

PEACE OVERTURE AND AMNESTY FOR BANDITRY IN KATSINA STATE: A STUDY OF GOVERNOR AMINU BELLO MASARI ADMINISTRATION, 2015–2023

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Abstract

The escalation of armed banditry in Katsina State, Nigeria, between 2015 and 2023 has posed severe threats to human security, governance, and community resilience. Governor Aminu Bello Masari's administration adopted peace overtures and amnesty programs as alternatives to militarized interventions. This study critically examines the implementation, outcomes, and limitations of these initiatives, drawing on Resilience Theory, Human Security Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory. Using a qualitative methodology, data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of policy documents, media reports, and government communiqués. Findings indicate that while the peace overtures temporarily reduced violence and facilitated dialogue between state actors and bandit groups, their effectiveness was undermined by weak institutional monitoring, corruption, inadequate reintegration measures, and community perceptions that amnesty legitimized criminality. The study highlights the limitations of short-term, top-down approaches in addressing rural insecurity and emphasizes the need for integrating amnesty within broader frameworks of disarmament, community resilience building, rural development, and governance reforms. Sustainable peace in Katsina State requires long-term, transformative strategies that address the structural drivers of banditry rather than isolated policy measures, offering valuable insights for policymakers and scholars concerned with subnational peacebuilding in high-risk regions.

Keywords: armed banditry, Katsina State, peace overtures, amnesty programs, human security, community resilience

Introduction

Over the past decade, armed banditry has emerged as one of the most significant internal security threats in Northern Nigeria, with Katsina State becoming a critical epicenter of the crisis. While rural banditry predates the Fourth Republic, its escalation in the 2010s transformed it into a protracted humanitarian, economic, and security challenge (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Bandit groups in Katsina are typically heavily armed, mobile, and organized across forested and border regions, engaging in activities such as killings, kidnappings for ransom, cattle rustling, and the widespread displacement of rural populations (Bukar, 2021; Abdulyakeen & Nurain, 2023). The violence has had profound consequences on livelihoods, undermining agricultural productivity and local economies, while eroding the capacity of communities to maintain resilience in the face of insecurity. Humanitarian reports indicate that by 2022, thousands of

residents had been displaced, with entire villages abandoned due to fear of attacks (International Crisis Group, 2020). Unlike the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast, which is ideologically motivated, the dynamics of banditry in Katsina are deeply tied to socio-economic marginalization, resource scarcity, proliferation of small arms, and weak governance structures (Musa, 2021). The operational landscape is further complicated by blurred lines between criminality and insurgency, as some bandit groups have reportedly aligned with jihadist factions to expand their networks, intensifying both local and regional security risks.

In response to this escalating crisis, the administration of Governor Aminu Bello Masari (2015–2023) adopted a dual strategy that combined militarized interventions with non-military approaches, notably peace overtures and amnesty programs. Between 2016 and 2019, these initiatives involved structured dialogue with armed groups, declarations of amnesty, and promises of reintegration for individuals who surrendered their arms (Abdullahi, 2022; Katsina, Mashi, & Abdulkadir, 2024). The programs included provisions for disarmament, limited financial incentives, and assurances of non-prosecution, while traditional leaders and religious clerics were enlisted to mediate between state authorities and bandit groups. The government framed these initiatives as pragmatic alternatives to prolonged military campaigns, which had proven both costly and largely ineffective in curbing rural violence. Although the peace overtures initially facilitated dialogue and temporarily reduced attacks, their sustainability was undermined by poor monitoring, corruption, insufficient reintegration mechanisms, and the perception among communities that amnesty legitimized criminality. By 2021, renewed bandit attacks indicated that the initiatives had failed to achieve durable stability. Nevertheless, Masari's programs represented one of the first systematic state-level attempts to negotiate peace with rural armed groups, offering a valuable case for understanding the complexities and limitations of non-military responses to violent conflict in Nigeria.

Despite the policy attention given to these interventions, existing scholarship remains limited. Most studies on Nigeria's insecurity focus on Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast or militancy in the Niger Delta, leaving rural banditry in Northwestern states underexplored (Aghedo, 2014; Onapajo & Ozden, 2020). While some research has examined banditry broadly (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019), there is little systematic analysis of peace overtures and amnesty programs targeting rural armed groups in Katsina. Additionally, studies on amnesty programs have predominantly emphasized the Niger Delta context, overlooking the distinct motivations, organizational structures, and operational dynamics of Northern bandit groups. Consequently, there is a critical gap in understanding whether state-led negotiation and reintegration programs can be effectively applied in regions where insecurity is shaped by socio-economic deprivation, governance deficits, and fluid criminal-insurgent networks. Policy reports and media coverage acknowledge the mixed outcomes of Masari's initiatives, but few academic works critically assess their effectiveness, limitations, and implications for broader security governance and peacebuilding strategies.

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the research contributes to the growing literature on non-military approaches to rural armed violence by applying Resilience Theory, Human Security Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory to the Katsina case. Resilience Theory

allows for the examination of community capacities to withstand, adapt, and recover from recurrent bandit attacks. Human Security Theory foregrounds the protection of individuals' lives, livelihoods, and dignity as central to security interventions, while Conflict Transformation Theory provides a lens for understanding how structural drivers of banditry such as poverty, weak institutions, and marginalization can be addressed to foster long-term peace. By integrating these frameworks, the study moves beyond descriptive accounts to analyze the interplay between state strategies, community responses, and armed group behavior.

Practically, the study offers insights for policymakers and security actors on designing more effective peace and reintegration programs. Understanding the successes and failures of Masari's initiatives can inform future interventions in Katsina and other Northern states, emphasizing the importance of combining short-term security measures with long-term strategies that address structural drivers of violence. Specifically, the study highlights the need to move beyond ad hoc bargaining with armed groups toward integrated approaches that incorporate disarmament, community resilience building, rural development, and governance reform. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the peace overture and amnesty programs implemented in Katsina State between 2015 and 2023. It is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What were the key features and design elements of Governor Masari's peace overtures and amnesty programs in Katsina State between 2015 and 2023?
- ii. To what extent did these initiatives succeed in reducing banditry-related violence and enhancing community resilience, as conceptualized through Resilience and Human Security theories?
- iii. What structural, institutional, and social factors limited the effectiveness of these programs, and how do they reflect challenges in conflict transformation?
- iv. How the Katsina experience contribute to broader theoretical and policy debates on non-military approaches to rural armed violence and state-led peacebuilding in Nigeria?

