

Rural Banditry and Economic Crimes: Exploring the Perceptions of Male Pastoralists' Lived Experience in Kwara State, North-Central Nigeria

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Abstract

Armed banditry and insurgency are among the principal insecurity challenges in present-day Nigeria. This study investigated the lived experience of male pastoralists on rural banditry and associated economic crimes in Kwara State, north-central Nigeria to fill identified gaps in the literature. A sample of 20 pastoralists' hamlets was selected for the study. Data were collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data. Data analysis showed that study participants were aware of the problem of rural banditry. Major banditry-related economic crimes reported by participants were robbery and burglary, livestock rustling, farmers-herders conflicts with attendant destruction of pastoralists' assets, among others. Through facilitation by pairwise ranking exercise within focus group sessions, study participants identified livestock rustling as the most important banditry-related economic crime. Participants carried out social profiling of livestock rustlers. Results further suggested that the key factors influencing livestock rustling were economic deprivations and social dislocation in Nigerian society, criminal networks on livestock rustling and illegal trading on rustled livestock, and access to light weapons by the livestock rustlers, among others. Participants reported the immediate and long-term effects of livestock rustling on the crime victims and their communities. The study recommends the rollout of the government-planned National Animal Identification and Traceability System, the enactment of state law that would prohibit indiscriminate livestock transportation and, the creation of a local security system to complement the state-based policing system to reduce armed banditry and livestock rustling among the study population.

Keywords: rural banditry; economic crimes; male pastoralists; livestock rustling; qualitative research

Introduction

Rural Nigeria is home to the agricultural population of the country. Depending on geographical factors, various communities in rural Nigeria possess comparative advantage over each other in certain types of agriculture. Some are suitable for arable crop farming, livestock farming, poultry, fishery, and cash crop production (Adama et al., 2018). Rural communities have no standard human population size. They can range from a few individuals to some hundreds of people (Ogunleye et al., 2018). In rural communities in Nigeria, social amenities are often inadequate, inefficient and poorly managed by the government. The majority of the inhabitants suffer from multi-dimensional poverty typified by poor and sub-optimal human nutrition, transport facilities, housing and sanitation facilities, access of children to education, healthcare access for all the inhabitants, access to clean energy sources, engagement of child labour, inefficient communication and mobile telephony services, poor access to formal banking facilities, and lack of financial inclusion (Sulaimon, 2022).

The economy of Nigeria's rural communities is predominantly agricultural and informal. However, rural communities are important to urban centres that are close to them for the local supply of farm produce such as food, vegetables and fruits and, equally serve as markets for the urban-based retailers of agro-inputs, pharmaceutical goods, household consumables and, toiletries among others (Adama et al., 2018). State-based security agencies (uniformed security agencies) do not have a strong presence in many of the rural communities in Nigeria. The personnel of the state-based security agencies usually come around periodically on market days to put up illegal roadblocks to extort money from farmers, local traders and rural transport service providers (Asanebi, 2023).

Rural communities in Nigeria are confronted with diverse insecurity problems which constitute challenges to the agriculture-based livelihood systems of farmers. Among the problems that have emerged and then festered in recent years is the problem of armed banditry and insurgency. These two insecurity problems are closely related and supply criminal to each other's bands (Ojo et al., 2023). Armed banditry refers to criminal activities that involve the use of harmful weapons to threaten and intimidate potential victims to plunder or forcefully dispose of their moveable assets and other valuables (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014a). Armed banditry can take place in both urban and rural geographical settings. Therefore, rural bandits are violent criminals that are domiciled in the countryside or choose to make such an environment their operating arena (Ukaeje, 2021), and their activities have effects on the social and economic lives of the inhabitants and their commercial partners (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018).

Among the crimes that rural bandits perpetrate are economic crimes that have direct effects on the economic well-being of their victims. Economic crimes are subsets of the forms of crimes that are traditionally categorized as "crimes against property" in the criminological literature (Case et al., 2017). Based on previous research outcomes in the north-west and north-

east of Nigeria, documented examples of economic crimes that are associated with rural banditry and afflicting all categories of farmers include kidnapping for ransom and violent robbery along the rural portions of inter-state highways (MacEachern, 2020; Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017), livestock rustling (Bello & Abdullahi, 2021), the existence of forest warlords (see footnote 6 for a description) that inhibit and disturb farmers' access to the local markets and in some instances impose illegal security levies on resource-poor farmers and their communities (Onwuzurigbo, 2020).

Studies have reported that armed banditry has been on the increase in recent years in Nigeria, and the insecurity problem has diffused from its epicentre (the north-western and north-eastern parts) to other regions of Nigeria, including the north-central and southern regions (Lenshie, 2018; Ukaeje, 2021). Similar to what has been going on in the north-west and north-east of Nigeria, the rural roads linking urban communities in the north-central and southern regions are currently volatile zones of operation for armed bandits (Atubi, 2022).

Empirical studies have been completed on rural banditry and economic crimes in the north-east and north-west of Nigeria (for example Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017; MacEachern, 2020; Onwuzurigbo, 2020; Bello & Abdullahi, 2021). However, little is known about the lived experience of the pastoralists in Kwara State, the north-central region of Nigeria, on rural banditry and associated economic crimes. This identified gap in the literature provided impetus for the present study. Therefore, the general objective of the current study was to explore the perceptions of male pastoralists' lived experience in Kwara State on rural banditry and the most common economic crimes that are associated with insecurity, using qualitative research and phenomenological approaches.

The specific objectives of the current study were to: (1) investigate awareness of rural banditry among the male pastoralists; (2) assess the types of economic crimes that are associated with rural banditry; (3) identify the most important crime(s) from a list of economic crimes that would be supplied based on the "social meaning" process (or social constructivism) among the study participants; (4) investigate the social profile of criminals/bandits based on the knowledge and experiences of the study participants; (5) examine the factors that are influencing the most important rural banditry-related economic crimes identified; (6) assess the effects of the most important economic crimes on victims and their hamlets; and (7) investigate the local control and mitigation measures for the most important banditry related economic crimes among the pastoralists in Kwara State.

The first segment of the paper outlines the empirical context of the current study while the remainder is broken down into sub-sections on methodology, results, and discussion of the major findings of the study. The final sub-section is the conclusion and recommendations based on the findings from the study.

