



Understanding the Nature and Dynamics of Ungoverned Spaces in Katsina State, 2017-2025

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the nature, evolution, and dynamics of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State, Nigeria, between 2017 and 2025. Ungoverned spaces, characterized by weak or absent of state authority, have increasingly become hotspots for insecurity, including banditry, kidnapping, and illicit economic activities. The research adopts social contract theory and a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with community members, security personnel, and local officials, alongside quantitative analysis of conflict data and socio-economic indicators. The primary quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (Version 25) while the primary qualitative data was presented qualitatively (using themes and phrases). The study reveals that ungoverned spaces are predominantly located in forest areas, mountain ranges, border communities, and cyberspace, where state presence and institutional control remain weak which are deeply rooted in structural and socio-economic factors, including poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, political manipulation, conflict, injustice, and inadequate governance capacity. Also findings reveal that the proliferation of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State is driven by a combination of factors, including inadequate security presence, porous borders, poverty, environmental stress, and weak governance structures. The study further identifies how non-state actors exploit these conditions to establish parallel systems of control, often undermining state legitimacy and exacerbating local vulnerabilities. Over the study period, there has been a noticeable shift in the organization and sophistication of armed groups, as well as in their interactions with local communities. The research highlights the cyclical relationship between insecurity and underdevelopment, where each reinforces the other. It also underscores the limitations of militarized responses in addressing the root causes of ungoverned spaces. The paper concludes by recommending a comprehensive strategy that integrates security interventions with governance reforms, community engagement, and sustainable development initiatives. Such an approach is essential for restoring state authority, enhancing resilience, and promoting long-term stability in Katsina State.

CITATION

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of ungoverned spaces has increasingly become a major security concern across many parts of the

world, particularly in regions experiencing weak state presence, fragile institutions, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. The concept of ungoverned spaces refers

to geographic areas where the state is unable or unwilling to exercise effective control, enforce laws, or provide basic services. These areas often become breeding grounds for criminal activities, insurgency, and other forms of insecurity, thereby posing significant threats to national and regional stability.

In Nigeria, the challenge of ungoverned spaces has become more pronounced over the past decade, especially in the northern regions. Katsina State, located in the northwestern part of the country, has witnessed a steady rise in insecurity linked to banditry, kidnapping, cattle rustling, and cross-border crimes. Ogoh (2025) argued that these security challenges have been partly attributed to the presence of vast forest reserves, difficult terrains, porous borders, and limited government presence in rural and remote communities.

Between 2017 and 2025, Katsina State has experienced a notable escalation in violent activities associated with armed groups. Forest areas such as the Rugu, Kamuku, and Faskari axis have been identified as safe havens for bandits and other non-state actors. The inability of security agencies to maintain sustained control in these areas has contributed to the expansion of ungoverned territories, allowing criminal networks to thrive. Furthermore, the proximity of Katsina State to international borders has facilitated the movement of arms, fighters, and illicit goods, thereby complicating security dynamics.

The emergence and persistence of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State are influenced by multiple factors, including weak governance structures, poverty, unemployment, corruption, and inadequate security infrastructure. Additionally, climate change and environmental degradation have intensified competition over scarce resources such as land and water, further exacerbating conflicts between farmers and herders. These conditions create an enabling environment for non-state actors to exploit governance gaps and establish parallel systems of authority.

Efforts by the Nigerian government to address insecurity in Katsina State have included military operations, community policing initiatives, and policy interventions. Despite these measures, the situation remains complex and dynamic, suggesting that conventional security approaches alone may be insufficient. There is a growing need to understand the underlying nature, patterns, and drivers of ungoverned spaces in the state in order to design more effective and sustainable responses (Igboin, 2021).

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the nature and dynamics of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State between 2017 and 2025. By exploring the structural, socio-economic, and political factors contributing to the emergence of these spaces, the research aims to provide insights that can inform policy formulation and enhance security governance. Ultimately, understanding how and why these spaces persist is crucial for restoring state

authority, improving human security, and fostering long-term stability in the region.

Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous security interventions by the Nigerian government, Katsina State continues to experience persistent insecurity linked to the proliferation of ungoverned spaces. These areas, characterized by weak or absent of state authority, have become operational bases for bandits, kidnappers, and other non-state armed groups. From 2017 to 2025, incidents of violent attacks, mass abductions, and rural displacement have increased significantly, particularly in forested and border communities.

The persistence of these ungoverned spaces raises critical concerns about the effectiveness of existing governance and security strategies. While military operations and policing efforts have been intensified, they have largely produced short-term results without addressing the underlying structural drivers such as poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, and limited state presence. Furthermore, the lack of reliable data and nuanced understanding of how these spaces emerge and evolve has hindered the development of sustainable policy responses.

Another dimension of the problem lies in the dynamic nature of these spaces. Ungoverned areas are not static; they expand, shrink, and transform in response to state actions, environmental pressures, and the strategies of non-state actors. However, there is insufficient scholarly and policy-oriented research focusing specifically on Katsina State that captures these dynamics over time.

Consequently, the gap in knowledge regarding the nature, causes, and evolution of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State has limited the capacity of policymakers and security agencies to respond effectively. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of these spaces between 2017 and 2025.

General Objective

To examine the nature and dynamics of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State in terms of the characteristics and geographical distribution from 2017 to 2025 and the role of non-state actors in sustaining these spaces are the general objective that have guided the study

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Ungoverned Spaces

The concept of ungoverned spaces has been widely discussed in security studies and political geography. In an attempt to understand the concept "Ungoverned Spaces" there is need to first understand what "Ungovernability" imply. It refers to areas where the state lacks effective control, leading to governance vacuums that may be exploited by criminal or insurgent groups. Some scholars

argue that such spaces are not entirely “ungoverned” but are instead governed by alternative actors, including militias, traditional authorities, or criminal networks. In other words, ungovernability connotes the inability, unwillingness and the ineffectiveness of the state to perform its functions within a particular territory. In contrast, Governability means the ability, willingness and effectiveness of the State to perform its function over a given territory (Rabasa, Steven, Peter, Kim, Theodore, Jennifer, et al., 2007).

The idea of ungoverned space points to ‘spaces of contested governance and mis-governance’ (Clark & Mansour, 2013). For the authors, ungoverned spaces are actually placing where governance does not exist or existing governance has been liquidated, and they are now being governed by alternative authorities. They argue for a reconceptualization of ungoverned space as space voluntarily ceded (mis-governance) and space that is not voluntarily ceded (contested) given that there are no absolutely ungoverned spaces.

