



Cross-border banditry influencing national security along the Kenya–Ethiopia border

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ABSTRACT

Banditry in Kenya continues to pose a serious security threat, especially along cross-border regions. This paper examined cross-border banditry influencing national security along Kenya–Ethiopia border. Specific objectives included to examine the drivers of cross-border banditry along the Kenya–Ethiopia border, and to assess how competition over transboundary natural resources impacts cross-border national security along Kenya–Ethiopia border. The study was guided by Regional Security Complex Theory and Neoliberal Institutionalism Theory. It adopted descriptive research design, with a target population of 200, comprising of local community members, law enforcement officials, government representatives, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working in the region. Stratified purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 133 individuals calculated using Yamane formula. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire, where it was analyzed descriptively, inferentially, as well as using thematic content analysis method. The findings indicated that poverty, and resource competition are significantly linked to banditry. Multiple regression analysis showed that both of the predictors of cross-border banditry activities ($\beta = 0.331$, $p=0.000 < 0.05$) and resource competition ($\beta = 0.246$, $p=0.001 < 0.05$) significantly influenced banditry. The study concluded that banditry along Kenya-Ethiopia borders is a sign of deeper socioeconomic deprivation, and inadequate institutional solutions. The recommendations included creating legislation to reduce poverty, improving access to education and career training, encouraging prudent use of natural resources, and including community leaders in the process of changing cultural norms.

Keywords: Cross-Border Banditry, Inter-Community Relations, National Security, Youth Involvement

I. INTRODUCTION

Across the world, banditry is closely linked to national and international security matters, contributing to violence and instability, including in Kenya's cross-border areas (Musau et al 2023). Although banditry is frequently presented as a local problem, Zaid (2024) contends that it actually has significant regional and cross-border dimensions, particularly in Northern Kenya, where communities engage in resource conflicts, banditry, and arms trafficking that extend to neighbouring countries like Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Uganda (Tar & Dawud, 2022). According to Musau et al. (2023), poverty is one of the common drivers of cross-border banditry since raiding is often considered a means of economic survival for underprivileged communities. For instance, young men who have no other means of support are more likely to engage in cattle rustling, and other criminal activity, which is frequently facilitated by the availability of illegal weaponry from areas that are prone to conflict. Like many other regions in the world where natural resources are scarce, the counties of Mandera, Marsabit, Turkana, and Wajir on the Kenyan side, and Borena and Dhawa Zones in the Ethiopian side often experience heightened competition for scarce resources, especially water and grazing land (Musau et al., 2023).

Banditry in the northern Kenyan region has historically been associated with cattle rustling, a violent and organized criminal activity that was formerly a cultural practice (Tar & Dawud, 2022). Due to a lack of economic prospects, poverty continues to be a major factor, pushing many young people to turn to banditry as an alternative way of subsistence. The Kenyan northern corridor's high unemployment and underdevelopment rates make it hard for people, especially the youth, to find steady job, which drives them to turn to banditry-associated illegal activities for survival purposes (Yadeta et al., 2025). Banditry is a strategy used by groups to establish control over these limited resources, and the fight for land and water frequently turns violent. Furthermore, education accessibility plays a critical role because the youth living across Kenya-Ethiopia border may have poor school enrollment and high dropout rates, which make them susceptible to being recruited into criminal activities.

Driven by socioeconomic factors, banditry is not exclusive to Kenya; rather, it is a global phenomenon that affects many different countries, especially those that have resource-based conflicts, economic marginalization, and poor governance (Onota et al., 2024). According to Yadeta et al. (2025), often taking the form of organized crime, cattle rustling, or armed insurgencies, banditry has been witnessed in several continents due to such aspects as poverty, unemployment, and competition for natural resources. The lack of viable economic alternatives for underprivileged communities and systemic inequality are often the driving forces behind these illegal actions. Despite different dynamics of poverty and other socioeconomic issues underlying banditry across the globe, its consequences include disruption of people's livelihoods and fueling of persistent conflicts (Rufus & Ogbe, 2025).

In Latin America, armed groups like the National Liberation Army (ELN) and rebel sections of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have engaged in rural banditry, controlling illicit economies and extorting local people, especially in Venezuela and Colombia (Sullivan & Jones, 2021). In Venezuela, for example, the country's economic collapse has further fueled the growth of organized criminal groups involved in drug trafficking, cattle theft, and cross-border smuggling. Yadeta et al. (2025) further observed that since many young people lack employment opportunities, they resort to crime as a means of subsistence. Similarly, in rural Mexico where poverty and government indifference have left locals open to recruitment into violent activities, criminal cartels have amplified their powers, increasingly instilling fear among the citizens across borders.

In Africa, banditry is a pervasive security issue, mostly caused by socioeconomic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, resource shortages, corruption, and ineffective governance (Akinyetun & Ogunbodede, 2023). Banditry is often used as a survival strategy by marginalized populations in the African region that have little access to economic possibilities. According to Sullivan, and Jones (2021), the problem of banditry is more common in areas with a weak state presence, which facilitates the growth of criminal networks. In many countries in Africa, banditry commonly takes the form of kidnappings, armed robberies, and cattle rustling, with some of these groups going on to become larger organized crime syndicates or aligning with bigger militant organizations (Tar & Dawud, 2022).

In Ethiopia's Oromia and Afar regions, due to poverty and rivalry for grazing pasture, armed gangs regularly commit highway robberies and cattle raids as a way of making livelihoods (Dansa & Musa, 2021). In Somalia, a country that has witnessed decades of political instability and poor institutional governance, Ndiyun (2023) further noted that banditry coexists with piracy and terrorism, which is a big threat to peace and security. Many young people have little options but to join criminal networks as a result of the lack of employment possibilities and the breakdown of traditional economic systems. These incidents from all around Africa show how banditry is a constant threat to cross-border security and development because of poverty, resource competitiveness, and government shortcomings.

