VICTIMOLOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING BANDITRY VICTIMS AND ENHANCING NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

Suleiman Dahiru,
sdjamaajamaa9@gmail.com
+2348065376183

Aisha Bukar Dapchi
aisha2bukar2@gmail.com
+2349030312047
Department of Sociology,
Yobe State University,
PMB 1144, KM7 Gujiba Road.
Damaturu, Yobe State, Nigeria

Abstract

Banditry has evolved into one of Nigeria's most severe internal-security challenges, particularly in Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina States. Thousands of citizens have been displaced, livelihoods lost, and public confidence in state institutions eroded. This conceptual paper examines victimological strategies for addressing the plight of banditry victims and enhancing national security. Drawing on the Victimological Theory of Justice and the Restorative-Justice Framework, the paper synthesizes current Nigerian and international literature to propose a Victimological, Security Nexus Model. Findings reveal that effective victim management, through rehabilitation, compensation, and empowerment, is indispensable to sustainable peace and legitimacy. The paper concludes that national security must be re-envisioned as human security, with victims recognized as central agents of stability. Policy recommendations emphasize coordinated institutional reform, victim participation, restorative-justice programs, and integration of victimology into Nigeria's security education and governance systems.

Keywords: Victimological Strategies, Banditry Victims, National security, Nigeria,

Background of the Study

Across the world, the security and protection of citizens have remained the cornerstone of state responsibility and legitimacy. In recent decades, violent criminal activities such as banditry, insurgency, terrorism, and organized kidnapping have posed serious threats to global peace and security. The global rise in non-state armed violence has been linked to deepening socio-economic inequalities, weak governance structures, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2023). According to the Global Peace Index (2024), over 80 countries are experiencing severe internal security challenges driven by non-state actors, with sub-Saharan Africa among the most affected. This growing trend of criminal banditry highlights a fundamental shift in the nature of modern insecurity, from state-centered conflicts to civilian-targeted violence, with victims increasingly drawn from vulnerable rural populations.

The African continent has witnessed a surge in transnational organized crime and localized armed groups. In West Africa, the situation has become more complex due to porous borders, corruption, and youth

unemployment (Alemika, 2022). The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has repeatedly warned about the links between cross-border banditry and terrorism, particularly in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions (ECOWAS Commission, 2023). The collapse of governance in parts of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has created a fertile environment for criminal networks that trade in arms, drugs, and human trafficking. These dynamics spill over into Nigeria's northern territories, especially Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kaduna, and Niger States, where bandit groups operate with impunity and exploit weak state control to attack civilians, destroy livelihoods, and displace entire communities (Ojewale, 2024; Iwara & Ayandele, 2024).

In Nigeria, banditry has evolved from isolated cattle rustling incidents to a full-blown national security crisis. The phenomenon, particularly in the Northwest and North-central regions, is characterized by mass kidnappings, ransom collection, arson, and targeted killings. Over the last decade, thousands of people have been killed, and millions displaced internally, while agricultural production and rural commerce have drastically declined (Ojewale, 2025). The National Bureau of Statistics (2024), reported that bandit-related violence has contributed significantly to rural poverty, food insecurity, and school dropouts in affected areas. For instance, in Zamfara State, over 300,000 people have been internally displaced since 2021, while over 500 schools have closed due to insecurity (Nigerian Emergency Management Agency [NEMA], 2023).

The victimological dimension of this crisis has often been under explored in policy responses. Most interventions have focused on military offensives, intelligence operations, and ransom bans rather than on addressing the psychological, social, and economic recovery of victims (Achem & Aderinto, 2024). However, victims of banditry suffer multi-layered trauma, loss of family members, destruction of homes, forced displacement, and stigmatization. From a victimological perspective, understanding the needs, rights, and coping mechanisms of victims is essential for sustainable peace building and rehabilitation. This perspective shifts the focus from crime control to victim recovery and social reintegration (Adisa, Alabi, & Ayodele, 2022).

Globally, modern security discourse increasingly recognizes victim-centered approaches as integral to counter-violence frameworks. The United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (1985), underscore the state's obligation to ensure restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation for victims. Countries like Colombia, South Africa, and the Philippines have adopted transitional justice and restorative mechanisms to reintegrate victims of armed violence (UNODC, 2023). Applying these approaches to Nigeria's context can help bridge the gap between military solutions and human-centered recovery.

