deliberate and workable policies on entrepreneurship and industrialization which the youths should key into, this will help reduce highway crime.

Responsibility for youth engagement should not be the exclusive problem of the government. People between the ages of 13 and 40 should show the zeal to work, everybody want cheap money in Nigeria. Many youths are no longer interested in working and this is responsible for the mass drift into politics, kidnapping, robbery, ritual and criminality. Youths in Nigeria should be encouraged to embrace functional education, entrepreneurship and economic self-reliance. It would help to curb highways banditry to a great extent.

Armed banditry on the highways across the six-geopolitical zones in Nigeria justify the calls for the creation of state police. There are many advantages of state policing, which is also known as community policing in some societies. A Policeman is supposed to know the nooks and crannies of the society where he is engaged. If you bring someone from Kaduna or Kano, who doesn't know Enugu – Onitsha Express Road terrain or even speak Igbo language, policing effectively would be difficult for such a person. In the Western world, the police do not have settlements. They live among the people and they know who the bandits are. How can officers, who do not live in an area, know the terrain of the community they are policing? Although some

people are of the opinion that governors may abuse their usage, especially for election purposes, but the advantages of state policing outweigh the disadvantages (Dayo, 2019).

Armed banditry on the Nigerian highway in recent times is worrisome. Commuters need the support of the government and law enforcement agents to defend themselves. Self defence should be well coordinated by commuters to protect their lives and properties from highway robbers and kidnappers. There is need for all hands to be on deck to tackle insecurity in Nigeria; as road marauders have sent shivers down the spine of travelers; many have been victims of kidnapping, rape and banditry. The citizenry should be ready to fight back through self defence approach. If the law enforcement agents are reluctant to protect them.

Traditional rulers also need financial support and constitutional powers to assist the police to fight armed bandits on the highways. Most of the criminals that are engaged on highway banditry live in the communities surrounding the highways. They are neither ghost nor spirits. It will only take concerted community efforts to flush armed bandit out, if the traditional rulers should be empowered by the law to do this in the real sense. For example, in Akure, it took the initiative of organizing some youths through the traditional ruler, who worked under the supervision of the Nigerian police to stem the tide of armed banditry. They were funded for logistics throughout the exercise. Traditional rulers are better positioned in curbing crime but there should be a review of the system in order to give them specific role. (Dayo, 2019).

The police and other allied security agencies should step up the zeal to arrest armed robbers, kidnappers, cattle rustlers on Nigerian highways. For example, the Adamawa State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Audu Adamu Madaki's approach of "Operation Puff Adder" to fight highway bandits is the right action in the right direction. It yielded wonderful road check of crime in Adamawa state; as the police command nabbed 45 of the robbers and kidnappers in the State. Moreover, the police clamped down on some flashpoints and arrested suspected armed robbers on

Demsa/Numan Road and Malgero in Song Local Government Area. The police also recovered arms from the highways robbers. Furthermore, a coordinated Anti-kidnapping unit squad stands in a better platform to fight kidnappers in Nigeria. With the assistance of the police intelligence and SARS operatives. If security agencies are serious they can raid hideout of robbers and kidnappers as well as recovery weapons and ammunition. This will go a long way to reduce armed bandits in Nigeria. (Madaki, 2019).

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