Since governance is pivotal to space ownership, the fundamental questions to ask should be: ‘who is governing, how are they governing, and what are the consequences of this mode of governance?’ (Clark & Mansour, 2013) This does not obviate the contest, for, as they hold:

In the case of spaces of contested governance, this core problem how the space is governed and by whom takes on added significance. By definition, in such areas it is frequently unclear who is governing; often, even when the identity of the dominant actor is established, the manner in which governance is being implemented and its consequences remain opaque (Clark and Mansour 2013). According to Clark and Mansour, contested spaces are ‘safe havens’ for non-state actors that have come to occupy them. Ilija Djugumanov and Marko Pankovski (2013, p.9) succinctly define ‘safe haven’ as a ‘space for operational activity,’ spaces where non-state actors can galvanise and mobilise forces for expansionist purposes. From there, they ‘are able to establish themselves, consolidate, plan, organise, fundraise, recruit, train, and operate’ (Clark and Mansour 2013).

The idea of ungoverned spaces is synonymous with physical space, but sometimes used in connection with cyberspace. It is hardly extended to social spaces. We argue that the idea of space extends beyond physical space and includes any conceived sphere of human activity. Whether physical, cyber or social, the question is whether such space is governed. Social spaces share some of the characteristics of physical space. For instance, social spaces can be ceded and contested, and provide safe haven for some actors to prosper and establish themselves as influential actors in society.

Ungoverned spaces, therefore, connotes both the non-existence of effective state sovereignty and governmental

control in both physical and non-physical geographical territory (Raleigh & Dowd, 2013). This implies that in such territories, the state is entirely non-physical; and such non-existence results to ineffective governance and can lead to the rise of conflict and other forms of insecurities. Rabasa, Steven, Peter, Kim, Theodore, Jennifer, Kevin, and John (2007), in their own point of view sees ungoverned territory as places in which a state or government encounters prominent challenges in establishing control, in which the national government’s authority does not reach these areas thereby serving as a breeding ground for terrorism, insecurities and conflict. Risse (2011), further emphasised that ungoverned areas or restricted statehood where territories in a country in which the national authority (governments) have no ability to enforce laws and decisions or in which the legal power over the means of violence is absent.

Clunan and Trinkunas (2010) sees Ungoverned spaces as social, political, and economic arenas where states lack “effective sovereignty,” or where state control is non-existence, weak, or contested by other entities. This is more paramount in many regions across the world, especially Arab and African territories like Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Lebanon, Libya, Iraq, South Sudan, and Palestine among others where some parts of their territories are being controlled by terrorist groups and international forces. These countries are witnessing various forms of insecurities as a result of the inability or unwillingness of the governments to perform certain functions and the breakdown or the absence of state power. These forms of insecurities are numerous such as banditry, civil war, terrorist activities, humanitarian issues, arms and drug, smuggling, piracy, and refugee flows among others which threatens national security and regional stability of the affected country.

The term “Ungoverned Spaces” according to Clunan and Trinkunas (2010), originate from the state-centered operationalisation originated by many governments and international organisations after the cold war of politically disordered territories in which state supply of effective governance had collapse. Ungoverned territories take place not only on poorly controlled land territories but also maritime borders which can also extend to airspace that the countries affected are unable to control. Ungoverned territories can be failed or failing nations, or states that are not able to effectively exercise sovereignty and can be seen along a continuum of state control in which healthy States when they lose control of some geographic or functional areas within their territories become ungoverned territories. For instance, a state that otherwise functions effectively could be infected with a high level of illegal immigration across less controlled or porous borders which can lead to smuggling of small armed weapons and the presence of criminals. Inclusively, ungoverned territories can manifest as a result of weak

states in which the organisations, most especially the security agencies of the national government are incapacitated that they cannot maintain authority or political law beyond the major cities.

Igboin (2021) argues 'since the state does not voluntarily cede its space, the idea of mis- governance readily explains the reason for contested governance.' The state may not cede any part of its territory because it bodes on sovereignty and national prestige. Social spaces, however, have little to do with sovereignty or prestige. It becomes easy for the state to voluntarily cede certain social spaces to members or supporters of the ruling party. This is less a case of mis- governance than political calculation. Cession of the social space performs some political functions for the state; it enables it settle and retain supporters who are critical to the ruling party's electoral victory at the polls. At the same time, the practice facilitates the beneficiary's desire for economic empowerment. Financial empowerment makes the beneficiary more influential politically, paving the way to access political office or appointment or become a local political godfather in the near future. Ungoverned space may be likened to state capture. State capture refers to 'efforts of firms to shape the laws, policies, and regulations of the state to their own advantage by providing illicit private gains to public officials' (Hellman & Kaufmann 2001).

The RAND corporation's definition states that "Ungoverned territories can be failed or failing states; poorly controlled land or maritime borders or airspace; or areas within otherwise viable states where the central government's authority does not extend" (Rebasa et al., 2007). According to Clunan & Harold, (2010), this form of definition puts the concept of ungoverned spaces within the category of doctrines such counterterrorism; counterinsurgency; reconstruction; stabilization; counternarcotics and peacebuilding. Thus, the association of ungoverned space and security threat becomes apparent in this case. The definition by America's Department of Defense is preferred for this paper. It states that,

"A place where the state or central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or influence the local population, and where a provincial, local, tribal, or autonomous government does not fully or effectively govern, due to inadequate governance capacity, insufficient political will, gaps in legitimacy, the presence of conflict, or restrictive norms of behaviour. "Ungoverned areas" should be assumed to include under governed, ill-governed, contested, and exploitable areas" (OUSD, 2007).

Ungoverned Spaces in Nigeria

In Nigeria, ungoverned spaces have been linked to insurgency in the North-East and banditry in the North-

West. Studies indicate that forest regions and borderlands serve as strategic hideouts due to limited surveillance and difficult terrain. Research also points to governance deficits, corruption, and socio-economic inequalities as underlying causes.

The conversion of forest reserves to locations of criminal activities and the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian security operatives has created ungoverned spaces. Theresa Whelan (2006) conceptualised such ungoverned space as "a physical or non-physical area where there is an absence of state capacity or political will to exercise control." She claimed that the physical refers to land and maritime areas, while the non-physical captures areas such as the financial space, utilised by criminal groups to transact money for nefarious activities. Such arguments suggest that the Nigerian forest reserves could turn into ungoverned spaces. By law, forest reservation as a means of conservation is itself "a sensitive social and political issue" (Areola, 1987) that the state employs deliberately to preserve forests for the benefits of humanity. Therefore, the forests are products of legality and ought to be properly secured. However, the increasing invasion and conversion of the forest spaces in Nigeria for criminal purposes has raised serious issues of security and the larger question of the widening of ungoverned spaces. Forest reserves are increasingly becoming bases for insurgents to launch attacks; hideouts for armed robbers who launch attacks on travellers and traders; hideouts for thieves, criminals, and cattle rustlers; and bases for attacks on local people (Ladan, 2014). The lack of government presence in these areas constitutes a trigger for criminal operatives to operate with impunity.