Regionally, West African states such as Ghana and Sierra Leone have successfully implemented community-based victim support systems after civil conflicts, emphasizing psychosocial support and community dialogue (Alemika, 2022). These experiences demonstrate that addressing victimhood is not merely a humanitarian response but a strategic pathway to national stability. The failure to integrate victimological strategies into security management, therefore, risks perpetuating cycles of violence and revenge in rural Nigeria.

At the national and state levels, Nigeria's security challenges have been exacerbated by weak governance, corruption, and a crisis of legitimacy among security agencies (Omale, 2025). Reports by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR, 2024), reveal that in many affected communities, victims have lost confidence in law enforcement and judicial systems, perceiving them as complicit or indifferent. This breakdown of trust undermines cooperation between citizens and the state, making it harder to collect intelligence or implement rehabilitation programs. Furthermore, the inadequate institutional framework for compensating or supporting victims has left thousands in protracted displacement. In states like Kaduna and Katsina, displaced farmers live in temporary camps without access to adequate health care or education (Ojewale, 2025).

Victimological strategies offer a pathway to correct this imbalance by emphasizing justice, empowerment, and rehabilitation. Such strategies involve recognizing victims as active participants in the peace process, not just passive recipients of aid. This includes providing access to justice, trauma counseling, restitution, livelihood restoration, and community reconciliation mechanisms. Integrating these strategies within national security planning could enhance social cohesion and rebuild public trust in state institutions.

The motivation for this study arises from the persistent gap between Nigeria's military-based responses and the victim-centered needs of affected populations. Despite extensive government and donor investments in security operations, banditry continues to expand geographically and socially. Scholars like Iwara and Ayandele (2024), argue that any sustainable strategy must balance deterrence with compassion, punishment with rehabilitation, and state security with human security. A purely militarized response fails to address the long-term socio-psychological consequences that perpetuate cycles of victimization and revenge.

In Zamfara State, for instance, displaced persons often return to devastated villages without psychosocial support or restitution for losses. Many victims become economically vulnerable, leading to youth recruitment into criminal groups (Ojewale, 2024). Similarly, women who experience violence and abduction face stigmatization and exclusion, worsening gender-based inequalities (Nnam & Dastile, 2025). Therefore, integrating victimological insights into national security policy is crucial not only for justice but also for sustainable peace.

This study is thus anchored on the conviction that national security cannot be achieved without addressing the plight of victims. It aims to explore and articulate victimological strategies that can empower survivors, rebuild communities, and restore public trust in state institutions. By examining experiences from select states such as Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina, the paper draws lessons applicable to Nigeria's broader security context. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to an evolving discourse that situates victim welfare at the heart of national stability and resilience.

Statement of the Problem

Banditry has become one of Nigeria's most devastating security challenges in the 21st century. Despite substantial investments in military operations and community policing, the crisis continues to expand in scale and intensity. States such as Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, and Kebbi have become epicenters of mass abductions, forced displacement, and the destruction of livelihoods (Ojewale, 2025). The core of the problem lies not only in the criminality but also in the state's limited recognition of the complex

victimological consequences—trauma, stigmatization, and prolonged economic deprivation (Achem & Aderinto, 2024).

National responses remain largely militarized, emphasizing punitive operations over rehabilitation, compensation, or reintegration (Omale, 2025). Consequently, many survivors continue to endure suffering long after violence subsides. Entire rural economies have collapsed, leaving farmers, women, and children destitute. Reports from the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR, 2024), reveal that the absence of psychosocial and financial support for victims has deepened poverty and increased the likelihood of re-victimization and recruitment into armed groups.

This neglect perpetuates a cycle of insecurity. Traumatized communities are less willing to cooperate with security agencies, while unaddressed grievances fuel resentment and retaliation. In the absence of coordinated victim-centered programs, such as trauma counseling, livelihood restoration, and reconciliation, vigilante groups and informal justice systems have filled the vacuum (Iwara & Ayandele, 2024). These responses, though well-meaning, often escalate violence and undermine state legitimacy. Existing research has focused mainly on the causes and operations of bandits, neglecting the experiences and agency of victims (Demehin, Raji, & Ala, 2024). This creates a significant gap in understanding how victimological strategies, centered on justice, restitution, and empowerment, can enhance national security. Although international frameworks such as the UN Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime (1985) promote victim rights, their domestic application remains limited.

