

Civilian Protection Payment and the Escalation of Violence against Civilians in Northwestern Nigeria

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How do civilian protection payments to militias affect the dynamics of communal conflict? Building on the literature on communal conflict, civilian agency, rebel taxation, and criminal extortion, I argue that civilian protection payment is not a sustainable self-protection strategy. Civilian protection payment refers to an arrangement whereby communities pay levies to militias for protection against attacks, often buying temporary safety. Drawing on fieldwork in Nigeria's conflict-ridden northwest region, I inductively build a theory that identifies two pathways that explain how protection payments transform into extortion and contribute to the escalation of militia violence: acquiescence or resistance. The acquiescence pathway shows how militias increase predation by demanding ever higher payments. The resistance pathway theorizes militias' violent retaliation to punish communities that refuse to pay, instilling fear in communities that may be considering resisting and justifying their protection role for those communities that pay. The article improves our understanding of the unintended negative consequences of civilian self-protection and changing dynamics of conflict in northwestern Nigeria.

Quels sont les effets des paiements de protection des civils aux milices sur les dynamiques de conflit communautaire ? En m'appuyant sur la littérature relative aux conflits communautaires, au rôle des civils, à la taxation rebelle et à l'extorsion criminelle, j'affirme que les paiements de protection des civils ne constituent pas une stratégie durable d'autoprotection. Ces paiements correspondent à un arrangement dans lequel les communautés paient des taxes aux milices pour bénéficier d'une protection contre les attaques—une sécurité qui n'est souvent que temporaire. En me fondant sur un travail de terrain dans la région Nord-Est du Nigéria en proie aux conflits, j'élabore une théorie par induction qui identifie deux possibilités d'explication de la transformation des paiements de protection en extorsion et de leur contribution à l'aggravation des violences des milices : l'acquiescement et la résistance. L'enchaînement de l'acquiescement montre comment la prédation des milices se renforce, en demandant des paiements toujours plus élevés. Celui de la résistance théorise les violentes représailles des milices afin de punir les communautés qui refusent de payer. Ces milices instillent la peur chez les communautés qui envisageraient de résister, tout en justifiant leur rôle de protecteur pour celles qui les paient. L'article améliore notre connaissance des conséquences négatives imprévues de l'autoprotection des civils et de l'évolution des dynamiques de conflit dans le Nord-Est du Nigéria.

¿Cómo afectan los pagos de protección por parte de los civiles a las milicias a la dinámica del conflicto comunal? Argumentamos, basándonos en la bibliografía existente en materia de conflictos comunales, agencia civil, impuestos recaudados por los rebeldes y extorsión criminal, que el pago de protección civil no es una estrategia sostenible de autoprotección. El pago de protección civil se refiere a un acuerdo por el cual las comunidades pagan impuestos a las milicias con el fin de protegerse contra los ataques, lo que, a menudo resulta en una compra de seguridad temporal. Construimos, de manera inductiva, basándonos en el trabajo de campo llevado a cabo en la conflictiva región noroeste de Nigeria, una teoría que identifica dos vías que explican cómo los pagos de protección se transforman en extorsión y contribuyen a la escalada de la violencia de las milicias: aquiescencia o resistencia. La vía de la aquiescencia muestra cómo las milicias aumentan la depredación exigiendo pagos cada vez más altos. La vía de la resistencia teoriza las represalias violentas por parte de las milicias para castigar a las comunidades que se niegan a pagar, infundiendo miedo en aquellas comunidades que pueden estar considerando resistir y justificando su papel de protección para aquellas comunidades que pagan. El artículo mejora nuestra comprensión con relación a las consecuencias negativas no deseadas de la autoprotección civil y a la dinámica cambiante del conflicto en el noroeste de Nigeria.

Introduction

“The outside world has no idea what we are going through or why we support the protection payment,” a community elder in Keku village lamented as he explained why they agreed to pay militias regularly to secure their protection. Keku is one of the many conflict-affected communities in Nigeria's northwestern region. As communal conflicts in the region intensified, with increased attacks on farmland and cattle rustling and security forces frequently overburdened and incapable of fully protecting vulnerable communities, civilians resorted to self-protection strategies. One of these strategies is to give cash, cattle, or truckloads of food crops to armed militias with a sporadic territorial presence in the hope of avoiding attacks.

