



# Banditry, institutional weakness and the Zamfara State amnesty programme

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## Abstract

This article demonstrates how institutional weakness makes amnesty, as a conflict management strategy, ineffective as found in Zamfara State; and how prioritising human security can help combat insecurity. Using Weak Institutions of State as a framework of analysis, the article argued that factors such as loss of territorial control or the sole use of force, crisis of legitimacy, mass poverty, corruption and inability to provide basic services to the citizens as characteristic of states with institutional weakness, create very complex security problems that amnesty is incapable of addressing effectively. Rather than mitigate insecurity, weak institutions in a state further fuel it by creating opportunities for both state and non-state actors to exploit the offer of amnesty for personal enrichment. This article adopted the documentary method of data collection, using deduction and inferences as analytical methods. Based on its findings, the study recommends the need for a more sustainable approach to conflict management that can benefit a larger number of citizens.

**Keywords:** Insecurity, Weak Institutions, Amnesty, Banditry, Zamfara State

## Introduction

The Nigerian state is a colonial creation; hence, after independence, the ruling class that emerged inherited and sustained the dictatorial tendencies of the colonial power that it replaced. Rather than establish a people-oriented system of governance, post-colonial Nigeria further alienated the people, and as the primitive competition for power got fiercer, different fractions and factions of the political elite employed anti-democratic tactics such as ethnicity, suppression of human rights, recruitment of political protégés in a patronage manner, among others, to either secure their hold on power or carryout a reactionary change of power (Ake, 1985, 1992; Ibeanu, 1998; Ekekwe, 1986). This character of political leadership made the Nigerian state to be characterised by weak institutions that are ineffective and incapable of discharging some of the fundamental responsibilities of the state such as the maintenance of law and order, and protection of its territorial integrity (Usman et al., 2015). Political leadership in Nigeria's federating units is sadly similar to the centre as most states lack effective governance institutions and responsive governments that can adequately address the needs of their people.

The fact that Nigeria has been the hotbed of conflicts in Africa for some time now cannot be overstated. The torrential spate of armed violence and criminality in all the geopolitical zones of the country has brought untold hardship to the citizens, especially those who live in the areas affected by these conflicts (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). However, banditry in the Northwest region of Nigeria, particularly in its epicentre, Zamfara state, has seemingly overshadowed all other conflicts in recent times due to the frequency of attacks, their impact on the socio-economic lives of the people and the high number of civilian casualties being recorded. The strategy of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in its first major attempt to tackle the security threat posed by bandits in Zamfara state in 2016 involved further militarisation of the state. The Nigerian Police for instance, in 2016, launched several 'anti-banditry' operations focusing on herder-allied armed groups and roving criminal gangs. In the same year, the Nigerian Army expanded its troop presence in Northwest Nigeria (Nadama, 2019; Anka, 2017). However, the Zamfara state government grew frustrated due to the failure of the FGN's militarised approach to fighting the bandits.

Following a review of the FGN's anti-banditry operations in the state, the Zamfara State government concluded that the use of federal security forces to combat bandits in the state had not yielded significant results or the desired success, in spite of the huge financial investment of the state government in support of these operations (Nadama, 2019). Hence, to tackle insecurity within its jurisdiction, the state government decided to borrow from the FGN's playbook of using amnesty as a strategy to neutralise non-state armed groups, instead of engaging in direct combat with them (cf. Agwu et al., 2022). The state government's justification for the adoption of amnesty is rooted in the claim that the federal security apparatuses in the country, which are under the control of the FGN, are seemingly incapacitated to deal with the security challenges posed by bandits and related armed criminal groups operating within the state, which have their attendant economic and humanitarian crises.

Amnesty has been commonly used by governments for centuries to achieve two major aims. The first is to encourage non-state actors to turn in contraband such as arms and ammunition and the second is to end a violent conflict with armed non-

state actors. Whatever the contractual obligations contained in the amnesty agreement, the government's ultimate aim is to bring these non-state actors into compliance with its law rather than punishing them for their crimes (ICRC Advisory Service, 2017). The FGN's first experiment with amnesty as a means of combating insecurity fuelled by non-state actors after the return to civilian rule in 1999 was in 2009 when the then President, Umaru Yar'adua, announced an amnesty programme for militants in the Niger Delta region of the country. The amnesty offer required militants to surrender themselves and their arms within two months in exchange for immunity from prosecution, as well as financial and educational support towards finding an alternative livelihood (Adibe et al., 2018; Agwu et al., 2022). Since then, amnesty has been offered by the FGN to Boko Haram fighters who are predominantly operational in the Northeastern region of Nigeria. There have been calls by some political actors for the FGN to further extend amnesty to other armed non-state actors operational in other geopolitical zones of the country like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the Unknown Gunmen (UGM), operational in the Southeastern part of the country as a strategy for addressing the security challenges associated with

the activities of these groups (Agbo, 2021; Nwangwu, 2023).

