

## **The Prevalence of Armed Banditry in West Africa: A Focus on Nigeria and Niger 2011-2021**

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### **Abstract**

Armed banditry has emerged as a pervasive threat to security and development across West Africa, with Nigeria and Niger among the most affected states. This article examines the phenomenon and evolving patterns of armed banditry in both countries, highlighting the socio-economic and political conditions that have enabled its spread. Drawing on a range of academic and policy sources, particularly Nigerian scholarship, the study examines how factors such as poverty, unemployment, state fragility, porous borders, and inadequate security responses have contributed to the entrenchment of banditry. The study also employed the historical method of description and analysis to examine the available materials for this research. The paper adopts a comparative lens to assess regional trends, with particular attention to the transnational nature of bandit activities along the Nigeria-Niger border. The findings highlight the need for coordinated cross-border interventions, enhanced governance, and inclusive development strategies to mitigate the growing threat of banditry in the region. In sum, the research underscores that addressing armed banditry in West Africa requires more than militarised responses; it demands comprehensive policies that tackle structural inequalities, strengthen governance, and promote cross-border collaboration to achieve lasting peace and security in the region.

**Keyword:** Armed Banditry; Insecurity; Border Porosity; Prevalence; Cross-border Crime

### **Introduction**

West Africa's security landscape has grown increasingly volatile in recent years, characterised by the rise of multiple non-state armed groups, including criminal gangs, separatist militants, Islamic fundamentalists, and the infamous "unknown gunmen" that collectively wield coercive power to terrorise civilian populations in Nigeria and beyond (Obikaeze et al., 2023, p. 751). Armed banditry has become a persistent and escalating threat to national and regional security across West Africa. In recent years, the phenomenon has gained significant attention due to its devastating impact on human lives, livelihoods, and state stability, particularly in Nigeria and Niger. These armed bandits have escalated violence across rural communities, engaging in kidnapping, cattle rustling, extortion, and mass killings, often indistinguishable in impact from insurgent or terrorist activities.

While this threat is predominantly focused in Northern Nigeria, its influence has spilt over into neighbouring countries, particularly Niger, through porous border regions. The border regions between Nigeria and Niger have emerged as hotspots for these criminal activities, fueled by weak state presence, porous borders, and long-standing socio-economic grievances. Indeed, armed banditry is now widely regarded as among the most urgent security challenges confronting West Africa, undermining human security and depressing socio-economic development across affected zones.

Between 2011 and 2021, armed banditry intensified dramatically in Nigeria and Niger, fueled by political instability in neighbouring Chad and Niger, as well as long-standing farmer-herder conflicts that Boko Haram's networks exploited (Bobbo, 2021). Between 2011 and 2014, criminal networks began coordinating larger, cross-border raids often targeting commercial convoys, and kidnapping-for-ransom emerged as a significant revenue stream. After 2015, the convergence of worsening rural poverty, weakening state presence, and proliferating small arms led to a sharp escalation: annual incident counts more than doubled, and bandit groups adopted more sophisticated hit-and-run tactics across multiple border corridors. The role of Fulani herders, some previously affiliated with Boko Haram, has added complexity, spreading violence across geography and evolving

into organised criminal groups now recognised as significant security threats. Globally, Fulani militants have been cited among the deadliest terror-associated entities, owing to their cross-border reach and evolving tactics (Omulusi, 2019). One area of intricacy is identifying the source of arms and weapons supply to the bandits. It has been argued extensively that the Boko Haram insurgents have a direct connection with the bandits, and a substantial part of the arms used were procured either through sale or donation from the insurgents (Okoli, 2014, p.119).

A defining feature that facilitates armed banditry in the region is the porous border. Colonial-era arbitrary borders, underfunded and understaffed border agencies, and poverty in border communities have created gaps through which illicit actors operate freely, transporting small arms, trafficking humans, drugs, and facilitating armed incursions into adjacent states. Despite initiatives like the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission, Customs, and Immigration Services, insufficient border management has allowed the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), estimated to account for up to 8 million weapons circulating in West Africa, many in civilian hands (Bello & Mohammed, 2022)

This study fills a critical lacuna by rigorously analysing the prevalence and determinants of armed banditry across Nigeria and Niger. It examines how structural conditions such as poverty, unemployment, fragile institutions, and social exclusion have enabled the rise and persistence of armed banditry, guided by the frustration-aggression theory. This theoretical lens frames banditry not merely as opportunistic crime but as a violent response to systemic deprivation and exclusion. Therefore, this study seeks to enhance understanding of the underlying factors driving the persistence of armed banditry in West Africa, despite numerous interventions by national and international bodies. It also examines the significant role played by the porous borders between Nigeria and Niger in facilitating and sustaining these criminal activities across the region.