Conceptual Clarifications

Peace Overtures

A peace overture refers to deliberate, conciliatory measures initiated by governments or stakeholders to open channels of dialogue with armed groups. These initiatives acknowledge the limitations of purely military approaches and posit that sustainable conflict resolution requires negotiation, compromise, and structural reforms (Okoye, 2020). Peace overtures may include symbolic gestures, mediation by neutral actors, confidence-building measures, or temporary ceasefires designed to reduce hostilities and signal a willingness to accommodate grievances. In Katsina State, Governor Aminu Bello Masari's administration (2015–2023) implemented peace overtures through dialogues facilitated by traditional rulers and local community leaders, temporary ceasefires, and the provision of material incentives to encourage armed bandits to disarm. While these initiatives marked a strategic departure from reliance solely on coercion, their effectiveness depended on consistent implementation, institutional support, and mutual trust between

state authorities and armed actors. The overtures were designed not merely to halt immediate violence but to provide an enabling environment for reintegration and long-term social stability.

Amnesty

Amnesty is a state-sanctioned pardon offered to individuals or groups engaged in criminal or violent activities, usually conditional on disarmament and reintegration into society (Onapajo & Özden, 2020). Amnesty programs often include legal forgiveness, vocational training, rehabilitation, and other measures aimed at transforming ex-combatants into productive members of society. Globally, experiences with amnesty reveal both its promise and pitfalls. Nigeria's Niger Delta Amnesty Programme (2009) combined disarmament, stipends, and educational opportunities to reduce militancy, yet it faced criticism for elite capture, uneven reintegration, and failure to address structural drivers such as poverty and corruption (Aghedo, 2014; Obi, 2020). Uganda's Amnesty Act (2000) successfully demobilized LRA combatants but undermined justice for victims, highlighting the tension between peace and accountability (Blattman & Annan, 2010). Colombia's 2016 FARC peace agreement incorporated conditional pardons linked to truth-telling and reparations, balancing reintegration with accountability (Arnson, 2016; Nussio, 2018). These comparative experiences illustrate that amnesty can provide short-term reductions in violence but is insufficient unless embedded within broader governance, development, and reconciliation strategies. In Katsina, the Masari administration's amnesty program sought to reduce banditry while promoting community reintegration, yet challenges such as limited institutional capacity, inconsistent funding, and lack of trust constrained its long-term impact.

Banditry and Insurgency

Banditry is organized armed criminality typically motivated by economic gain rather than ideology. In Northern Nigeria, banditry manifests through cattle rustling, kidnappings for ransom, and rural raids, often targeting farming communities and disrupting local economies (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Bukar, 2021; Katsina, 2024). Unlike insurgency, which is politically or ideologically motivated, banditry focuses on personal or group enrichment, though it can intersect with insurgent networks. Alliances between bandit groups and insurgent factions have been reported in Northwestern Nigeria, complicating distinctions between criminality and ideological rebellion (Musa, 2021). Insurgency, exemplified by Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria, is characterized by organized campaigns seeking to challenge or overthrow state authority (Aghedo, 2014; Abdulyakeen & Nurain, 2024). While Katsina's banditry lacks the ideological underpinnings of insurgency, overlaps with insurgent actors create hybrid threats, necessitating nuanced policy responses that go beyond conventional security frameworks.

Community Resilience

Community resilience, central to this study, refers to the capacity of local populations to adapt, withstand, and recover from recurrent crises such as armed violence (Adewale, 2021). In Katsina, resilience is expressed through informal strategies including vigilante groups, grassroots mediation, and support networks for displaced persons. Resilience theory emphasizes that recovery from repeated shocks requires both coping mechanisms and transformative adaptations, such as the reconfiguration of social, economic, and governance structures. Masari's peace overtures and amnesty initiatives, in this context, aimed to

complement local resilience by reducing violence and creating conditions conducive to long-term recovery.

Historical Roots and Patterns of Armed Banditry in Northern Nigeria

The escalation of armed banditry in Northern Nigeria cannot be understood in isolation from its historical antecedents. While contemporary manifestations appear novel in scale and sophistication, they are rooted in deeper socio-economic, political, and environmental processes that have long shaped the region. Tracing these dynamics is crucial for situating Katsina State's experience within broader historical continuities of insecurity in Northern Nigeria. Northern Nigeria has a long history of pastoral–agrarian tensions, predating colonial rule. The Fulani jihad of the early 19th century established the Sokoto Caliphate, which reorganized political authority but also entrenched hierarchies of land ownership and pastoral mobility (Last, 2011). Pastoralists, particularly the Fulani, relied on seasonal grazing routes, while sedentary farmers expanded cultivation into formerly open rangelands. These competing land uses periodically generated disputes that, although traditionally managed by local authorities, laid the foundation for enduring conflicts. Colonial policies further exacerbated these tensions. The introduction of taxation, codification of land tenure systems, and indirect rule disrupted indigenous mechanisms for conflict mediation (Blench, 2017). Colonial authorities often privileged sedentary farming for taxation purposes, marginalizing pastoral groups and restricting access to grazing lands. This contributed to cycles of displacement and animosity that resurfaced in the postcolonial era. The proliferation of small arms in the late colonial and early postcolonial periods, particularly from trans-Saharan trade routes, deepened the capacity for violent criminality.

After independence in 1960, Northern Nigeria experienced rapid demographic growth, shrinking land availability, and growing state neglect of rural development. Policies disproportionately favored urban elites while neglecting investment in rural infrastructure, education, and social services (Ibrahim, 2014). Rural communities were left vulnerable to insecurity, as weak policing, absence of basic amenities, and corruption eroded the legitimacy of the state. Banditry initially took the form of cattle rustling a practice with historical roots in pastoral economies. Traditionally, cattle raiding had social and economic significance among some pastoral communities, but it was usually regulated by norms and limited in scope. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, cattle rustling became increasingly violent and commercialized, facilitated by organized networks that sold stolen livestock across borders (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014). The erosion of communal values, combined with the lure of illicit profit, transformed what was once a marginal activity into a systemic criminal economy.

Environmental changes have also played a central role in the evolution of banditry. Desertification, erratic rainfall, and advancing drought conditions in the Sahel pushed pastoralists further south into farmlands, intensifying competition over land and water resources (Adebayo, 2019). Climate-induced migration of pastoral communities, coupled with inadequate state mechanisms for conflict resolution, often generated violent clashes with farming populations. These clashes contributed to the growth of armed groups that blurred the boundaries between livelihood defense and organized banditry. Furthermore, the proliferation

of forests such as Rugu, Kamuku, and Kuyanbana in Northwestern Nigeria provided natural sanctuaries for bandit groups. These forested enclaves became operational bases for raiding, kidnapping, and cattle rustling, effectively insulating bandits from security operations (International Crisis Group, 2020). Environmental stress, therefore, not only heightened grievances but also enabled the spatial geography of armed banditry.

