

Policyweekly

The Zamfara Paradox:

Peace Deals, No Security



(Photo credit: AIT live)

Policy Recommendations

- 1 There is an urgent need to rethink appeasement to stop the apparent reward of violence.
- 2 There is a need for well-armed security operatives to be deployed to the rural areas to stop people in those areas from relying on bandits for protection.
- 3 There is a need for an urgent mop-up of firearms in Zamfara state.
- 4 While government should continue to open dialogue with bandits, it should continuously demonstrate its ability to govern and protect the lives and properties of its citizens.
- 5 In future peace designs, the government should seek the expertise of peace-building consultants to ensure effectiveness and success.

The Zamfara State government has, in addition to hard security, relied on an appeasement strategy to address pervasive banditry in the sprawling area. In recent years, the state government has extended many peace deals to criminals and terrorists known locally as ‘bandits’ to mitigate their campaigns of violence. In a recent justification of appeasement, the deputy governor of Zamfara State disclosed that government’s romance with the notorious bandit kingpin, Bello Turji, who had masterminded the kidnap and killing of several persons, was yielding positive results. The deputy governor, Hassan Nasiha, said, [“Turji is now killing unrepentant bandits who unleashed terror on innocent citizens in Shinkafi, Zurmi and Birnin Magaji local government areas”](#). However, Byman (2006) argues that

talking with terrorists has some potential rewards, such as encouraging dissent within the group by swaying the opinions of its constituents. Yet, the ceasefire provided by such overture could lead to an eventual reward of violence by giving recognition to terrorists and enabling them to buy time, raise funds and rearm. Besides, terrorists often relapse after renouncement, making the government look foolish. Against this background, this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly examines the dangers posed by the (ab)use of peace deals by the government and the bandits in Zamfara State.

A Harvest of Peace Deals

The uses of appeasement strategy or peace deal by government and community leaders to woo violent criminals in Zamfara State has taken different forms and shades, including the exchange of cows for AK-47 rifles, payment of protection fees and conferment of chieftaincy title. For example, in July 2021, Zamfara Governor Bello Matawalle approved the [exchange of two cows for every AK-47 surrendered](#) by repented bandits in the state. According to the Governor, [“we are asking them to bring us an AK-47 and get two cows in return; this will empower and encourage them”](#). The gun trading for cows was rationalised on the basis that an average cow costs about N100,000 while an AK-47 rifle on the black market costs about N500,000 in northern Nigeria.

Apart from exchanging cows for guns, some communities have also paid several millions of Naira as protection fees to bandits. For example, in January 2022, people in nine Bukkuyum Local Government Area communities were asked to pay a [N24 million](#) compulsory tax to avoid attacks by bandits. Depending on their population size, each community was levied between N500,000 and N5m each. Another strategy some communities use to secure peace with bandits is conferring chieftaincy titles. Recently, [a BBC documentary revealed](#) how bandit warlord, Ado Aleru, was conferred with the title of Sarkin Fulani (chief of the Fulanis) by Aliyu Marafa, the Emir of Birnin Yandoto. While the Emir was widely condemned for aiding and abetting banditry by the conferment, he may have acted in good faith to protect his subjects from rampaging bandits the security forces could not repress. Despite the enormous

costs, peace deals between communities and bandits have become the only hope for security in several rural areas.

An Enduring Violence

The resort to peace deals with bandits has not been able to guarantee human livelihood security in Zamfara State as killings, ransom kidnapping, and stealing of livestock remain unabated. A [report](#) submitted by a Committee constituted by Governor Bello Matawalle and chaired by a former Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Abubakar, to seek solutions to banditry disclosed that 4,983 women were widowed, 25,050 children orphaned and 190,340 persons displaced in the state by bandit-related violence between June 2011 and May 29, 2019. The report further revealed that bandits collected over [N3 billion](#) as ransom from 3,672 victims whose relatives paid to secure their freedom. Added to these losses, herders in the state [“lost 2,015 cattle, 141 sheep and goats, 2,600 donkeys and camels to rustlers while 147,800 vehicles, motorcycles and others were burnt at different times and locations within the period”](#) under review.

Banditry-related violence has escalated in the last two years following challenges with the peace deals. According to a perceptive observer, “the peace deal is doing more harm than good” (Personal Communication). Indeed, some bandits who earlier accepted the peace deal have started to renege and return to the forests. The case of Awwalun Daudawa exemplifies this. He commanded the abduction of over 500 students from Government Science Secondary School in Kankara in December 2020. But he later secured an amnesty deal with the Zamfara State government. However, in April 2021, the bandit leader [renewed on the peace deal](#) and returned to the forests.