Setting

Kwara State is the largest State in the north-central region of Nigeria, based on census figures (Figure 1). The north-central region is home to five federating States and Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Kwara State lies between Lat. $7^{\circ}45'N$ and $9^{\circ}30'N$ and, Long. $2^{\circ}30'E$ and $6^{\circ}25'E$. Ilorin is the administrative headquarters. It has a land area of approximately 36,825 square kilometres. Current population data is lacking on Kwara State, however, the State was projected to have a population of 3.2 million people in 2016. It is presently subdivided into 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs). The major ethnic groups in the State are Yoruba, Fulani, Nupe, Bariba, and Hausa (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

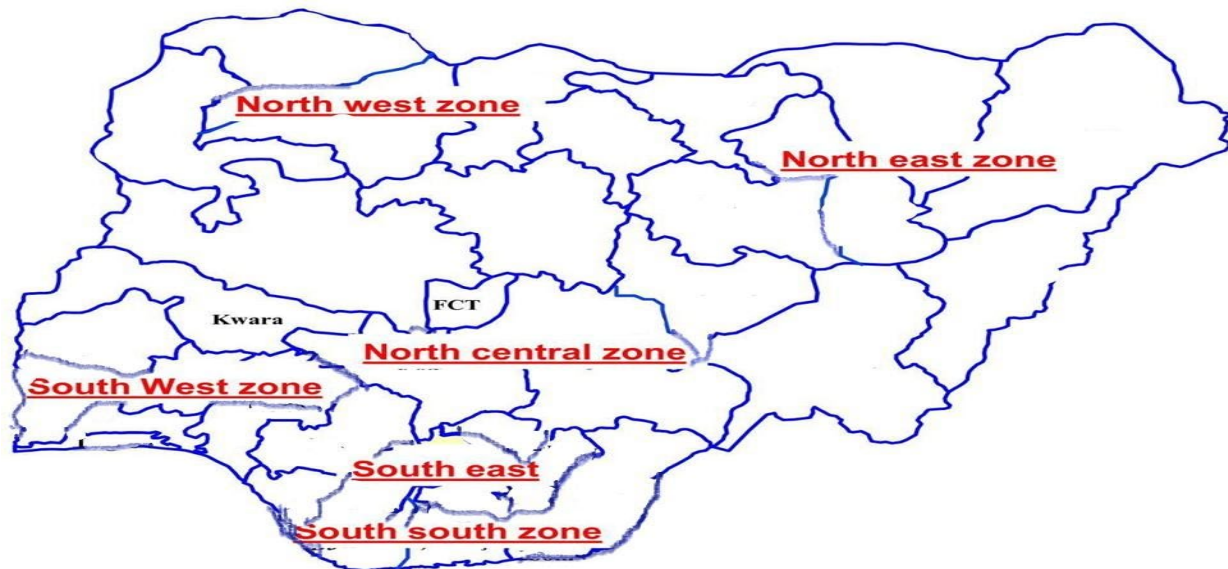
Agriculture is the traditional occupation of the indigenous people in the area of land politically carved out as Kwara State in Nigeria. To date, it is still the largest employer of labour in the informal sector of the State's economy. The climate is moist savannah and it supports all types of agricultural activities such as pastoral farming, arable farming, fisheries, and poultry farming. The pastoral farming sector is dominated by the Fulani ethnic group, many of whom are migrants from the arid regions of Nigeria and other West African countries. Their migration history into the present-day Kwara State dates back to the late 18th century. Many of the present generations of Fulani descendants were raised in the native language of their host (proximate) Kwara State communities. They are predominantly semi-settled¹ in contrast to the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the pastoralists. Because of the nature of their livelihood system, which is livestock keeping and the need for grazing fields, the semi-settled pastoralists stay on the outskirts of the major villages² in all the LGAs in Kwara State (Gemma, 2012; Aderinoye-Abdulwahab et al., 2015).

¹ Based on personal communication with the Field Assistants, there are three categories of Fulani pastoralists in Nigeria. These are the nomads, the semi-settled and the settled categories. The nomads are the transhumance (i.e., moving livestock) pastoralists. The semi-settled are those pastoralists who chose to reduce a nomadic lifestyle and settle on the outskirts of arable-producing villages (especially in the moist savannah region) but could relocate when the conditions for livestock grazing are no longer favourable in any particular area; for example, if there is a shortage of grazing land due to increasing demand for crop production by the host community or excessive conflicts with the host villages. The settled Fulani have permanently relocated to towns and cities, and the affluent among them may retain an interest in livestock farming and keep their animals in the care of the nomads or the semi-settled pastoralists.

² Villages in Nigeria are farming communities that have human populations that range from a few individuals to some hundreds of people. The economy is largely informal. The level of social infrastructure is minimal compared to the cities. In Nigeria, typical villages have no good roads, no potable water, no good healthcare facilities, and poor access to modern communication facilities such as mobile telephone coverage and the Internet.

Figure 1

Map of Nigeria showing Kwara State, Federal Capital Territory, and the Geo-political zones



(Source: Kwara State Ministry of Lands and Housing, 2024)

Methods

This is a qualitative and exploratory study³ These two approaches were adopted because the study aimed at exploring the lived experience of the male pastoralists in the study area on some dimensions of rural-based crimes. For the current study, the qualitative and exploratory approaches are anchored on the phenomenological model of social scientific investigation and analysis (see Williams, 2021) to uncover the subjective social meanings that the study participants attached to rural banditry and what they considered to be the most important (or worst) economic crimes associated with it through the process of a ‘social construction of reality’. The subjective social meaning process (social constructivism) and its capacity to help explain social behaviour is an epistemological approach in Max Weber’s interpretive sociology (Oliverio, 2019). Max Weber employed the German word *verstehen* and postulated that social action and phenomena in human society can best be understood based on the subjective meaning that they have to the social actors that are concerned with or affected by them. Going by Max Weber’s phenomenological tradition, the subjective meaning of social action should be comprehended based on the ‘definition of the situation’ and ‘empathic interpretations’ of the

³ The fieldwork for the current study took place between May and October 2023. It was an independent (non-funded) study by a group of researchers with an interest in rural criminology at a Federal University in Kwara State, Nigeria.

explanations supplied by human social actors in a given context (Williams 2021; Berger & Luckmann, 2023).

On the selection of the study hamlets, Kwara State is subdivided into 16 LGAs (Figure 2). With the assistance of the relevant government departments, the rural LGAs in the State were isolated (12 in number). Research funds and available time could not support data collection in all 12 rural LGAs. A multi-stage sampling method facilitated a random selection of five rural LGAs from the sampling frame of 12 rural LGAs (Figure 2). This was followed by a second stage of random selection of four Villages from each LGA, making 20 Villages (Table 1). Random sampling in the selection of study LGAs and villages was undertaken literally to reduce selection bias and enhance representativeness at the level of LGAs and villages. It was not intended to enhance the generalizability of the findings beyond the study communities.