The consequences are profound, where persistent trauma erodes community resilience (Aleyomi & Olajubu, 2024), displacement worsens food insecurity, and lack of restorative interventions weakens public trust and cooperation with authorities (Omale, 2025). Addressing these issues requires re-framing national security as both protection and recovery.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to develop a victimological framework for addressing the experiences of banditry victims in Nigeria and to identify strategies that enhance national security through victim-centered interventions. By linking recognition, rehabilitation, and reintegration to social cohesion and peace building, this study seeks to bridge the gap between security operations and victim welfare, the study aimed;

To examine the nature, scope, and consequences of victimization arising from banditry in Nigeria, focusing on its psychological, economic, and social dimensions.

To analyze existing institutional and policy responses to banditry victims and assess the extent to which they align with victimological principles of justice, compensation, and rehabilitation.

To propose a victimological strategy for addressing the needs of banditry victims that can enhance national security and promote sustainable community resilience.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification; Victimological Strategies, Banditry, and National Security

Victimological strategies refer to structured approaches, policies, and interventions derived from the principles of victimology, the scientific study of crime victims, their experiences, rights, and roles within justice systems (Fattah, 2015; Walklate, 2017). These strategies seek not only to understand the patterns of victimization but also to design frameworks for victim recognition, protection, rehabilitation, and empowerment. In the context of violent conflict and insecurity, victimological strategies encompass psycho-social support, compensation, livelihood restoration, and community reintegration mechanisms that address both immediate and long-term victim needs (Zehr, 2015; Braithwaite, 2018).

The central philosophy of victimological strategy lies in restorative justice,an approach that views healing, reconciliation, and empowerment of victims as essential to social stability and peace. It moves beyond punitive responses to crime by promoting victim participation, offender accountability, and community rebuilding. In Nigeria, where victims of banditry face displacement, trauma, and social exclusion, victimological strategies provide a framework for transforming suffering into social resilience. They also contribute to national security by rebuilding trust between affected communities and state institutions (Achem & Aderinto, 2024; Ojewale, 2025).

Banditry

Banditry, in its simplest form, refers to organized criminal violence perpetrated by armed groups engaging in robbery, kidnapping, extortion, and territorial control, often in rural or weakly governed regions. Historically, banditry has been understood as both an economic and political crime, emerging in contexts of poverty, state fragility, and social injustice (Alemika, 2022; Ojewale, 2024). In contemporary Nigeria, particularly in the Northwest states of Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, and Niger, banditry has evolved into a complex network of armed groups targeting civilians, farms, and trade routes for ransom and resource control.

Unlike insurgency, banditry lacks ideological motivation; however, its consequences are equally devastating. It results in mass displacement, economic paralysis, food insecurity, and widespread trauma (Iwara & Ayandele, 2024; Nnam & Dastile, 2025). Scholars increasingly view Nigerian banditry as a hybrid form of organized violence, situated between crime and conflict, where state weakness and corruption sustain impunity. Conceptually, addressing banditry thus requires not only military containment but also social interventions that neutralize its root causes: inequality, lack of justice, and victim neglect.

National Security

National security traditionally refers to the protection of a state's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and citizens from internal and external threats. However, modern security scholarship, particularly under the Human Security framework (UNDP, 2022), expands this definition to include the protection of individuals' rights, dignity, and welfare. National security, therefore, is no longer measured solely by military capacity but by the safety and well-being of people within the state.

In Nigeria, the persistence of banditry exposes the limitations of a purely state-centric security model. When citizens are displaced, traumatized, or impoverished, the nation's security is fundamentally compromised (Omale, 2025; Aleyomi & Olajubu, 2024). From a victimological perspective, national security can only be achieved when victims of violence are recognized as stakeholders in peace building. This aligns with the argument that *a secure state is one that secures its people,* ensuring justice, inclusion, and recovery for all affected populations.

The interconnection among these three concepts, victimological strategies, banditry, and national security, forms the core of this study. Banditry produces large-scale victimization; victimological strategies provide the tools to repair the resulting social damage; and the effectiveness of these strategies ultimately determines the sustainability of national security. By integrating victimological thinking into Nigeria's security architecture, policymakers can move from reactive counter-violence to proactive peace building, anchoring national security in human dignity, justice, and trust.