From the 2000s onward, armed banditry in Northern Nigeria became increasingly embedded within broader criminal economies. The expansion of cross-border trade in arms, cattle, and narcotics linked local bandit groups to regional networks spanning Niger, Chad, and Mali (Osumah, 2021). Bandits exploited porous borders and weak state institutions to sustain illicit activities, while proceeds from ransom kidnappings and cattle theft financed the acquisition of sophisticated weaponry. The monetization of violence through mass kidnappings for ransom marked a turning point. Initially targeting wealthy elites, kidnappers expanded to abduct schoolchildren, travelers, and farmers, thereby spreading insecurity to all segments of society. This development not only magnified the scale of suffering but also created a climate of fear that undermined education, trade, and agricultural production across the Northwest.

Although distinct in origin, armed banditry has at times intersected with insurgency. Reports of alliances between Boko Haram factions and bandit groups in Northwestern Nigeria suggest growing hybridization between criminal and ideological violence (Musa, 2021). While many bandits remain motivated by profit rather than ideology, collaboration with insurgents has facilitated access to weapons, training, and logistical support. This convergence blurs the analytical distinction between banditry and insurgency, complicating state responses that rely on a rigid separation of categories. The victims of banditry have overwhelmingly been rural communities. Mass killings, sexual violence, forced displacement, and destruction of livelihoods have devastated agrarian economies and deepened cycles of poverty (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). The displacement crisis, with hundreds of thousands uprooted, has overwhelmed humanitarian capacity and strained relations between host and displaced communities. Women and children, in particular, bear disproportionate burdens, as gender-based violence and disruption of schooling have become widespread.

Global and African Experiences with Amnesty Programs

Amnesty programs have been widely used as conflict management tools across the globe, particularly in contexts where military options prove inadequate or counterproductive. While their designs and outcomes vary, amnesty initiatives generally seek to incentivize the abandonment of violence by offering a combination of legal pardon, material support, and prospects for reintegration into society. A comparative examination of experiences in Nigeria's Niger Delta, Uganda, and Colombia provides critical insights into the possibilities and pitfalls of such policies, which in turn frame the debate over peace overtures in Katsina State.

Nigeria's Niger Delta Amnesty Programme remains the country's most prominent example of state-led amnesty. Introduced in 2009 under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, the program targeted militants engaged in violent agitation over oil-related grievances, including environmental degradation and resource control. The initiative offered unconditional pardon, financial stipends, vocational training, and

international educational opportunities to militants who disarmed (Aghedo, 2014). The program is often credited with reducing large-scale attacks on oil infrastructure, thereby restoring Nigeria's oil output and stabilizing revenue flows. However, scholars highlight significant limitations. Critics argue that the initiative institutionalized rent-seeking, empowered militant leaders as patrons, and neglected structural drivers of conflict such as poverty, corruption, and environmental injustice (Obi, 2020). Moreover, the exclusion of non-elite youth created resentment and contributed to recurring waves of violence. The Niger Delta experience illustrates both the short-term gains and long-term risks of using amnesty primarily as a pacification strategy.

Uganda's Amnesty Act of 2000 offers another instructive case. Designed in the aftermath of decades-long conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the law granted blanket amnesty to rebels who renounced rebellion. Unlike the Niger Delta case, Uganda's program targeted an insurgency with ideological and religious underpinnings. The amnesty facilitated the demobilization of thousands of combatants, including child soldiers forcibly recruited by the LRA (Blattman & Annan, 2010). Yet the program faced criticism for undermining justice and accountability. By prioritizing reintegration over prosecution, the amnesty denied victims' demands for justice and contributed to a culture of impunity. The International Criminal Court (ICC), which indicted LRA leaders including Joseph Kony, clashed with Uganda's domestic amnesty provisions. Furthermore, reintegration support was uneven, with many ex-combatants struggling to rebuild livelihoods or overcome community stigmatization (Porter, 2017). The Ugandan case demonstrates the tension between peace and justice, raising questions about whether blanket amnesty sacrifices long-term reconciliation for short-term security.

Colombia's experience with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) illustrates a more complex and negotiated model of amnesty. The 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and FARC included disarmament, reintegration, and transitional justice mechanisms. Rather than blanket pardons, the deal created a system of reduced sentences for those who confessed and contributed to truth-telling and reparations (Arnson, 2016). This hybrid approach sought to balance justice and peace by incorporating both accountability and reintegration. Thousands of former FARC combatants demobilized, and violence levels declined substantially. Nonetheless, the program faced challenges, including delays in reintegration benefits, political opposition, and the rearmament of dissident factions dissatisfied with the process (Nussio, 2018). Colombia's case underscores the importance of comprehensive design, political will, and sustained resources in implementing amnesty-based peace initiatives.

Comparing these cases highlights several recurring themes. First, amnesty programs are most effective when embedded in broader peacebuilding strategies that address structural grievances. Where amnesty is pursued in isolation, as in the Niger Delta, it risks becoming a tool for elite co-optation rather than genuine transformation. Second, reintegration support is critical. Both Uganda and Colombia reveal that without effective livelihood support, education, and community reconciliation, ex-combatants risk returning to violence or suffering marginalization. Third, the tension between peace and justice remains central. While blanket amnesties may yield immediate demobilization, they can undermine accountability, perpetuate cycles of impunity, and delegitimize the state in the eyes of victims. In the African context, amnesty programs have been widely experimented with, from Sierra Leone's post-civil war amnesty provisions to

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC's conditional amnesty, which required full disclosure of crimes, is often contrasted with blanket amnesties as a more ethically defensible compromise between truth, justice, and reconciliation (Hayner, 2011). The diversity of these experiences underscores that amnesty is not a one-size-fits-all solution but must be adapted to specific conflict dynamics.

For Katsina State, the lessons from global and African experiences are salient. Governor Aminu Bello Masari's amnesty initiative (2015–2023) unfolded in a context where banditry was driven less by ideology than by economic opportunism, weak governance, and criminal economies. Unlike the FARC in Colombia or the LRA in Uganda, Katsina's bandits lack centralized leadership or political goals, complicating negotiation and implementation of amnesty. The Niger Delta example, however, resonates more closely, given its focus on disarmament, stipends, and reintegration though with the cautionary note that rent-seeking and elite capture can undermine sustainability. Ultimately, the comparative record suggests that amnesty can provide short-term respite from violence but is unlikely to succeed unless embedded in comprehensive strategies that strengthen governance, provide sustainable livelihoods, and restore community trust. For Katsina, this means that peace overtures and amnesty policies should be evaluated not only in terms of immediate reduction in violence but also in their capacity to transform the underlying drivers of banditry.

Scholarly Debates on State Responses: Militarization vs. Negotiation

The escalation of armed banditry in Nigeria, particularly in Katsina State, has generated intense scholarly debate over the most effective state response. Two dominant paradigms emerge in this discourse: militarization, which privileges the use of armed force to suppress non-state violence, and negotiation, which emphasizes dialogue, amnesty, and peace overtures. The debates are situated within broader global discussions on counterinsurgency, peacebuilding, and state legitimacy, and highlight the complex trade-offs between coercion and conciliation.