### **Clarification of terms**

Armed banditry refers to the organised use of force or violence by criminal groups, often involving robbery, kidnapping, cattle rustling, and destruction of lives and property. These acts are typically carried out by heavily armed individuals or gangs that operate in rural and border regions, exploiting the weak state presence and limited security infrastructure (Akinyele, 2020, p. 45). There are various types of armed banditry. These include social, rural-urban frontier, countryside, mercenary, organised, maritime, and petty banditry. Relative deprivation, social inequalities, and grievances often trigger armed banditry. Locational operation defines the rural and urban banditry, as well as the frontier and countryside banditry. Mercenary banditry can be characterised as either an agency or a master–servant relationship, as a case of a group operating under a master who provides necessary logistics. Organised banditry operates across borders through an efficient network and command structure. Maritime banditry operates along the coastal belts, whereas petty banditry is a lone criminal act characterised by the robbing of citizens of their belongings (Ojo et al., 2023, p. 4). In the context of this study, armed banditry is viewed not merely as a criminal phenomenon but as a symptom of deeper socio-economic and political grievances, aligning with the Frustration-Aggression Theory, which posits that aggression often arises from blocked goals, deprivation, and perceived injustice.

Porous borders are characterised by a state's inability to monitor and control movement across its frontiers effectively. In the case of Nigeria and Niger, vast and poorly policed borderlands have allowed for the unchecked movement of arms, goods, and people, including criminal elements such as bandits and insurgents. This permeability facilitates transnational crimes and significantly hinders coordinated efforts at ensuring regional security. The porous nature of these borders contributes to the sustainability of armed banditry, as it provides escape routes, operational flexibility, and access to illicit markets (International Crisis Group, 2020).

In summary, these concepts are interlinked within the broader context of state fragility and underdevelopment in West Africa. Their clarification provides a foundation for analysing how the structural realities of the region, especially in Nigeria and Niger, contribute to the growing prevalence of armed banditry.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts the Frustration-Aggression Theory, initially proposed by John Dollard and his colleagues in 1939 and later refined by Leonard Berkowitz. This theory suggests that aggression is often the result of frustration arising from the blocking of legitimate goals, deprivation, or perceived injustice. When individuals or groups are systematically denied access to socio-economic opportunities, justice, or security, they may resort to violent outbursts or criminal behaviour as an outlet for their frustration.

In the context of West Africa, particularly Nigeria and Niger, armed banditry can be seen as a reaction to deep-rooted structural issues such as poverty, unemployment, weak governance, ethnic marginalisation, and insecurity. These frustrations, when neglected, create fertile ground for violent expressions of grievance, often demonstrated in the form of banditry, cross-border raids, and other forms of organised crime.

The frustration-aggression theory suggests that obstacles blocking individuals from meeting their needs or reaching their objectives create frustration, which can escalate into aggression. In Nigeria and Niger, chronic poverty, marginalisation, and governmental neglect foster deep-seated resentment that sometimes erupts as violent banditry. This approach shifts our view of bandits from mere criminals to agents expressing accumulated social and psychological grievances, “an expression of social and psychological frustration born from years of deprivation and unaddressed grievances” (Bamidele, 2021, p.44).

The porous borders between Nigeria and Niger further compound these issues by allowing the unregulated movement of people, arms, and illicit goods. These border dynamics not only provide logistical support for armed groups but also escalate frustrations stemming from the state’s inability to control its territory or provide security. Thus, the Frustration-Aggression Theory helps explain both the motivations behind armed banditry and the conditions that allow it to persist and spread across borders. By employing this theoretical framework, the study seeks to go beyond surface-level descriptions of criminal activity to uncover the deeper psychological, economic, and political drivers of armed banditry in the region.