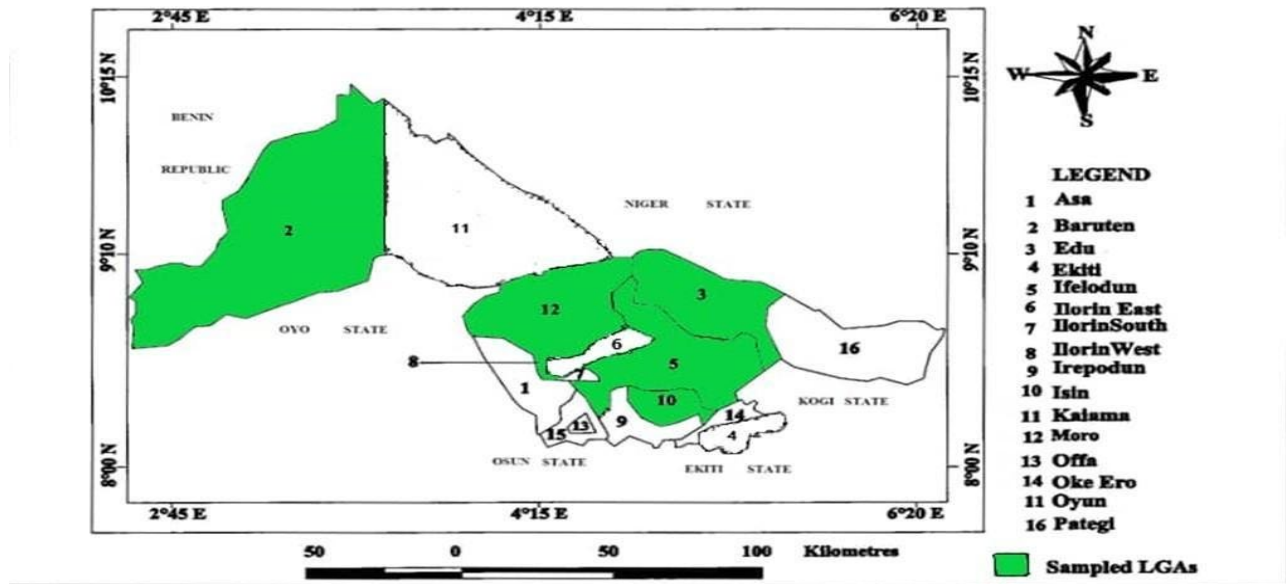
For the third stage of sampling, due to a lack of a sampling frame, the selection of 20 pastoral farmers' hamlets in the forests surrounding the randomly selected villages was carried out through a convenience sampling method. Qualitative studies were carried out in all the pastoral farmers' hamlets ($n=20$)⁴ In Table 1 and the Results sub-section of the manuscript, pseudonyms were adopted and substituted for the actual names of villages and hamlets to ensure their anonymity and mitigate the risk of re-identification, due to the sensitivity of the research topic. Therefore, the symbol VI would denote village 1 and H1 would denote hamlet 1. This applies to all the 20 villages and the 20 hamlets.

Data for the study were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KII). The selection of the study participants in each hamlet (focus group and key informants) was carried out by the Head of each hamlet. The FAs had a prior visit to each of the study hamlets (before the data collection visit) and had a briefing with their Heads on the objective of the study. The Heads had a free hand in the selection of study participants to the focus groups and the identification of key informants at the hamlet level. The semi-structured data collection instruments for the focus groups and informants' interviews were pre-tested in two pastoralist communities (non-study hamlets) to assess their content reliability. The outcome of the pre-testing exercise was used to fine-tune the final versions of the instruments. Ten Field Assistants (FAs) were recruited from the pool of village-level Agricultural Extension staff who were employees of the Kwara State Agricultural Development Programme (Kwara ADP) and the Local Government Councils (LGCs). Two FAs were deployed per each study LGA to work with the principal investigators on data collection.

⁴ Note that 'n' refers to the study sample, and these are pastoralists' hamlets.

Figure 2

Map of Kwara State showing the study LGAs



(Source: Kwara State Ministry of Lands and Housing, 2024)

Steps were taken to recruit village-level Agricultural extension staff as FAs. These individuals statutorily cover the randomly selected Villages as part of their official duty schedules for the government. Therefore, fieldwork for the current study benefitted from the previous work experience of the FAs (Agricultural Extension workers) with the pastoralists and their knowledge of the local terrain. The inclusion of the extension workers who were previously known to the community was not a hindrance to data collection; rather it assisted in facilitating rapport at the community level and the study participants' trust in the researchers. The FAs were remunerated for field guidance and their assistance with data collection (encompassing coordination of focus group activities, field note taking, translation and transcription of field notes and digital recordings).

The semi-structured checklists of questions for the focus groups and informants' interviews were designed with flexibility that facilitated the subsequent tailoring of discussions with focus groups and interviews with informants to address and concentrate on the most important economic crimes (that are associated with rural banditry) as eventually identified by the study participants. In each study hamlet, focus group participants were requested to list both known and experienced economic crimes that were closely associated with rural banditry. The listings were captured on flip charts in each of the study hamlets. Subsequently, pairwise-ranking exercises within the focus group were carried out to measure the various crimes using the following subjective parameters: (a) social weight of crime; (b) effects on farmers' livelihood; and (c) intractability and challenges with local management of the crime.

Table 1*Result of the Sampling of LGAs, Villages, and Pastoral Farmers' Hamlets for Data Collection*

s/n	Study LGAs*	Four villages selected from each LGA*	Pastoral farmers' hamlets selected from each village**
1	Ifelodun	i. V1***	i. H1***
		ii. V2	ii. H2
		iii. V3	iii. H3
		iv. V4	iv. H4
2	Moro	i. V5	i. H5
		ii. V6	ii. H6
		iii. V7	iii. H7
		iv. V8	iv. H8
3	Baruten	i. V9	i. H9
		ii. V10	ii. H10
		iii. V11	iii. H11
		iv. V12	iv. H12
4	Isin	i. V13	i. H13
		ii. V14	ii. H14
		iii. V15	iii. H15
		iv. V16	iv. H16
5	Edu	i. V17	i. H17
		ii. V18	ii. H18
		iii. V19	iii. H19
		iv. V20	iv. H20

(Source: Field Survey, 2023)

* Selected through random sampling method

**Selected through convenience sampling method

*** Pseudonyms to enhance anonymity and mitigate the risk of re-identification of the study hamlets

Apart from the flipcharts utilized to carry out the pairwise ranking of economic crimes during focus groups in each of the study hamlets, data collection during the focus group session in each hamlet entailed handwritten notes taken by one of the assigned FAs. For the key informant interviews, data collection was done through digital voice recording. The field notes and the digital recordings were transcribed and translated within 48 hours after the completion of data collection in each of the study hamlets.