Forestlands pose significant existential threats, especially when they are not well managed and policed. According to Ladan: In general, forests anywhere in the world, by their nature... can be security threats as thieves, criminals, armed groups, rebels, insurgents and terrorists can use them in carrying out their activities in one way or the other (Ladan, 2014).

Indeed, by their very nature, forests provide a veritable operational base or hideout for a variety of criminal activities. A typical forest consists of a cluster of trees, plant communities and undergrowth vegetation. It is usually isolated from the frontiers of human settlement and often alienated from community and state policing. It is also oftentimes extensive in scale, covering series of kilometers the countryside. In view of these peculiarities, the forests provide a conducive environment for criminal inhabitation and activities.

The occupation of forestlands by criminals and insurgents in various parts of this world has been informed by a number of strategic calculations, viz:

1. forests serve as a safe haven for criminal 'habitation' and 'asylum'

2. forests provide bases for camping, training and guerilla warfare
3. forests provide avenues for illicit economic activities (forest resources exploration) such as logging, charcoal production, poaching, gaming, drug trafficking, and mercantile smuggling activities;
4. forests provide sanctuaries for the safe keeping of prisoners of war and abductees;
5. forests are difficult to police owing to their expansive and often isolated terrains.

Suffice to note that forestlands are potentially and existentially a veritable threat to national security of states. As we shall see in the case of Nigeria shortly, some frontier and country-side forests in the country have been a centre for criminality and insurgency, thereby posing a palpable threat to the country's national security.

Kabakawa Forest Reserve

This forest reserve is located in Katsina metropolis, the capital of Katsina State covering an area of about 8 square kilometers. The forest reserve was created in 1948 by the British Colonial Administration. The reserve is one of the four forest reserves that surrounds Katsina city for many years until their recent degradation. The reserve is traversed by Ginzo stream that had its source from the reserve flowing northwards close to the city gates. The reserve is within the Sudan savanna ecological zone and the dominant tree species that grows in the reserve is *Azadirachta indica*. There are also different species of shrubs that are growing below the trees. The reserve was de-gazetted in the years 2006 and 2009 with sections being converted into political party office, housing units and industrial plots (Ladan, 2013). However, a small section of the reserve could still be seen covered by trees and shrubs along Dutsinma road near Ulul Albab Science Secondary School.

Rumah/Kukar Jangarai Forest Reserve

These are two forest reserves that were merged into one forest reserve in 1959 and today are lying Northwest of Katsina state in Batsari and Safana local government areas. The reserve covers an area of about 800 square kilometers extending up to Zamfara State and is about 80km south west of Katsina city (Jari, 2011). The reserve was once famous for its wildlife such as lions, hyenas, gorillas, zebras and other wild animals with river, dams and rocks that makes it a beautiful tourist site (Sunday Trust, 2012). River Bunsuru and its tributaries traverse the reserve and the damming of the river upstream affected water supply in the reserve as water becomes scarce during the dry season. The density of the forest has over the years reduced in many sections and it is now a camp for cattle rustlers, thieves and armed robbers. The reserve is within the Sudan savanna ecological zone and tree species still present include *Acacia nilotica*, *Adansonia leicarpus*,

Azadirachta indica, *Adansonia digitata*, *Combretum glutinosum*, *Feidherbia albida*, *Sclerocarya birrea* etc (Jari, 2011). There are many lorries and trucks that go regularly to the forest to collect firewood for sale to fuel wood wholesalers and retailers in Katsina, the State capital which has presently resulted in deforestation of large parts of the forest.

Kamaku Forest

This forest is part of the wider Kamuku National Park located in western Kaduna State covering an area of 1,121 square kilometers precisely around Birnin Gwari though part of the forest extends up to Sabuwa in Katsina State to the northeast. The Funtua-Birnin Gwari (Kaduna state) – Kagara (Niger State) road passes through sections of the forest and the road is used by people from Katsina and Zamfara States for travelling to Ilorin, Ibadan and Lagos. Several tributaries of River Kaduna that merged and flows into Shiroro reservoir cross the forest. The forest is within the northern guinea savanna ecological zone with some transitional Sudan savanna elements in some areas. The dominant trees include *Isobertia doka*, *Terminalia avicennioides*, *Detarium macrocarpum* and *Daniellia Oliveri*. The animals found in the forest include elephants, lions, leopards, monkeys, baboons, buffalos, roan antelope, hippopotamus, crocodiles and variety of wild birds. A study by Osunsina et al (2008) shows that the forest is rich in fauna, flora and cultural resources which needs to be further developed to enhance the ecotourism potentials of the forest. However, people around the forest are traditional farmers, hunters, pastoralists and craftsmen whose activities posed threats to the forest resulting in partial forest degradation.

Sambisa Forest/Sambisa Forest Reserve

This forest/forest reserve are located in Borno State south of the capital Maiduguri occupying a large area of 518 square kilometers between Maiduguri, Damboa, Bama and Goza (Olugbode, 2014). In the 1990s, a game reserve exists with birds and wild animals such as ostriches, pelicans, baboons, elephants, gazelle and some facilities for tourists that later fell into state of disrepair. The forest/forest reserves are within the Sudan-Guinea savanna ecological zone, but human activities have degraded areas of the reserve to be more of Sahel savanna. The dominant tree species include *Acacia* spp, *Balanites aegyptiaca*, *Combretum* spp, *Adansonia digitata*, *Tamarindus indica*, and *Terminalia* spp. In many areas short trees and thorny bushes form the dominant form of vegetation. Sambisa is one of the few patches of forests in a vast land of north eastern Nigeria where there is sparse vegetation. The Boko Haram insurgents took over what remains of the game reserve in the forest on 5th February, 2013 by attacking the base station killing two rangers and forcing other staff to flee (Olugbode, 2014).

Gaps in Existing Literature

While existing studies provide valuable insights into insecurity in northern Nigeria, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on Katsina State and examining changes over time (2017–2025). Additionally, few studies integrate both structural and dynamic perspectives of ungoverned spaces.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical postulation, upon which this research is anchored, is the social contract theory, with proponents such as, Hobbes (1588-1679), Locke (1632-1704), Rousseau (1712-78), among others. According to Appadorai (1975), the tenets of the social contract theory emphasize that the state is the outcome of an agreement entered into by men who originally had no governmental organization. The history of the world is thus divisible into two clear epochs: the period before the state was established and the period after the state was established.