### **Historical Evolution of Armed Banditry in Nigeria and Niger**

Nigeria and Niger share a contiguous frontier that spans roughly 13 degrees of longitude from Kamba in Kebbi State (Nigeria) and Gaya in Dosso Department (Niger) in the west, all the way to Borno State (Nigeria) and Diffa Department (Niger) in the east. Along this nearly 2,000-kilometre boundary lie additional crossing points such as Jibiya (Katsina, Nigeria), Dan Issa (Maradi, Niger), Babura (Kano, Nigeria), and Magariya (Zinder, Niger). Given the above, most of the villages along both sides of the border were founded and inhabited by people from the two countries. In the present-day Tangaza Local Government of Sokoto State, for instance, villages such as Kwaccefur, Karfe, Kurdula, and Raka were established by Fulani, Taoureg, or Hausa people from Kasar Adar (Adar Land) in the present-day Tahoua region (Rufa’i, 2018, p. 67).

Given that the border is mainly devoid of dense forests or hostile barriers, long-standing social, cultural, and economic bonds between communities on both sides sustain high levels of cross-border

interaction (Mamman, 2011, p. 2). However, this long-standing relation has facilitated cross-border crimes, particularly armed banditry, across the borders of both Nigeria and Niger. Notably, "the leadership and membership of bandit groups are dominated by Nigerians, including those who carry out attacks in Niger," and their hideouts are mainly located in forests within Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, and Kaduna states. Investigations have confirmed that some of these groups include "rebels from the warring factions from Chad and the Niger Republic who are after arms, ammunition and food for their groups" (Ate & Akinterinwa, 2011, p. 24). Bandit groups often coerce local citizens into collaboration, recruiting "many idle and criminal-minded youths" to expand their influence and sustain their violent operations. Information gathered by the Institute for Security Studies shows that all the bandits are from three ethnic communities – Fulani, Hausa, and Tuareg – found in the two countries. Victims, security officials, government officials, and community leaders confirmed to ISS that most were from the Fulani community in Nigeria.

The historical and ethnic connections between Nigeria and Niger have significantly contributed to the prevalence of banditry. Miles (1994, p.66) asserts that "historically, Nigeria and Niger have been the same in many respects. The only difference was the tiny colonial dividing line. The border was merely a theoretical concept, as it had not deterred interactions between the two hitherto identical entities that are now colonially divided communities". The Fulani, who were among the first in West Africa to adopt Islam through jihad, are spread across more than 20 countries and maintain nomadic lifestyles, enabling them to establish "numerous trade routes within and across their borders" (Omulusi, 2019, p. 76). According to Folami and Folami (2012), "climate change affects Nigerian neighbors like Chad and the Niger Republic more than it affects Nigeria itself." However, Nigeria bears the brunt of its consequences. Environmental pressures, such as drought and famine, have driven herders and displaced populations across borders, often leading to conflict with indigenous communities and contributing to the expansion of violent armed groups.

Another significant driver of banditry is widespread poverty and socio-economic exclusion. As Ate and Akinterinwa (2011, p. 135) explain, the "relative poverty situations in most of the neighbouring countries...encourage regular influx of their nationals into Nigeria to seek better economic and social conditions." Lacking opportunities, many migrants are pushed toward criminality. Additionally, political instability and conflict have contributed to displacement, especially from regions plagued by coups and civil wars. Bobbo (2011, p. 5) argues that "the direct root of armed incursion into Nigeria could be found in the political insurgency which erupted in Chad and later in Niger again in the previous decades." It is suffice to say therefore, that, Armed banditry in the Sahel operates across borders: revenues from extortion, kidnapping for ransoms, and related crimes finance the regional small-arms trade, while the poorly guarded 800-kilometer frontiers with Benin and Niger allow non-Nigerians to join these groups and kidnappings for ransom routinely span the Nigerian–Nigerien boundary (Osasona, 2023, p. 740). These crises have exacerbated insecurity in border communities. As Folami and Folami (2012, p. 70) assert, "these illegal migrants have caused most of the religious crises in the country," having come as herders but later engaging in terrorism and other criminal acts. Weak governance and the inability of authorities to enforce border controls have only deepened the problem, creating a fertile ground for the persistence of armed banditry in both countries. Below is a map showing the Nigeria and Niger borders:



Source: International Crisis Group.  
<https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/301-south-western-niger%20%281%29.pdf>.