In Kenya, banditry has consistently been a security threat, especially in pastoralist areas like Turkana, Marsabit, Baringo, and West Pokot counties which stretch along the Kenyan borders with countries like Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan (Zaid, 2024). According to Dansa and Musa (2021), socioeconomic issues including unemployment, poverty, and resource scarcity have contributed to the rise in banditry, with communities commonly using cattle rustling as a way of both economic gain and survival. Furthermore, many young men find banditry to be a profitable alternative due to the lack of good economic opportunities. Northern Kenyan insecurity is largely caused by banditry, which has been allowed to persist in regions with scarce government presence due to a lack of effective law enforcement. Moreover, Abdullahi and Mukhtar (2022) showed that the spread of illicit weaponry, which are frequently imported from South Sudan and Somalia, has made the conflict even worse, thus putting national security test.

Cross-border banditry has evolved from being a local criminal issue to a transboundary and regional security threat with intricate economic, cultural, and geopolitical dimensions, especially in border areas. Banditry continues to intensify in spite of continuous government and non-governmental organization interventions, suggesting a more profound structural issue (Tar & Dawud, 2022). These increasing cross-border banditry operations have repercussions that go beyond localized insecurity to jeopardize national security and regional stability. Attacks that occur often erode trust between communities and security agencies, limit economic activity, cause internal displacement, and undermine political authority. Meanwhile, various forms of interventions have yielded inconsistent results due to logistical limitations, mistrust among communities, poor cross-border coordination, and insufficient intelligence-sharing mechanisms (Goldhahn et al., 2021). The fact that insecurity persists in spite of numerous attempts suggests serious implementation challenges and structural weaknesses that require systematic research. This study seeks to examine the causes, effects, mitigation measures, and challenges of tackling cross-border banditry along the Kenya–Ethiopia border.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Cross-border banditry along the Kenya–Ethiopia border has grown to be a serious security threat that undermines the region's peace, human security, and socioeconomic development. The ability of security forces is strained and state authority is weakened by recurring incidents of armed raids, cattle theft, illegal weapon movement, and violence among cross-border communities. Banditry is still common despite collaborative security operations and regional peace measures carried out by the governments of Ethiopia and Kenya. This indicates that current interventions

have not sufficiently addressed the root causes of these crimes. Despite increased emphasis to border security, there is no empirical data explaining the particular causes of cross-border banditry in the Kenya–Ethiopia setting.

Furthermore, population growth, shifting livelihood patterns, and climate unpredictability have increased competition for limited transboundary natural resources, especially water and pasture, which has increased the incidence of cross-border disputes and instability. Few studies have explicitly looked into how resource rivalry affects cross-border banditry and, in turn, national security along the Kenya–Ethiopia border. Despite the fact that prior research has looked at pastoral conflicts and border security independently, there are still notable knowledge gaps. The creation of efficient, fact-based security and resource governance policies is hampered by this knowledge gap. Thus, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of competition for transboundary natural resources on national security along the Kenya–Ethiopia border and to investigate the causes of cross-border banditry..

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the drivers of cross-border banditry along the Kenya–Ethiopia border.
- ii. To assess how competition over transboundary natural resources impacts cross-border national security along Kenya–Ethiopia border.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Regional Security Complex Theory

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) was founded by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in late 1990s–early 2000s. According to the RSCT, countries that are close to one another share interdependent security problems, which is why security threats are most densely clustered within geographic regions (Buzan & Waever, 2003). The theory further claims that insecurity in one state often has an impact on neighbouring states due to shared borders, interconnected ethnic groups, and overlapping economic systems. The theory explains why cross-border banditry spreads readily among populations like the Turkana and Nyangatom along the Kenya–Ethiopia border, whose security dynamics cannot be understood within national borders alone. Thus, RSCT provides a basis for understanding bandit mobility across borders, the circulation of small arms, and how poor border management links Ethiopia's internal dynamics to Kenya's national security.

By framing the Kenya–Ethiopia border as a component of an interconnected regional security system where threats transcend national boundaries, RSCT directly supports objective 1 on drivers of cross-border banditry, and objective 2 on resource competition and regional security. More broadly, RSCT aligns the research with international relations theory on regional security governance by conceptualizing cross-border banditry as a regionalized threat rather than a local problem.

2.1.2 Neoliberal Institutionalism Theory

Neoliberal Institutionalism was initiated by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in the 1970s–1980s, with major publications produced in 1977 and 1984 (Keohane, 1984). According to liberal institutionalism, international and regional organizations that provide rules, norms, information-sharing channels, and conflict-resolution mechanisms can help governments cooperate even in the face of anarchy (Keohane, 1984). It highlights the importance of formal agreements, transboundary collaboration, and international institutions to mitigating insecurity and promoting stability. This theory emphasizes the importance of bilateral security accords, joint border commissions, IGAD mechanisms, and AU peace and security frameworks in mitigating cross-border banditry along the Kenya–Ethiopia border. It also emphasizes how bandit networks can take advantage of governance gaps due to institutional weaknesses such as poor implementation, insufficient funding, or a lack of coordination. Overall, it grounds the study by explaining that in addition to being a security concern, cross-border banditry is a governance and cooperation issue that calls for institutional responses at the national, bilateral, and regional levels (Udosen & Uwak, 2021).

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Drivers of Cross-Border Banditry and National Security

Onota et al. (2024) provide an empirically supported analysis of how cross-border migration and porous borders have allowed armed banditry to thrive in some areas of Nigeria. The study used an opportunity-structure framing to explain why and under what circumstances migration and weak border control create conducive environments for violent criminality. The study was based on a detailed secondary-source review of reports, official data, and scholarly literature. The authors list a number of structural factors that collectively give bandit organizations opportunity structures. These were identified as porous borders, unemployment and youth marginalization, illicit trade networks, and small-arms trafficking. The authors demonstrate how cross-border mobility provides logistical networks, such as markets for stolen livestock, and routes for weapons, that perpetuate violence while also concealing bandit movements.