In the pre state era, there was no existing government, and no law to control the behaviour of man. Men lived in a state of nature in which they were subject to such regulations as nature was supposed to prescribe. But there was no human authority in the form of government to formulate these rules precisely or to enforce them. However, after some time, they decide to set up a government. As a result, they parted away with some of their natural liberty to form a government and agreed to obey the laws prescribed by the government. The state therefore became a human creation, the result of a contract, (Appadorai, 1975). Appadorai further posit that in the social contract, no man can make himself emperor or king; the people sets a man over it to the end that he may rule justly, giving to every man his own, aiding good men and coercing bad, in short that he may give justice to all men. If then he violates the agreement according to which he was chosen, disturbing and confounding the very things which he was meant to put in order, reason dictates that he absolves the people from their obedience; especially when he has himself first broken the faith which bound him and the people thereafter (Appadorai, 1975).

For Thomas Hobbes, in his book the Leviathan (1651) with his analysis of human nature: man is essentially selfish, he is moved to action not by his intellect or reason but his appetites, desires and passions. Men living without any common power set over them; i.e in a state of nature, would be in “that condition of war and such war as is of every man, against every man, not war in the organized sense but a perpetual struggle of all against all, competition diffidence and love of glory being of the three main causes. Law and justice are absent, the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. For John Locke, in the state of nature men were free and equal: each life according to his own liking. This freedom, however is not license. There is a natural law or the law of reason which

commands that no one shall impair the life, health, the freedom or the possessions of another. The state or political society is instituted to be a way of remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature. To arrest, not to escape from a state of war. These inconveniences are three-fold;

1. The want of an established settled known law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right or wrong and the common measure to decide all controversies;
2. The want of a known and disinterested judge, with authority to determine all differences according to the established law; and
3. The want of power to back and support the sentence when right and to give it due execution.

The state is created according to Locke through the medium of a contract in which each individual agrees with every other to give up to the community the natural right of enforcing the law of reason, in order that life, liberty and property may be preserved. Locke unlike Hobbes gives the power to the community and not to a government. The community is supreme but its supreme power is latent. Its power does not come into play so long as the government is acting according to the trust reposed in it, but when it acts contrary to that trust, the power of the community manifests in its rights to replace that government by another. For Rousseau (1712- 1778) the social contract is important in two respects: it inspired the French revolution of 1789 which was a revolt against French monarchy. It also supplied the basis of the theory of popular sovereignty. Man, according to Rousseau is essentially good and sympathetic, the state of nature is a period of idyllic happiness, men being free and equal soon, however with the introduction of private property and the growth of numbers, quarrels arise and man is compelled to give up his natural freedom. His problem is to find a form of association to gain protection of lives and acquired property of each associate and in virtue of which everyone while uniting himself to all remains as free as before. The problem is solved through a contract and the creation of civil society. In this contract, every one surrenders to the community (and not to the government as Hobbes) all his rights; the surrender as complete as in Hobbes. The community therefore becomes sovereign. Its sovereignty is as absolute as that of the government as in Hobbes.

These theories buttress the factors that necessitated the emergence and establishment of government. The government is to protect the lives and property of the citizens, while enhancing their welfare. This ethical reasoning of government is enshrined in the constitutions of many states. Thus, the masses after electing their leaders are there to fully represent the people in areas of protecting their lives and properties, enhancing their welfares in areas of food, infrastructure (roads, electricity, social services, wealth, education, pension, housing etc.),

for the wellbeing of the masses. Also issues like employment, poverty reduction, the safety and the protection of human rights etc. which are all ingredients of human security, are all what the citizens deserve in return for giving some persons the power to govern them. The citizen should obey law, observe and respect national symbols, pay tax, be civil and act within the confine of the law, thus avoid engaging in any unlawful activities like robbery, rape, kidnapping, killing, murder, vandalization, etc. which are attributes of a lawless and failed society. The utility of the theory to this study, brings to the fore the current situation in Katsina state. Thus, the level of insecurity as evident in the serial killings from bandits, etc., are all forces truncating and destabilizing Nigerian fledgling democratic governance. Life in contemporary Nigeria has clearly shown the break in the social contract. We are experiencing a reversal to the life in the state of nature. Life in contemporary Katsina State, Nigeria is short, nasty, brutish, poor and solitary. Even military personnel and their installations are being attacked by armed bandits. All these is happening amidst high level of poverty, decayed health facilities, food insecurity, hunger, high cost of living when there is low income, poor salary, high unemployment rate. Hence a case of poor level of human security. The Nigeria state entirely has seen its entire fabrics been wrecked by all manner of insecurities, threatening the corporate existence of the state, with many centripetal and centrifugal forces playing out as evidence in the banditry activities in Katsina State.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design

This study adopted mixed method design which involves the integration of qualitative and quantitative research data. These methods help to generate unique insight into a complex social phenomenon that are not available from either type of data alone.

Area of the Study

The study examines the understanding of the nature and dynamics of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State. Thus, the research is located in Katsina State. Katsina State is one of the thirty six (36) States in Nigeria. The State was created on the 23rd September 1987, with its capital as Katsina, and a total population of 5,801, 584 persons in 2006 (NPC, 2006). Katsina State is bounded in the south by Kaduna State, in the East by Jigawa and Kano States, at the West by Zamfara State and at the North by the Sahara Desert and republic of Niger (Murtala, Arokoyu & Weli, 2020). It has thirty-four (34) LGAs which are further divided into three (3) senatorial districts. Katsina State is presently affected by banditry, cattle rustling and kidnapping. The selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) for the study from the three senatorial zone are: Dutsi, Jibia, Safana, Kankara, Kankia and Musawa.

Sources and Methods of Data Collection

This study uses the two (2) sources: primary and secondary data collection. Questionnaires were used to collect data on the understanding of the nature and dynamics of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State and the response from the selected LGAs. Both close and open-ended questions were used for this purpose. The FGD questions focused on comprehensive range of issues including socioeconomic characteristics of the respondent, the nature of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State. The secondary data was gathered from published sources (Text Books, News Papers, Journals, Magazines, gazette, communique and reports). Other data were collected from annual reports and research dissemination by the development partners (UNDP, IOM, CDD etc) and civil society organizations.

Population of the Study

In this study, the target populations were drawn from: Farmers; Civil servants, herders; Government officials (such as KTMISH and Security personnel); Representatives of farmers’ associations; community leaders, victims of the violent, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and experts (professionals) in security studies.