Unfortunately, Nigeria is not alone in this situation. In conflict zones where state security forces or international peacekeeping missions are insufficient to protect communities, civilians face a range of abuses and human rights violations, including killings, torture, sexual abuse, and forced displacement (Balcells and Stanton 2021). The growing body of literature on civilian self-protection has explained how civilians respond to conflicts in novel ways to protect themselves from armed actors (Jose and Medie 2015; Krause et al. 2023). Even though many studies have highlighted various forms of civilian self-protection, ranging from civilians accommodating armed actors to civilians remaining neutral or even resisting them (Kaplan 2017; Krause 2018; Jackson 2021; Masullo 2021; Schubiger 2021; Jentsch 2022; Moncada 2022), there has been little focus on protection

payment as an example of civilian self-protection. Exceptions are the studies by Suarez (2017) and Verweijen (forthcoming) that highlighted how civilians use symbolic and material resources to secure protection from armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Most research on civilian payments to armed groups is based on studies of *rebel taxation* that rebel groups collect when they seek to make money or consolidate power to advance their ideology (Sabates-Wheeler and Verwimp 2014; Revkin 2020; Breslawski and Tucker 2021; Bandula-Irwin et al. 2022), or *criminal extortion* by organized criminal gangs that do not need civilian support and thus extort businesses and individuals (Gambetta 1996; Paoli 2008; Moncada 2019, 2022; Magaloni et al. 2020). These studies explain how weak state capacity and conflict create conditions for payments to armed groups but fall short of examining such payments' impacts on the broader conflict dynamics. I build upon these studies to analyze how some communities pay militias as a form of civilian self-protection and its impacts on the dynamics of communal conflict. The article asks, how do civilian protection payments to militias affect the dynamics of communal conflict? I inductively build a theory that argues that civilian protection payment to militias is not a sustainable self-protection strategy. I demonstrate how such payments contribute to the escalation of militia violence against civilians.

My research focuses on northwestern Nigeria. The region is engulfed in communal violence between Hausa farmers and Fulani herders that involves many Fulani militias¹—reportedly over 120 groups, with membership strength ranging from 28 to 2,500 (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2021). Some of the few scholarly publications on the conflict have emphasized the consequences of the illegal movement of arms through “ungoverned” forests (Ojo 2020; Okoli and Abubakar 2021; Onwuzoruigbo 2021). Others have highlighted the marginalization of Fulani herders through material deprivation and media stereotypes (Eke 2020; Ejiofor 2021, 2022), and the punitive security measures of Hausa-dominated vigilantes that make Fulani militia reprisal attacks the norm² (Rufa'i 2018; Lar 2019; Nwozor et al. 2021). While these studies shed light on some factors that triggered and exacerbated the conflict, the impact of the civilian protection payment on the conflict dynamics has been overlooked.

My research draws on 2 weeks of fieldwork conducted in Zamfara state, following several years of lived experience in Nigeria while working for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in humanitarian support and peacebuilding programs. My identity as a Nigerian national originating from northern Nigeria facilitated safe and ethical research in this extremely volatile conflict region. I conducted twelve focus groups and sixteen individual interviews in Zamfara state between July and August 2022. In addition, I analyze conflict event data provided by the Armed Conflict Location and

Event Database (ACLED) and secondary literature, particularly that relating to human rights, and journalistic reporting by Nigerian researchers. Using a micro-comparative research design, I analyze the impact of civilian protection payment on communal conflict dynamics in three villages, two of which engage in protection payment (Keku and Gada) and one that does not (Furfuri). I carefully selected these villages to make inferences about the broader conflict region. I interviewed both ordinary residents and those that analyze the conflict, such as journalists, civil society leaders, and academics, to elicit their perspectives on the civilian protection payment and militia attack patterns.

This article makes three key contributions. First, it conceptualizes civilian protection payment as a self-protection strategy distinct from criminal extortion and rebel taxation. Second, it advances our understanding of the unintended consequences of this civilian self-protection strategy. My analysis shows how payments temporarily protect some communities from attacks but ultimately transform into criminal extortion, thereby contributing to conflict escalation. This transformation of communal conflict to organized crime adds to the literature on patterns of political violence (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017; Kalyvas 2019) and criminal politics (Barnes 2017). Third, my fieldwork-based findings from northwestern Nigeria improve our understanding of a conflict zone that has suffered from a recent dramatic upsurge of militia violence against civilians but attracted little scholarly analysis to date.

I begin by summarizing the current research on rebel taxation and criminal extortion and conceptualizing civilian protection payment as a practice distinct from them. Next, I provide background on the communal conflict in northwestern Nigeria. I present the civilian protection payment and conflict escalation theory in the third section. In the fourth section, I describe the methodology and research process. In the fifth section, I discuss fieldwork findings and alternative explanations. Finally, I conclude and reiterate the findings' theoretical relevance.