In Zamfara State, however, the state government's adoption of amnesty also failed like the militarised strategy of the FGN. The security situation in the state worsened with almost an exponential rise in incidents of violent attacks by bandits. In fact, almost every village in the state has witnessed the impact of armed banditry despite the existence of a truce between the state government and bandit groups operating within the state. Privileging the Weak Institutions framework of analysis, this paper examined the connection between banditry, institutional weakness and the ineffectiveness of the Zamfara State government's amnesty programme.

### Methodology

The paper adopted the documentary method of data collection. This method was used by the researchers to glean information and data from already documented sources that border on the subject matter of banditry and insecurity in Zamfara State. Thus, the design follows a secondary data analysis to appreciate the numerous studies that have been done in this area. Given this, the study considers carefully selected relevant

documents from credible sources and other academic research on the topic of study. The documentary method is relevant for this study because our task is to glean, illuminate, interpret and extract valuable information in order to draw inference from the available evidence. In other words, we sought to connect different variables through interpretation. Although primary data are not collected when using the documentary method, the ability to triangulate data gathering processes helps neutralise the seeming demerit of the method. Hence, this study relied on multiple credible sources for data gathering so as to corroborate information gotten from one source with other sources. The analysis identifies commonalities and differences in themes, perceptions about insecurity and institutional weakness in Zamfara State, and the recommendations offered within the data set. We essentially relied on articles in journals, books, independent media organisations and official publications of organisations/institutions on the subject matter. An important merit of the documentary method of data collection is economy, and ease, in that information gathered from secondary data does not require the cooperation of the concerned subjects of research.

## Overview of insecurity in Zamfara State: The road to amnesty

Zamfara State is among the seven states that make up the Northwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria: the other six being Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto states. With an estimated population of 9,838,160 based on the 2021 census, it is the 11th most populated state in Nigeria (National Population Commission, 2021). Indigenes of the state are predominantly agrarian people. While the Hausas constitute the dominant tribe, the Fulanis are about 20 to 30 percent of the total population with over 80 percent of them being pastoralists. Zamfara State is endowed with vast forests composed of 30 thick grazing reserves. The grazing reserves cover about two million, two hundred and twenty-five thousand, six hundred and forty-eight hectares [2,225,648 hectares] (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2020). This ideally should provide a habitable environment for pastoral life. Hence, Zamfara has an estimated total livestock of about 6 million, comprising cattle, sheep, goats, camels, horses and donkeys (Anka, 2017).

The activities of bandits in Zamfara State are considered the most critical security challenge that threatens the peace of the state as criminal gangs continue to

exploit the situation to rustle cattle and other ruminant animals. Between 2011 and 2017, no fewer than 15,000 cattle were rustled by armed criminal groups in the state (Anka, 2017). Also, according to the ICG, in terms of destruction of lives and properties, more than 36 communities in the state have been attacked since 2011 (ICG, 2020). The ICG also reported that before the Federal Government's increased security presence in Zamfara State and the adoption of amnesty by the state government, the first significant attempt by the state government to address the bandit-fuelled insecurity in the state was in 2013 when it formed and provided arms to some community-based vigilante groups to protect communities within the state (ICG, 2020). This was aimed at countering the attacks by herder-allied groups of bandits and other criminal gangs. However, as noted in the report, this strategy failed as these criminal groups continued their attacks on communities within the state. Thus, the state government disbanded the state-formed vigilante groups by the end of 2014.

Also, between 2015 and 2016 when the FGN made its first significant effort to combat bandits in the state, the Zamfara state government responded to the increasing violence in the state mostly by

supporting the FGN-controlled security institutions (notably the Nigerian Police and Nigerian Army) with funds and logistics to fight the armed groups. This according to the then state Governor, Abdulaziz Yari, diminished the state's ability to address other pressing socioeconomic problems. Despite its huge investment in the FGN's effort to combat armed criminal groups in Zamfara State, violent attacks targeting civilians and communities continued in the state resulting in the state government's dissatisfaction with the FGN's effort.

For an alternative means of managing the conflict in the state, the Abdulaziz Yari-led government in late 2016 announced its intention to engage in direct negotiation with the armed criminal groups with the intention of offering an amnesty deal to them in exchange for surrender. The state government inaugurated a committee to oversee this negotiation which was headed by the state's Deputy Governor, Malam Ibrahim Wakkala. The armed criminal groups targeted were mostly herder-allied bandits that accounted for the majority of the violent attacks and conflict fatalities in the state.