Table 1: LGAs in the three Katsina Senatorial District

LGAs in Katsina Central Senatorial District	LGAs in Katsina North Senatorial District	LGAs in Katsina South Senatorial District
Batagarawa	Baure	Bakore
Batsari	Bindawa	Dandume
Charanchi	Daura	Danja
Dutsin-ma	Dutsi	Faskari
Jibia	Ingawa	Kafur
Kaita	Kankia	Kankara
Katsina	Kusada	Malumfashi
Kurfi	Mai’adua,	Matazu
Rimi	Mani	Musawa
Safana	Mashi	Sabuwa
	Sandamu	
	Zango	

Sources: Researcher, 2024

The study selected four (4) LGAs, Safana, Jibia, Kankara, and Musawa for the purpose of eliciting primary quantitative data while Kurfi and Batsari were also selected for the purpose of gathering primary qualitative data from the population of the study. These selected LGAs fall under the frontline Local Government areas with large geographical areas of ungoverned space and the most security challenged in recent time.

Sample Size

There are so many statistical formulas for arriving at sample size in social science research, in this study however, Taro Yamani formula for determining sample size was used to arrive at the appropriate sample size for the study with 95% confidence level and 0.05 margin of error- given the sampling frame of as population of the study.

Taro Yamani Formula

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Population size

e = Level of Significance (0.05)

$$n = \frac{1,507,400}{1 + 1,507,400 (0.5)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{1,507,400}{1 + 1,507,400 (0.0025)}$$
$$n = \frac{1,507,400}{3769}$$

= 399.9 n = 400

Therefore, using Taro Yamane formula, 400 respondents were used as the appropriate sample size of the study.

Having identified the number of respondents for each cluster, the next stage was to find the number of respondents that representing each unit using Bourley (1926) as cited in Achonu, Anukaenyi and Okoro, (2019) arriving for determining the proportion of sample size as follows:

$$\text{LGA Respondents (s) X Sample Size (n)}$$
$$\text{Sample Frame (N)}$$

Kankara = $\frac{434,700 \times 400}{1,507,400}$ = 115

Safana = $\frac{544,400 \times 400}{1,507,400}$ = 145

Musawa = $\frac{229,500 \times 400}{1,507,400}$ = 61

Jibia = $\frac{299,200 \times 400}{1,507,400}$ = 79

Table 2: Population and Sample Distribution of the Study Per Unit (LGA)

S/N	LGA	LGA Population	Sample Size
1.	Kankara	434,700	115
2.	Safana	544,000	145
3.	Musawa	229,500	61
4.	Jibia	299,200	79
5.	Total	1,507,400	400

Source: Researcher’s Compilation, 2025

The Table 2 above represents the sample distribution per each unit (LGA) with each unit having its total population and corresponding sample size. The Researcher after arriving at the appropriate sample size per cluster using simple percentage formular shared the questionnaire to the respondents using snowball sampling technique where a total of 400 questionnaires were shared to the respondents.

Method of Data Analysis

The primary data collected through the questionnaire administration was presented and analyzed using

descriptive statistics. Specifically, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25 was used to run the data while the primary qualitative data generated through key informant interview was presented and analyzed qualitatively.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This part of the study present data analysis and discussion of results of the study on understanding the nexus between ungoverned spaces and human security in Katsina state.

Table 3: Questionnaire Rate of Return by Local Government

Questionnaire Administered				Questionnaire Returned	
Percent				Percent	
Valid	Jibia	79	19.8	79	19.8
	Kankara	115	28.7	115	28.7
	Musawa	62	15.5	61	15.3
	Safana	144	36.0	144	36.0
	Total	400	100.0	399	99.8

Author’s Computation IBM SPSS Version 25, Survey Data, 2025

Table 3 above presents the questionnaire return rate across the four selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Katsina State: Jibia, Kankara, Musawa, and Safana. Out of 400 questionnaires administered, a total of 399 were successfully returned, representing a high overall return rate of 99.8%, which demonstrates strong respondent participation and enhances the credibility of the data. Specifically, Jibia had 79 questionnaires administered and all were returned, constituting 19.8% of both the total

administered and returned questionnaires. Kankara received 115 questionnaires, all of which were also returned, representing 28.7% of the total. Musawa had 62 questionnaires distributed, of which 61 were returned, indicating a return rate of 98.4% for that LGA and accounting for 15.3% of the total responses. Safana had the highest distribution and return figures, with all 144 questionnaires returned, making up 36.0% of the total responses.

Table 4: All the available forest in Katsina State as ungoverned spaces * Local Government Crosstabulation

	Local Government				Total
	Jibia	Kankara	Musawa	Safana	
Strongly Agree	71	82	10	81	244
Agree	8	27	46	40	121
Undecided	0	2	4	14	20
Disagree	0	1	1	2	4
Strongly Disagree	0	2	0	5	7
Total	79	114	61	142	396

Author’s Computation IBM SPSS Version 25, Survey Data, 2025

The cross-tabulation distribution in table 4 above reveals how respondents from different local governments perceive the classification of forests in Katsina State as ungoverned spaces due to lack of effective government control. Out of the 396 total respondents, the majority (244 respondents) strongly agreed with this assertion, and this view was most strongly held in Kankara (82), followed by Safana (81) and Jibia (71). In contrast, only 10 respondents from Musawa strongly agreed, showing relatively lower intensity of agreement in that area. Additionally, 121 respondents agreed (without strong conviction), with the highest coming from Musawa (46), suggesting a broader but less intense agreement there. Very few respondents were undecided (20), disagreed (4), or strongly disagreed (7) across all LGAs, indicating an overwhelming consensus that government absence in forest areas renders them ungoverned spaces.

This overwhelming agreement underscores a widely shared perception that lack of effective government presence in forested areas significantly contributes to insecurity, making these spaces vulnerable to criminal activities and insurgent operations. This finding aligns with the study’s focus on the relationship between state control, territorial governance, and human security in Katsina State.

Similarly, data gotten from the FDG supported the above responses. According to FGDBS1: My opinion is that the reason is that human beings, wherever they are, often do not have proper governance in such places. If you go there, you will not see any signs of government; you will not see any schools. There are no security forces or places of worship. People live in these forests on their own. Whoever is strong becomes the one in power in these places. I was born in Batsari and I am 45 years old. Almost all of these

forests are close to each ward in Batsari. I can remember back in 1986 when I was in primary school. There was a time when we would take our brides from Batsari town to the forest. We followed them until we reached the outskirts of a nearby area in Zamfara State. We walked until night and there was a lot of peace there. But even when I went to Barakaga, there were no signs of government; the people lived in the forests. I went to the sixteenth ward of Batsari; there was no ward office where I could go. Then we took people from Batsari and went to Manawa, to Duburawa and Katafi until the border between Batsari and parts of Zamfara State. This is as far as I can recall. Like I said, if you go from Batsari town to Manawa, you may find another Barakaga. There are no visible signs of government in these places that we have been talking about.