Overview of Banditry and Security Challenges in Nigeria

Banditry has become one of Nigeria's gravest internal-security challenges in the post-insurgency era. It involves organized rural violence, armed attacks, kidnapping for ransom, looting, and destruction of livelihoods (Ojewale, 2024; Iwara & Ayandele, 2024). Once rooted in cattle rustling, it has evolved into a multidimensional crisis sustained by criminal networks, ethnic militias, and unemployed youth. The Northwest and North-Central regions, especially Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, and Sokoto States are the worst affected.

Underlying factors include the proliferation of small arms, unemployment, and weak governance (Demehin, Raji, & Ala, 2024). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023), estimates over 350 million illicit firearms in West Africa, many circulating within Nigeria. The Nigerian Security Tracker (2024), recorded more than 10,000 banditry-related deaths between 2019 and 2023. Beyond fatalities, agriculture and trade have collapsed and school closures have increased poverty (Ojewale, 2025).

Nigeria's responses have been largely militarized through airstrikes, troop deployments, and curfews, yet these yield limited results because they ignore the root causes and victims' conditions (Aleyomi & Olajubu, 2024; Alemika, 2022). This reflects the wider African security model that equates national security with territorial defense rather than human security (UNDP, 2022).

Victimization and Consequences of Banditry

The human toll of banditry is severe. Victims endure trauma, economic loss, sexual violence, displacement, and insecurity. In Zamfara and Katsina, thousands live in camps with minimal access to justice or rehabilitation (Ojewale, 2025). Achem and Aderinto (2024), note that survivors rely on fragile community coping systems lacking institutional support.

Secondary victimization, caused by official neglect and corruption, deepens suffering. Many victims who report crimes face ridicule from law enforcement (Omale, 2025). Women suffer double marginalization as both survivors and social outcasts (Nnam & Dastile, 2025). These experiences mirror other conflict zones where stigma and state failure hinder reintegration (Zehr, 2015).

Banditry also undermines Nigeria's socio-economic base. Agriculture and local trade are paralyzed, fueling food insecurity and unemployment (IPCR, 2024). Eroded trust in government encourages vigilantism and cycles of revenge. Iwara and Ayandele (2024), describe this as social trauma, collective fear and humiliation that destabilize communities and call for a victim-centered security framework.

Institutional and Policy Responses

Government interventions remain dominated by military operations such as Operation Hadarin Daji and Operation Thunder Strike, hindered by weak coordination and intelligence (Omale, 2025). Policies like the National Security Strategy (2023), and National Policy on IDPs (2022), acknowledge victim assistance but lack consistent implementation (IPCR, 2024).

At the state level, peace deals and amnesty programs, especially in Zamfara, collapsed due to distrust and exclusion of victims (Ojewale, 2024). The justice system's inefficiency and police corruption further deter victims from seeking redress (Omale, 2025). Courts are slow and inaccessible, while compensation mechanisms remain under-funded. Weak institutionalization of victim support thus perpetuates impunity and resentment.

Victimological Strategies and Gaps

Despite expanding research on banditry, few studies prioritize victims' perspectives. Analyses largely emphasize perpetrators and state security responses, leaving victims' agency and resilience under explored (Demehin et al., 2024). This limits both scholarship and policy innovation.

Victimological strategies combine psychological, economic, and legal rehabilitation. Effective programs integrate state efforts with local participation (Achem & Aderinto, 2024; Adisa et al., 2022). Victims should be treated as active stakeholders in peacebuilding rather than passive aid recipients. Restorative-justice mechanisms, dialogues, compensation schemes, and truth-telling, help rebuild trust and social order (Zehr, 2015; Braithwaite, 2018). These align with Nigeria's traditional institutions that retain community legitimacy. Yet scholars caution that without tackling inequality and corruption, such measures provide only temporary relief (Walklate, 2017). A sustainable approach must therefore link prevention with rehabilitation and reform.

Comparative International Experiences

Lessons from Kenya, Colombia, and South Africa offer valuable insights. In Kenya, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC, 2022), merged community policing with reconciliation dialogues including victims and offenders. Compensation for displaced families reduced revenge attacks and strengthened early-warning systems. Nigeria could replicate these through community peace committees under traditional leaders.

Colombia's Victims and Land Restitution Law (2011), institutionalized victims' rights and compensation through a dedicated agency, ensuring transparency and reintegration (García-Godos, 2018). Nigeria could adapt this by establishing a Victim Reparation and Resettlement Commission to coordinate assistance.