These bandits made three major demands during negotiations that included first,

that unauthorised vigilantes must stop wanton attacks on herders' communities; second, that security agencies and vigilante groups must stop seizing their cattle, and last, that the government must not continue to neglect herders' communities in the area of development. The state government also made its own demand that bandits must surrender their arms and promise not to invade any community while the peace deal lasted. In addition, the state government also promised and proposed some measures it would adopt to integrate the bandits back into their communities. Some of these measures included the provision of soft grants for them to start up legitimate businesses and the integration of some of them into the government. Both parties agreed to each other's demands and began working on modalities for actualising them (Anka, 2017). This continued and was finalised under the next administration of Bello Muhammad Matawalle, shortly after he assumed office as Governor of Zamfara state in May 2019.

However, despite reaching an agreement to end hostilities in the state, violent attacks and other criminal acts carried out by bandits in Zamfara State rose in the post-amnesty period, with 2020 becoming the bloodiest year. The attacks

took new dimensions as bandits expanded the scope of their targets beyond rural farming communities to include new targets such as travellers, high-profile citizens, public institutions or properties like schools and the general citizenry. Thus, rather than the expected decline in number of attacks as a result of the amnesty, insecurity in Zamfara State was elevated to a new height as violent confrontations became almost a daily occurrence in some parts of the state. This suggests that the adoption of amnesty as a conflict management strategy by the state government has failed to yield the desired result. In the current study, we argued that the failure of the amnesty offered by the Zamfara State government to bandits is inevitable because of the weakness of the sub-national institutions of the state government. This argument is explained in the succeeding analyses and discussions.

### **Weak institutions and insecurity in Zamfara State: A theoretical discourse**

Institutional weakness is the gap between the actual and intended effects of having an institution (Brinks et al., 2020). Thus, the existence of weak institutions makes the translation of national economic potentials to realistic sustainable development difficult or almost

impossible (Owogbemi, 2021). Weak institutions create a disconnect between the government and the governed at all levels, in that public policies often do not achieve the desired or expected impact on citizens' lives due to corruption. This situation worsens the inequality between citizens as the State's corrupt nature often widens the gap between the rich and the poor. Corruption is usually endemic with government officials and institutions not only being offered bribe, but often demanding bribe from citizens and businesses (Kauzlarich & Friedrichs, 2003). Arguably, there is hardly any institution in any state that does not fall short of their intended outcomes; weak institutions have a much larger gap when compared to strong institutions. While strong institutions can cause positive effects in a society, weak institutions undermine the success of many government policies or agendas (Brinks et al., 2020). Weak institutions often result in a state's decline and powerlessness of its government and agencies to effectively discharge some of the fundamental responsibilities of the state such as maintenance of law and order and the protection of its territorial integrity (Usman et al., 2015).

State institutions are considered weak when they are either insignificant,

noncompliant or unstable. Insignificant institutions are weak by design and lack the capacity to produce positive effects. For noncompliant institutions, political actors are complicit in reinforcing its weakness through actions that weaken state institutions. Finally, unstable institutions emerge when state institutions change frequently. As noted by Brinks, Levitsky and Murrilo (2020), frequent changes often lead to institutional weakness because institutions need time to develop.

Although institutional weakness is distinct from weak state capacity, Fukuyama (2013) argued that institutional weakness sets the stage for weak state capacity and other problems of governance, such as state capture or overrun of state security forces by criminal groups. Levitsky (2018) noted that beyond the problem of governance, institutional weakness undermines democratic legitimacy because poor governmental performance erodes public trust in politicians, political parties and even the institutions themselves. The citizens are alienated from governance through undemocratic means like human rights violations, press repression, electoral fraud, and shrinking of the civil society space. Conflicts become problematic when the institutional

mechanisms established by the state fail to manage them and prevent their escalation.

In a country like Nigeria where power is shared between national, sub-national and local governments, this legitimacy crisis permeates all the levels of governance. Weak institutions beget 'strong' leaders who fill the vacuum created by underperforming institutions. Owing to the all-consuming nature of political contests in Nigeria, political leaders often find it desirable to weaken institutions in order to be less accountable in the exercise of political power. The implication of this is that Nigeria at national, sub-national and local levels of governance is characterised by insignificant, non-compliant and/or unstable institutions, as well as low legitimacy for political leaders who are responsible for undermining institutional performance.

Thus, Zamfara State government (which is a sub-national level of government) possesses similar characteristics with the Nigerian national government in terms of institutional performance and nature of political contest. Although the security institution of the Nigerian State is exclusively under the control of the national government, its failure to effectively tackle banditry in Zamfara



State led to a temporal reliance on traditional security institutions founded on vigilantism by the sub-national government. Thus, local or community vigilantes were armed and funded by the Zamfara State government to tackle insecurity in the state. Traditional security institution was, however, insignificant, noncompliant and unstable to combat insecurity in Zamfara State as political actors are often complicit in the crisis. While some political actors take advantage of the situation for economic gains, some exploit it for unfair political gains. In extreme instances, the campaign against insecurity in Zamfara State has been used to attack opposition politicians

and parties by the state Governor due to the absence of strong sub-national legislative and judicial institutions to checkmate the Governor's abuse of power. Aihe (2022) for instance, reported that the Zamfara State Governor, Bello Matawalle, under the guise of combating insecurity, shut down six media broadcast outfits for covering the political activities of an opposition party in the state. Table 1 below shows evidence of the complicity of political/state actors fuelling violence in Zamfara State, while Table 2 shows the financial and material benefits bandits gained from accepting the Zamfara State amnesty deal.

