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The Paradox of Peace Negotiations and Armed Banditry in Katsina State, Nigeria

Isah Musa Yusuf
Abdurashid Dalha
Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences
Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, Sokoto State, Nigeria
+23408036055088

Corresponding Author: Isah.yusuf@udusok.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper investigates the paradoxical consequences of localised peace dialogues between local communities, traditional institutions, and armed bandit groups across five Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Katsina State: Danmusa, Musawa, Batsari, Jibia, and Safana. Drawing on primary negotiation data, the study confirms that while these localised truces secure brief windows of stability and allow for the restoration of essential socio-economic activities, such as farming and market operations, they simultaneously produce institutional fragility and intensify the moral hazard of impunity. The central mechanism of this paradox is the transactional institutionalisation of criminality, where bandit leaders gain legitimacy, social access, and the right to retain weapons for 'self-defence,' effectively establishing a parallel security governance structure. The research emphasizes the critical role of bandit fragmentation (the spoiler problem, evidenced by the violent internal schism in Jibia) and the contagion effect, arguing that localised peace in Katsina is merely a spatial displacement of conflict rather than a durable resolution to the broader regional security threat.

Keywords: Armed banditry, insecurity, local communities, peace negotiations,

1. Introduction

The Northwest region of Nigeria, encompassing Katsina State, has faced a severe and evolving security threat characterised as armed banditry. This phenomenon transcends simple criminal activity; it is a complex security crisis rooted in ecological stress, institutional erosion, and the emergence of sophisticated criminal networks (Shehu, 2024). The threat has evolved significantly since 2012, manifesting initially as episodic cattle rustling and pastoralist insurgency before transforming into large-scale organised banditry characterised by mass abductions, large-scale livestock theft, and the extensive monetisation of insecurity (Liman, 2023).

The humanitarian and economic toll in Katsina has been profound. Local communities in areas such as Danmusa lamented that banditry had become intolerable, leading to the loss of lives and properties, the burning of entire villages, and the collapse of local economic activities.[1] People had stopped farming, animal rearing, and local businesses. The displacement of populations, alarming levels of food insecurity, and the closure of essential social infrastructure, schools and hospitals, defined life across the frontline LGAs until the recent localised truces provided a temporary reprieve. Understanding how these local, often community-driven, negotiations affect the longevity and structure of the banditry crisis is central to developing effective policy responses.

The primary analytical challenge in Katsina State lies in reconciling the immediate, tangible desire for peace by victims and local leaders with the long-term, strategic damage inflicted by the negotiation process itself. While securing a four-month period without attacks in Batsari or enabling residents to return to farms in Danmusa represents crucial short-term success, these localised peace deals are precarious. They frequently fall short of the principles required for durable peacebuilding, such as comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) and accountability for past crimes (Ebiede, 2024).

The negotiation process introduces a significant moral hazard, where armed groups are emboldened, impunity is perpetuated, and community mistrust of the state deepens (Yusuf, 2025). This issue is exacerbated by the institutional rift in state policy. The state government, under Governor Dikko Radda, has officially maintained a stance of "No negotiation with bandits". Yet, simultaneously, the government has tacitly supported, or at least failed to prevent, arrangements sanctioned by local government officials, traditional rulers, and community elders that explicitly involve transactional deals with armed groups. This policy of doublespeak compromises the state's judicial and security mandate, resulting in a fragile middle ground that risks mistaking "peace of the graveyard for durable peace" (Oluwole, 2024).

1.2 Research Question

The study seeks to answer the following core research questions:

1. How do localised peace negotiations influence the cohesion and operational capacity of armed bandit groups in Katsina State, specifically regarding the emergence of spoiler factions?
2. What specific transactional terms (concessions regarding arms retention, resource access, and impunity) characterise these agreements, and what are their institutional and economic consequences?
3. In what ways does the reliance on traditional institutions and local officials in these dialogues undermine or reinforce the state’s long-term security architecture and monopoly on violence?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyse the specific negotiation mechanisms and concessions across Danmusa, Musawa, Batsari, Jibia, and Safana LGAs, providing empirical evidence of transactional bargaining.
2. To analyse the political economic implications of granting resource access (e.g., dams, markets) to bandit groups.
3. To map the consequences of delegating local security responsibility, explicitly or implicitly, to bandit commanders.