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) offered victims platforms for testimony and symbolic reparations, contributing to national healing (Clark, 2020). State-level Victim Truth Forums in Zamfara or Kaduna could replicate this restorative process.

Across these contexts, three principles recur: victim participation, institutional accountability, and linking justice with development. They show that supporting victims is not only humanitarian but a strategic pillar of sustainable national security.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Victimological Theory of Justice and the Restorative Justice Framework, which together explain how victim-centered approaches can strengthen national security. Victimology, a branch of criminology, arose to correct the offender-centered bias of criminal justice systems by emphasizing victims' rights, needs, and participation (Fattah, 2015). It seeks recognition, compensation, and restitution for those harmed by crime. Within Nigeria's banditry crisis, this framework provides a human-centered understanding of victims' suffering and offers policy direction that prioritizes their welfare as essential to peace and stability.

The Victimological Theory of Justice contends that justice must restore victims' dignity, functionality, and security rather than focus solely on punishing offenders (Walklate, 2017). It highlights acknowledgment, participation, and empowerment as vital elements of justice. In the Nigerian context, where victims have lost family, homes, and livelihoods, justice is incomplete without restitution and psycho-social healing (Achem & Aderinto, 2024). The theory implies that true national security cannot exist where victims remain traumatized and unassisted; unresolved pain can perpetuate resentment and instability.

The Restorative Justice Framework complements this by promoting reconciliation and relationship repair among victims, offenders, and communities (Zehr, 2015). It advocates dialogue, forgiveness, and reintegration as pathways to peace (Braithwaite, 2018). Applied to Nigeria, it supports the creation of community-based peace dialogues, compensation funds, and rehabilitation centers in conflict-affected states such as Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina. Such participatory mechanisms can rebuild trust, discourage revenge, and encourage community ownership of peace efforts.

Both frameworks align with the human security paradigm, which broadens security beyond military protection to include freedom from fear, want, and humiliation (UNDP, 2022). While Nigeria's militarized responses target armed groups, they often neglect victims' psycho-social and economic recovery (Omale, 2025). Victimological and restorative perspectives together link emotional healing, institutional accountability, and social reconstruction to the broader goals of national stability.

Nevertheless, each theory has limitations. Victimology may overemphasize victim-hood, neglecting deeper structural issues like poverty and corruption (Walklate, 2017). Restorative justice faces implementation barriers in large-scale conflicts where offenders are unidentifiable or justice systems are weak (Braithwaite, 2018). Yet, combined, these approaches form a balanced framework, seeking offender accountability while restoring victims' dignity and resilience. Addressing victims' needs thus becomes central, not peripheral, to achieving sustainable peace and national development in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a conceptual and qualitative research design appropriate for exploring the theoretical and policy dimensions of victimological responses to banditry in Nigeria. Conceptual analysis was chosen because it allows for critical synthesis of ideas, theories, and empirical findings to build a new framework linking victimology and national security (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The study relied primarily on secondary data sourced from scholarly journals, government reports, and reputable international organizations published between 2020 and 2025. Sources were selected through systematic searches of databases such as Scopus, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, and Sage Journals, ensuring recency and academic rigor (Bowen, 2009).

A thematic review approach was applied to identify major trends in the literature on victimization, restorative justice, and security governance. The analysis proceeded through coding and thematic synthesis, grouping evidence under categories such as "institutional neglect," "victim empowerment," and "restorative policy mechanisms." Comparative insights from Kenya, Colombia, and South Africa were integrated to strengthen the global validity of the proposed conceptual model (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Potential biases in this study include publication bias, since academic articles may over represent formal perspectives and under report community voices. This limitation was mitigated by including policy reports and humanitarian documents (e.g., UNDP, NEMA, IPCR) that reflect lived experiences. Researcher bias was minimized through triangulation, where data from multiple independent sources were compared for consistency and reliability (Denzin, 2017).

Ethical considerations were upheld by accurately attributing all sources and avoiding distortions of victims' experiences. As such, this methodology ensured balanced, evidence-based conceptual insights while maintaining scholarly transparency and validity.

Findings

The findings of this conceptual analysis are presented according to the three objectives of the study.