**Table 1:** State actors indicted for complicity in armed conflict in Zamfara State

1	Two ex-governors of Zamfara state
2	10 military officers
3	15 Emirs
4	33 District Heads

**Note.** Culled from the de-classified part of the commissioned report by the Zamfara Committee for Finding Solution to Armed Banditry in the State, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/09/zamfara-report-on-banditry-two-ex-govs-indicted-another-for-trial-15-emirs-to-be-removed/>

**Table 2:** Financial and Material Benefits accrued to Bandits in the Zamfara State' Amnesty Deal

Offers	Targeted Recipients
<b>Payment of cash and/or reward of ram in exchange for arms surrendered</b>	All bandits that surrendered arms within the period agreed upon
<b>Payment of cash for return of rustled cattle</b>	All bandits that returned stolen cattle within the period agreed upon
<b>Payment of monthly stipend of N20,000 as social intervention fund</b>	About 18,000 people described as 'foot soldiers' within bandit cells in the state
<b>Offer of houses and cars</b>	Leaders of bandit cells
<b>Offer of appointment into government positions in the state</b>	Leaders of bandit cells

**Note.** Culled from Zamfara State Government press briefings, <https://gazettengr.com/amnesty-zamfara-bandits-surrender-200-weapons-to-government/> and <http://punchng.com/zamfara-gov-to-grant-100-bandits-amnesty/>

Table 1 shows that political actors, including security agents and community leaders, are known for complicity in the Zamfara State armed banditry. They often aid and abet bandits in exchange for criminal and other material rewards. The de-classified information contained in the report presented during a press briefing by Governor Matawalle in September 2021 showed that two ex-governors of the state, 10 military officers, 15 emirs and about 33 district heads were complicit in fuelling armed conflict in Zamfara State. Although the names of the ex-governors and the

military officers are yet to be de-classified for public knowledge, names of some of the emirs and district heads indicted by the Zamfara State Committee for Finding Solution to Armed Banditry report were released during the press briefing of Governor Matawalle. The affected district heads in the Dansadau community are Alhaji Shafiu Salihu and Alhaji Ishe. While Alhaji Salihu was accused of instigating and encouraging local militias in his District to carry out jungle justice on any Fulani caught rustling cattle, Alhaji Ishe was accused of fuelling bandits' attacks on Hausa

communities in Dansadau. The Emir of Birnin Gwari was also indicted in the report for fuelling armed attacks in Zamfara State (Vanguard, 2021). The complicity of some state actors and politicians in insecurity in Zamfara State was reiterated by the state Governor in late 2021 when he stated that politicians sabotaged the amnesty programme his administration instituted for bandits.

Another recurring theme in studies about amnesty in Nigeria has been the lack of transparency about the actual amount voted into it and the issue of misappropriation or outright embezzlement of amnesty-related funds (Nwangwu, 2022). The amnesty offer of the Zamfara State government is no different as it lacks transparency and accountability due to the weakness of other sub-national institutions such as the Zamfara State legislature in carrying out an effective check and balance on the executive arm, particularly the state Governor. Information on the actual amount spent on amnesty or fighting insecurity by the Zamfara State government cannot be independently verified easily. As shown in Table 2, it was stated by the Zamfara state government that about 18,000 'repentant' bandits were going to be beneficiaries of the N20,000 monthly stipend without any

clarity about how they arrived at the 18,000 figure or the criteria adopted to determine eligible beneficiaries. The identities of the beneficiaries have not been made public by the state government and such lack of clarity often creates opportunity for misappropriation of funds or outright embezzlement. Also, at the finalisation of the amnesty deal, the state government announced that part of the provisions of the amnesty was the establishment of a Ruga settlement in each of the three senatorial zones of Zamfara State to resettle herders and boost economic activities. However, little information was given by the state government on the cost of the project and how public funds will be appropriated for it. The state government earmarked 300 hectares of land for the project (100 hectares per senatorial zone), and in late 2021, it stated that one of the Ruga settlements has reached 80 percent completion. No information was provided on the funding of this project as well as the progress of the project in the other two senatorial zones (Sahara Reporters, 2021a). Further, in its 2021 budget, the government earmarked the sum of ₦200 million for amnesty benefits to bandits and another ₦354 million for building of grazing reserves (Sahara Reporters, 2021a). The authenticity of these figures as the actual financial

requirements for the amnesty programme cannot be ascertained due to lack of transparency, which seems to have provided opportunities for some state actors to government officials to embezzle public funds given the ineffective checks on them by the weak sub-national institutions in Zamfara State.