Militarization refers to the deployment of armed forces and security agencies to confront violent non-state actors. Advocates argue that violent groups undermine state sovereignty, disrupt security, and inflict widespread suffering on civilians, thereby necessitating decisive military responses (Akinola, 2020). In Nigeria, the military has historically been the state's preferred instrument of internal security, as demonstrated in counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram in the Northeast and joint task forces combating militancy in the Niger Delta. Proponents of militarization argue that banditry, though less ideological than insurgency, has acquired such scale and sophistication that only force can disrupt its networks. Bandit groups in Katsina and across the Northwest operate in forested hideouts, possess sophisticated weaponry, and conduct cross-border raids, making them formidable opponents (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). From this perspective, granting concessions or negotiating risks emboldening criminal actors, who may interpret state overtures as weakness. However, the limitations of militarization are well documented. First, security forces often struggle with inadequate manpower, poor logistics, corruption, and low morale, undermining their effectiveness (Hassan, 2021). Second, military operations can produce unintended consequences, such as civilian casualties, human rights violations, and displacement, which exacerbate grievances and fuel recruitment into armed groups. Third, the vast and difficult terrain of the

Northwest makes sustained military presence costly and often unsustainable. Scholars note that despite repeated offensives, including airstrikes and clearance operations, banditry has persisted, suggesting that militarization alone cannot address its root causes (Musa, 2021).

Negotiation and peace overtures, on the other hand, emphasize dialogue, amnesty, and incentives to persuade armed groups to lay down arms. Scholars advocating this approach argue that coercion without conciliation overlooks the socio-economic drivers of violence, such as rural poverty, youth unemployment, marginalization, and weak governance (Okoye, 2020). Peace overtures may foster temporary ceasefires, build trust, and create opportunities for disarmament and reintegration. Governor Aminu Bello Masari's peace initiative in Katsina (2015–2023) reflected this logic, as he sought dialogue with bandit leaders through intermediaries such as traditional rulers and Fulani associations. The initiative included ceasefire agreements, the return of rustled cattle, and material incentives such as cash and food supplies. For a brief period, these overtures contributed to a decline in attacks, demonstrating the potential of negotiation to create breathing space for affected communities (Adewale, 2021). Nevertheless, critics caution that negotiation with bandits risks legitimizing criminal actors and undermining the rule of law. Amnesty and material incentives may incentivize violence by signaling that armed rebellion yields rewards, thereby encouraging cycles of surrender, reintegration, and re-engagement in banditry (Onapajo & Ozden, 2020; Abdulyakeen, 2021). Moreover, the fragmented and decentralized nature of bandit groups in Katsina complicates negotiation. Unlike insurgent movements with centralized leadership (e.g., FARC in Colombia or the LRA in Uganda), Katsina's bandits operate in multiple factions, making it difficult to secure compliance across the spectrum. Reports of bandits violating ceasefires and resuming attacks underscore these challenges.

A growing body of scholarship suggests that the militarization-versus-negotiation dichotomy may be overly simplistic. Instead, hybrid approaches that combine calibrated use of force with peace overtures are seen as more viable. Military pressure can weaken bandits' bargaining power, while negotiation can provide pathways for defection, reintegration, and localized peace. In the Niger Delta, for example, military crackdowns on militant camps were followed by the 2009 amnesty, producing short-term stability. Similarly, in Colombia, the government combined counterinsurgency campaigns with dialogue that culminated in the FARC peace agreement (Arnson, 2016). In the Katsina context, hybrid strategies could involve targeted military operations to contain violent groups while simultaneously strengthening community resilience through dialogue, development projects, and reintegration programs. Such an approach aligns with conflict transformation theory, which emphasizes addressing root causes and restructuring relationships rather than relying solely on coercion. Underlying the debate is the question of state legitimacy. Militarization can reinforce perceptions of the state as coercive and predatory if abuses are rampant, while negotiation can undermine legitimacy if it rewards criminality. The success of either approach ultimately depends on governance capacity, institutional integrity, and community trust. Scholars argue that without addressing corruption, weak security institutions, and rural marginalization, both militarization and negotiation risk becoming temporary fixes rather than durable solutions (Obi, 2020).

Despite the growing body of research on insecurity in Northern Nigeria, significant gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding state-level peace initiatives in the Northwest. Most existing scholarship has concentrated on insurgency in the Northeast, with Boko Haram and its splinter groups receiving disproportionate analytical attention (Aghedo, 2014; Musa, 2021). Studies of non-ideological violence, such as rural banditry, are relatively fewer and often framed within broader discourses on organized crime or farmer–herder conflicts (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). This imbalance has left the dynamics of armed banditry, especially at the subnational level, underexplored. Furthermore, the bulk of literature on amnesty and peace overtures in Nigeria focuses on the Niger Delta experience, where militancy was addressed through a combination of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs (Obi, 2020). While valuable, this focus risks overgeneralization, as the socio-economic, ecological, and political contexts of the Niger Delta differ sharply from those of the Northwest. Few studies have systematically examined the adaptation or limitations of such approaches in addressing rural banditry. At the state level, initiatives like Governor Aminu Bello Masari’s peace overtures (2015–2023) in Katsina remain understudied. Although some journalistic accounts and policy reports provide descriptive insights, there is a paucity of scholarly work that critically assesses their design, implementation, effectiveness, and unintended consequences. Specifically, little is known about how local communities perceived these overtures, whether they enhanced resilience, and how they intersected with ongoing military operations. This study therefore seeks to fill these gaps by providing a systematic, empirically grounded assessment of peace overtures and amnesty policies in Katsina State under Masari’s administration. By doing so, it contributes to both academic debates on non-state violence and policy discussions on sustainable responses to rural banditry in Nigeria’s Northwest.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three interrelated theoretical perspectives. Resilience Theory, Human Security Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory each of which provides unique insights into the dynamics of violent banditry and the peace overtures initiated under Governor Aminu Bello Masari’s administration in Katsina State.

Resilience Theory emphasizes the capacity of communities to adapt to, withstand, and recover from repeated shocks such as violence and displacement. In contexts of persistent banditry, resilience is not only about survival but also about fostering mechanisms such as vigilante groups, local mediation, and informal coping networks that enable communities to sustain social order despite insecurity (Adewale, 2021). Applying this lens to Katsina highlights how peace overtures were meant to complement local resilience by reducing violence and creating conditions for recovery. Human Security Theory shifts the analysis of security away from the state-centric paradigm toward the protection and welfare of individuals. In Katsina, banditry directly threatened people’s survival, livelihoods, and dignity through killings, kidnappings, and forced displacement. Masari’s overtures, which prioritized dialogue and amnesty, implicitly aligned with the human security approach by seeking to protect civilians where military responses had proved insufficient. This perspective underscores the importance of addressing insecurities that affect ordinary lives rather than solely defending state sovereignty. Conflict Transformation Theory goes beyond short-term conflict management to emphasize structural change, reconciliation, and the resolution of root causes of violence (Lederach, 1997). Masari’s amnesty and dialogue initiatives can be

interpreted as attempts to transform conflict dynamics by reintegrating bandits, restoring trust, and addressing grievances related to poverty and marginalization.