Characteristics of the Study Communities and FGD Sessions

Focus group sessions and key informant interviews were conducted in all 20 study hamlets⁵ (Table 2). Based on the wishes of the pastoralists, some of the study hamlets invited

⁵ Based on the information supplied by the agricultural extension workers (FAs), a typical Fulani hamlet is a kinship-based semi-permanent settlement of a Fulani lineage. The adult population in each hamlet is below 20

their neighbouring hamlet(s) to join the focus group session in their community. Therefore, some of the sessions were clusters of about two or three contiguous hamlets. The focus group size was between five and eight individuals in each of the study hamlets. The focus group sessions were attended by adult males of different ages in the study communities. None of the focus groups had a record of female attendance. The key informants selected by the head of study hamlets were also males only. This was probably due to the influence of Islamic beliefs among the study participants.

Table 2*Characteristics of the Study Communities and FGD Sessions*

Traits	n=20
1. Community Characteristics	
Settlement types	
Semi-settled (non-nomadic) pastoral farmers	20
Non-settled (nomadic and roving) pastoral farmers	0
Farming types	
Livestock farming only	0
Integrated livestock and subsistence crop farming	20
2. FGD sessions	
Hamlets invited neighbours (other hamlets) to the focus group session	8
Hamlet stood alone and did not invite others to the focus group session	12
Gender composition of FGD attendance	
Males only (Adult males of different ages)	20
Combined males and females	0

(Source: Field Survey, 2023)

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data. All the investigators participated in the process of data analysis. Analysis commenced with inter-coding activities involving all the investigators to facilitate inter-coder reliability in content analysis. Through iterative and recursive processes, a consensus codebook on key themes and categories was produced. The investigators were able to carry out textual data mining with the aid of the free online General Architecture for Text Engineering (GATE) software. GATE software assisted in organising the translated field notes and digital recordings by themes for the consideration of the data analysts on four levels: explanatory strength, comprehensiveness, clarity and, frequency of themes coming up among the 20 study hamlets. However, GATE was not employed to automate the qualitative content analysis process. The decision on the statements to include in the final

persons. Opportunities for good grazing land and access to crop residues on harvested farmers' fields are good reasons for setting up hamlets in any location.

report (under each theme or category of findings) was taken by consensus among the data analysts.

The analysis of the qualitative data yielded some empirical themes and categories around which the Results sub-section for the current study is presented. The themes and categories are:

- Community-level awareness of rural banditry
- Common forms of economic crimes that are associated with rural banditry in the study communities
- Perceptions of study participants on the topmost economic crime that is associated with rural banditry
- Social profiling of livestock rustlers
- Factors promoting livestock rustling in the study communities
- Effects of livestock rustling and other economic crimes on victims and farmers' communities
- Farmers' efforts to curtail rural banditry and livestock rustling and, the required support from the government to reduce livestock rustling
- Relatively uncommon rural banditry dimensions in the study area

Results

Community-Level Awareness of Rural Banditry

Analysis of the data collected in all the 20 pastoralist hamlets (focus groups and key informants) showed that the study participants and their communities were aware of the phenomenon of rural banditry and have experienced insecurity problems in diverse forms within the last five years. Thematic coding of focus group data indicated that some common forms of rural banditry that participants were aware of included youth militancy leading to sporadic farmer-herder conflicts, kidnapping for ransom and robbery by violent criminals with access to arms, livestock rustling involving all types of animals, community infiltrations by religious extremists and pro-jihadist sects and, substance abuse among young people. In the words of an adult participant at a focus group session in H7:

... We have experienced many unpleasant behaviours [crimes] over the last five years in this hamlet and many of the hamlets surrounding us. The chief among these bad behaviours is the stealing of animals [Livestock rustling]. The criminals steal all types of animals like cows, goats, sheep, rams and even chickens ... However, the most common animal that they steal is cows... (FGD/Moro LGA/V7H7).

On community-level awareness of rural banditry, the explanations obtained from informants in 80% of the study hamlets were similar to what an interviewee in H2 narrated, in his words:

... In recent years, we have been paying a big price for what I can call modern-day social change ... Bandits are terrorizing us in all our communities ... Nobody is safe again. We are not saved as farmers and our animals are not saved either. Insider criminals are colluding with external criminals to make life unbearable for us ... Robbers come to steal our animals at night and, when we go out to the field during the daytime they come and break our granaries to steal our grains(KII/Ifelodun LGA/V2H2)

Common Forms of Economic Crimes that Associates with Rural Banditry in the Study Communities

The result of the pairwise ranking exercise by the focus group participants in all the study hamlets (n= 20) is presented in Table 3 below. The results showed that livestock rustling took the first position and is regarded as the most important banditry-related economic crime for pastoralists. Based on pairwise ranking, other criminal activities took the positions presented in Table 3. This was an initial qualitative analysis in the field to generate the categories of pastoralists' known and experienced banditry-related crimes for pairwise ranking and the result obtained assisted in guiding the semi-structured data collection process to address the most important crimes identified by the study participants. Therefore, the information in Table 3 was not a product of the qualitative content analysis of the data.

Forest warlords⁶ were mentioned during the problem (economic crimes) in 80% of the study hamlets (n=16) as a form of economic crime. However, in a manner that further attracted the empirical attention of the investigators for the current study, it recorded the lowest score (5th position) in all the study hamlets during the pairwise ranking exercise. Furthermore, because the forest warlord phenomenon is a novel dimension of rural banditry in Nigeria, this ranking result provided the impetus to explore its level of significance among the study hamlets. Data obtained and analysed are presented in a later segment of the results sub-section.

⁶ Forest Warlord is a term that has evolved in insecurity studies in Nigeria to describe leaders of criminal bands that avail themselves of the opportunities that the poorly policed forest environment provides to them to lead and coordinate armed bandits. Leaders of banditry groups use such terrain to build administrative structures for the recruitment and training of members of their criminal bands. The criminal bands usually return to their forest haven after operation to evade arrest by the security forces. In many instances of kidnapping for ransom, victims are transported to such forest abodes to facilitate successful negotiation and collection of monetary ransom.