The significance of this study is rooted in its use of unique, micro-level data derived directly from the negotiation processes. By analysing the actual terms agreed upon by local authorities and bandit leaders (such as Ado Aleru and Audu Lankai), the paper provides crucial empirical evidence concerning conflict resolution involving decentralised criminal Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs). This analysis addresses a key gap in the literature regarding the operationalisation of the spoiler problem in non-ideological conflicts and provides actionable recommendations for policymakers grappling with the consequences of localised truces (Oluwole, 2024).

The paper is structured into six parts. The first section is this introduction while literature review and framework of analysis is the second section. The third section covers the methodology employed in this research. The fourth section explained the findings from the peace negotiations in the five local governments of Katsina State. The fifth section discusses the mechanisms of the paradox of Peace negotiations with armed bandits, while the sixth section concludes the work.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Defining Banditry: The Nexus of Criminality, Grievance, and Resistance

Historically, banditry may combine elements of criminality and resistance, placing "social bandits" in the role of freedom fighters or reformers alongside their status as lawbreakers (Tanko, 2024). While some armed groups in Katsina articulate grievances regarding governmental abandonment, lack of benefits, and unfair judicial practices (where judges allegedly overcharge them and seize animals) , the contemporary form of banditry in Northwest Nigeria is primarily defined by its scale and profit orientation. The violence transcends pastoralist insurgency. It is structured around mass abductions for ransom, creating a highly lucrative criminal enterprise. As one bandit reportedly noted, there is bountiful wealth in banditry (Nsaiba, 2019).

This motivation is intrinsically linked to the illicit economy. Banditry in the region is sustained by profits derived from cattle rustling, arms trade, and ransom payments, establishing a shadow economy that actively rivals the formal state economy (Shehu, 2024). The wealth generated is often reinvested in legitimate structures, such as farmland, livestock, and motorcycles, embedding criminal capital within local economic systems. The link to illegal mining is particularly salient, with the Katsina State Government noting that illegal mining is the "wheel that drives armed 'banditry'" (Shehu, 2024). This connection provides a consistent source of arms and revenue, fueling violence and instability, especially in mining-prone areas like Batsari.

2.2. The Moral Hazard of Negotiation and the Spoiler Problem

Negotiations with armed criminal groups inherently create a moral hazard. Poorly structured amnesty deals fail because they reward violence with political recognition and access to resources, thereby incentivising the formation of new armed groups or the escalation of violence by existing ones to secure better bargaining positions.[3] In the context of Nigeria's conflict-affected environment, negotiating with bandits validates their status as legitimate interlocutors, undermining the fundamental state prerogative of maintaining law and order.

Furthermore, the bandit networks operating in Katsina are not monolithic; they are a "fluid, transactional landscape of rival gangs" (Oluwole, 2024). This fragmentation is a major driver of the spoiler dynamic, a central theory in conflict resolution. When peace is reached with one faction (e.g., Audu Lankai in Jibia), rival commanders (e.g., Aloda) may reject the deal, viewing it as a move by the negotiating leader to consolidate personal wealth or power. These excluded or dissenting factions act as spoilers, escalating attacks in adjacent areas or against the communities that brokered the truce, compelling the state or community to offer them their own deal. The consequence is that localized peace is often structurally destabilising for the region (Oluwole, 2024).

2.3. Hybrid Security Governance and the State Monopoly on Violence

The failure of the Nigerian state's coercive capacity to provide adequate security has necessitated the emergence of non-state security actors and collaborative policing (Charlotte, 2024). In Katsina, this failure has elevated Traditional Rulers (TRs) and religious figures, who retain high levels of legitimacy and trust in rural communities, to the status of primary security brokers (Mukhtar and Jafaru, 2025). While TRs possess the local knowledge and cultural authority essential for mediation, their involvement in brokering truces with armed bandits fundamentally challenges the sovereign state's exclusive right to the legitimate use of force. When agreements explicitly permit bandit leaders to retain weapons for "self-defence" against rival groups, the community is effectively accepting a hybrid governance model where judicial and kinetic authority is delegated to criminal oversight (Ebo, 2007). This delegation results in institutional erosion, substituting state security apparatus with the operational dominance of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs).