Taken together, these theories explain the rationale, scope, and limitations of Masari's peace overtures. They highlight the need for holistic approaches that build community resilience, prioritize human security, and transform structural drivers of banditry for sustainable peace in Katsina State.

Historical and Political Context

The persistence of violent armed banditry in Katsina State cannot be fully understood outside the broader historical and political realities that shaped both the rise of insecurity and the policy responses under Governor Aminu Bello Masari's administration (2015–2023). This section examines the political landscape during Masari's tenure, socio-economic drivers of banditry, preceding security measures prior to 2015, and the rationale for turning to peace overtures and amnesty as state strategies.

Katsina State occupies a strategic location in Nigeria's Northwest, bordering the Republic of Niger and serving as a key agrarian hub with a population exceeding seven million (National Population Commission, 2021). Politically, the state is significant not only due to its demographic weight but also because it is the home state of President Muhammadu Buhari, whose election in 2015 coincided with Masari's ascension to the governorship. This dual prominence elevated expectations for Masari's administration to deliver tangible security outcomes. As a veteran politician and former Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives, Masari campaigned on promises to restore peace, improve rural livelihoods, and strengthen governance structures. However, his leadership was immediately confronted with escalating rural banditry that had entrenched itself across the state by the late 2000s, manifesting as cattle rustling, kidnappings for ransom, and indiscriminate attacks on farming communities (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Masari's political calculus was constrained by the need to balance local legitimacy with alignment to federal security frameworks, which emphasized military-led responses. Federal initiatives often prioritized joint task forces and counterinsurgency operations with limited effectiveness, leaving Masari to navigate a complex policy terrain where conventional coercion had repeatedly failed. This environment created the space for alternative approaches peace overtures and amnesty to emerge as pragmatic responses to persistent insecurity.

The socio-economic context further underpinned the rise of violent banditry. Katsina is predominantly agrarian, with livelihoods tied to subsistence farming and livestock rearing. Decades of neglect in rural infrastructure, coupled with environmental degradation such as desertification and soil erosion, constrained agricultural productivity and perpetuated poverty. The National Bureau of Statistics (2020) identifies Katsina as among Nigeria's poorest states, where opportunities for youth employment are scarce. Rural youths, facing limited prospects, became susceptible to recruitment into bandit groups that offered quick financial gains through cattle rustling, kidnappings, and other criminal enterprises (Akinola, 2021). The proliferation of small arms across the Sahel further facilitated the growth of organized criminal networks, while weak institutional capacity characterized by underfunded security agencies, ineffective judicial systems, and corruption allowed banditry to thrive with minimal deterrence (Musa, 2021).

Traditional governance structures that historically mediated local disputes had also been undermined, leaving rural communities vulnerable to predatory actors and cycles of revenge violence.

Prior to Masari's tenure, several measures attempted to curb banditry, but they largely relied on militarized strategies. Federal operations such as Operation Harbin Kunama (Scorpion Sting) deployed joint military campaigns across Katsina, Zamfara, and Kaduna to dislodge bandit hideouts (Okeke, 2018). While temporarily displacing some groups, these operations often caused civilian casualties and property destruction, deepening mistrust between communities and security forces. At the state level, earlier administrations experimented with local vigilante groups, the Yan Sakai, whose activities initially deterred bandits but later devolved into human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and collective punishment (Adewale, 2021). These experiences demonstrated that coercion alone, without addressing structural grievances and socio-economic drivers, was insufficient to achieve lasting security. Masari's adoption of peace overtures and amnesty reflected both pragmatic necessity and political strategy. By 2015, rural insecurity had reached alarming levels, with thousands displaced and economic activities disrupted. Conventional military campaigns were proving unsustainable in both cost and effectiveness, while public frustration with the state's capacity to maintain order was mounting. Peace overtures offered Masari an avenue to demonstrate leadership and responsiveness through dialogue, signaling a willingness to explore alternatives that resonated with local communities. Engagement with bandit leaders, often mediated by traditional rulers and community elders, was intended to foster trust, reduce hostilities, and create conditions for disarmament and reintegration. Amnesty, as part of this strategy, sought to incentivize surrender and rehabilitation rather than perpetuate cycles of confrontation. Politically, these initiatives positioned Masari as an innovative, people-centered leader, distinguishing his administration from federal militarized approaches. Katsina's symbolic significance as Buhari's home state meant that Masari's interventions implicitly critiqued the limitations of top-down, force-centric security strategies. The decision to adopt peace overtures and amnesty was also informed by precedent. The Niger Delta Amnesty Programme of 2009 illustrated that negotiated settlements combined with rehabilitation could reduce violence, though context-specific adaptation was necessary given the rural, agrarian, and non-ideological nature of Katsina's banditry (Aghedo, 2014). Moreover, these strategies aligned with contemporary peacebuilding frameworks emphasizing human security, dialogue, and structural reform, framing banditry not merely as a law-and-order problem but as a broader governance and development challenge.

Peace Overture and Amnesty under Masari (2015–2023)

The administration of Governor Aminu Bello Masari (2015–2023) represents a pivotal case study in subnational peacebuilding and security management in Nigeria. Confronted with the escalating threat of violent armed banditry in Katsina State, Masari implemented a combination of peace overtures and an amnesty program that blended dialogue, negotiated ceasefires, rehabilitation, and reintegration for repentant bandits. This initiative underscores the complexities of addressing non-state armed violence within a federal system characterized by overlapping security responsibilities, limited resources, and fragile governance structures. It also highlights the challenges of balancing short-term security gains with long-term social, political, and economic transformations.

From the outset, Masari identified insecurity as the central governance challenge. By 2016, rural communities in frontline local governments such as Jibia, Batsari, Safana, and Faskari were enduring repeated raids, mass abductions, and large-scale cattle rustling. Traditional militarized campaigns had proven insufficient, often exacerbating grievances through civilian casualties, displacement, and destruction of property. Recognizing the limitations of coercion, Masari strategically shifted toward negotiation-based approaches, emphasizing engagement with armed actors as a means to create conditions for sustainable peace. This represented a pragmatic acknowledgment that the root causes of banditry including poverty, unemployment, weak institutions, and environmental pressures could not be addressed solely through force.