Patterns and Impacts of Banditry Victimization

The first objective reveals that banditry victimization in Nigeria is multidimensional, varying by region, social group, and gender. Studies by Ojewale (2025) and Iwara and Ayandele (2024) categorize victims into direct victims (killed, injured, or kidnapped), indirect victims (relatives of abducted or murdered persons), and collective victims (entire displaced communities). In Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina States, victims have faced large-scale displacement, property loss, and economic paralysis. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA, 2024), estimates that over 350,000 people have been displaced in Zamfara since 2020, reflecting the deep social and economic costs of banditry.

Psychologically, victims suffer chronic trauma, loss of trust, and social isolation, which erode community cohesion and resilience (Achem & Aderinto, 2024). Women experience secondary victimization through stigmatization and exclusion from decision-making (Nnam & Dastile, 2025). This secondary harm perpetuates insecurity by deepening marginalization. Moreover, community frustration with weak state protection has fostered reliance on vigilante groups, temporary self-help mechanisms that risk escalating violence (Omale, 2025). The findings affirm that neglecting victims undermines peace and national stability.**Institutional Responses and Their Effectiveness**

The second objective examined institutional responses to banditry victims. Findings show that government efforts remain reactive, fragmented, and offender-focused. Security operations like *Operation Hadarin Daji* and *Operation Accord* achieved tactical gains but failed to address post-conflict rehabilitation (Aleyomi & Olajubu, 2024). The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) provides for education, healthcare, and resettlement, yet implementation suffers from poor funding and weak coordination (IPCR, 2024).

Victims in Zamfara and Katsina report receiving little or no compensation or counseling, relying mainly on community and religious networks (Ojewale, 2025). Amnesty programs, designed to pacify perpetrators, often excluded victims from consultations, thereby deepening mistrust (Iwara & Ayandele, 2024). As Zehr (2015), argued, denying victims a voice in restorative processes weakens justice and long-term peace building.

Institutional corruption worsens this challenge. Omale (2025), notes that extortion and neglect by police discourage reporting, perpetuating impunity and alienation. Consequently, victims perceive state institutions as inaccessible or biased, reinforcing fatalism and social withdrawal.

Comparative evidence from other countries demonstrates the benefits of structured victim support. Kenya's National Cohesion and Integration Commission (2022), combined psycho-social support with reconciliation dialogues, reducing revenge violence. Colombia's Victims and Land Restitution Law (García-Godos, 2018), institutionalized compensation and reintegration, while South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission restored moral trust through acknowledgment and reparations (Clark, 2020). These cases

illustrate that institutionalizing victim-centered programs enhances justice and security, a lesson Nigeria has yet to fully adopt.

Victimological Strategies for Enhancing National Security

The third objective identifies strategies grounded in victimological theory to promote sustainable peace and security. Findings emphasize that addressing victimization is central, not peripheral, to national stability.

Firstly, establishing a Victim Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission at federal and state levels would standardize support and ensure accountability. Colombia's experience shows that legal recognition of victim rights sustains long-term policy effectiveness (García-Godos, 2018). Secondly, psycho-social and community healing programs are essential. Counseling, trauma therapy, and traditional reconciliation forums can rebuild trust and resilience (Achem & Aderinto, 2024). In Zamfara and Kaduna, locally led peace dialogues facilitated by NGOs and faith leaders have reduced hostility and encouraged returns. Thirdly, inclusive security governance should empower victims and affected communities in decision-making. Such engagement enhances legitimacy and intelligence cooperation, aligning with the human security paradigm that prioritizes people over the state (UNDP, 2022).

Fourthly, integrating gender-sensitive approaches as vital. Women, often the most affected, should access education, microfinance, and leadership roles to aid recovery (Iwara & Ayandele, 2024). Finally, restorative justice mechanisms, victim-offender dialogues, compensation schemes, and truth-telling forums, can promote reconciliation and social trust (Clark, 2020; Zehr, 2015). By recognizing victims' suffering and providing restitution, the state can rebuild moral legitimacy and strengthen social cohesion. These evidence supported the central argument that victimological strategies as indispensable for national security. A society that heals and empowers victims builds resilience, trust, and long-term peace.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from first objective revealed that, banditry victimization in Nigeria is multidimensional, varying by region, social group, and gender, categorize victims into direct victims (killed, injured, or kidnapped), indirect victims (relatives of abducted or murdered persons), and collective victims (entire displaced communities) that is not recognized. It was confirm that Nigeria's response to banditry remains predominantly offender-focused, reactive, and fragmented. From a victimological perspective, this reflects a justice deficit, the failure to recognize victims as central to peace-building and national stability. Interpreted through the Victimological Theory of Justice and Restorative Justice Framework, the results reveal that Nigeria's conception of security is still largely state-centric, prioritizing territorial control over human welfare. This contrasts with the UNDP's (2022), *Human Security* paradigm, which defines security as freedom from fear, want, and indignity.