2.4. Research Gaps

Previous academic studies have generally recommended that governments demonstrate the superiority of force by defeating armed groups before inviting them to negotiate (Muhammad, Umar and Ibrahim, 2021). However, the immediate security crisis facing Katsina communities necessitated localised, community-driven dialogues regardless of the lack of kinetic superiority. Consequently, there is a lack of micro-level analysis detailing how the transactional terms of these community-led negotiations—specifically the explicit exchange of social benefits, resource access, and tacit impunity for non-violence, reinforce the criminal business model and compromise state institutions. This research paper addresses this gap by utilising proprietary dialogue data from five LGAs to dissect the institutional and economic concessions made at the local level.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

The study employs a qualitative, comparative case study design, analysing the localised negotiation processes across five distinct, conflict-affected LGAs in Katsina State: Danmusa, Musawa, Batsari, Jibia, and Safana. The selection of these cases allows for the identification of common patterns, negotiation dynamics, and resulting policy paradoxes across different geographical and conflict contexts within the same state. This comparative approach is essential for understanding whether the outcomes observed are unique to specific bandit groups or represent a systemic consequence of the negotiation strategy itself.

3.2 Sources of Data Collection

The study relies on both the primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data involve the in-depth content analysis of confidential dialogue transcripts originating from the five LGAs. These documents provide rich, first-hand accounts detailing the roles of key participants (e.g.,

Ado Aleru, Audu Lankai), the explicit terms and conditions set by both communities and bandits, and the immediate, observed post-agreement outcomes, including breaches and enforcement actions. The secondary data is a comprehensive review of peer-reviewed academic literature, policy reports, and reputable security analyses relevant to armed banditry, illicit economies, conflict financing, and peace process dynamics in Northwest Nigeria.

3.3 Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

The data were systematically coded using a thematic content analysis framework centered on three dimensions critical to the security paradox: Firstly, examining explicit demands (resource access, fertiliser subsidies, infrastructure) and agreed-upon concessions (arms retention, impunity for past acts); secondly, analyzing internal bandit group cohesion, the roles of dominant leaders (like Ado Aleru in Danmusa or Audu Lankai in Jibia), and evidence of the spoiler dynamic (e.g., the Aloda/Lankai conflict); and thirdly, mapping the roles of traditional rulers versus formal security agencies and evaluating how agreements impact the perception of state capacity and sovereignty. Ethical review acknowledges the challenges inherent in studying conflict in Nigeria, particularly the need to protect the identity and integrity of local informants who provided the dialogue reports (Babatunde, 2022). The analysis maintains objectivity, focusing exclusively on institutional and policy patterns rather than individual criminal or political culpability.

4. Empirical Findings: Case Studies in Katsina's Localised Dialogues

The localised dialogues across the five LGAs reveal highly consistent patterns of transactional peacebuilding, where immediate de-escalation is achieved through concessions that fundamentally compromise long-term security architecture.

4.1. The Demand for Social Integration and Economic Concessions

Bandit groups systematically utilized the negotiations to articulate grievances and demand socio-economic integration that would allow them to function more seamlessly within the civilian economy. Their demands consistently transcended mere safety guarantees, acting instead as transactional tools for securing political recognition and infrastructure. Across Danmusa, Musawa, and Safana, bandit leaders requested grazing areas for their animals, access to water sources (dam renovations), and the re-opening of social services for their families, including schools for their children and indoor dispensaries (Interviews,2025). In Safana, they specifically demanded inclusion in government benefits like subsidies for fertilisers. This transactional linkage of peace to developmental concessions means that bandit leaders are not simply seeking peace but are negotiating for the means to sustain and integrate their livelihoods, which often intertwines with criminal capital reinvestment (Shehu, 2024).

A key concession sought by the bandits involved neutralising local resistance. In Musawa, they requested the cessation of actions by local vigilantes and C-Watch groups that had previously resulted in the burning of their houses (Interviews, 2025). This transactional element indicates a strategic effort by the bandits to use the peace process to dismantle community-driven security structures that opposed their presence.