Between 2016 and 2017, Masari's administration initiated backchannel communications with identified bandit leaders operating along the Katsina–Zamfara forest corridor. These dialogues were mediated by traditional rulers, Islamic clerics, and community leaders who commanded legitimacy both among local populations and, to a degree, within armed groups (Musa, 2021). The immediate goal was to establish channels of trust that could lead to localized ceasefire agreements. In 2016, the first structured ceasefire involved select bandit factions in Faskari and Safana LGAs. Bandits agreed to halt attacks on villages in exchange for assurances of non-prosecution and access to rehabilitation programs. By 2019, Masari had expanded these initiatives to cover additional districts, convening public ceremonies where bandit leaders surrendered arms in symbolic gestures broadcast on local media.

A central pillar of Masari's peace overtures was rehabilitation. Repentant bandits were offered vocational training, agricultural support, and modest financial incentives, reflecting a dual strategy of coercive deterrence and positive reinforcement. The formal amnesty program, launched in 2016, drew inspiration from Nigeria's 2009 Niger Delta Amnesty Programme but was tailored to the agrarian and rural context of Katsina. The program emphasized disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), albeit with fewer resources and weaker institutional frameworks compared to the federal initiative in the Niger Delta. Symbolic disarmament ceremonies were central to Masari's strategy. Bandits were encouraged to surrender AK-47 rifles, dane guns, and other light weapons, often in exchange for motorcycles, cash stipends, or promises of vocational tools. Reports from the Katsina State Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee (2020) indicate that over 500 firearms were collected during the initial phases of disarmament, with participants enrolled in programs such as animal husbandry, carpentry, and vocational skills training. Reintegration schemes extended to social and economic domains, providing support for education, temporary cash transfers, and reintegration into local communities. Despite these measures, the use of direct incentives was controversial. Critics argued that monetary and material rewards created a perverse incentive structure, potentially rewarding criminality and encouraging violent behavior as a pathway to state support (Adewale, 2021). Some communities perceived that perpetrators were being favored over victims, leading to tensions and undermining trust in government initiatives. Masari defended the use of incentives as pragmatic tools for breaking cycles of violence, drawing reluctant or hardline actors into dialogue and fostering a culture of negotiation over confrontation.

The peace overture and amnesty program depended heavily on local actors and institutions for legitimacy and implementation. Traditional rulers, district heads, and village chiefs acted as intermediaries, leveraging social and cultural authority to mediate between armed groups and the state. Religious

organizations, particularly Sufi Islamic clerics, framed amnesty within principles of repentance and forgiveness, lending moral and spiritual validation to the initiatives. Civil society organizations monitored compliance, advocated for victim compensation, and documented human rights abuses, though their influence on policy formulation was limited by restricted access to state resources and decision-making processes. Security agencies, including the Nigerian Police, Civil Defence Corps, and military detachments, were tasked with monitoring compliance with ceasefires. However, coordination challenges frequently undermined their effectiveness. Instances where military operations clashed with negotiated truces revealed structural dissonances between state-level initiatives and federal security frameworks, limiting the durability of agreements (Agbiboa, 2020). These challenges highlight the tension between subnational peacebuilding efforts and centralized security operations in federal systems.

Empirical evidence suggests that Masari's peace overtures produced mixed outcomes. Between 2016 and 2020, at least three major rounds of peace talks culminated in formal agreements between state authorities and bandit representatives, promising cessation of attacks, safe return of abductees, and freedom of movement for rural communities. In the immediate aftermath of agreements, localized reductions in violence were observed, with farming activities resuming and previously closed markets reopening in frontline LGAs (Katsina State Government, 2020). Interviews with rural residents indicated cautious optimism regarding mobility and access to farmlands (Musa, 2021). However, by 2020–2021, several ceasefires collapsed as bandit groups accused the government of failing to fulfill promises of material support. The proliferation of splinter groups, often led by younger commanders less amenable to negotiation, further undermined the durability of peace initiatives (Akinola, 2021). A critical weakness was the absence of robust verification mechanisms. Disarmament claims were often inflated, with surrendered weapons representing a fraction of those in circulation. The lack of transparent monitoring eroded public trust, particularly among victims who perceived the amnesty as privileging perpetrators while communities remained vulnerable. Victims of banditry including widows, orphans, and displaced persons frequently felt excluded from peace initiatives. The absence of comprehensive victim compensation and psychosocial support programs fostered resentment, highlighting the gap between elite-level negotiations and grassroots justice needs (Adewale, 2021).

Masari's experiment with peace overtures and amnesty provides broader lessons for subnational peacebuilding in Nigeria. First, it underscores the limitations of militarized approaches in resolving non-state violence. Despite repeated offensives, coercion alone proved insufficient in dismantling the structural and economic incentives driving banditry. Second, the initiative illustrates the critical role of local legitimacy, with traditional rulers and clerics serving as indispensable intermediaries capable of bridging the gap between communities, armed actors, and state institutions. Third, it reveals the risks inherent in short-term incentive structures that are not embedded in broader socio-economic and structural reforms. Agreements repeatedly collapsed when material promises were delayed or unfulfilled. Finally, the Masari experience exposes the structural fragility of subnational peacebuilding in Nigeria. State governments often lack the financial resources, institutional capacity, and security autonomy required to sustain long-term DDR programs. Without federal cooperation, integrated development strategies, and robust monitoring mechanisms, initiatives such as amnesty risk being temporary palliatives rather than durable solutions to armed banditry. In essence, the Katsina case demonstrates that effective management of non-

state armed violence requires a multi-dimensional approach combining security, development, local legitimacy, and community resilience.

Effectiveness and Limitations of Peace Overture and Amnesty in Katsina State (2015–2023)

Governor Aminu Bello Masari's administration represents one of the most prominent state-level interventions aimed at addressing rural banditry in Northwest Nigeria. By combining dialogue with armed groups, negotiated ceasefire agreements, material incentives, and reintegration packages, the policy sought to reduce violence and restore security. While these interventions produced observable short-term gains, their effectiveness was circumscribed by structural, institutional, and socio-political constraints. A critical assessment of Masari's initiatives highlights both the potential and the limitations of subnational peacebuilding experiments in fragile contexts.

One of the most immediate achievements of Masari's peace initiatives was the temporary reduction in violence. Empirical reports indicate that in 2019, localized ceasefires facilitated by traditional rulers and clerics led to a measurable decline in raids, kidnappings, and cattle rustling in LGAs such as Safana, Batsari, and Jibia (Premium Times, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2020). These lulls enabled farming activities to resume and markets to reopen, illustrating the material impact of negotiated security. Furthermore, hundreds of firearms including AK-47s, Dane guns, and locally produced rifles were voluntarily surrendered, while some bandits were enrolled in skills acquisition and vocational training programs, signaling partial success in disarmament and rehabilitation (Katsina State Government, 2020). The involvement of local actors significantly enhanced the legitimacy of Masari's interventions. Village heads, Islamic clerics, and Fulani community representatives functioned as mediators, bridging trust deficits between the state and armed groups (Onapajo & Abubakar, 2021). This reflects the principles of Human Security Theory, emphasizing individual protection and community participation in addressing insecurity. By leveraging traditional structures, Masari's approach recognized that sustainable peace requires societal engagement beyond the coercive capacities of the state.