According to Ejiofor (2022), people in underprivileged communities frequently turn to illegal activity in order to survive, making economic deprivation a significant contributing factor to the rise of organized crime and violence. The emergence of violent robberies, drug cartels, and criminal gangs has been associated with high levels of poverty in places like Latin America (Hernández-García & Salgado-Ramírez, 2022). Economic hardship, for instance, has been found to be a major contributing factor in Mexico's youth recruitment into organized crime and drug cartels. Similarly, economic hardship has contributed to the growth of insurgent groups in parts of Asia, including Afghanistan, where jobless youths participate in armed activities in return for financial rewards (Aziz, 2021). These global studies underscore the link between poverty and violent crime, stressing that economic marginalization fosters an atmosphere conducive to banditry.

In a study by Fuoli (2024) on banditry in global social history, it was established that this is a world phenomenon closely associated with poverty, where individuals and groups turn to criminality as a form of survival. The study examined the parallels and connections among various banditry cases in terms of their inclusion within the global dynamics of imperial expansion, capitalism, and the evolving concepts of territoriality and sovereignty, drawing on various regional case studies. The findings further showed that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, banditry appeared concurrently and with remarkable intensity in several parts of the world. It argues that the ubiquitous presence of banditry in this period was propelled by the deep-running changes to local relations of class, economy, and power that resulted from these accelerating global dynamics.

In Africa, the persistence of banditry has been linked to poverty, especially in areas with weak state presence and economic exclusion. For example, in Nigeria's North-West region, poverty and unemployment have led to an increase in banditry, forcing many young men to join bandit groups that engage in violent raids, cattle rustling, and kidnapping as alternative livelihood strategies (Ejiofor, 2022). Similarly, in the Sahel region, economic deprivation has pushed communities to engage in cross-border banditry and illicit trade, with weak governance structures making matters worse (Aziz, 2021; Simeon, 2023). Furthermore, according to Hernández-García and Salgado-Ramírez (2022), people in coastal towns in Somalia turned to hijacking commercial ships as a source of money due to poverty and a lack of economic prospects, which contributed significantly to the emergence of piracy in the early 2000s. These African instances show how poverty leads to transnational security issues in addition to fostering local banditry.

In Kenya, banditry has been a recurring problem in a number of places, especially in arid and semi-arid areas where poverty and resource constraint are common. Researchers like Chemase and Muhindi (2024) contend that the increase in armed banditry and livestock rustling in Northern Kenya is as a result of pastoralist groups' economic marginalization. Musau et al. (2023) found out that young men frequently turn to banditry as a source of income in places like Turkana, Baringo, and Samburu where there is little access to formal work and economic prospects. Furthermore, Chemase and Muhindi (2024) established that planned livestock raids in banditry-prone areas like Northern Kenya, such as Baringo, are a cultural and economic survival tactic that have been made more common by poverty and weak law enforcement systems and efforts.

Musau et al. (2023) examined the relationship between cattle rustling, banditry, and insecurity in northwest Kenya, including Samburu, Turkana, and neighbouring counties. The article employed descriptive methodologies, documentary review, and synthesis of regional incident data in order to determine causative causes and assess the effectiveness of state actions. A multi-causal driver set was identified in the raiding activities, including historical marginalization, poverty and unemployment, competition for limited rangelands and water, the spread of small guns, and cultural norms. The authors emphasized how inadequate state-centric and security-only solutions have been and advocates for a more human-centered, integrated strategy such as livelihoods, education, and community-led peacebuilding to end the cycle of violence. Additionally, the study demonstrate how organized and lethal banditry has grown over time, with cross-border and cross-county aspects that make law enforcement more difficult. Despite the paper's strength in contextual description and policy prescriptions, it heavily relies on secondary data and descriptive analysis; leaving the gaps addressed through the current study's mixed-methods fieldwork (surveys, interviews) to quantify effects and test causal pathways empirically at the Kenya–Ethiopia frontier.

According to Tawane (2025), since Kenya gained independence in 1963, insecurity has been fueled by banditry and long-lasting interethnic conflicts caused by lack of resources, poverty, and economic opportunity. The study further established that over time, modern banditry has been marketed, and other actors, such as politicians and dishonest businessmen, exploit it as a means of igniting conflict and deflecting attention of security forces. Between 1901 and 1933, the colonial authority implemented a number of Ordinances that systemically excluded and marginalized populations in North Western Kenya and the majority of the Northern Frontier Districts (NFD), thus leading to historical marginalization which has in turn fueled banditry for the longest time. Despite these revelations, it is important to note that changing dynamics, such as change of regimes, improved economic and educational opportunities, could have significant implications on the banditry phenomenon in those marginalized areas. The current research is therefore important to highlight the current situation.

In Turkana County, pastoralism is the primary economic activity in the area, and the region's severe climate further exacerbates the problem by rendering cultivation unfeasible. According to Vundi and Koome (2023), livestock

losses during droughts drive communities into desperation, leading to an increase in violent conflicts and cattle rustling as they try to restock their herds. A Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) report states that Turkana is one of the country's poorest counties, with little access to economic, educational, and infrastructure prospects (Vundi & Koome, 2023). The cycle of banditry has been exacerbated by historical marginalization and economic hardship, as young people view it as one of the only practical ways to survive. Yet, banditry in the area is often studied within the narrow perspective of local conflicts rather than the broader perspective of regional peace and security.

2.2.2 Competition Over Transboundary Natural Resources and Cross-Border Banditry

Conflict has long resulted from competition for natural resources, which fuels criminal activity including organized violence, banditry, and insurgency. According to Ejiofor (2022), resource shortage, particularly in areas with weak governance frameworks, can result in violent rivalry. For example, throughout Latin America, banditry and organized crime have been fueled by conflicts over land, water, and minerals (Hernández-García & Salgado-Ramírez, 2022). Armed organizations, drug cartels, and local farmers have engaged in violent battles in Colombia as a result of rivalry for coca-growing regions, thus creating regional conflict, insecurity and social instability. Similarly, disputes over access to water and fertile land in Afghanistan have fueled rural violence and the emergence of small bandit organizations that commit crimes to make ends meet (Aziz, 2021). These incidents show how economic hardship, poor administration, and rivalry for limited resources may foster an atmosphere that encourages banditry and eventually jeopardizes regional peace and security.