The above response was corroborated by the responses gathered from FGDKS2. According to FGDKS2:

Honestly, if you look at the security situation in the state and the local governments affected, you will see that this forest is a security risk. As a result, it is a hiding place for those who are trying to commit crimes. But if you look at Katsina, which has other local governments that have not been affected at all, you will see the reason for not having them is because there are no forests. There is no doubt that the forests are the root cause of this security problem. Kurfi local government has these mountains, but it doesn't have many mountains except the forests that link with other local government areas in Zamfara and Niger Republic. All the forests come from Jibiya and enter Batagarawa, so Kurfi, Safana, Danmusa, Faskari and Dandume all have borders with other dangerous forests linking Katsina with Kaduna and Zamfara States. There is a Sauna in Kurfi local government like mountains and hills. Honestly, I'm afraid because there is a mountain and it's

not even a kilometer away, you see bandits riding on it and attacking people.

The above responses gathered from quantitative and qualitative data revealed that almost all the forests in

Katsina State constitute ungoverned spaces thereby making it difficult to address the security challenges related to the forest.

Table 5: All the available mountains in Katsina State as ungoverned spaces * Local Government Crosstabulation

	Local Government				Total
	Jibia	Kankara	Musawa	Safana	
Strongly Agree	59	34	3	49	145
Agree	19	75	22	74	190
Undecided	0	4	35	16	55
Disagree	0	1	1	3	5
Strongly Disagree	1	0	0	1	2
Total	79	114	61	143	397

Author's Computation IBM SPSS Version 25, Survey Data, 2025

The cross-tabulation distribution in table 5 above presents respondents' views across four local governments Jibia, Kankara, Musawa, and Safana regarding whether mountains in Katsina State where government presence is weak or absent qualify as ungoverned spaces. Out of a total of 397 respondents, the majority 145 individuals (36.5%) strongly agreed with this assertion. Notably, strong agreement was most pronounced in Jibia (59 respondents) and Safana (49 respondents), indicating a higher perception of government neglect in mountainous regions of these areas. Another 190 respondents (47.9%) simply agreed, with Kankara (75) and Safana (74) again recording high numbers, reinforcing the widespread belief that these mountains fall outside effective state control. Interestingly, Musawa had the highest number of undecided respondents. (35), suggesting a degree of

uncertainty or possibly less exposure to mountainous terrains perceived as ungoverned.

The data indicates broad agreement, particularly in Jibia, Kankara, and Safana, that mountains lacking state presence are perceived as ungoverned spaces, though Musawa stands out with more neutral or undecided responses, possibly reflecting differing local realities or topographies.

This was further confirmed by FGDKS2 who maintained that:

Honestly, I am afraid because there is a mountain and it's not even a kilometer away. You see bandits riding on it and attacking people. There are times they came like a hundred people and they took forty or so people, all women except one man. We have a lot of problems, and our communication between the deaf and the deaf.

Table 6: All the available border communities in Katsina State as ungoverned spaces *Local Government Crosstabulation

	Local Government				Total
	Jibia	Kankara	Musawa	Safana	
Strongly Agree	21	43	8	53	125
Agree	57	68	46	76	247
Undecided	1	1	6	6	14
Disagree	0	1	0	2	3
Strongly Disagree	0	1	1	4	6
Total	79	114	61	141	395

Author's Computation IBM SPSS Version 25, Survey Data, 2025

The cross-tabulation distribution in table 6 above reveals responses by local government areas (LGAs) Jibia, Kankara, Musawa, and Safana shows a strong perception that border communities in Katsina State, where government presence is lacking, are indeed ungoverned spaces. Out of 395 respondents, 125 (31.6%) strongly agreed, and 247 (62.5%) agreed with the statement, making a total of 372 respondents (94.2%) affirming the assertion. Notably, Kankara (43 strongly agreed, 68

agreed) and Safana (53 strongly agreed, 76 agreed) recorded the highest number of affirmative responses, indicating widespread concern in those areas. Musawa, while still supportive, had fewer strong agreements (8) and a slightly higher number of undecided respondents (6). Very few respondents across all LGAs disagreed or strongly disagreed, highlighting a nearly unanimous belief that border communities without government oversight qualify as ungoverned spaces in Katsina State.

These results highlight the widely held perception that the state's inability to secure or effectively govern border areas contributes significantly to the persistence of ungoverned

spaces in Katsina State, reinforcing concerns over security, territorial control, and the risk of transnational threats in these regions.

Table 7: All the available cyber spaces in Katsina State as ungoverned spaces * Local Government Crosstabulation

	Local Government				Total
	Jibia	Kankara	Musawa	Safana	
Strongly Agree	18	30	33	59	140
Agree	61	79	13	69	222
Undecided	0	3	13	6	22
Disagree	0	1	2	7	10
Strongly Disagree	0	1	0	2	3
Total	79	114	61	143	397

Author's Computation IBM SPSS Version 25, Survey Data, 2025

On cyberspace as Ungoverned Spaces in Katsina State, the cross-tabulation distribution in table 7 above reveals that the perception of ungoverned space is also widespread but varies more across local governments. Out of 397 respondents, 140 (35.3%) strongly agreed and 222 (55.9%) agreed, making a cumulative total of 362 respondents (91.2%) affirming that cyber domains in the state are ungoverned where government control is lacking. The highest concentration of strong agreement was found in Safana (59), followed by Musawa (33) and Kankara (30). Interestingly, Jibia had the highest number of 'agree' responses (61) but fewer 'strongly agree' responses (18), indicating moderate concern. While Musawa showed strong agreement, it also recorded a notable number of undecided responses (13), suggesting some uncertainty about cyber governance in that area. The number of outright disagreements remained very low across all LGAs. In a similar vein, responses gathered from FGDBS1 and FGDKS2 supported the above submissions. According to FGDBS1:

In Batsari, there are some areas that do not have network, even in remote areas, and they are even more so. For example, there is the town of Dumburawa, there is the town of Dan Geza, there is the town of Labo, there is Ingi, there is El Larba, a mixture of Duji, Shekewa, and Karewa, all of them do not have network, so I am using Ruma, so today's Rumawa has not had network for a year. There is a town called Yaw Yaw. There was a time when bandits attacked the town. We tried to get help but the people could not reach the security forces; one man ran into the forest because there was no network. In Batsari and other remote areas there is little or no network. For example, the towns of Dumburawa, Dan Geza, Labo, Ingi, El Larba, Duji, Shekewa, and Karewa have poor or no network. Rumawa has not had network for a year.