Following the assumptions of the Weak Institutions framework, we argued that institutions of governance in Zamfara State exhibit similar underperforming characteristics as the institutions at the national level. The security institution at the national level has failed to effectively combat insecurity in Zamfara State despite additional financial and other logistical supports it gets from the Zamfara State government. Also, the use of sub-national security institution (vigilante system) has been grossly inadequate in combating the activities of bandits and other criminal groups in Zamfara State; while other sub-national institutions such as the state legislative and judicial arms of government have been weak as they have demonstrated incapacity to enact effective anti-banditry laws and prosecute perpetrators respectively. For instance, despite the press release by the state government about the culpability of some political

actors in fuelling insecurity in the state, the government is yet to institute any legal action against them, especially those indicted in a committee report. This reflects the weakness and underperforming nature of the relevant institutions of governance. In 2021 also, the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) reported that two members of the Zamfara State House of Assembly, Yusuf Muhammad (Anka constituency) and Ibrahim Tukur (Bakura constituency) were suspended from parliament over alleged ties with banditry in the state. However, this matter was never formally forwarded to the Nigerian Police for proper investigation (ICIR, 2021).

The legitimacy crisis caused by the underperformance of sub-national institutions creates opportunities for political actors to intensify their struggle for political power through many undemocratic and illegal strategies. For political opponents, complicit involvement in crime or acts of deliberate sabotage that undermine the existing government's anti-banditry efforts and delegitimise their staying in power is often adopted. For the government in power, anti-banditry measures like the award of amnesty to 'repentant' bandits is often an avenue for the

misappropriation of public funds due to the weakness of sub-national institutions in enforcing accountability. Thus, the amnesty programme in Zamfara State and the campaign against banditry in general became a means of rewarding political allies in a patronage manner, arming loyalists to intimidate political rivals or opponents and to advance primitive accumulation of wealth. It is against this background that we explain the link between weak institutions and insecurity in Zamfara State in connection with the state's amnesty deal.

### **Weakness of sub-national institutions and the failure of Zamfara State government's amnesty initiative for bandits**

There are adequate pieces of evidence to show that weakness of sub-national institutions impacts negatively on governance in Zamfara State. The state has the highest number of poor and vulnerable people in Nigeria with a record of 3,836,484 people from 825,337 households (NASSCO, 2021)

**Table 3:** 10 Worst states in terms of poverty headcount rate in Nigeria (2019 data)

Ranking	States	Share of people in poverty (%)
1	Sokoto	87.73
2	Taraba	87.72
3	Jigawa	87.02
4	Ebonyi	79.76
5	Adamawa	75.41
6	Zamfara	73.98
7	Yobe	72.34
8	Niger	66.11
9	Gombe	62.31
10	Bauchi	61.53

**Note.** Culled from Statistica.com, 2019 state-by-state poverty headcount in Nigeria, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1121438/poverty-headcount-rate-in-nigeria-by-state/#:~:text=Poverty%20headcount%20rate%20in%20Nigeria%202019%2C%20by%20state&text=The%20Nigerian%20states%20of%20Sokoto,the%20lowest%20rate%20in%20Nigeria.>

**Table 4:** Zamfara State Human Development Report (2019)

	Nigeria	Zamfara state	Ranking of Zamfara among states in Nigeria (Including FCT)
<b>HDI (2019)</b>	0.511	0.339	32 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Longevity Index</b>	0.459	0.475	32 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Education Index</b>	0.797	0.424	32 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>GNI per capita (in USD)</b>	1,756	575	32 <sup>nd</sup>

**Note.** Culled from Human Development Report: Nigeria, by the UNDP, <https://www.undp.org/nigeria/publications/human-development-report-2019>

Tables 3 and 4 above show the negative impact of weak sub-national institutions on governance in Zamfara State. Poverty rate in the state is 73.98% which is higher than the national average and the state also performs badly when compared to the national average on almost every development indicator. It ranks 32nd out of 36 states on the Human Development Index (HDI). The alienation of the people from governance limits their chances of economic prosperity, so they are often forced into criminality. The financial benefits associated with criminal activities like banditry and other related crimes such as illegal gold mining, arms smuggling and kidnapping (which has turned to a multimillion-naira industry) serve as economic incentives for many young people in Zamfara State to engage in criminal activities. The weakness or ineffectiveness of sub-national security institutions in Zamfara State in

combating insecurity, as well as the ineffectiveness of the legal or judicial institutions in punishing offenders, embolden the perpetrators of violence and other complicit actors and sustain criminal activities. As posited earlier, institutional weakness undermines the success of many government policies or agendas, and this has been the case with the amnesty initiative of the Zamfara State government. The noncompliant nature of sub-national institutions in the state indicates that the amnesty initiative of the state government has been grossly undermined by both acts of sabotage by rival politicians and misappropriation of public funds meant for the initiative. The weakness of the sub-national institutions responsible for oversight functions on the activities of the executive arm of the government shows lack of clarity on how funds are raised and utilised for the amnesty initiative of the Zamfara State

government. Thus, rather than reduce conflict, violence intensified in the post-amnesty period.