In Africa, banditry and instability have been mostly fueled by disputes over natural resources, which include grazing, water, minerals, and land. Bandit groups are rustling livestock, kidnapping people, and raiding villages in the North-West area of Nigeria as part of a larger conflict between pastoralist and farming communities over grazing space (Ejiofor, 2022). In a study by Rufus and Ogbe (2025) on the rise of banditry and its security implications and pathways to regional stability in Northwest Nigeria, the findings indicated that banditry has become a major threat to regional security in Northwest Nigeria, causing serious problems for public safety, governance, and socioeconomic stability. This study looks at the main factors that contribute to banditry in the area, such as the pervasive poverty, unemployment, and rivalry for limited resources, especially in rural areas. Armed organizations can now operate with impunity due to the worsening of state authority and inadequate law enforcement.

In Ghana, Andoh (2023) examined banditry, terrorism threats and rising bullion van robbery attacks, and noted that most offenders were poor young people who were probably driven by desperation to make ends meet. It emerged that attacks by Bullion van robbers have become a serious security risk in Ghana in recent years, with serious repercussions for social, political, and economic stability as well as national security. The rate of bullion van robberies and their audacity are depicted in the paper using realism theory. The findings reveal factors that have contributed to the increase in these attacks as economic slump, social issues, and collusion with corruption. It also highlights how crucial citizen participation and public awareness initiatives are to promoting a coordinated response to stop bullion van robberies. The study concluded that both the public and commercial sectors must act quickly to address Ghana's growing trend of bullion van robbery incidents.

According to Ogembo (2024), in a study on the effects of insecurity on socio-economic development on Northern Kenya, there is significant relationship between (in)security and socioeconomic situation in the region. In the Arid and Semi-Arid regions of Northern Kenya, human insecurity is a major obstacle to achieving equitable spatial-geographical development. Cattle rustling, in which terrorists, particularly Al-Shabaab, employ modern weaponry like AK-47s and M16 rifles, exacerbates the region's already high level of insecurity, particularly in Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, and Lamu Counties. The Al-Shabaab also use machetes, landmines, IEDs, and hand-propelled grenades, among other deadly weaponry. The consequences of insecurity on trade in Northern Kenya, the implications of insecurity on crop and livestock farming, and the effects of insecurity education on health services were the specific objectives.

Competition for grazing pasture and water supplies has been connected to recurring banditry attacks, especially in counties along the Kenya-Ethiopia borders. Muchema (2023) revealed that herders are compelled to relocate into disputed areas during protracted dry seasons, which results in violent conflicts that intensify into cycles of retaliatory attacks and ongoing instability. Although the Kenyan government has put in place a number of disarmament and conflict resolution programs, banditry is nevertheless fueled by competition for natural resources, endangering regional stability. Muchema (2023) further observed that the banditry issue has gotten worse because of the proliferation of small guns and the weak implementation of land rules, which have allowed bandit organizations to operate with impunity. In order to reduce banditry and maintain long-term peace in Turkana and other impacted areas across Kenya-Ethiopia borders, it is still imperative to address the underlying causes of this conflict, such as sustainable resource management and alternate sources of income which often contribute to national insecurity if they are left unaddressed.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Descriptive research design was used in the study, which was suitable for this study since it enabled a comprehensive analysis of the influence of poverty, access to education, competition for natural resources, cultural practices in fueling regional banditry and influencing cross-border national security. The design enabled gathering of qualitative and quantitative data (Taherdoost, 2022), allowing the researcher a thorough understanding of the social and economic factors that underlie national security along the Kenya-Ethiopia border.

3.2 Target Population

The study's target population included Turkana County local community members, law enforcement officials, government representatives, and NGOs working in the region. These groups were significant since they are key stakeholders that are either directly impacted by or actively participating in combating banditry in Turkana County and along the Kenya-Ethiopia borders in general. Law enforcement officers, administrators, and other security workers were essential in controlling and reducing banditry. For practical purposes of the study in terms of resource availability and time needed for its completion, the target population entailed 200 individuals, distributed across different social groups, as illustrated in table 1.

Table 1

Target Population

Categories	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Local Community Members	90	45
Law Enforcement Officials	50	25
Government Local administrators	30	15
NGO representatives	30	15
Total	200	100

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study used stratified purposive sampling technique to select the sample from various categories (strata) of the respondents. This method allowed selecting the respondents from groups of individuals to provide their unique perspectives to the study (Andrade, 2021). The study applied the Yamane (1967) formula to calculate the sample size, as follows:

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

Where;

n = sample size

N = Total Population

1 = Constant

e² = Estimated standard error at 95% confidence level

$$n = \frac{200}{1 + 200(0.05)^2}$$

$$= 133$$

Distribution of the sample size is summarized in table 2, calculated based on the target population of 200 individuals.

Table 2

Sample Size

Categories	Number (N)	Sample Size (n)
Local Community Members	90	60
Law Enforcement Officials	50	33
Government Local administrators	30	20
NGO representatives	30	20
Total	200	133

3.4 Research Instruments

The study used a questionnaire for primary data collection. A questionnaire was more suitable for data collection due to its ability to gather large amounts of data with relative ease (Nes & Yamu, 2021). Additionally, a questionnaire typically saves time during the fieldwork exercise by helping the researcher to quickly and easily arrange detailed

information for processing and analysis (Ranganathan & Caduff, 2023). The questionnaire's validity was pre-tested through piloting, where it was administered to a small sample (13) of the respondents to identify and address any ambiguities or inconsistent questions. Its reliability was assessed using two statistical metrics, including test-retest, and internal consistency reliability. Test-retest reliability was ascertained by administering the questionnaire to a subgroup of respondents twice and appraising their responses for uniformity. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7-1.0 values was used to assess reliability of internal consistency, where the closer the index was to 1.0, the more reliable the instrument was considered to be.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The questionnaire was administered to the respondents through face-to-face interactions where they were approached in their places of convenience. Where necessary, blank questionnaires were dropped to or a Google questionnaire shared with some of the respondents for self-administering. To expedite data collection process, two research assistants were engaged from the local communities and properly trained on data collection processes before they were allowed to assist with fieldwork.