4.2. The Disarmament Dilemma: Arms Retention as an Economic Insurance Policy

The paradox of the negotiations is most acutely visible in the failure of comprehensive disarmament, which renders these truces merely periods of temporary non-violence rather than definitive conflict resolution. In nearly every case, complete disarmament was rejected by the bandits, who argued that they needed to retain weapons for "self-defence" against rival groups that had not accepted the peace deal (Interviews, 2025).

- In Danmusa, the bandit leader Ado Aleru surrendered only three AK-47 rifles, stating that the remaining weapons would be used to defend their animals and belongings.
- In Batsari and Jibia, the acceptance of the dialogue was conditional on the bandits being allowed to keep some of their guns, justified by the threat posed by non-negotiating rivals.
- In Safana, bandit leaders expressed profound reluctance to surrender their "irons" (guns), pointedly asking the community leaders what provisions had been made to secure them economically if they disarmed.

The retention of arms signifies that weapons are viewed not merely as tools of coercion but as essential capital assets required for protecting their illicit economic base and maintaining deterrence against competing criminal networks. This failure to enforce disarmament immediately contravenes the fundamental objectives of post-conflict DDR programmes (Ebiede, 2024).

4.3. The Internal Fragmentation Trap: Jibia's Violent Policing

The localised dialogues exposed the highly fragmented nature of bandit groups, confirming the reality of the spoiler problem. The Jibia negotiation, led by Audu Lankai, initially saw participation from numerous commanders and their eight groups. However, four days after the agreement, the internal schism became violent. Commanders Aloda and Bala Wuta initially changed their minds, with Aloda claiming that Lankai's motives were driven by personal wealth accumulation and that the dialogue was only a temporary break. Aloda subsequently left Jibia to continue illicit activities (Interviews, 2025).

The most compelling illustration of the paradox occurred when Audu Lankai, the negotiating commander, began violently enforcing the peace agreement on behalf of the community. After some of Aloda's boys killed Bala Wuta due to a misunderstanding, Lankai pursued and killed eight of Aloda's boys in retaliation. Furthermore, when incidents of rustling occurred post-dialogue, Lankai was informed, and he ensured the animals were returned, punishing the responsible bandits by death (Interviews, 2025). This demonstrates that the peace in Jibia was sustained not by state enforcement but by the successful negotiating bandit faction assuming the role of the local armed authority, executing justice through criminal-on-criminal violence.

4.4. The Contagion Effect and Institutional Delegation

The localised nature of the truces resulted in a clear contagion effect, where success in one area merely displaced the conflict to the next unprotected territory. The dialogue in Safana was initiated by traditional rulers specifically because the bandit groups previously terrorising Jibia and Batsari had diverted their operations to Safana's communities (Interviews,2025). This indicates that localised peace agreements fail to reduce the overall kinetic capacity of the armed groups; they only shift the geography of their operations, ensuring the regional conflict remains fluid and chronic.

The Safana dialogue also highlights the extent of institutional delegation. The process was driven by the District Heads (Yarima and Gatari) after receiving approval from the Emir of Katsina and the Local Government Chairman. Significantly, formal security organisations (military, police) were *not involved* in the negotiation itself (Interviews, 2025). This formalised the reliance on traditional authority as the primary security broker. The Safana community further undermined the formal state institutions by agreeing to release a captured bandit boy to his colleagues. In return, the bandits immediately released fourteen kidnapped individuals (Interviews, 2025). This prisoner exchange, brokered entirely outside of the judicial and security framework, represents a direct compromise of the state's legal and punitive authority. The table below summarizes the core

transactional dynamics observed across the five LGAs.