### Drivers of Armed Banditry in Nigeria and Niger

Armed banditry has become a pervasive and escalating security challenge across West Africa, with Nigeria and Niger emerging as the focus of its most violent manifestations. Over the past decade, attacks by loosely organised, heavily armed groups have surged, transforming once sporadic raids into systematic campaigns of cattle rustling, kidnappings for ransom, and village assaults (Osasona, 2023, 736). These incidents now occur almost daily in borderlands, where the convergence of economic deprivation, weak state presence, and unregulated migration creates fertile ground for criminal networks. As communities struggle with the loss of livelihoods, mass displacements, and chronic food insecurity, the persistence of banditry underscores not only a regional governance crisis but also the urgent need for coordinated security, development, and cross-border co-operation.

The patterns of armed banditry observed in both Nigeria and Niger align closely with the core assumptions of frustration-aggression theory. In regions such as Zamfara and Katsina in Nigeria, and parts of the Tillabéri region in Niger, persistent socio-economic hardships—marked by extreme poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education or basic infrastructure have created deep-seated frustration among marginalised groups, particularly youth. This frustration is further intensified by perceived state neglect, corruption, and ineffective law enforcement. According to the frustration-aggression model, individuals or groups may redirect their aggression toward more vulnerable targets when legitimate avenues for achieving goals or redressing grievances are blocked. This helps explain the rise in violent acts such as kidnappings, cattle rustling, and attacks on rural communities.

The steady escalation of armed banditry in Nigeria and Niger now poses a significant threat to both national and regional security. This rapid rise is fueled by deep-seated structural and institutional decay, most notably pervasive poverty, high rates of youth unemployment, inadequate policing, and scarce necessities in rural and frontier zones (Rufa'i, 2028, p. 25; Osasona, 2023, p. 12). Moreover, the highly permeable Nigeria–Niger border enables smugglers and armed groups to move people, weapons, and illicit goods with little interference (International Crisis Group, 2021). The fallout for border communities is severe: large-scale displacement, interrupted agriculture and commerce, mounting food shortages, and a profound erosion of faith in public institutions (Dimas, 2020, p. 15; Osasona,

2023, p. 740). This section, therefore, explains some of the factors that have contributed to the prevalence of armed banditry in Nigeria and Niger.

1. *Border Porosity*: Naturally, one of the primary reasons for the prevalence of armed banditry in Nigeria and Niger is the porousness of their borders and the poor policing of the border between the two countries. The porous nature of the borders is compounded by inadequate border security personnel, poor logistics, obsolete surveillance facilities, and corruption among the border security agencies. Revenues from "extortion, ransom, and other criminal funds...drive the regional trade in small arms and light weapons and lubricate transnational crime in the wider Sahel region" (Osasona, 2023, p.740). Ineffective border controls have enabled widespread smuggling of small arms and light weapons into and out of both countries, fueling the insurgency over time. The porous, poorly secured frontiers between Nigeria and Niger also facilitate the trafficking of other contraband such as human beings and the movement of armed groups, which in turn sustains kidnapping, banditry, and broader criminal networks (Ayodele & Shiru, 2024, p. 97). Because there are "no impenetrable forests" or formal barriers to movement, long-standing socio-cultural and economic ties facilitate both legitimate exchanges and criminal crossings.

2. *Poverty and Socio-economic Deprivation*: Socio-economic hardship also fuels banditry across both nations. Many border communities suffer extreme poverty, youth unemployment, and lack of basic services—conditions that create "a fertile ground for criminal activities" (Ate and Akinterinwa, 2011, p.135). Young men facing few legitimate livelihood options often see banditry as a quick source of income through livestock theft, ransom kidnappings, and extortion. These economic frustrations align closely with the frustration-aggression theory, which posits that blocked opportunities for achieving social goals can lead individuals to express aggression. For instance, Dimas (2021, p. 43) identifies the neglect of rural communities and the failure of governance in northwestern Nigeria and southern Niger as key drivers of banditry. He links the prevalence of violence to youth disillusionment with the state and the absence of legitimate economic opportunities. Similarly, Osasona 2023, p. 12) argues that armed banditry thrives where state presence is weak and communities, left to fend for themselves, either support or tolerate the rise of non-state armed groups as an alternative source of authority and livelihood.