3.6 Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and regression statistics with the help of SPSS version 25 computer software, whereas qualitative data was analyzed using thematic content analysis technique. The following multiple regression model was applied to show the cause-and-effect relationship between variables:

$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$, where:

Y = national security

X_1 = drivers of cross-border banditry

X_2 = competition over transboundary natural resources

$\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2$ = Beta Coefficient

ε = Error term

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Participants' rights and confidentiality were safeguarded throughout the study process by carefully considering ethical issues. Every participant was asked for their informed consent to participate in the study and were given guarantees about their privacy and confidentiality of their personal data. The respondents were informed of their right to discontinue participation in the study at any point without any penalty.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

The findings indicated that an 88% (117 out of 133) overall response rate was obtained by the study, which was considered very high and reliable for objective findings. The high response rates also minimized non-response bias and improved the representativeness of the results. Table 3 provides summary of the study's response rate.

Table 3

Response Rate

Category	Sample (N)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Local Community Members	60	55	92
Law Enforcement Officials	33	29	88
Government Local administrators	20	16	80
NGO representatives	20	17	85
Total	133	117	88

4.2 Respondents' Background Information

The respondents' background information was interrogated in terms of category, gender, age bracket, level of education, and the period lived/worked in Turkana County.

4.2.1 Gender of the Respondents

The gendered characteristic of responses on cross-border banditry activities influencing national security along the Kenya-Ethiopia border is reflected in figure 1, showing that 61% (71) of them were men and 39% (46) were women. The dominance of men in banditry and community security decision-making highlights the need to understand how factors related to identity, masculinity, and livelihood contribute to conflict.

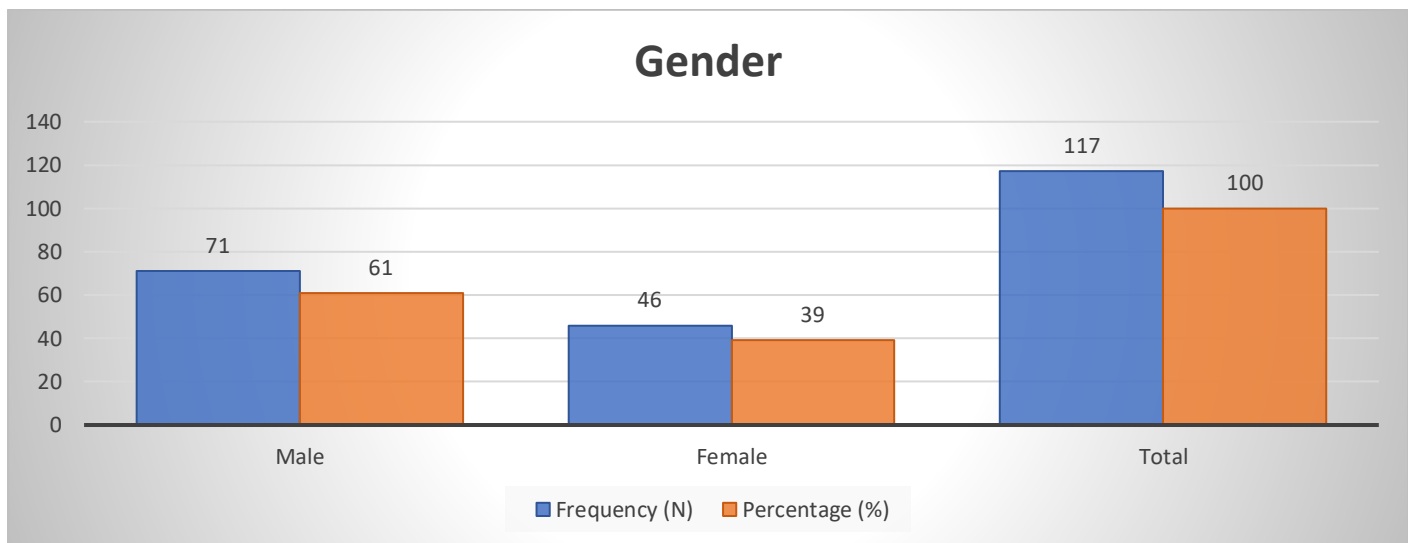


Figure 1
Respondents' Gender

4.2.2 Age of the Respondents

The respondents' age distribution indicated that the largest proportion fell within the 46–55 years-age group (32%), followed by 36–45 years (28%), while the younger cohorts of 18–25 (8%) and 26–35 years (15%), as well as the very old (56+ years) (18%) were least represented. These results imply that the discourse about factors contributing to cross-border banditry along Kenya-Ethiopia border is dominated by older members of the community, administrators, and law enforcement officers. Their perspectives were invaluable given their firsthand knowledge of the persistent banditry, generational cultural norms, and state responses over time.