Table 3

Pairwise Ranking Results on the Level of Importance of Crimes Carried Out by Rural Bandits on the Pastoralists' Livelihood System

Forms of criminal activity	Pairwise ranking position	Number of hamlets that allocated ranking position
Livestock rustling	1 st	n=20
Youth militancy leading to sporadic farmer-herder conflicts with attendant arson (that targets movable and immovable assets)	2 nd	n=18
Robbery, burglary and theft	3 rd	n=18
Kidnapping for monetary ransom	4 th	n=16
Forest warlords	5 th	n=16

(Source: Field survey, 2023)

Perceptions of Study Participants on the Topmost Three Economic Crimes that Associated with Rural Banditry

Livestock rustling

Study participants (both focus groups and key informants) narrated that for pastoralists, livestock is the most important livelihood asset and wealth storage system. They volunteered that any negative thing that befalls the livestock is a direct blow to their means of livelihood and survival system of pastoral farmers as human beings. An adult focus group participant in H12 gave the following remarks:

... Livestock stealing is the major occupational problem among pastoral farmers in this Hamlet and the others that surround us ... If our animals are sick, we know who to contact to treat the animals, or we can arrange to sell them off quickly. Loss of animals to livestock thieves is a different story altogether for the farmer household ... The emotional pains of this type of economic loss for pastoral farmers cannot be put into words ... (FGD/Baruten LGA/V12H12).

On the economic importance of livestock and rustling to the livelihood system of the pastoralists, data obtained from key informants shed additional light on the information obtained from the focus groups. The narration of an interviewee, who is also a community leader in H6, approximates the comments obtained from informants in all of the study hamlets. In his words:

... Cattle are our major livestock assets and means of wealth storage ... The livelihood of many households [pastoralists] depends on cattle ... Unfortunately, the livelihood of

some households has been destroyed because many of their cows have been stolen ... Go to several hamlets around us to ask pastoral farmers, and they will tell you that animal stealing is the major headache and heartache of pastoralists ... (KII/Moro LGA/V6H6).

Youth militancy leading to herder-farmer conflicts and attendant destruction of pastoral farmers' assets

Results of data analysis suggested that most herders-farmers' conflicts were fallouts of misdemeanours on the parts of youths and under-age children when they lead livestock out for grazing, and allow the livestock to graze planted crops on arable farmers' fields. Study participants reported that the consequences of this type of problem could also be far-reaching, leading to the killing of livestock, killing of human beings, burning of houses and destruction of other economic assets. In the words of an interviewee in H2:

... Some of our underage children and young adults in our pastoralist communities tend to misbehave when they lead their father's animals out into the forest for grazing ... Some of them will carelessly allow their animals to enter and graze the crop fields of neighbours ... on the part of the crop farmers this represents an economic loss ... Crop farmers may react by killing some of the cows that they apprehend grazing their farms or that of any other pastoral farmer after some days ... This way, fighting will start and this will cause more economic loss to the farmers on both sides ... (KII/Ifelodun LGA/V2H2).

Robbery, burglary and theft

In all study hamlets, study participants reported that robbery, burglary and theft have been age-long crimes that are associated with rural banditry, however, they unanimously averred that both crimes are increasing in scope and severity. In the words of an adult focus group participant in H18:

... Robbery and burglary have been part of our problems for many years ... bandits break into our grain stores at night or when we are grazing animals in the field and stealing our food... The incidences of robbery and burglary are getting worse in recent years ... due to the use of dangerous weapons like guns and machetes ... In the last five years, our lives have not been peaceful in remote settlements, like this hamlet due to the increasing activities of robbers and burglars ... (FGD/Edu LGA/ V18H18).

Interrogating Study Participants about the Phenomenon of Livestock Rustling⁷

When asked, all the study hamlets (n=20) reported that they have experienced livestock rustling activities in the last five years. From diverse accounts supplied by the focus groups and the key informant interviews, many of the operations were repelled, while some were successfully carried out by the marauders. According to an adult focus group participant in H7:

... In this hamlet and in many other pastoral farmers' hamlets that surround us, we have recorded several incidents of stealing of animals [rustling] and attempted cases of animal stealing within the last five years. On some occasions, the invaders succeeded in their mission before help could reach the besieged hamlet. In many instances, we were able to pool rescue efforts to fight the livestock robbers, with the collaborative help of many neighbouring hamlets ...(KII/Moro LGA/V7H7).

Social Profiling of Livestock Rustlers

Analysis of both the focus groups and key informants' interviews signified that people who were presumed to be livestock rustlers are those that have the following characteristics: individuals who possess skills in how to physically handle cattle and other livestock (such as sheep and goats), individuals who have facilities to temporarily keep rustled cattle and other livestock within their home premises without attracting suspicion from observers and neighbours, individuals that know how to tend cows and other livestock, individuals that have sufficient knowledge of cattle marketing systems within and outside their local environment and individuals that have access to arms and offensive weapons. Based on data collected and analysed for the current study, there is a likelihood that livestock rustling is dominated by the Fulani youth, who have taken to criminal activities and rural banditry. At the focus group session in H6, one of the young men in attendance spoke as follows:

... Let me say frankly that it is only people who have good knowledge about cows, those who know about cow behaviours, and those who know about what needs to be done to tend cows comfortably, that can attempt to steal cows ... Also, cow thieves are those people who can comfortably keep stolen cows without attracting suspicion from their neighbours... Cows would make noise [Moo] during the daytime, then if a person has never been associated with cow keeping or cow trading, how will he justify the sudden

⁷ During FGD sessions, consequent upon the identification of livestock rustling as the most important economic crime related to rural banditry by the study participants through a pairwise ranking exercise, the flexible semi-structured data collection instrument was orientated to assess the empirical ambits of the identified most important economic crime. In line with the phenomenological approach that orientated this qualitative study, the pairwise ranking exercise that produced results on the most important economic crime was a product of the pastoralists' social meaning process on the phenomenon of livestock rustling and, the social values that the study participants attached to the problem of livestock rustling in their livelihood system.

presence of three or four cows making noise [Mooing] in his compound? People who do not have the kind of knowledge or facility that I have briefly stated can never venture into the crime of stealing cows ...(FGD/Moro LGA/V6H6).

An adult focus group participant in H1 also remarked as follows:

... From what we have experienced over the years in this village on cow stealing, it is the youth from our ethnic group [Fulani youth] that are doing the bad work of cattle stealing ... It is not people from outside the ethnic group or people that don't even know anything about cows and cattle tending activities that are involved in the bad work ... (FGD/Ifelodun LGA/V1H1).

Factors Promoting Livestock Rustling in the Study Communities

In all the study hamlets, participants noted that livestock theft was perpetrated by a range of actors, from disaffected adults to organised criminals and this was exacerbated by easy access to drugs and weapons. The factors identified by the study participants and further discussed in detail include:

- Economic deprivations and social dislocation in the Nigerian society
- The existence of criminal networks on livestock rustling and illegal trading on rustled livestock
- Access to illicit drugs
- Illegal and unregulated access to light weapons among young men
- Urban migration and negative effects of modern-day audio-visual entertainment media

Economic deprivations and social dislocation in the Nigerian society

In all the study hamlets, participants identified poverty and economic deprivation as well as children's defective upbringing due to social dislocation of parents among members of the Fulani ethnic group as one of the key factors promoting deviance and breeding of bandits at the rural level. In the words of a focus group participant in H16:

... Many households have lost their livestock assets in the past through various calamities such as stealing or livestock, death by diseases, or through destruction of livestock assets during communal fighting with our neighbouring arable farmers ... These have caused poverty for some households...Adults, youth and children from poor homes, who also are not brought up with good character, are prone to crimes that can enable them to get resources or money to survive, no matter how small the money may be ... they can steal a cow, and just sell it for a fraction of its market price...