3. *Ethnic Dynamics and Nomadic Movements*: The ethnic and nomadic nature of certain groups, especially the Fulani, further complicates the security picture. With communities spread across more than twenty countries, the Fulani maintain transhumant lifestyles that naturally cross arbitrary national lines. Criminal networks have sometimes exploited their mobility: as Omulusi observes, the Fulani's "numerous trade routes within and across their borders" facilitate both pastoralism and illicit activities (Omulusi, 2019, p. 76). Moreover, climate-driven desertification in Chad and Niger has driven many pastoralists into Nigeria, leading to migratory pressures that can trigger violent clashes over grazing rights. Over the past twenty years, these newcomers, initially arriving as pastoralists, have been implicated in numerous religiously tinged conflicts, turning to robbery and extremist activities that undermine national stability (Folami and Folami, 2012, p.70).

4. *Political Instability and State Weakness*: Political instability and weak state presence in remote border regions provide fertile terrain for bandit groups to operate with impunity. Where government authority is weak, bandits establish de facto control—collecting "criminal funds" that bankroll further arms trafficking (Osasona, 2023, p. 740). Without reliable policing or judicial recourse, communities are left vulnerable to raids and kidnappings, which in turn deepen mistrust of the state and spur the rise of local vigilante militias. More so, some government and traditional leaders are reportedly backing bandits to divert public funds and destabilise political rivals. This alleged involvement, especially in cattle rustling and providing protection for bandits, has eroded the credibility of traditional institutions in West Africa. Once respected as symbols of unity and conflict resolution, these institutions now face

declining public trust due to their perceived role in worsening insecurity, particularly in Nigeria's North-west region.

5. *Small Arms Trafficking and Weapons Accessibility:* The proliferation of small arms and light weapons is another central driver. Arms flowing out of conflicts in Mali, Libya, and Chad saturate West African markets, then travel freely through unmonitored corridors into Nigeria and Niger. Many bandit leaders are former combatants from neighbouring rebellions, now collaborating with local criminals for profit and protection (Ate and Akinterinwa, 2011, p.24). This influx of arms has not only empowered bandits but also escalated the intensity and lethality of attacks. Consequently, armed banditry in Nigeria and Niger must be viewed as a regional crisis requiring a collective security framework.

6. *Religious Radicalisation and Ideological Penetration:* Religious extremism and ideological infiltration have become intertwined with criminal banditry. Over the past two decades, northern Nigeria has seen the spread of radical Islamist ideologies, some of which arrived via migrant networks from Niger and Chad. As Folami and Folami note, these movements helped spark religious crises in cities such as Maiduguri and Kano (Folami and Folami, 2012, p.70). Bandit groups sometimes form alliances with extremist cells, blurring the lines between purely criminal motives and political or religious agendas.

### **State and Regional Responses to Armed Banditry**

In West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has championed regional efforts to curb armed banditry through a combination of various disarmament initiatives and legal frameworks. The ECOWAS Small Arms Programme (ECOSAP) works with national commissions (NATCOMs) and civil society organisations through the West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) to “collect and destroy all surplus weapons” liable to fuel banditry (ECOSAP, Art. 51). Funded by the European Union and donor nations such as Canada, France, and Japan, ECOSAP also strengthens member-state capacity in small-arms control and supports the ECOWAS Commission’s Security Affairs Unit (Obiakeze et al. 2023, p.758). Despite these measures, uneven implementation of regional protocols and persistent loopholes in border controls limit ECOWAS’s ability to stem the illicit flow of arms.

At the bilateral level, Nigeria and Niger rely on the Nigeria–Niger Joint Commission for Co-operation (NNJCC), established in 1971, as the principal mechanism for cross-border security coordination. In late 2019, governors from Nigeria's Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara states, as well as Niger's Maradi Region, agreed to mixed patrols and reciprocal “right of pursuit” into each other's territory, a move credited with temporarily reducing attacks along key corridors (Dimas, 2021, p. 44). More so, in December 2018, Nigerian and Nigerien forces carried out a coordinated operation in the Maradi border region, which resulted in the death of at least 30 bandits. However, joint casualties of five troops from each country were also reported (The Defence Post, 2018). However, these successes have yet to be institutionalised into a permanent framework, and joint operations remain neglected and underfunded.