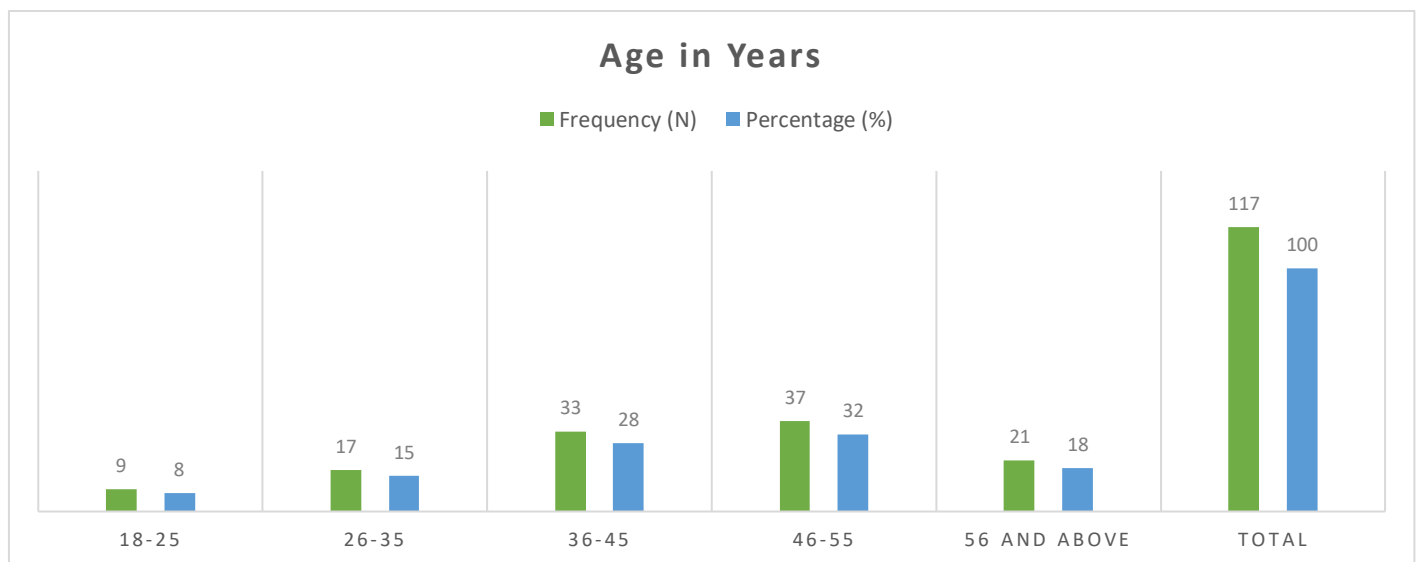


Figure 2
Respondents' Age

4.2.3 Education Level of the Respondents

A sizable percentage have only completed primary level (28%) and secondary school (21%), while smaller percentages have earned diplomas (18%) and university degrees (15%). The fact that 18% (21) of respondents said they had no formal education at all highlights how persistent educational marginalization is in Turkana County as one of the counties along the Kenya-Ethiopia borders. These statistics demonstrate the systemic inequalities that make certain segments of the population more vulnerable to participating in or putting up with banditry.

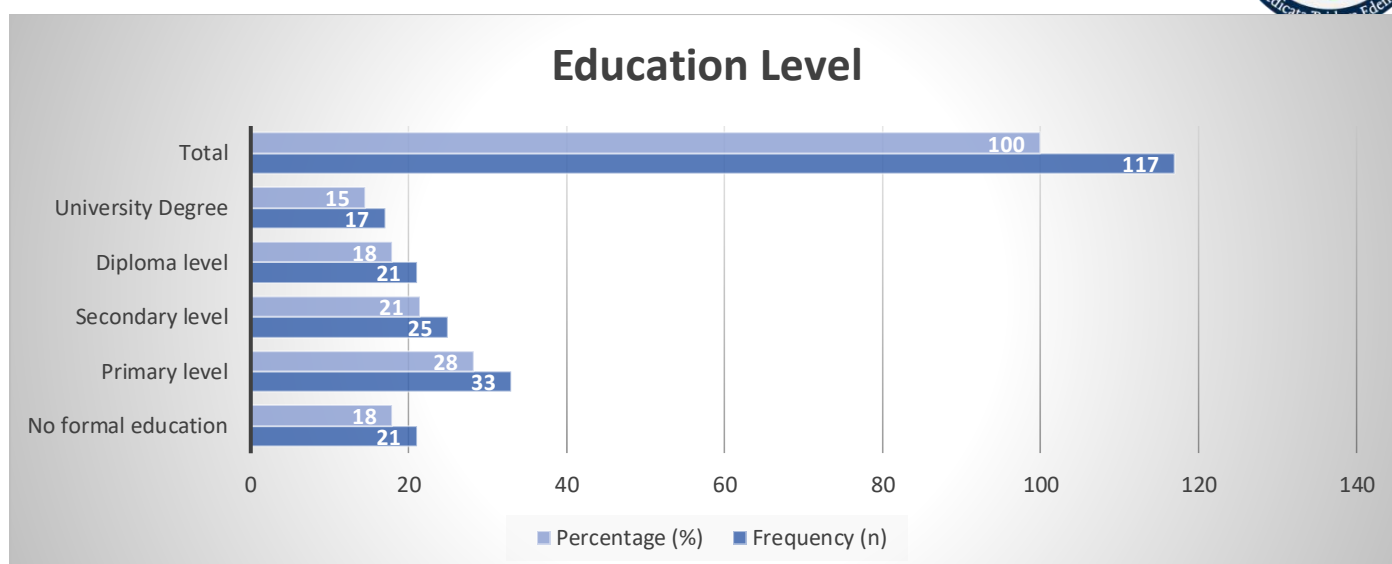


Figure 3
Respondents' Education Level

4.3 Drivers of Cross-Border Banditry Along the Kenya–Ethiopia Border

The first objective of the study was to examine the drivers of cross-border banditry along the Kenya–Ethiopia border, where a 5-points Likert scale based on five statements was used to measure this variable.