Table 1: Comparative Summary of Localised Peace Negotiations in Katsina State

Local Government Area (LGA)	Initiator	Key Bandit Leaders	Arms Surrender Outcome	Post-Agreement Breach/Challenge
Danmusa	Community/Fulani Leaders	Ado Aleru, Manore	3 AK-47s surrendered; retained others for self-defence	Councilor killed by Fulani children (Impunity)
Musawa	Bandit (Wada)	Wada, Manore, Kamilu	None surrendered (not on agenda)	Peaceful daily life; markets and schools reopened
Batsari	NGO (Wake Daya)	Dankarami, Audu Lankai, Abu Radde	Some retained for self-defence	Bandit leader assigned to guard Jibia Road and mining sites
Jibia	Bandit (Audu Lankai)	Audu Lankai, Aloda, Bala Wuta	Unspecified number, including 3 AK-47s	Violent internal conflict (Aloda/Bala Wuta schism); Rustling incidents
Safana	Traditional Rulers	Abdulmumini Danda, Bawa Mai Sanda	Unresolved; reluctance expressed ('irons' kept)	Instant prisoner exchange compromised formal security process

Table 2: Bandit Demands and Community Concessions (Core Bargaining Terms)

Negotiating Party	Key Demand/Condition	Implicit Goal	Associated Paradox/Risk
Bandits	Retention of arms for "self-defence"	Maintaining economic and operational deterrence	Institutionalises parallel military authority
Bandits	Access to resources (dams, fertiliser)	Societal legitimacy; integration of criminal capital	Reinforces the political economy of banditry
Community	Ban on guns/uniforms in town	Restoring symbolic state authority	Delegates enforcement to bandit commanders
Community	Forgiveness/No harassment	Trust-building and de-escalation	Institutionalises moral hazard and impunity
Community	Release of captured	Immediate	Undermines judicial

	bandits (Safana)	demonstration of good faith	system and security forces

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

5. Discussion: Mechanisms of the Paradox

5.1. The Fragmentation Trap: When Peace Empowerment Fuels Internal Conflict

The evidence from Jibia demonstrates that in conflicts involving fragmented criminal groups, a peace deal with one faction often functions as an act of territorial consolidation rather than reconciliation. Audu Lankai's decision to pursue dialogue likely aimed at securing legitimate economic access and protecting his sphere of influence. Aloda's rejection, attributing the deal to Lankai's accumulation of wealth, confirms the underlying economic and political rivalry. When Lankai violently retaliated against Aloda's boys, killing eight of them after Bala Wuta's death, he was establishing a clear delineation between "peace-abiding" and "spoiler" factions. This intense criminal-on-criminal violence is a crucial mechanism of the paradox: the community achieves peace by tolerating the intensification of violence among the armed groups, effectively legitimising the dominant faction (Lankai) as the necessary armed security provider. The survival of the truce relies not on institutionalised state security but on the internal kinetic dynamics of the criminal networks.

5.2. The Delegated Security Model: Bandit Leaders as Local Enforcers

A defining characteristic of the Katsina dialogues is the substitution of state enforcement with criminal oversight. Bandit leaders, such as Audu Lankai in Jibia and Abu Radda in Batsari, accepted the responsibility for guarding key routes (Jibia Road) and strategic economic sites like mining areas (Interviews, 2025). They were tasked with ensuring the safety of commuters and miners. This phenomenon is not merely passive cooperation; it is the active delegation of security functions to non-state armed groups due to the demonstrated failure of state capacity (Charlotte, 2024). The paradox is clear: the same retained weapons (the 'irons') that previously facilitated terror are now utilised by the bandit commanders to enforce the new non-violence agreement, thereby protecting the community and securing the commanders' legitimacy. The community accepts the presence of armed bandit boys guarding fields and patrolling towns because the alternative is complete insecurity. This arrangement replaces the state's exclusive authority with a hybrid, localised security structure dominated by former (or current) criminals.

5.3. The Political Economy of Negotiation: Entrenching Criminal Wealth

The negotiation demands show that banditry is fundamentally an economic pursuit. The requests for access to resources, water, grazing land, and markets are strategic requirements that enable the seamless integration of illicit capital into the local economy. Bandits profit extensively from ransom and cattle rustling, creating a shadow economy where wealth circulates through rural markets. By guaranteeing access to these markets and resources, the community inadvertently facilitates the laundering and reinvestment of ransom proceeds. Furthermore, the failure to address the core economic drivers, particularly the rampant illegal mining that provides vast revenues and arms (estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually), means that the truces are financially self-defeating (Shehu, 2024). When a truce is established, the underlying economic engine of the conflict remains intact, allowing bandit groups to rearm, recruit, and shift operations, making the peace agreements financially unsustainable in the long term.