According to FGDKS2:

Like Kurfi to Batsari, we don't have a network problem; Kurfi to Safana is not a problem. The network in Safana to Dan Musa is nowhere to be found; they cut off all the networks that linked them to these local governments which are neighboring Zamfara State. There is no network in the mountains. If a phone is stolen from Lagos to Katsina State, the security agencies will detect it. They know where the phone is, but thieves, you can communicate with them in this forest, but you can't detect it because they are communicating with them, and they are getting in touch with some people in the forest, they are meeting these people, they said, everyone knows them differently, you know they are mining, and they are also known to be thieves, the local government is almost the same, they are the thieves who have become dealers of this gold that is being operated, for example, whether you help them or not, you can't answer or sell it, you see, this network is contributing to these problems.

The above responses both in quantitative and qualitative suggest therefore that the inability of the government to control the cyberspace is contributing to the problem of insecurity in Katsina State.

Discussion of Findings

On identification and classification of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State. The findings reveal that ungoverned spaces in Katsina State are dominantly found in forest areas, mountain ranges, border communities, and cyberspace. The cross-tabulated data show that local governments like Jibia, Kankara, Safana, and Musawa acknowledged the existence of these ungoverned areas, especially in forests and mountainous regions, where the state or federal government's presence is limited or non-existent.