Table 4
Drivers of Cross-Border Banditry

Statements	1=SD	2=D	3=N	4=A	5=SA	Total (%)
Weak surveillance and porous border points along the Kenya–Ethiopia frontier significantly enable the movement of bandits across the border.	2	4	9	45	39	100
Limited coordination between Kenyan and Ethiopian security agencies contributes to increased cross-border banditry.	3	6	11	52	27	100
The easy availability of illicit small arms smuggled across the Kenya–Ethiopia border increases the frequency and intensity of banditry incidents.	6	8	15	44	28	100
Cross-border trafficking networks play a major role in supplying weapons used in banditry along the Kenya–Ethiopia border.	5	11	18	40	26	100
Informal cross-border trade routes are exploited by bandits to transport stolen livestock and other contraband.	3	9	16	44	26	100

The results clearly show that structural weaknesses along the Kenya–Ethiopia border are key drivers of cross-border banditry, as the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with every statement in table 4. For example, 84% of participants (45% Agree, 39% Strongly Agree) thought that bandit groups' mobility is considerably facilitated by porous border points and weak surveillance. This demonstrates the widespread belief that state presence of and border governance gaps are major causes of conflict. Similarly, 79% of respondents (52% Agree, 27% Strongly Agree) agreed that poor coordination between Ethiopian and Kenyan security agencies increases cross-border banditry. This suggests that attempts to discourage armed criminal groups operating across borders are hampered by the absence of coordinated joint patrols, intelligence sharing, or coordinated security operations.

Another significant issue is the proliferation of illicit weapons. While 66% of respondents (40% agree, 26% strongly agree) ascribe weapon supply chains to cross-border trafficking networks, a total of 72% of respondents (44% agree, 28% strongly agree) admit that easy access to illegal small guns boosts the frequency and severity of attacks. This illustrates how criminal organizations integrated into border communities maintain banditry by guaranteeing a steady supply of weapons. Furthermore, 70% of respondents (44% agree, 26% strongly agree) acknowledge that criminals use illegal cross-border trade routes to transport contraband and stolen livestock, demonstrating the dual character of these routes as both security risks and economic lifelines. Generally, the findings emphasize that border banditry is not merely a localized security issue but a complex interplay of porous territorial control, weak bilateral coordination, arms trafficking, and unregulated trade networks.

According to Ogembo (2024), economic crimes and the experiences of poor male pastoralists who turn to raiding as a means of subsistence are closely linked to rural banditry in Kwara State, Nigeria. This is in line with the

results of the present study conducted in Turkana County, where 74% of respondents cited poverty as a primary driver for banditry. Turkana youth participate in cattle raids and armed banditry as an economic option in a setting of limited opportunities, much like Nigerian pastoralists justify their engagement in banditry by citing their lack of access to productive livelihoods. The parallel shows that poverty-driven insecurity is not unique to Kenya; rather, it is a reflection of a larger regional trend in which armed crime is fueled by economic hardship.

Furthermore, Ejiofor (2022) uses the perspective of relative deprivation to explain how people in Nigeria are motivated to engage in banditry and violence by perceptions of economic and social disparity. This opinion is supported by the present study along the Kenya-Ethiopia border, which demonstrates how widespread poverty and unequal access to resources have increased the emotions of exclusion. This has in turn driven young unemployed local people to engage in raiding as a symbolic and financial reaction to deprivation. This link emphasizes how poverty in the border counties, such as Turkana, reflects both material deprivation and a sense of psychological abandonment, which is similar to what Ejiofor found in Nigeria's ungoverned areas. However, the two settings are different, with possible applicability of the findings in either case.

4.4 Impact of Competition Over Transboundary Natural Resources on National Security

The study also assessed how competition over transboundary natural resources impacts cross-border national security along Kenya–Ethiopia border, with summary provided in table 5.

Table 5

Impact of Competition Over Transboundary Natural Resources on National Security

Statements	1=SD	2=D	3=N	4=A	5=SA	Total (%)
Resource-based conflicts (e.g., cattle raids) are a major driver of banditry in Turkana County.	1	3	6	54	37	100
Limited access to grazing land and water sources leads to violent conflicts that escalate into banditry.	2	4	11	50	32	100
The lack of clear frameworks for resource allocation worsens conflicts among communities	8	9	15	38	31	100
Banditry is sometimes used as a means to secure or reclaim scarce natural resources.	0	2	8	52	38	100
Strengthening resource-sharing agreements between communities could help reduce banditry	3	4	14	47	32	100

The results show that one of the main causes of banditry in Turkana County is competition for limited natural resources. The majority of respondents concurred that conflicts centered around resources, such as livestock raiding (91%) and disagreements over water and grazing land (82%) directly contribute to violence and state insecurity. Furthermore, 90% of respondents concurred that banditry is occasionally used as a tactic to access or recover these limited resources, illustrating how resource scarcity turns routine conflicts into coordinated acts of violence, even across borders. Furthermore, 69% (80) of respondents cited the absence of clear procedures for allocating resources as a significant aggravating factor, demonstrating how institutional gaps and poor governance foster an environment that is conducive to banditry. Notably, 79% (91) of respondents agreed that strengthening agreements for resource sharing across communities might lessen these disputes, indicating that collaborative strategies can mitigate the incidence of violent competition as a fueling factor of national security.

Competition for limited resources like water and pasture has increased due to extended droughts, unpredictable rainfall, and declining grazing pastures (Onota et al., 2024). Communities resort to violent tactics like armed banditry and cattle raiding as a means of securing their existence when their livelihoods collapse due to environmental hardship. This may explain why a great majority of border county respondents immediately connected banditry to resource constraint. As a result, climate change intensifies already-existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities and makes pastoralist livelihoods even more risky.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the lack of natural resources is a serious security challenge for Kenya's national stability, and not only an environmental or economic one. When resources like pasture and water are in short supply, particularly during droughts, banditry becomes a survival strategy in Turkana and the larger Kenya-Ethiopia border region. National security resources are diverted from development, retaliation cycles are sustained, and state authority is weakened. The relationship between resource acquisition and banditry further demonstrates how environmental stress can directly jeopardize internal stability and cohesion by undermining governance and peacebuilding in vulnerable regions.