5.4. Institutional Erosion and Policy Doublespeak

The state government's official policy of "no negotiation" while local government chairmen and traditional rulers conduct dialogues (often with the presence of security personnel who are not authorised to participate formally) results in institutional hypocrisy (Agbedo, 2025). This strategy allows the central government to avoid political accountability for negotiating with criminals, but it simultaneously externalises the moral and physical risk onto local actors. This institutional ambiguity actively erodes the credibility of formal security institutions. In Danmusa, security personnel were present during the peace talks, even allowing bandit children to take pictures with military armored cars (Interviews,2025). In Safana, formal security was not involved in the negotiation, effectively relegating them to passive acceptance of the local deal. When local leaders broker prisoner exchanges outside of the judicial system (as seen in Safana), the community learns that genuine justice and security are best achieved by circumventing state agencies and dealing directly with the armed groups.

5.5. The Moral Hazard of Normalisation and Impunity

The ultimate danger of the paradox is the normalization of impunity. The agreements generally require the community to "forget about past grievances" and accept the bandits as co-brothers (Interviews,2025). This normalisation is symbolised by the post-dialogue visits of bandits to Musawa town to see family, engaging in conversations, and returning to their dens at their leisure. However, this climate of tacit impunity facilitates opportunistic criminality by lower-level actors who feel shielded by the truce. The incident in Danmusa, where a councilor was shot dead by Fulani children after he refused to hand over his phone, illustrates this danger. While the bandit leader promised an investigation, the fact that such an incident occurred shortly after the dialogue confirms that the structural violence and criminal mindset persist, protected by the political legitimacy granted through the negotiation.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Recapitulation of localised peace negotiations in Katsina State is a necessary humanitarian response to intolerable insecurity but represents a dangerous, institutionally corrosive strategy. These truces secure immediate cessation of violence, a vital achievement for communities that had ceased farming and commerce. However, they simultaneously empower fragmented criminal networks, institutionalise non-disarmament, facilitate the integration of illicit wealth into the local economy, and fundamentally compromise the state's monopoly on violence. The peace achieved is highly transactional, fragile, and often dependent on the internal kinetic balance among competing bandit leaders.

Moving beyond the reliance on precarious local truces requires a comprehensive, coordinated, and structurally sound approach that addresses the political economy of the conflict while restoring state authority. Therefore, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Future peace efforts must transcend the LGA and state level. The mobility of commanders, such as Ado Aleru who hails from Danmusa but relocated to Zamfara State, and the clear contagion effect seen in Safana, necessitates a coordinated security and dialogue framework involving multiple affected states (Katsina, Zamfara, Kaduna, etc.) to prevent the mere spatial displacement of violence.
2. Negotiations should only be initiated after credible kinetic operations have demonstrably reduced the bandits' bargaining leverage. The government must avoid negotiating under duress, as this compels negotiators to grant concessions like arms retention or immunity that entrench the criminal status quo. Achieving kinetic superiority is essential to ensuring full disarmament, which is the cornerstone of any sustainable post-conflict transition.

3. Comprehensive DDR programmes must be implemented, linking disarmament explicitly to robust, state-funded economic alternatives. The state must strictly regulate access to vital resources like fertiliser subsidies, water dams, and markets to prevent them from becoming transactional tools used by bandit leaders to sustain their criminal political economy. Concurrently, there must be a coordinated effort to dismantle the illicit economies, particularly illegal mining, which funds the acquisition of sophisticated arms.
4. The vital role of highly trusted traditional rulers must be formally integrated into conflict monitoring and peace consolidation efforts. However, their mandate must be clearly delimited and supported by law. Traditional rulers should be strictly prohibited from brokering kinetic security decisions, such as tolerating arms retention, or engaging in judicial compromises, such as arranging the release of arrested bandits. All judicial and kinetic responsibilities must be unequivocally reclaimed by the formal state security apparatus.

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