(FGD/Isin LGA/V16H16).

The existence of criminal networks on livestock rustling and illegal trading on rustled livestock

Study participants narrated that locally based criminals usually collaborate with those who engage in livestock rustling from outside the community to consummate crimes. They also reported that there exist criminal networks, cartels and barons that receive stolen animals from the livestock rustlers and arrange to sell them in distant markets. In the remarks of a focus group participant in H3:

... The local cattle rustlers have built linkages with like-minded bigger business circles [Networks] of powerful traders on rustled cows, who are engaged in cattle transportation and trading across towns and cities ... The rustlers don't bring stolen cows to the local markets in the immediate environment of the villages where they stole the cows. We know our cows, we know our sheep and goats, and the thieves know that the farmers will be able to identify their animals ... What they do is to take the stolen animals to far places to sell ... They do this through the support of some big-time animal traders [merchants]...who have chosen to combine crime with the legitimate business of livestock trading...(FGD/Ifelodun LGA/V3H3).

A key informant in H15 also volunteered as follows:

... Without the existence of big-time criminals [Barons coordinating the marketing of stolen livestock], the local animal thieves can't enjoy and thrive in their evil works ... The big-time criminals will collect the animals stolen in Kwara [Kwara State], and arrange for the transportation of the stolen animals to the markets in Enugu [Enugu State] ... Those that stole animals in Katsina [Katsina State] will take their own stolen animals to Ondo [Ondo State]... With their perfected style of selling stolen animals, it will be difficult for the unhappy victims of their crimes, to trace and recover their stolen animals ... (KII/Isin LGA/V15H15).

Access to Illicit Drugs

Study participants recounted that availability and cheap access to illicit drugs in their immediate environment is another factor that is aiding rural banditry and related economic crimes such as livestock rustling. According to a focus group participant, who described himself as a pastoralist and Islamic cleric in H8:

... We don't understand how we entered into the problem of youth having reckless access to bad drugs [illicit substances] in our rural communities ... All along, the problem of using bad drugs was a problem confined to the large cities, but in recent years several

people are now distributing and trading in bad drugs, to the extent that the bad drug users [substance abusers] in our midst don't undergo any trouble to get these bad drugs to buy and use ... (FGD/Moro LGA/V8H8).

Illegal and Unregulated Access to Light Weapons among the Young Adults

Based on data analysis, another factor that is contributing to the problem of rural banditry and related economic crimes is the cheap access to firearms by some young adults. Based on data analysis, study participants reported that some young adults have access to firearms due to their employment by the urban-based absentee pastoral farmers to secure their herds of animals in the forest. From the information supplied by the study participants, these absentee pastoral farmers are mostly serving or retired government officials and military personnel, career politicians, and venture capital investors with an interest in livestock farming. An adult participant at the focus group session in H9 spoke as follows:

... Some government workers and businessmen who live in the cities have come into the business of animal rearing [Livestock farming], some are members of our ethnic group while many are not members of our ethnic group ... They have invested in animals such as cows, sheep and goats and have hired many of our youths to keep the animals for them in the forest ... It is these modern-day and city-based farmers [absentee farmers] who have provided guns and bullets, to the boys [young adults] they have hired, to support them, in securing their animals in the forest ... Unfortunately, the employers don't pay them good salaries ... and when many of these young men want to meet their personal needs they don't hesitate to utilize the guns in their possessions to carry out criminal activities ...(FGD/Baruten LGA/V9H9).

Urban Migration and Negative Effects of Modern-Day Audio-Visual Entertainment Media

The study participants narrated that the influence of urban migration and diffusion of foreign-originated crime and violence-related movies and films, especially Video Compact Disks, have contributed to the acquisition of criminal behaviours among youth. According to the study participants, many movies have been audio-dubbed into local languages, including Fulfulde and Hausa languages, to facilitate local purchase and viewing. Furthermore, the study respondents also reported that whenever the wealthy livestock traders engage some of the youth to accompany livestock-in-transit to the urban markets, this category of people tends to mingle with criminals during their brief stay in urban centres, due to the inadequate arrangement for their accommodation in urban centres. In the words of a key informant in H7:

... Some of our young men are occasionally hired by cattle merchants to accompany and tend livestock during transportation to urban markets. Some of these youth may overstay in urban communities and, in the process they mingle with urban-based criminals, acquire

bad behaviours and bad knowledge from those urban-based criminals, they begin to take bad drugs ... This category of youth also has the opportunity to learn criminal behaviours by watching crime and violent films too in the urban centres. By the time they finally returned to the villages, they had already changed individuals. Upon their return, they begin to mastermind criminal activities...(KII/Moro LGA/V7H7).

Effects of Livestock Rustling and Other Economic Crimes on Victims and Pastoralists' Communities

Data were collected and analysed on the immediate and long-term effects of livestock rustling on victims and the farmers' communities. The analysis yielded the following results:

Immediate Effects of Livestock Rustling on Victims

The study participants reported that the immediate effect of livestock rustling is on the mental and physical health of victims, this includes owners of rustled livestock and members of their households. Some of the immediate effects reported include health shocks that could translate into sudden death, high blood pressure and, mental disorders such as depression, sleep disorder, eating disorder, stress disorder and, suicide ideation. In the words of a focus group participant in H14:

... About four years ago, I was a victim of these livestock thieves. The night that they came to rob me of my animals, they came with guns, machetes, and other weapons. The thieves brutalized me and all the members of my household. They brought a truck to transport the stolen animals. They tied me and my wife and two grown-up children like goats. They finally took away eight cows, six females and two males ... They also took away twenty goats and sheep. It was a period of anguish and distress, I could not sleep for several nights and, I could not eat for several days, I lost interest in living for several months ...(FGD/Isin LGA/V14H14).

A key informant, who is also a community leader in H11 also narrated as follows:

... In this hamlet and among pastoralist communities around us, we have seen or heard stories of people that almost had mental problems, after their livestock was stolen ... People have different capacities to absorb shocks and disasters ... However, the immediate effect of the economic shock is usually ill health ... Inability to eat and sleep, bad level of thinking and lack of ability to coordinate daily living, which could also cause other health problems ... In one of our neighbouring hamlets, a household head committed suicide some years ago when all his cattle were rustled ...(KII/Baruten LGA/V11H11).