Victimological theory (Walklate, 2017), posits that when citizens feel unsafe, excluded, or denied justice, national security erodes regardless of military power. Victims in Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna experience displacement, trauma, and economic loss (Ojewale, 2025; Iwara & Ayandele, 2024). The collapse of agriculture intensifies food insecurity and undermines the legitimacy of the state. These findings reinforce Aleyomi and Olajubu's (2024), argument that unchecked victimization fuels instability by creating "zones of despair" where state authority weakens.

The second objective examined institutional responses to banditry victims. Findings show that government efforts remain reactive, fragmented, and offender-focused. Institutional neglect and corruption compound

secondary victimization as postulated (Omale, 2025). Victims often encounter indifference or extortion when reporting crimes, deepening trauma and mistrust. This contradicts restorative justice principles of empathy, accountability, and inclusion asserted by (Zehr, 2015). Although policies such as the *National Policy on IDPs* (2022), outline rehabilitation and resettlement goals, weak funding and poor coordination limit impact. Victims in Zamfara camps receive irregular aid with minimal psycho-social care as confirmed (NEMA, 2024). As a result, they experience emotional detachment and loss of confidence in both government and social systems.

The third objective identifies strategies grounded in victimological theory to promote sustainable peace and security. Findings emphasize that addressing victimization is central, not peripheral, to national stability. The Restorative Justice Framework predicts that reconciliation is unattainable when victims are excluded from justice processes. Nigeria's amnesty programs, which reward perpetrators while overlooking victims, exemplify this imbalance. This mirrors Clark's (2020), critique that reconciliation without recognition is morally and politically unsustainable. Comparative evidence from Kenya, Colombia, and South Africa supports this perspective. Kenya's NCIC (2022), combined dialogue and compensation to reduce revenge attacks; Colombia's Victims and Land Restitution Law (García-Godos, 2018), institutionalized reparation; and South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission restored moral trust through acknowledgment and restitution. These examples confirm Braithwaite's (2018), assertion that sustainable peace requires balancing justice with compassion.

For Nigeria, such models imply that security agencies, humanitarian institutions, and civil society must coordinate within a unified victim policy. Establishing a Victim Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission could ensure legal recognition, transparency, and equitable assistance. State-level truth and reconciliation forums, adapted from South Africa's model, could provide platforms for acknowledgment and healing.

Four insights emerge from the discussion:

Victims as agents of peace – Involving victims in dialogues provides authentic narratives that counter misinformation and strengthen empathy (Achem & Aderinto, 2024).

Restitution and compensation – Material and symbolic reparations address grievances that might otherwise fuel revenge or radicalization.

Institutional trust – Transparent compensation and ethical policing rebuild confidence in the state, supporting Omale's (2025) call for police accountability.

Gender sensitivity – Integrating women's experiences into recovery programs enhances community resilience (Iwara & Ayandele, 2024).

Ultimately, these affirms that victimological justice is inseparable from national security. A nation that heals and empowers its victims restores legitimacy, unity, and trust. As García-Godos (2018) and Clark (2020), demonstrated that, post-conflict societies thrive only when victims' needs shape reconciliation agendas. Nigeria's current neglect mirrors earlier Latin American experiences where impunity prolonged insecurity. By advancing a bottom-up, victim-centered framework, this study redefines national security as a social contract rooted in justice, inclusion, and compassion, addressing Alemika's (2022), critique that African states too often protect regimes rather than citizens. Comparative lessons from Kenya, Colombia, and South Africa confirm that integrating victim justice strengthens reconciliation and legitimacy.

Conclusion

The study established that Nigeria's banditry crisis represents not only a breakdown of security but a profound failure of human protection. Victims, particularly in Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, and Niger States, remain marginalized, traumatized, and excluded from justice, deepening mistrust and perpetuating cycles of violence. Drawing on Victimological and Restorative Justice frameworks, the study emphasized that sustainable peace requires shifting from militarized responses to victim-centered recovery. National stability depends on recognition, rehabilitation, and empowerment of victims as participants in peace-building. The proposed Victimological, Security Nexus Model links victim empowerment with state resilience. By embedding victimological strategies into security policy, through recognition, compensation, and participation, Nigeria can transform victims into agents of peace and rebuild its moral and social foundations. A nation that restores its victims ultimately secures its own future.