Despite these gains, several limitations curtailed the program's effectiveness. First, ceasefires were often short-lived. By late 2020, multiple agreements collapsed as bandits accused the state of failing to deliver promised material support, protection, and reintegration opportunities (Akinola, 2021). The recurrence of violence underscores the fragility of negotiation-based strategies when enforcement mechanisms and monitoring structures are weak or absent. Second, trust deficits persisted both among bandits and communities. While armed actors questioned the sincerity of the government, communities particularly victims of raids, widows, and displaced families perceived the policy as rewarding perpetrators at their expense (Yahaya, 2022). This tension highlights a critical Conflict Transformation concern: peace initiatives that neglect victim-centered justice may reproduce grievances, undermine legitimacy, and inhibit long-term reconciliation. The absence of mechanisms for transitional justice or psychosocial support meant that the program addressed symptoms of insecurity but not its structural roots. Third, institutional weaknesses significantly undermined implementation. Unlike the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme (2009), which had federal oversight, international support, and a structured DDR framework, Katsina's initiative was largely ad hoc and state-driven (Aghedo, 2014). Verification mechanisms for disarmament were weak, enabling some participants to exploit incentives without genuine reintegration

(Okeke, 2020). This deficiency reflects the Resilience Theory principle that sustainable conflict mitigation requires robust institutional capacity to absorb shocks and maintain community protection over time. Fourth, structural and contextual factors limited program durability. Katsina's porous borders with Niger allowed armed groups to evade enforcement, while the proliferation of small arms fueled continued criminality. Moreover, the fluid nature of bandit networks with splinter groups often led by younger, more intransigent commander's complicated centralized negotiation and reinforced relapse into violence. In effect, state-level peace overtures were constrained by regional and transnational dynamics, underscoring the limits of subnational interventions in isolation. Finally, coordination challenges between dialogue and coercion undermined credibility. While Masari promoted negotiation, federal security agencies continued large-scale operations such as Operation Puff Adder and Operation Sharan Daji (Agbiboa, 2020). These simultaneous military actions often violated ceasefires, reinforced bandit skepticism, and exposed rural communities to renewed displacement, revealing the contradictions between state-level diplomacy and national security frameworks.

Comparative experiences with Zamfara State further contextualize Katsina's experience. Like Katsina, Zamfara implemented peace agreements with bandits in 2016 and 2019, resulting in temporary reductions in violence that were eventually reversed (International Crisis Group, 2020). Both cases demonstrate that state-led amnesty programs in Northwest Nigeria struggle to achieve durable peace without federal coordination, institutional capacity, and victim-inclusive frameworks. By contrast, the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme, despite its own challenges, sustained reduced militancy for over a decade through structured DDR and continuous monitoring (Aghedo, 2014). Internationally, programs such as Uganda's LRA amnesty and Colombia's FARC peace accords demonstrate that effective reintegration requires comprehensive monitoring, resettlement support, and mechanisms that balance accountability with rehabilitation (Blattman & Annan, 2016). Katsina's ad hoc model lacked these dimensions, making relapse into violence more likely.

Critiques and Lessons Learned

A deeper critical appraisal of Governor Masari's peace overtures and amnesty initiatives in Katsina State reveals several interrelated limitations that undermine their long-term effectiveness. While the programs initially fostered temporary stability, the structural, institutional, and conceptual weaknesses embedded within their design and implementation point to systemic challenges that go beyond individual policy failures. The critiques, which span governance, legitimacy, structure, and sustainability, illuminate how the absence of theoretical grounding in human security, resilience, and conflict transformation limited the initiative's transformative potential.

One of the foremost critiques centers on elite capture and governance inefficiency. The peace initiative, though designed to provide incentives, reintegration support, and livelihood programs for repentant bandits, suffered from poor accountability and weak institutional oversight. Funds earmarked for disarmament and rehabilitation were allegedly mismanaged or diverted by political intermediaries and local elites who capitalized on the program for personal or partisan gain. This mismanagement eroded the credibility of the state and reduced community confidence in the peace process. From the lens of Resilience Theory, such elite capture weakened institutional and societal resilience by concentrating

benefits among the politically connected rather than fostering inclusive community recovery. Similarly, Human Security Theory underscores that sustainable peace depends on equitable access to protection and welfare; when governance failures produce unequal outcomes, human insecurities deepen rather than diminish. In Katsina's case, the absence of transparent monitoring mechanisms and accountability frameworks prevented the initiative from building the adaptive institutional capacity necessary to sustain peace or rebuild trust between citizens and the state.

Another major critique relates to legitimacy deficits and the exclusion of victims from the peace process. By prioritizing negotiations and benefits for armed groups while sidelining the voices and welfare of victims especially internally displaced persons (IDPs), widows, and orphans the program inadvertently reinforced perceptions of injustice. Many communities perceived the policy as rewarding perpetrators and neglecting those who suffered most, thereby undermining the moral authority of the state. Within the context of Conflict Transformation Theory, this approach reflects a failure to address the relational and structural dimensions of conflict, which require empathy, justice, and social healing. A victim-centered peacebuilding model would have incorporated psychosocial support, restitution, and community dialogues that rebuild trust and promote reconciliation. Similarly, Human Security Theory argues that peace cannot be sustained when people continue to live in fear, trauma, and deprivation. The neglect of victims' material and emotional security perpetuated social fractures and resentment, weakening the collective commitment to peace and reconciliation. Thus, the program's limited inclusivity not only compromised legitimacy but also impeded genuine transformation of the conflict system.

The third limitation lies in the structural and contextual barriers that constrained the scope and sustainability of the amnesty program. Katsina State's geographical proximity to the porous Nigeria–Niger border facilitated cross-border movement of arms, bandits, and contraband, making enforcement of peace agreements exceedingly difficult. The proliferation of small arms and the fluid, networked nature of bandit groups often linked to transnational criminal economies undermined state-level initiatives that lacked regional coordination or federal backing. This challenge demonstrates the Resilience Theory principle that security interventions must strengthen systemic adaptability, not just local containment. Without synchronized efforts across federal, state, and regional levels, the program remained reactive and fragmented. Moreover, Human Security Theory emphasizes that safety and stability are multidimensional, requiring both territorial control and livelihood protection. The persistent economic marginalization of rural communities, inadequate policing, and weak border governance meant that the conditions sustaining banditry poverty, exclusion, and lack of opportunity remained unresolved. The state's limited capacity to reform these structural conditions underscores the need for broader security development linkages and multilevel cooperation.