Available evidence shows that rather than de-escalation in the post-amnesty period, insecurity rose in this period and crime became an economic venture. Organised armed groups capable of causing mayhem and disrupting public life (with the complicity of some political actors and security agents) intensified attacks for the attraction of amnesty offer from the Zamfara State government. On the other hand, legitimacy crisis caused by weak sub-national institutions in the state turned the amnesty initiative into a means of patronage settlements to both political allies and some leaders of criminal gangs

who are often used to intimidate both known and perceived political rivals in the state. Thus, the absence of an effective institutional check on the initiative left it to become also a political weapon in the hands of the state executives (e.g., the Governor) who not only arbitrarily decides the amount approved for the initiative, but also who gets what. In sum, the initiative failed in its original objective to combat insecurity in Zamfara State because bandits increased their capacity to plan and coordinate attacks in both the state and neighbouring states curbing new different hideouts previously unknown or non-operational which is estimated to be around 105 camps by the end of 2020 (Agbo, 2021).

**Table 5:** Snapshot of the conflict in Zamfara State before and after the amnesty deal

	<b>*Before May 2019</b>	<b>**End of 2020</b>
<b>Estimated number of deaths</b>	2,619	6000-8000
<b>Estimated number of cattle rustled</b>	14,378	200,000-400,000
<b>Estimated number of people kidnapped/abducted</b>	1,190	6000-6500
<b>Estimated number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)</b>	100,000	120,000-190,000
<b>Estimated amount of ransom paid for release of people kidnapped</b>	N970 million	N1.8 billion-N2.8 billion
<b>Estimated numbers of properties destroyed</b>	336 vehicles, 600 shops, 2000 homes	3500-4000 (shops and homes alone)

**Note.** culled from *The Punch* Newspaper 2021, April 16, <https://punchng.com/2619-people-killed-1190-kidnapped-in-zamfara-between-2011-and-2019/>

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in a 2021 report noted that a total of 129 incidents of violent confrontations and attacks occurred in Zamfara State in 2020. Out of these incidents, 62 were combats between Nigeria's security forces and bandits, 26 were remote incidents between bandits and vigilante groups and sometimes against other unidentified local militia groups. There were also 39 incidents of attacks against civilians carried out by bandits. The report noted that out of the 39 attacks against civilians, 30 were armed attacks, while nine were reported incidents of abduction. There were also two reported incidents of anti-banditry riots with fatal consequences. There were 258 fatalities in the recorded incidents of clashes between bandits and security forces, 294 fatalities were recorded from clashes between bandits and vigilantes/local militias, 140 fatalities were recorded from bandits' attacks on civilians and two fatalities from riots against banditry (EASO, 2021).

Further, according to the 2021 EASO report, the number of fatalities in most of the reported incidents, particularly the death tolls in bandits' attacks on civilians, confrontation with the Nigerian military and vigilantes/unidentified local militias, could have been higher as most of the credible organisations that track incidents of violent outbreaks of conflicts and casualties were unable to verify many claims of outbreaks due to the security situation in most of the terrains where these incidents allegedly occur. Since a significant number of the rural communities in Zamfara State where incidents reportedly occurred are either ungoverned or poorly governed areas, some incidents were not effectively tracked by credible independent organisations. Despite the situation of possible under-reporting of incidents, information contained in the 2021 EASO report about the security situation in Zamfara State still depicted a worrisome situation. The EASO data is summarised in table 6 below.

**Table 6:** 2020 Zamfara State security situation report

Classification of Incidents	Number of Incidents	Fatalities
<b>Bandits VS Nigerian Security Forces</b>	62	258
<b>Bandits VS Vigilantes/Local Militias</b>	26	294
<b>Bandits' attacks against civilians</b>	39	140
<b>Riot</b>	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>694</b>

**Note.** Culled from EASO (2021, p.105) *Nigeria's Security Situation Report*. Valletta, Malta: EASO



The security situation in Zamfara did not improve in 2021 as bandits continued to carry out unprovoked attacks on both security forces and civilians. The year witnessed more attacks and the surge in the activities of bandits which resulted in 703 deaths, the highest number of recorded deaths by any state of the federation from violent attacks (Oluwafemi, 2022; Council of Foreign Relations, 2022). The year 2022 started on a bloody note also in Zamfara as violent attacks by bandits led to 200 deaths between 4 to 6 January. Although the state government tried to under-report the number of fatalities as it placed the death toll at 58, a spokesperson of the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, however, reported that over 200 bodies were recovered from the location of the incident (Egbas, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022).