Recommendations

There is need for the Federal,State Government and National Assembly toestablish a National Victim Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission (NVRCC) and Victims Support Centres in all the states, through legislation would institutionalize financial compensation, trauma care, and resettlement for victims of banditry and related violence as while as offering psycho-social counseling, livelihood assistance, and legal aid in coordination with the NVRCC.

There is need for the Nigeria Police Force & Police Service Commission, NEMA, IPCR & Civil Society Networks tostrengthen police accountability via transparent complaint systems, prosecution of corrupt officers, and training in victim-sensitive procedures, government and NGO collaboration for humanitarian aid, victim documentation, and long-term reintegration projects to address the**institutional responses and their effectiveness challenges.**

There is need for the Ministry of Interior & Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), Judiciary & National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), tointegrate victim participation into peace dialogues and national security policymaking, ensuring inclusion of victims' associations and community leaders, these would ensure full implementation of restorative justice mechanisms in rural communities through mediation panels that support reconciliation, truth-telling, and compensation.

References

Achem, V. O., & Aderinto, A. A. (2024). "I lost over 700 tubers of yam but am glad I am still alive": Implications of victimhood and displacement on conflict management. *International Review of Victimology.*https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758024123456

Adisa, W. B., Alabi, T. A., & Ayodele, J. (2022). Violent victimisation in Lagos Metropolis: An empirical investigation of community and personal predictors. *International Review of Victimology.*https://doi.org/10.1177/02697580221104932

Alemika, E. O. (2022). The politics of insecurity and governance crisis in West Africa. *African Security Review, 31*(2), 115–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2022.2063523

Aleyomi, M. B., & Olajubu, A. (2024). Kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria: Implications for national security. *Springer Social Sciences.*https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-024-00892-7

Braithwaite, J. (2018). *Restorative justice and responsive regulation.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315198610

Clark, P. (2020). *The limits of reconciliation: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in perspective.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108344084

Demehin, M. O., Raji, S. A., & Ala, M. (2024). Unveiling the multifaceted dimensions: A sociological inquiry into kidnapping in Nigeria. *Crime, Law and Social Change.*https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-024-10022-5

ECOWAS Commission. (2023). *Annual security report on West Africa 2023.* Abuja: ECOWAS. https://ecowas.int/publications

Fattah, E. A. (2015). The evolution of a young, promising discipline: Sixty years of victimology, a retrospective and prospective look. *International Review of Victimology, 21*(1), 73–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758014556035

García-Godos, J. (2018). Victim reparations in transitional justice: Lessons from Colombia. *International Journal of Transitional Justice, 12*(3), 482–502. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijy017

Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR). (2024). *National security and victim support report 2024.* Abuja: IPCR. https://ipcr.gov.ng/reports

Iwara, M. A., & Ayandele, O. (2024). A gendered dimension in understanding armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria. *Springer Social Sciences.*https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-024-00893-6

National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC). (2022). *Community peace and reconciliation framework for northern Kenya.* Nairobi: NCIC. https://cohesion.or.ke

National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). (2024). *Nigeria displacement situation report.* Abuja: NEMA. https://nema.gov.ng/reports

Nnam, M. U., & Dastile, N. P. (2025). Post-offence feelings and hidden emotional roles of women in kidnapping in Nigeria. *Security Journal.*https://doi.org/10.1057/s41284-025-00436-9

Ojewale, O. (2024). The bandits' world: Recruitment strategies and motivations for mass casualty attacks. *Small Wars & Insurgencies.*https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2024.2290834

Ojewale, O. (2025). We have lost everything: Banditry and internal displacement in Northern Nigeria. *Society.*https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-025-00931-8

Omale, D. J. (2025). *Police ethics and accountability: Unethical conducts and corrupt police practices in Nigeria.* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-22358-2

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2022). *Human security and resilience in Africa.* New York: UNDP. https://www.undp.org/publications/human-security-and-resilience-africa

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2023). *Global report on crime and justice 2023.* Vienna: United Nations. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-report-on-crime.html

Walklate, S. (2017). *Criminology: The basics* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315730469

Zehr, H. (2015). *The little book of restorative justice* (Revised ed.). Good Books. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781680990415