Long-term effects of livestock rustling on victims and pastoralists' communities

Among the long-term effects of livestock rustling reported by the study participants, during the focus group sessions and informant's interviews, are poverty for victims and their households, quitting livestock farming to migrate to urban areas to engage in petty trading and motorcycle transportation business, destruction of the inheritance system, pushing victims and offspring of victims into crimes and, discouragement of investment in livestock farming among local farmers. One of the focus group participants in H19 spoke as follows:

... The activities of the livestock thieves can produce generational poverty in the household of the victims ... It can also make some people abandon livestock farming and move to urban centres to start petty trading or engage in other menial jobs such as doing commercial motorcycle transport service ... When there is no more livestock to tend in the village, what would they stay in the village to do and earn money to take care of themselves and their households... This problem is one of the major factors that is pushing some of our youth into crime and banditry ... Some of us have even heard the stories of some victims who finally relocated to urban communities to become beggars ... (FGD/Edu LGA/V19H19).

Farmers' Efforts to Curtail Rural Banditry and Livestock Rustling and, the Required Support from Government

Data analysis indicated that through regular inter-community meetings and sensitization, the pastoralists in the State of Kwara are proactive in trying to ensure that what is going on in other regions in Nigeria (especially in the north-east and north-west regions), in terms of the severity of rural banditry and related economic crimes does not make an incursion into Kwara State. Some of the important efforts that were mentioned during the focus group sessions and by the key informants include the arrangement and holding of collaborative meetings by community leaders and household heads to quickly nip in the bud any youth who are showing characteristics of criminal behaviour and waywardness, proactive monitoring of forests to check activities of unknown individuals/strangers, collaboration and provision of local intelligence/information to the law enforcement agents as the need arises, to prevent the activities of rural bandits. The response obtained during the focus group session in H5 from an adult participant is as follows:

... To be able to check the activities of bandits, the hamlet heads hold regular inter-community security meetings ... We hold security meetings also with the chiefs in the big villages that are hosting us as pastoralists... We have also developed a culture of regular monitoring of our forests. We raise the alarm to our neighbours when we see the movement of strangers ... (FGD/Moro LGA/V5H5).

On the issue of local efforts to curb banditry and livestock rustling, an informant in H13 gave a remark that is representative of the opinions obtained from the interviewees in 80% of the study hamlets. He spoke as follows:

... We collaborate extensively among ourselves as neighbouring hamlets of pastoralists ... When we notice any of our youth beginning to behave perversely, maybe he has commenced to steal chickens, ducks, and goats or begun other petty criminal behaviour such as abuse of bad drugs, we join hands together to quickly nip him in the bud ... We do not restrict the required process of correction to his household or hamlet alone... (KII/Isin LGA/V13H13).

Furthermore, in all the study hamlets, participants were unanimous in their request for assistance from the Kwara State government to enact a law that would ban indiscriminate livestock transportation, as some States in Nigeria have successfully done. The remark of a key informant, who was also the community head in H4 is representative of the appeal for help given by all the informants in all the study hamlets. He spoke as follows:

... We are begging the government of Kwara [Kwara State] to help us make a law that would make illegal the current system of indiscriminate and poorly coordinated process of livestock movement by lorries and trucks in our environment... From what we are hearing from our people in other States in Nigeria, that type of law has been successfully done and enforced in places like Kaduna [Kaduna State] ... This type of law will help us in a long way to reduce livestock rustling ... (KII/Ifelodun LGA/V4H4).

Relatively Uncommon Rural Banditry Dimension in the Study Area

Focus group participants in 80% of the study communities (n=16) mentioned 'forest warlords' as a form of economic crime that is associated with rural banditry. However, analysis of the focus group data revealed that the study participants were only aware of the existence and operations of forest warlords as they pertain to some other States in Nigeria, especially States in the north-west and north-east. This finding is significant because it suggests that the phenomenon of ungoverned forests and the insecurity dimension of forest warlords have not yet surfaced in the study area. From the remarks of a focus group participant in H15:

... We are hearing about forest kings [Forest Warlords] from the news [mass media] only ... For now, in rural communities in Kwara [Kwara State], we don't have forest kings that are operating or breeding criminals and leading criminal gangs in our forests ... We hear stories from some parts of the far north, places like Katsina [Katsina state], Kaduna [Kaduna State], Yobe [Yobe State] and some other places where forest kings are making lives very difficult and unbearable for farmers ... Here, in Kwara, our case with rural banditry has not yet reached this type of bad level ... (FGD/Isin LGA/V15H15).

Discussion

This study investigated the lived experience of male pastoralists on rural banditry and associated economic crimes in Kwara State (Nigeria), using qualitative and exploratory research approaches. Based on the results from the study, the participants were aware of and have experienced the problem of rural banditry within the past five years and they were able to convey the knowledge that the insecurity problem comes with other unpleasant criminal activities that include crimes against property and other forms of rural violence. The most important banditry-related economic crimes reported, such as livestock rustling, farmer-herdsmen conflicts, robbery, burglary and theft are similar to the insecurity challenges facing pastoralists and negatively affecting their livelihood systems in the regions of the north-west and north-east that are considered to be epicentres of banditry in Nigeria (Okoli & Okpaleke; 2014b; Onwuzuruigbo, 2021). All the banditry-related economic crimes that the participants in the current study reported are interrelated in the rural insecurity web and they have the potential to generate linkages and rippling effects (Erondu & Nwakanma, 2018). In many instances, livestock rustling by unidentified thieves has ended up as triggers for farmers-herdsmen conflicts and vice versa. (Bello & Abdullahi, 2021).

Participants in the present study identified livestock rustling as the most economically devastating crime that is associated with rural banditry. They also highlighted their experience at the household and community level on rustling because livestock is the chief means of wealth storage among the pastoralists. Participants carried out the social profiling of livestock rustlers based on the processes of social construction of reality and submitted that people with extensive knowledge of livestock keeping and marketing, such as the herdsmen, are the set of criminals that have the highest level of skills and the ancillary wherewithal to rustle livestock. Crimes exist in all societies and members of a community who are experiencing specific forms of crimes usually employ the social meaning processes to carry out the labelling and profiling of the perpetrators of such crimes (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016) in their joint efforts to initiate preventive and control strategies (Sunday & Mohammad (2021).

