



Wild, Wild North-West

Policy Recommendations

1. Policy and Programmes targeted at reducing the army of children and youths who are not in education, employment or training.
2. Reformation of pastoralism in Nigeria, which will include traditional herders, whose source of livelihood are under threat.
3. Better border policing with modern technology to checkmate cross-border banditry.
4. Improved community policing driven through intelligence gathering and no extra-judicial killings.
5. An immediate stop of the peace process which monetises illegal arms submission, as research has shown that it is always counter-productive.

Nextier SPD Policy Weekly provides an analysis of topical conflict, security, and development issues and proposes recommendations to address them. It is a publication of Nextier SPD. For further discussion of pragmatic implementation of the recommendations, please contact

In the last six months, Nigeria's North-West geopolitical zone has been under siege on account of [rampaging armed bandits, cattle rustlers, and ransom kidnapers](#). Until now, the North-West had been relatively peaceful compared to its neighbouring North-East zone which has been ravaged by Boko Haram insurgency. But today, the North-West, which has the largest number of states in the federation, is at the mercy of violent non-state actors with resultant destruction of lives and investments. In July 2018, escalated banditry claimed the lives of 32 persons in Rabah Local Government Area of [Sokoto State](#). Similar attacks have been recorded in Katsina and other states in the region; however, the level of violence in Zamfara is the highest in the zone. The incumbent Governor of Zamfara State affirmed that in recent years over [500 persons have been kidnapped and over 3,000 lives, 2,000 homes, and 500 vehicles](#) have been destroyed by armed bandits. This edition of Nextier SPD Weekly examines the descent of the North-West into violent insecurity and makes appropriate recommendations to reverse the trend.

Many parts of the North-West Nigeria, especially Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna, are [becoming ungovernable spaces](#) as the Nigerian state is unable to police and secure them. There is a limited statehood with significantly diminished ability of the state to enforce law and order. The rise in violent crimes in this zone cannot

be disassociated from the dwindling fortunes in the predominant pastoral economy which is impacted by climate change, incessant violent conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, and overall increase in violence as a way of resolving disputes. In addition, is the failure to take into cognizance the old and existing socio-economic stratification in Northern Nigeria, especially among the pastoral Fulani ethnic group. Countries [Like Mali](#) have addressed their political economy of pastoralism and the emerging challenges facing it.

Both the state and federal governments have made a number of efforts (at varying levels of success) to improve the security situation in the region. For instance, Federal Government of Nigeria deployed both the [Air Task Force](#) (codenamed 'Operation Diran Mikiya') and [ground troops](#) (codenamed 'Operation Sharan Daji') especially in the areas around Shamashale village and the Rugu Forest area. Without progress reports or independent assessments, it is difficult to ascertain the level of success of these operations. On the other hand, state governments in the region have increased their security votes in support of the security agencies in the region especially to improve their ability to quickly respond to distress calls.

Zamfara State is one of the most violent in the region despite efforts by the state government to address the scourge. For instance, the government claims

to have expended over [N17 billion](#) in the last seven years to purchase 2,907 vehicles for the security agencies. The government proposes to employ [8,500 youths](#) (500 from each of the seventeen emirates in the state) as members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) to support the 1,600 soldiers and unspecified number of Police officers in the state. Furthermore, Zamfara is one of the seven states selected to pilot a programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria that aims to mop up illegal small arms and light weapons. As at May 2018, [5,870 illegal weapons were destroyed](#) in the state. The arms and ammunition were recovered from herders, farmers, cattle rustlers, kidnappers, vigilante and militia groups, and repentant bandits. In desperation to reduce the level of violence in the state, Government of Zamfara has been paying N1 million for every AK-47 rifle returned to the authorities. On November 06, 2018, N2 million was paid to [a driver](#) who ran over two bandits and took their AK-47 rifles to government. Similarly, a group of residents in Unguwan Mallamai and Matuzgi villages were rewarded with N2 million for overpowering and seizing two AK-47 rifles from bandits. However, there is no evidence that these “million for AK-47” has substantially reduced the level of violence in the North-West; in fact, going by experiences in other conflict areas, this will lead to an increase [in the inflow of AK-47 rifles](#) to the state as the government has essentially created a market for the guns.

Below are some critical policy options that could help to effectively reduce the level of non-state violence in the region:

1. Majority of those perpetrating violence in the North-West are drawn from the army of uneducated and out-of-school youth. The government in the region should empower these [poor, unemployed young persons](#) through the provision of entrepreneurial training and technical and vocational skills. This will make them less susceptible to financial inducement by conflict entrepreneurs.
2. There are reports that most of the rural bandits are from the traditional herder communities and their numbers will continue to swell with decline in that means of livelihood. There is need to transition the herders to more productive business models to ensure improved livelihoods.
3. Better border policing is needed. Most land borders in the North-West especially the Illela border in Sokoto State and [Jibia in Katsina State](#) are notoriously porous. These poorly policed borders are used as entry and exit points by local and trans-border bandits. The states in the region should work with the security agencies to deploy technology to monitor these border points to forestall illegal entry and exit.

4. The police, CJTF, and other security agents operating in the zone have been accused of heavy-handed tactics, human rights abuses, and also extra-judicial killings. These agencies should be provided with improved training and compelled to operate under improved rules of engagement. The training should also emphasise the need to protect the identity of informants as there are allegations of reappraisal attacks by bandits on perceived informants.
5. Both state and federal governments should stop the monetization of peace process in the North-West. The practice of paying N1 million per AK-47 rifle should be immediately discontinued because there is compelling evidence that it is ineffective. [Research](#) has shown that criminals who surrender weapons for cash often use the money to buy newer and more sophisticated arms. Unscrupulous persons can buy old weapons cheaply and surrender it to government for huge amount.

Unchecked, Nigeria’s North-West region could become the next theatre of violent conflict in Nigeria. While there are no easy solutions, there are “solutions” that would exacerbate and not resolve the problem. Government should start by stopping these bad solutions and begin to implement the good solutions.