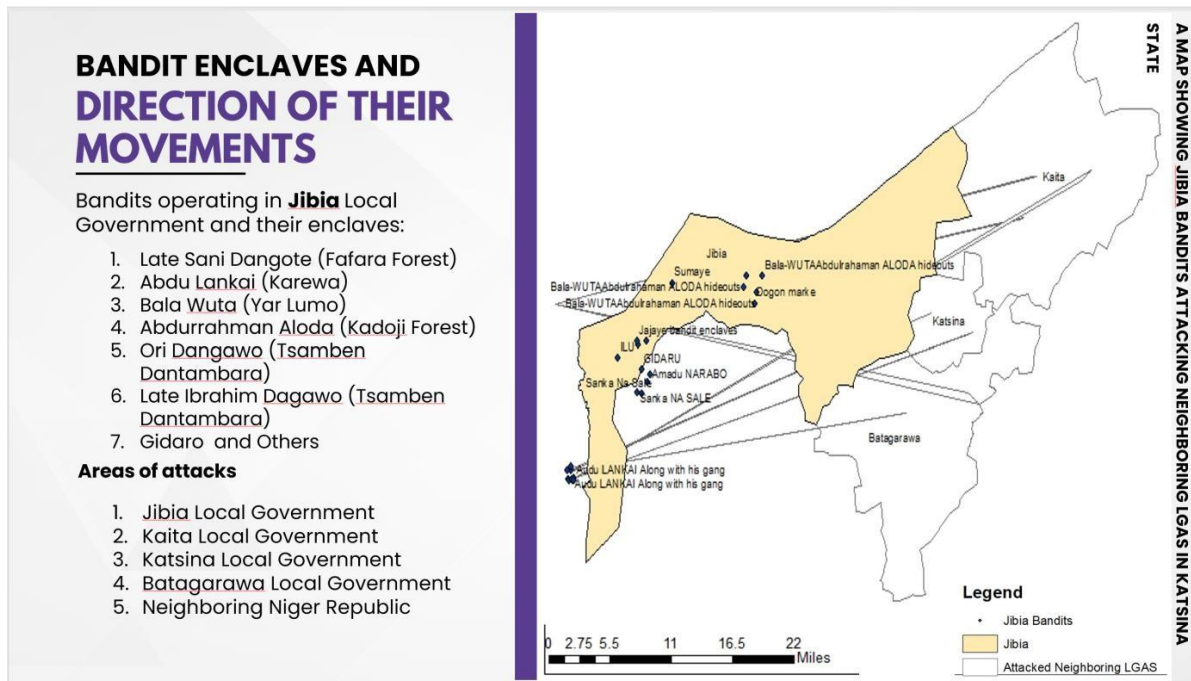


Figure 1: Map showing Jibia bandit enclaves and movements

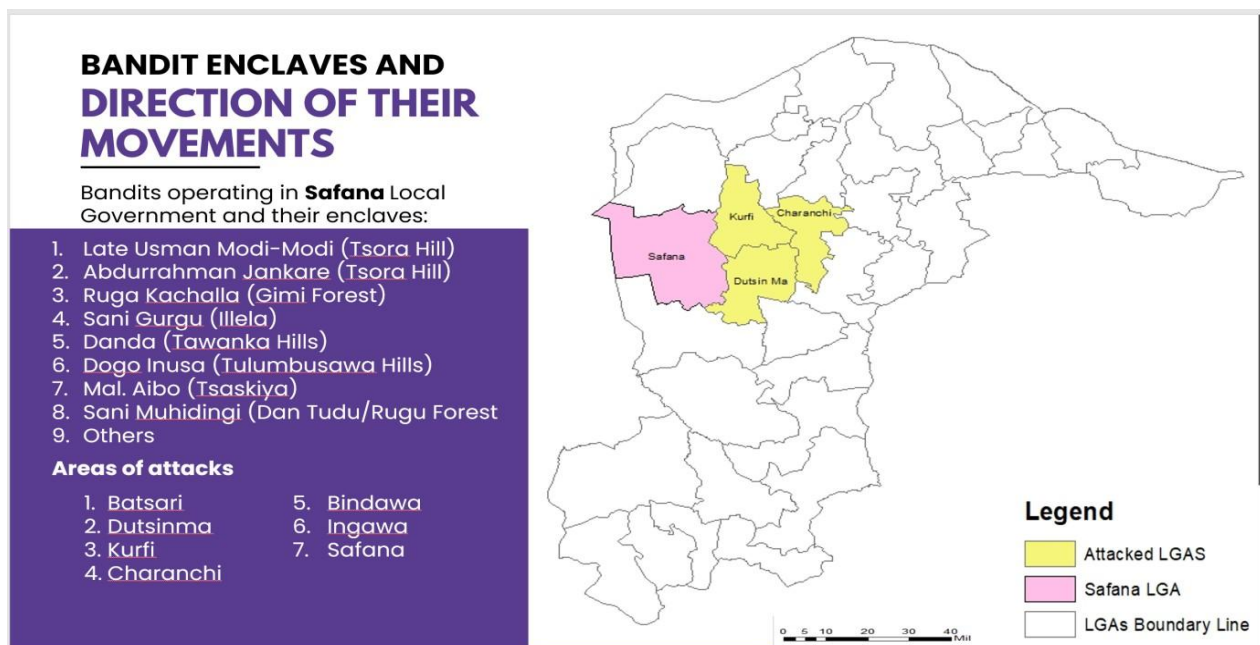


Figure 2: Map showing Safana bandit enclaves and movements

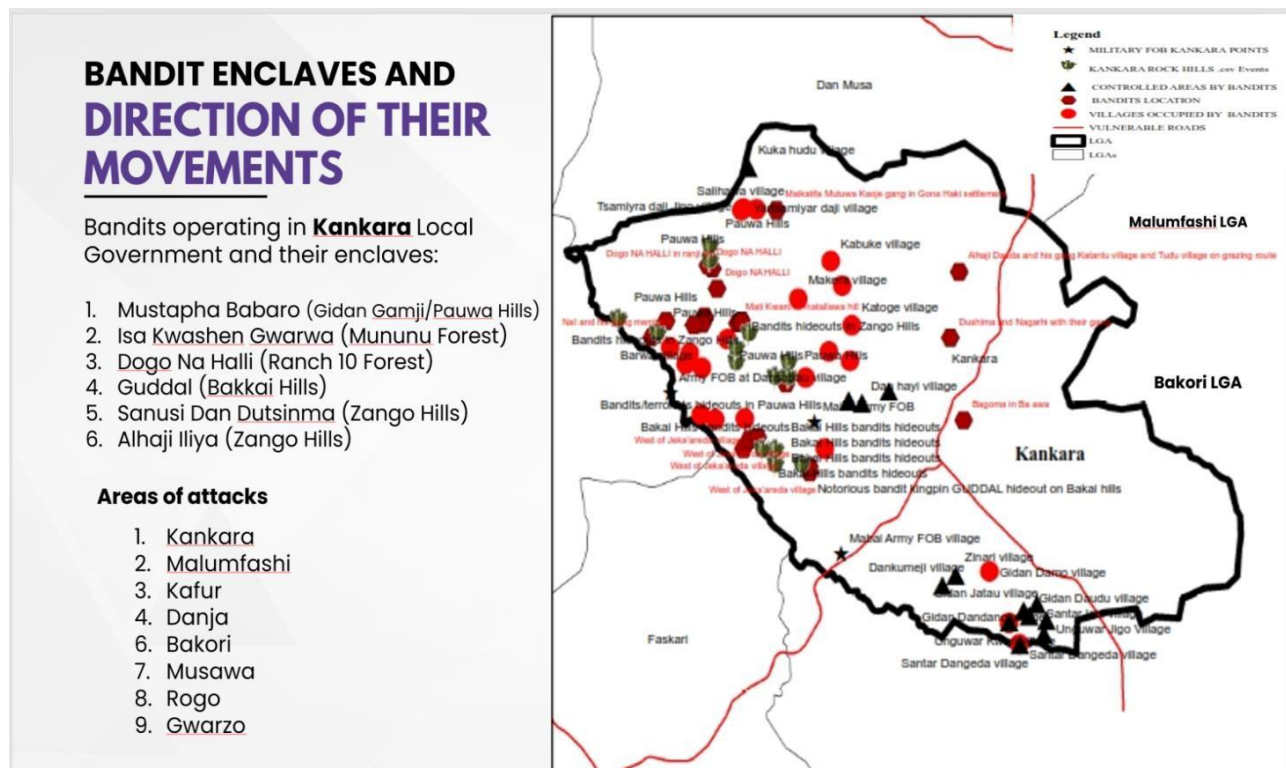


Figure 3: Map showing Kankara bandit enclaves and movements

These findings and maps above align with the empirical literature by Clunan and Trinkunas (2010), which argued that ungoverned territories arise where state institutions are absent or weak, creating a vacuum exploited by criminal elements. The theoretical lens of the Fragile State Theory supports this position, emphasizing that the state's inability to extend its authority across its entire territory allows non-state actors to thrive. This is also corroborated by the assertion of Rotberg (2002), who noted that failing states lose control over parts of their territories, creating ungoverned spaces prone to violence and criminality. This study is consistent with the study of Sackflame and Omitola (2022) that examines the conditions that created ungoverned spaces, the activities of diverse groups inhabiting them and the implications on national security and sustainable development. The study noted that terrors like Boko Haram insurgents, Bandits, herdsman to ethnic militias; these groups are becoming laws unto themselves and creating spheres of influence and jurisdictions due to government and state apparatus absence. Also, Jah and Iruonagbe (2021), opined that the overwhelming insecurity ranging from armed banditry, ethnic militias, armed robbery, militancy and insurgencies, Kidnapping/abduction, piracy, Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and trans-national crime in Nigeria are leveraged by the vast ungoverned spaces in the country.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the nature and dynamics of ungoverned spaces in Katsina State, Nigeria, 2017-2025.

The findings reveal that ungoverned spaces are predominantly located in forest areas, mountain ranges, border communities, and cyberspace, where state presence and institutional control remain weak. These areas have become hubs for criminal activities such as banditry, kidnapping, killings, destruction of villages, and internal displacement. The persistence of these threats underscores the multidimensional nature of insecurity in Katsina State and demonstrates that ungoverned spaces are not merely territorial gaps, but complex environments where governance deficits directly undermine human security.

Overall, the study concludes that addressing ungoverned spaces in Katsina State requires a holistic and human security centered approach that goes beyond militarized responses. Sustainable solutions must integrate improved governance capacity, socio-economic development, community participation, regulatory control of forests and mountainous areas, investment in research, and skill acquisition programs aimed at reducing youth unemployment. Reclaiming ungoverned spaces is therefore not solely about restoring territorial authority, but about rebuilding state legitimacy, strengthening institutions, and ensuring the protection, dignity, and well-being of citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed: Given that ungoverned spaces are predominantly located in forests, mountain

ranges, border communities, and cyberspace, government should adopt a comprehensive territorial governance strategy. This should include the establishment of well-equipped security outposts in vulnerable forest and mountainous areas, improved border surveillance systems, and enhanced inter-agency collaboration. In addition, digital security infrastructure should be strengthened to monitor and regulate criminal activities in cyberspace. The formal mapping, documentation, and regulation of forest and mountain settlements should also be prioritized to prevent unauthorized occupation and criminal entrenchment. To tackle the root causes of ungoverned spaces, government must prioritize poverty reduction, employment generation, and educational access. Large-scale skill acquisition programs targeting unemployed youth should be institutionalized, particularly in rural and border communities. Investment in basic education and adult literacy programs is critical to reducing vulnerability to manipulation and criminal recruitment. Furthermore, governance reforms aimed at improving transparency, justice delivery, and political accountability are necessary to rebuild public trust and reduce grievances that fuel insecurity.

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