Similarly, in April 2021, the bandit leader who masterminded the mass abduction of the 279 students in Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe on February 26, 2021, revealed that the [N60 million](#) ransom paid for the release of the schoolgirls was used to [acquire more firearms](#) to prosecute their campaign of violence. Yet, upon their release on March 2, 2021, the Governor of Zamfara State denied any ransom payment, claiming the [girls’ release](#) was secured by 30 repentant

bandits. Another challenge is that some bandits who earlier exchanged their AK-47 rifles for cows have not only reneged on the terms of the deal but have started trading the cows for hard drugs. For example, in May 2021, some bandits in Shinkafi Local Government Area [exchanged their cows for Pentax injections](#) and other hard drugs, which often encouraged criminals. A security analyst disclosed that the peace deal is ineffective because of the enormous incentives accruing the bandits from kidnap ransoms, protection fees and the sale of rustled livestock. “The gains they derive from banditry far outweigh those promised by a corrupt government that cannot even be trusted. Moreover, politicians and civil servants often hijack so-called peace deals and amnesty” (Personal Communication).

Breaking the Cycle of Banditry

From the preceding analysis, the resort to peace deals with bandits in Zamfara State has done more harm than good. Therefore, there is an urgent need to rethink appeasement to stop the apparent reward of violence. Some of the following policy measures could help in this direction.

First, discontinuation of peace purchase: As evident by the exchange of cows for guns, payment of protection fees, and conferment of chieftaincy, the Zamfara State government and some traditional leaders have been purchasing peace from bandits to forestall attacks. However, rather than mitigating, such appeasement has escalated the violence as bandits have only used the opportunities and ransoms provided to rearm. In particular, most of the enormous ransoms paid to bandits for releasing kidnapped persons have been used to purchase more firearms. As a result, the state and traditional authorities need to stop the appeasement.

Second, more security presence is needed in rural areas: Zamfara rural communities have been the worst hit by the phenomenon of banditry. This has been made possible by the near absence of security personnel

in the rural communities beyond Gusau, the state capital and a few local government headquarters. Thus, there is a need for well-armed security operatives to be deployed to the rural areas to stop people in those areas from relying on bandits for protection.

Third, there is a need for arms mopping up: despite some bandits surrendering a few guns for cows, Zamfara State remains awash with illegal small arms and light weapons, which the bandits use to terrorise the areas. Thus, there is a need for an urgent mop-up of firearms across the state. In particular, a special army and air force squad should deploy intelligence and work out counter-banditry operations in Zamfara forests, which bandits use as sanctuaries.

Fourth, Peace discussions by the Zamfara state government or the Federal government should come from a position of strength, not weakness. Therefore, while government should continue to open dialogue with bandits, it should continuously demonstrate its ability to govern and protect the lives and properties of its citizens by every force, and any means possible.

Fifth, the communities are the epic centres of this violence and should have their leadership on the table for every peace discussion. The government should work with every group in the communities for the achievement of sustainable peace. It will be good to reduce the profiling of groups and work towards restoring the old order and harmony in the communities.

Finally, there is a need for transparent peace-building: politicians and civil servants in the state have to eschew corruption in formulating and executing peace programming. However, as shown in the analysis, corruption and lack of trust were significant challenges in implementing some peace deal projects. Thus, in future peace designs, the government should seek the expertise of peace-building consultants to ensure effectiveness and success.

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Conclusion

Efforts by the Zamfara State government and traditional authorities to use an appeasement strategy to woo bandits have not reduced violence. Thus, there is a need to stop the purchase of peace from bandits, increase security in rural areas, mop up arms across the state, including the forests, and embrace transparent peace-building to build trust in government.

References

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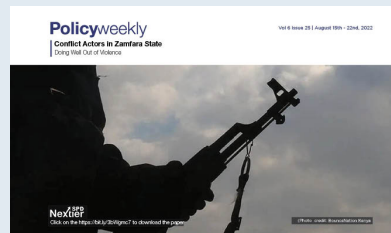
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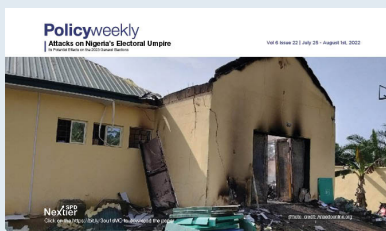
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