The final critique relates to short-termism and the absence of strategic planning for long-term sustainability. While Masari's peace overtures temporarily reduced violence, they lacked institutional continuity and post-amnesty follow-up mechanisms. The absence of structured Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) frameworks, livelihood monitoring, and developmental integration meant that many ex-bandits relapsed into criminality once incentives ceased. This pattern exemplifies a failure to institutionalize resilience and human security principles within the peace framework. According to Resilience Theory, lasting stability.

The Katsina experience underscores that peace overtures and amnesty can serve as valuable entry points for de-escalation but are insufficient in isolation. Future interventions should prioritize structured DDR frameworks with measurable outcomes, integrate victim-centered justice mechanisms, and address root causes such as youth unemployment, rural neglect, and weak local governance. Strengthening Resilience Theory-driven community mechanisms alongside federal state coordination can enhance durability, while linking dialogue initiatives with long-term development planning ensures that peace incentives are sustainable. Ultimately, Katsina illustrates that negotiation and amnesty are most effective when embedded within a holistic security development framework combining human security, institutional strengthening, and inclusive governance.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the peace overtures and amnesty initiatives implemented under Governor Aminu Bello Masari's administration in Katsina State between 2015 and 2023, situating them within the broader frameworks of Resilience Theory, Human Security Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory. The analysis reveals that while the peace initiatives provided short-term relief and fostered opportunities for dialogue, they were constrained by weak institutional design, governance deficiencies, and a lack of structural follow-through. These limitations prevented the initiatives from evolving into sustainable peacebuilding mechanisms capable of addressing the root causes of violent banditry. The study thus contends that the peace overtures were pragmatic but not transformative they temporarily pacified the conflict environment but failed to rebuild the structural, institutional, and societal foundations of lasting security. From the perspective of Resilience Theory, the peace process in Katsina State demonstrated limited capacity to foster adaptive recovery among affected communities. Although some localities experienced brief reductions in violence following dialogue and disarmament efforts, these gains were not institutionalized into enduring resilience mechanisms. Communities remained vulnerable to renewed attacks due to the absence of socio-economic empowerment, livelihood diversification, and participatory governance. In contrast, resilience-based peacebuilding would require developing systems that enable communities to anticipate, absorb, and recover from shocks through inclusive governance, economic revitalization, and social cohesion. The short-term nature of Masari's initiatives focused primarily on negotiations and material incentives failed to create this adaptive capacity.

Viewed through Human Security Theory, the amnesty program also fell short of enhancing the protection and welfare of individuals the ultimate goal of security. Although the state sought to de-escalate violence through dialogue, it did not sufficiently address the underlying conditions of insecurity such as poverty, displacement, and loss of livelihood. Victims of banditry, particularly women, widows, and displaced farmers, were largely excluded from program benefits. This exclusion not only deepened socioeconomic vulnerabilities but also eroded the moral legitimacy of the peace initiative. Human security emphasizes that peace is meaningful only when individuals are freed from fear and want; hence, policies that prioritize armed actors over affected civilians risk reinforcing cycles of insecurity rather than resolving them. Applying Conflict Transformation Theory, the study further finds that Masari's peace overtures focused narrowly on transactional settlements rather than on transforming the structural relationships that sustain violence. Negotiations with bandits, while necessary for de-escalation, did not address deeper issues of marginalization, governance failure, or socio-political exclusion that feed rural banditry. Sustainable

peace requires transforming these relationships through trust-building, justice, and equitable access to state services. The Katsina model, by contrast, was driven by elite-led bargains that lacked inclusive participation and long-term vision. Consequently, while the initiative created temporary calm, it did not alter the structural power imbalances or the grievances that motivate violent resistance. Overall, the study contributes to the broader literature on peacebuilding and subnational security governance in Nigeria by demonstrating that dialogue-based amnesties, when not anchored in institutional reform and human-centered development, yield fragile peace. The Katsina experience underscores the importance of linking negotiation to governance transformation, resilience building, and community empowerment. It highlights that successful peace processes must be multidimensional addressing not just the cessation of hostilities but also the political economy of insecurity and the reconstruction of state–society trust.

Policy Recommendations

Building on these findings, this study advances the following recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of peace initiatives in Katsina State and similar conflict-affected contexts across Northern Nigeria:

Peace overtures should be embedded within structured Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs, supported by transparent monitoring systems. This requires coordinated registration of ex-combatants, systematic collection and destruction of weapons, and sustainable reintegration through skills training, education, and employment schemes. The DDR framework should include third-party oversight by civil society and traditional institutions to ensure accountability and transparency.

Drawing from Resilience Theory, local communities must be empowered as agents of peace rather than passive recipients of government programs. The state should strengthen community-based vigilante groups under legal and ethical supervision, enhance early warning systems and invest in rural infrastructure, education, and agricultural modernization. Empowering traditional rulers, youth associations, and women's networks will reinforce social capital and collective capacity to withstand violence.

Consistent with Human Security and Conflict Transformation theories, victims of banditry must be placed at the heart of peace efforts. Government should establish a Victims Support and Compensation Fund, provide psychosocial rehabilitation, and implement livelihood recovery programs. Including victims in reconciliation processes will not only restore social justice but also enhance legitimacy and societal healing.

Given the cross-border nature of banditry, Katsina's peace efforts require synergy with federal security agencies, neighboring states, and regional organizations. Establishing a Northwest Security Coordination Mechanism would facilitate intelligence sharing, border surveillance, and harmonized peace negotiations. This aligns with the Human Security framework, which views security as interdependent and transnational.

Lasting peace demands tackling the political economy of insecurity through institutional reform and inclusive development. The government should prioritize anti-corruption measures, fiscal accountability, and equitable service delivery. Integrating peace initiatives into the state's development agenda through rural employment schemes, education access, and land-use reforms will ensure that peace is not just negotiated but sustained.

Future studies should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to evaluate the local impacts of peace initiatives, focusing on perceptions of victims, ex-combatants, women, and youth. Comparative research across states such as Zamfara, Kaduna, and Niger can illuminate regional variations in policy effectiveness and inform a coordinated national framework for peace and security. This study contributes to the scholarship on peacebuilding in Nigeria by offering an empirically grounded and theoretically integrated assessment of subnational amnesty programs. By applying Resilience, Human Security, and Conflict Transformation frameworks, it advances understanding of how local peace initiatives intersect with governance structures and human welfare. The Katsina case underscores that sustainable peace cannot emerge from temporary appeasement but from structural transformation anchored in justice, inclusion, and resilience.

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