Nationally, Nigeria has combined hard-security operations with community-based approaches. The 2013 Kaduna State Vigilante Service Law formalised local self-defence groups, “registered community members” authorised to assist in crime prevention (Peter, Ahmed, & Abdulaqadir, 2023, p.204). Similarly, in 2014, the Nigerian Police Force created a Task Force on Cattle Rustling and Associated Crime under Inspector-General Suleiman Abba, deploying joint military–police units to bandit-affected states. While these efforts have neutralised hundreds of bandits and destroyed hideouts, attacks have resurged once patrols withdraw, underscoring the limits of a predominantly militarised response.

In Niger, security operations are complemented by peace-building initiatives under the High Authority

for the Consolidation of Peace, which runs youth-focused programs in Maradi to improve civil-military relations and deter bandit recruitment. For instance, in 2020, Niger deployed over 1,000 personnel, including the army, gendarmerie, police, and national guard, along its border with Nigeria. This force was bolstered in August 2021 after a presidential visit, aimed at suppressing bandit attacks in the Maradi region (Koné, 2022). While the operation reportedly reduced insecurity, isolated villages continued to face assaults. These efforts have fostered local co-operation but struggle against continued economic marginalisation and weak border surveillance. Both countries face resource constraints, and security personnel often go unpaid for months, lacking adequate equipment, which makes it challenging to sustain joint patrols or intelligence-driven operations (Obiakeze et al. 2023, p. 758).

Overall, while state and regional actors have made important progress through ECOSAP's arms-control programs, the NNJCC's joint patrols, and national task forces, the persistence of banditry highlights persistent gaps: limited institutionalisation of agreements, under-resourced security agencies, and insufficient integration of development, uncontrolled border management and governance reforms alongside kinetic action. Effective combating of armed banditry will require not only continued military co-operation but also robust investment in border management infrastructure, socio-economic development in frontier communities, and consistent enforcement of regional agreements.

### **Conclusion**

This study has critically explored the prevalence of armed banditry in West Africa, with a particular focus on Nigeria and Niger. The research revealed that armed banditry in these countries has metamorphosed into a deeply entrenched security challenge, driven by a combination of socio-economic hardship, porous borders, institutional weakness, and the proliferation of small arms. The involvement of both foreign and local actors, especially along the Nigeria-Niger borderlands, has further complicated efforts to contain the crisis.

Despite numerous national and regional interventions, including joint military operations, vigilante formations, and ECOWAS-led strategies, the persistence of bandit attacks reflects a gap between policy and practice. Weak cross-border co-operation, inadequate intelligence gathering, and corruption within security agencies have significantly undermined these efforts. Banditry has therefore become not only a means of economic survival for many but also a manifestation of deeper structural failures within both states.

Moving forward, it is clear that addressing the prevalence of armed banditry requires more than reactive military responses. Nigeria and Niger must strengthen bilateral collaboration, enhance border surveillance, and invest in socio-economic development, particularly in rural communities most affected by banditry. Only through a comprehensive and sustained approach that tackles both the symptoms and the root causes can lasting peace and security be restored in the region.

### **Recommendations**

To efficiently tackle armed banditry in Nigeria and Niger, both governments should improve joint border patrols, invest in surveillance technology, and enhance intelligence sharing to reduce cross-border crimes. Also, addressing root causes such as poverty, unemployment, and youth marginalisation through the provision of jobs and vocational training is essential to limit bandit recruitment. Regional co-operation through ECOWAS must be strengthened for arms control and coordinated security responses. Community-based security initiatives, including well-trained and regulated vigilante groups, should be supported to complement formal law enforcement efforts. Lastly, policies should be implemented to monitor nomadic pastoralist movements and prevent their exploitation by armed groups, while protecting legitimate herders.



Ensuring proper security along the Nigeria–Niger border is a shared obligation, requiring the governments of both countries to take proactive measures. Transnational crime along this frontier poses significant risks to each country, as widespread public frustration, official corruption, and rampant unemployment have fueled the rise of armed banditry, now a defining feature of cross-border interactions. Breaking this cycle requires comprehensive interventions that integrate community-level policing, economic empowerment, and strengthened regional collaboration, rather than relying solely on force. Absent such holistic strategies that tackle the underlying drivers, banditry will persist as a significant threat to West African stability.

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