Another crime perpetuated by bandits that skyrocketed in the post-amnesty

period is kidnapping for ransom from government or/and families of the abducted. While bandits were traditionally known for cattle rustling and theft (Okoli & Nwangwu, 2022), the Zamfara State government's willingness to negotiate with criminal groups as they target vulnerable members of the society like school children, has created a new business venture for bandits who now account for the most reported cases of abductions in the state. As shown in table 7, between 2011 and 2018, known bandit groups reportedly carried out abductions in 2011, 2015 and 2018 only. In these three years, only 2.5%, 20% and 15% of abductions were reportedly carried out by them. However, the data showed that between 2019 when the peace deal came into effect and 2020, there was over a 500 percent increase in the number of abductions and bandits were reported to have carried out an estimated 65 percent of these abductions.

**Table 7:** Percentage of abductions caused by bandits in Zamfara State, 2011-2020

Year	Estimated number of abductions	% of abductions carried out by bandits
2011	28	2.5
2012	30	0
2013	50	0
2014	450	0
2015	90	20
2016	100	0
2017	120	0
2018	380	15
2019	215	40
2020	1,100	65

**Note.** Culled from the collaborative report of the Armed Conflict and Event Data Project [ACLED] and the Zamfara State Police, <https://www.ft.com/content/d8d9bf8f-0aa2-405f-b3f7-2a3e7e7b297c>.

The motivation of these bandit groups appears to be purely economic. The opportunity to receive financial settlement from the state government based on the amnesty initiative, as well as the weakness of sub-national institutions to hold them accountable for their crimes has further intensified their criminal activities in the post-amnesty period. The futility of the Zamfara State government's willingness to grant criminal groups 'forgiveness' and compensate them after perpetrating acts of violence was exemplified in the aftermath of the December 11, 2020, kidnap of over 300 schoolboys from a

Government Science Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina state, a state that shares a common boundary with Zamfara. The leader of the gang of bandits that abducted the schoolboys, Auwalum Daudawa, and seven of his men were welcomed to the Zamfara State Government House by Governor Matawalle and offered amnesty in February 2021 (Sahara Reporters, 2021b). Auwalum Daudawa, however, never stopped his act of banditry as he was reportedly ambushed and killed with four other members of his gang few months later while attempting to steal a herd of cattle (Alagbe, 2021).

**Table 8:** Incidents of school abductions in Zamfara State after the 2019 amnesty deal

Date	Local Government Area (LGA)	School	Incidents	Dates of Release of Abductees	Source
<b>February 26, 2021</b>	Jangebe LGA	Government Girls Science Secondary School, Jangebe	Gunmen kidnapped 317 schoolgirls from GGSSC, Jangebe, Zamfara state	March 2, 2021	<a href="http://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/timeline-of-abductions-in-schools/amp/">www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/timeline-of-abductions-in-schools/amp/</a>
<b>September 1, 2021</b>	Maradun LGA	Government Day Secondary School, Kaya	75 students and a teacher were abducted from the school by a large number of armed bandits	September 12, 2021	<a href="https://www.premiumtimes.com/news/headlines/484549-75-students-abducted-from-zamfara-school-freed.html">https://www.premiumtimes.com/news/headlines/484549-75-students-abducted-from-zamfara-school-freed.html</a>
<b>April 13, 2022</b>	Tsafe LGA	College of Health Science and Technology, Tsafe	Bandits invaded and abducted 5 students of the College	Victims still with the abductors as at the time of submitting this manuscript	<a href="https://www.channelstv.com/2022/04/13/bandits-abduct-five-students-in-zamfara-state/amp/">https://www.channelstv.com/2022/04/13/bandits-abduct-five-students-in-zamfara-state/amp/</a>

**Note.** Culled from the listed sources

Many communities remain at the mercy of bandit groups despite the amnesty offer from the Zamfara State government. Maishanu (2022) reported that 47 villages in Mutumji communities in the Maru LGA of Zamfara state remain under the control of bandits and between September 2021 and February 2022, they paid the sum ₦40.7 million as protection levy to bandits following the sack of

military base in the area. This claim is also corroborated by Babangida's (2021) report that bandits attacked a community in Tsafe LGA of Zamfara State in November of 2021 as punishment over its failure to pay a ₦3 million protection levy. Among other crimes, the bandits looted the villages in the LGA, raped women in their houses and abducted six people during the operation.