On the factors that are promoting rural banditry and livestock rustling in the study communities, findings from the present study signified that economic deprivations, social dislocation and poverty are important drivers of rural banditry and livestock rustling. Due to decades of economic mismanagement at all levels of governance in Nigeria, multi-dimensional poverty and unemployment have been two major social problems that are currently driving the high crime rate in Nigeria. Many of the criminals that engage in rural armed banditry with the attendant economic crimes are shuttling between urban and rural settings. Therefore, factors that border on economic hardship, poverty and lack of access to sustainable means of livelihood are

the key factors that are presently helping to breed career criminals and armed banditry in their efforts to ensure economic survival (Bello & Abdullahi, 2021).

The existence of criminal networks in illegal trading in rustled livestock also emerged as a major factor contributing to livestock rustling. The urban-based criminal networks and cartels in the marketing of rustled livestock have served as an impetus for the perpetuation and flourishing of rural armed banditry and livestock rustling (Opaleke & Okoli, 2014a). Based on findings from the current study, other factors that drove rural banditry and its associated crimes include access to illicit drugs and illegal and unregulated access to firearms among people, both of which are jointly making worse the insecurity problem and raising the incidence rate of violent crimes in Nigeria. The quest for economic survival by every available means is pushing many individuals to diverse unethical businesses including illicit drug marketing as well as illegal arms running and trading. It is from these sources that criminals obtain the resources required to carry out violent crimes (Ajala, 2020; Okwelum, 2023).

Results from the present study suggested that some of the immediate effects of livestock rustling among victims include personal mental health-related problems, while the long-term effects on the community include inter-generational poverty, farm exit for the pastoralists and underdevelopment for the community. At the immediate level, the condition under which a violent crime such as livestock rustling takes place has the potential to produce post-traumatic mental health disorders among victims, including the pastoralists as individuals, members of their immediate households and, other members of the community who perceive themselves as probable victims of rustlers and armed bandits (Lawal et al., 2018; Fadare et al., 2023). The long-term effects of livestock rustling at the community level tend to produce adverse effects on growth and socio-economic development, loss of economic resources for sustainable livelihood among the pastoralists, and erosion of the community's social support system. These negative fallouts of livestock rustling are consistent with the literature (Manu et al., 2014; Kehinde et al., 2015; Victor, 2020; Ighodalo and Abdul-Qadir, 2022; Ibrahim, 2023).

Findings from the present study also showed that the participants were utilizing some steps at the community level to tackle the problem of rural armed banditry and livestock rustling. State-based security support for rural communities in Nigeria is weak. In most instances of violent attacks, the police have to be mobilized from the nearest urban community. On many occasions, violent crimes would have been successfully carried out and the bandits would have escaped before the arrival of the state-based policemen. The local security system under the control of the traditional institutions and the local government administrative system is yet to be harnessed for rural crime control in the north-central region compared to the south-west region (Mou, 2023; Nwoko, 2024). Given the minimum penetration of the information and communication technologies in Kwara State, the capacity of the agricultural extension sub-sector

could be enhanced to develop a platform for the curtailment of livestock rustling, and the movement and trading of rustled animals (Clack, 2018).

Results from the present study also indicated that the pastoralists that participated in the current study have not experienced activities of forest warlord(s) that could potentially inhibit them from carrying out economic activities in their localities. This finding diverges from research outcomes in the north-east and north-west regions of Nigeria where studies on rural banditry and related crimes reported the existence of ungoverned forests and, the presence of forest warlords as important factors promoting rural banditry and livestock rustling among pastoralists in those parts of Nigeria (Onwuzuruigbo, 2021). Personal communication with agricultural extension workers (FAs) indicated that an important factor that might be responsible for this is the role of traditional institutions and local chiefs (in the host villages) that regularly invite the pastoralists to village-level security meetings. Through regular interface with the pastoralists, the traditional institutions seek to promote an oversight system that deters the settlement of unknown persons and armed bandits migrating from other regions in Nigeria.

One of the limitations of the present study is that the qualitative methodology employed does not strictly permit the generalizability of the findings beyond the LGAs and villages where the study took place. In another dimension, community women who are important stakeholders in the pastoralists' livelihood system were not permitted by their hamlet Heads to participate in the data collection process (for religious reasons) and were excluded from the opportunity to share their perceptions on how rural banditry affects them economically, socially and, psychologically. This represents a data gap. Therefore, a further study to be coordinated by female researchers is recommended among the study population to document the pastoralist women's lived experiences with rural banditry to assist in filling the identified gender-related data gap.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the experiences of male pastoralists on rural banditry and associated economic crimes in Kwara State, Nigeria, using qualitative and exploratory research approaches. From the study results, the commonest rural banditry-related economic crimes reported were youth militancy leading to sporadic farmers-herders conflicts with attendant arson (that targets movable and immovable assets), livestock rustling, and robbery and burglary by violent criminals with access to arms, among others. Through facilitation by pairwise ranking exercise during the focus group sessions (premised on social constructivism), study participants isolated livestock rustling as the most important banditry-related economic crime in their livelihood system.

Based on the outcomes of the present investigation, this study recommends urgent public investment and rollout of the government-planned National Animal Identification and Traceability System (NAITS) to reduce livestock rustling among the study population. NAITS is an Information, Communication Technology (ICT-based) tool that Nigeria's federal government publicly promised to produce and deploy at the national level in the country to tackle the menace of livestock rustling. Similar ICT-based tools have been deployed in some other West African countries such as Ghana to assist the pastoralists in combating livestock rustling. Nigeria's government has planned to replicate this support for the livestock farming sector in the country. However, for about two years running, the only information on NAITS in the domain of the pastoralists is mostly mass media news and government propaganda on the budgeted money to produce the ICT-based tool.

Furthermore, in line with the desire of the participants, this study recommends the enactment of a state law that would prohibit indiscriminate livestock transportation that has helped some other States (especially in the north-western region) to reduce the incidence rate of livestock rustling. The present study also recommends the strengthening of the local community-based crime control system (traditional security organs) in Kwara state and, the creation of an informal security system similar to what the combined States in the south-west region are currently utilizing to curtail rural banditry.

All over Nigeria, the efforts of the state-based police force are concentrated on managing urban crimes. Due to a shortage of personnel and resources, the state-based security organ has been unable to manage crimes in rural areas. To make up for this, the combined six States in south-western Nigeria have jointly established a local security outfit known as '*Amotekun*'. This informal crime control organ is supplementing and complementing the efforts of the state-based security system in the rural parts of the south-west region (see Mou, 2023; Nwoko, 2024). Presently, in the north-central region, there is nothing comparable to this type of local security arrangement. The creation and provision of required support for this type of local security outfit in the north-central region would avail its States the type of benefits that *Amotekun* is presently delivering in the south-west region of Nigeria.

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Erratum

9/24/2024: Added back in missing in-text citations. Corrected author's name in odd-numbered page headings.