According to Musau et al. (2023), rivalry for limited resources, especially grazing space and water sources, is intimately related to banditry and cattle rustling in Northwest Kenya. This is supported by the current research, which found that 68% of participants cited competition for natural resources as a key driver of banditry. According to both

research, pastoralist disputes are exacerbated by resource shortages, particularly during droughts when herders are compelled to move into disputed areas. The analogy highlights the systemic importance of ecological forces in sustaining insecurity by demonstrating how resource-based rivalry in Turkana, as well as other regions of Northwest Kenya, turn into banditry.

Zaid (2024) emphasizes how women's security is disproportionately impacted by climate change-induced scarcity in border areas, which intensifies violent confrontations over diminishing natural resources. This is supported by the current study, which shows that raids and banditry in Turkana are directly caused by competition for resources, which is made worse by environmental stress. According to Akinyetun and Ogunbodede (2023), resource-based pastoralist conflicts have been exacerbated by climate unpredictability in the Lake Chad region, leading herders to use violence in order to get access to pasture and water. This is supported by the present study, which demonstrates how environmental shocks like drought heighten competition for limited grazing areas, hence escalating violent raids.

4.7 Inferential Analysis

4.7.1 ANOVA

The mean national security scores for each respondent category (local community, law enforcement, government administrators, and non-governmental organizations) were examined using a one-way ANOVA).

Table 6

ANOVA – Regional Banditry by Respondent Category

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between groups	5.214	3	1.738	4.26	0.007
Within groups	45.957	113	0.407		
Total	51.171	116			

Post-hoc (Tukey): Local Community > NGO ($p=.011$) and Local Community > Government Admin ($p=.034$); differences with Law Enforcement were smaller ($p=.089$). The findings indicate that perceived national insecurity is higher among community respondents than among NGOs and authorities, which is in line with firsthand experience of community members on the ground. In terms of policy, this discrepancy indicates that operational/state narratives and community human-security realities must be reconciled, an international relations (IR) lesson on harmonizing institutional and local threat perceptions.

4.7.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlations (given acceptable normality) were computed between constructs (composite indices), as illustrated in table 7.

Table 7

Correlations among Key Variables (N=117)

Variable	1	2
1. National security (DV)	1	
2. Drivers of cross-border banditry	0.62	
3. Competition over transboundary resources	0.58	0.41

Note: bold coefficients $p < .001$.

From the findings, national security has a positive correlation with drivers of cross-border banditry, and competition over transboundary resources. The pattern is consistent with IR evidence from borders, where for instance Dansa and Musa (2021) showed that social investment reduces mobilization into armed activity, while material deprivation increases violence. This supports human security measures to maintain regional and state stability.

4.7.3 Multiple Linear Regression

The joint effects of the 2 factors on regional banditry (RB) were assessed using a simultaneous entry regression. Model: $RB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{drivers of cross-border banditry}) + \beta_2(\text{Competition}) + \varepsilon$

Table 8

Multiple Regression Results (N=117)

Predictor	B	SE	β (Std.)	t	p-value
(Constant)	0.412	0.176	—	2.35	0.021
Drivers of cross-border banditry	0.331	0.073	0.37	4.55	0.000
Competition over transboundary natural resources	0.246	0.071	0.29	3.45	0.001



Model fit: $R^2 = 0.57$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.54$, $F(4,112) = 35.68$, $p < .001$.

Diagnostics (from 4.8.1): VIFs 1.33–1.46; homoscedasticity not violated.

From these statistics, the constant was 0.412, implying the level of national security when all other factors remained at zero. However, collectively, the factors accounted for 56% or 0.564 units (drivers of cross-border banditry=0.331, competition=0.246) of the variance in regional banditry. This further implied that a change in the dependent variable (national security) when all other factors were held at constant, would be attributed to each independent variable by the above respective figures. Drivers of cross-border banditry was the strongest positive predictor (0.331), followed by competition over resources (0.246). For IR and policy, this means that, in addition to investing in education, lowering poverty, and regulating access to resources is statistically proven ways to minimize cross-border instability, increase state legitimacy, and stop banditry.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that one of the key reasons why banditry persists in Turkana County and other counties along the Kenya-Ethiopia border is poverty. Chronically impoverished households frequently see cattle raiding as an easy way to make money, especially when there are few job options and few government assistance programs. In addition to making families more vulnerable, poverty encourages young people to use violence as a coping strategy. This suggests that unless economic marginalization is addressed and livelihoods are improved, banditry will persist, threatening national security, regional peace as well as local stability.

It was further concluded that competing for limited transboundary natural resources, such as water and pastureland, directly contributes to recurring banditry cycles among the communities living along the borders. These conflicts are worsened by climate variability, fragile administration, and porous borders, which turn traditional pastoral rivalry into violent disagreements. Given that these local problems reflect larger cross-border conflicts in the Horn of Africa, this finding emphasizes that natural resource scarcity is not just an environmental problem but also a security concern with regional and international implications.

5.2 Recommendations

Prioritizing local poverty reduction initiatives through focused investments in infrastructure, livestock markets, microfinance access, and alternative livelihoods is recommended for both the national and local governments. Policy interventions should prioritize the sustainable use of natural resources by creating shared grazing lanes, water harvesting plans, and climate adaption initiatives. Cross-border peace accords between pastoralist groups, backed by IGAD and AU regional security frameworks, must be implemented in addition to these efforts. It is possible to reduce the likelihood that banditry will be fueled by violent rivalry by instituting supportive resource-sharing arrangements.

Initiatives for community-driven peacebuilding should work to change the way that raiding and warriorhood are portrayed in popular culture. Promoting alternate rites of passage, holding discussions between elders and young people, and using established authority structures to advance peace are some ways to accomplish this. Traditions can change to uphold peace rather than justify violence if such cultural transformation initiatives are in line with Kenya's National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) objective and larger AU cultural diplomacy tactics.

Declaration of Interest

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