**Table 9:** Food security indicators for Zamfara State

Population within Phase 3 (crisis stage) of food insecurity	537,000
Population within Phase 2 (pressure stage) of food insecurity	710,000
% of population below the UN WFP's acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS) (Zamfara North)	62%
% of population below the UN WFP's acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS) (Zamfara West)	38%
% of population below the UN WFP's acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS) (Zamfara Central)	19%
% of IDPs below the UN WFP's acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS)	84%
% of the population with the economic capacity to meet essential needs like food (Zamfara North)	29%
% of the population with the economic capacity to meet essential needs like food (Zamfara West)	27%
% of the population with the economic capacity to meet essential needs like food (Zamfara Central)	42%

**Note.** Culled from the World Food Programme (WFP) February 2021 Assessment Report, <https://www.wfp.org/publications?f%5B0%5D=country%3A2048>

The humanitarian crisis banditry has also created in Zamfara State cannot be overemphasized. A look at the data on

food security indicators in the state paints a vivid picture of the situation. The percentages of the population in Zamfara North, Zamfara West and Zamfara

Central below the UN WFP's acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS) are 62, 38 and 19 respectively. Banditry has affected economic activities in the predominant agrarian state and only an estimated 33% of the population in Zamfara State has the capacity to meet essential needs like food. It has also caused internal displacement and 84% of IDPs in the state are below the UN WFP's acceptable FSC. Thus, the state government's amnesty deal with bandits has not been effective in curbing insecurity in Zamfara State.

### Conclusion

The data presented in this article clearly indicate that the amnesty offer of the Zamfara State government to bandits failed to de-escalate insecurity. On the contrary, it provided opportunities for some political actors and other stakeholders like security agents to profit from the amnesty programme in a manner that fuels insecurity in the state. Lack of deliberate attempt by the political class to strengthen the sub-national institutions needed for effective governance in Zamfara State has continued to undermine all political interventions aimed at curbing insecurity in the state. As long as government at the sub-national level continues to suffer from legitimacy crisis, political opponents

will continue to exploit the situation for selfish benefits. With governance not having a positive impact on the people's lives, more people are pushed into criminalities as they exploit the weakness of the institutions of governance for economic gains. Thus, in this work, we argued that the failure of the amnesty deal with bandits in Zamfara State is rooted in the weakness of the sub-national institutions of the state which continues to erode the state government of legitimacy and also diminish its capability to discharge the duties of governance effectively. Policies or agenda are inherently undermined by these weak institutions in a manner that often result in the alienation of intended beneficiaries, or policy objectives not being achieved. The amnesty initiative in Zamfara State is an example of government policy that is inherently undermined by weak institutions.

Worsening socioeconomic conditions of citizens constitute an important trigger factor of crime and insecurity all over the world and the situation in Zamfara State is no different. Existence of weak sub-national institutions also means that policies or agenda of the state government targeted at combating insecurity and other manifestations of the worsening socioeconomic conditions

do not achieve the target objectives. Low legitimacy of the state government, which is also a consequence of underperforming sub-national institutions, makes the government to prioritise a 'strong' control over the weakened institutions due to the intense and often undemocratic nature of power struggle among political actors. Thus, rather than make a conscious effort to strengthen these sub-national institutions of governance, political actors deliberately undermine these institutions in their quest to gain an advantage in power tussle. The Zamfara State amnesty deal is an ineffective initiative of combating insecurity as it does not address the root cause, which is weakness of sub-national institutions of governance. Rather than reduce insecurity, the amnesty offer provided political actors (those in power and opposition politicians) opportunities to profit from the insecurity in the state due to absence of strong sub-national institutions to hold them accountable.

There is need to strengthen the sub-national institutions of governance in Zamfara State to perform the task they were established to achieve. Institutional strengthening is a more sustainable approach to conflict management as amnesty is incapable of addressing the

long-term security challenge of Zamfara State. It is not only too expensive to sustain considering other developmental challenges that Zamfara State is faced with, but deliberate sabotage of the initiative by political actors also makes it ineffective. The state is among the worst performing states in Nigeria on almost every development indicator and therefore, needs to prioritise strengthening its institutions of governance to address security and other challenges it is faced with. Data showing the negative socioeconomic impacts of weak sub-national institutions in Zamfara State were presented in this study, as well as the data that showed the complicity of political actors in fuelling insecurity in the state. Also, data showing that insecurity increased in Zamfara State in the post-amnesty period were also presented to support our central argument that the failure of the amnesty for bandits in Zamfara State is rooted in the weakness of the sub-national institutions of the state which continues to erode the state government of legitimacy and also diminish its capability to discharge the duties of governance, including the provision of security for the people. In light of these findings, we recommend the need for deliberate and conscious efforts aimed at strengthening the institutions of

<p>governance in the state as this is a more sustainable and effective strategy of combating insecurity and addressing other negative socioeconomic conditions that further escalate the security challenges of the state. Strengthening</p>	<p>sub-national institutions improves the legitimacy of the government because it promotes public accountability. It will also enhance the capacity of existing security institutions to effectively combat insecurity</p>
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