Criminal Extortion, Rebel Taxation, and Civilian Protection Payments

The literature on criminal extortion explains how criminal organizations prey on vulnerable individuals and businesses, sometimes in exchange for the promise of a protection service that is not provided. Early contributions, such as Gambetta (1996), explain criminal gangs as “entrepreneurs of violence” whose protection services tend to be self-perpetuating through violence and intimidation. Other scholars expand on this idea, emphasizing how these criminal gangs extract payments to communicate their power and control over a specific territory (Paoli 2008; Varese 2013; Moncada 2019, 2022; Magaloni et al. 2020). While most of the literature on criminal extortion focuses on Mafia gangs in cities, these dynamics also apply to “bandits” in rural areas who emerge as protectors but then terrorize the communities from which they emerged (Tiedmann 1982; Mburu 1999; Okoli and Abubakar 2021). The early literature on rebellion also viewed rebel taxation as extortion (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Weinstein 2006). However, more recent work by scholars of rebel governance demonstrated that rebels primarily use taxation for governance, legitimacy, and ideological purposes (Revkin 2020; Mampilly 2021; Bandula-Irwin et al. 2022).

Neither research on criminal extortion nor rebel taxation has examined the effect of civilian payments to armed

¹By using the term “Fulani militia,” I do not mean that all Fulanis are militias or that they support the militias. My use of the term corresponds to ACLED's understanding of identity militia, which claims to act on behalf of a larger identity community but does not necessarily represent it. Many Fulanis are currently opposed to their activities, and some of their victims are Fulanis. For more discussion on the ethnic stereotype of Fulani, see Ejiofor (2021) and Moritz and Mbacke (2022).

²Vigilantes focus on protecting a specific area, whereas militias focus on offense (Higazi 2008). Vigilantes engage in crime and social control directed at community members and measures to defend the community from external threats. Conversely, militias are groups that form in response to hostility or grievance against another community and engage in violence against it through raids and other offensive attacks. See Higazi (2008) and Schuberth (2015) on the distinctions between militias and vigilantes.

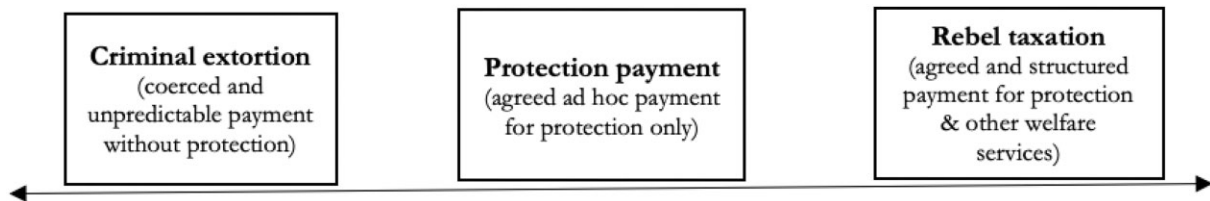


Figure 1. Spectrum of civilian payment to non-state armed groups.

groups on conflict dynamics. While some prior research explained how conflicts create conditions for civilian payments to armed groups, I focused on how the payments escalated the conflict and increased violence against civilians. I define *civilian protection payment* as an ad hoc arrangement in which communities pay levies in cash or kind to non-state armed groups that originated outside the community of civilians making the payments in exchange for protection from attacks by other groups or attacks by the groups receiving the payment. Although individual civilians can pay for private security (Verweijen forthcoming), this article focuses on collective payments and community protection outcomes. Protection payment differs from, but falls somewhere between, criminal extortion and rebel taxation.³ We can think about these concepts in terms of a spectrum, as figure 1 illustrates. The distinction lies in the degree to which armed groups collecting the payments employ coercion or persuasion, the predictability of the payment schedule, and whether genuine protection services are provided to those who made the payment. Criminal extortion is at one end of the spectrum, while rebel taxation is at the other. Protection payment is in the middle of the spectrum.

Rebel taxation is associated with rebels who seek to replace the government or govern their territories. In contrast, protection payment and extortion are associated with militias and mafia-like gangs, respectively, groups that required only intermittent territorial presence or vulnerable people but had no intention of providing welfare services in the territories. However, protection payment, as a middle-ground concept, can often devolve into taxation overtime when the militias that accept the payment provide additional governance functions (Tilly 1985; Cheng 2018) or into criminal extortion when they resort to predation (demanding unpredictable payment) and unfulfilled protection obligations (Paoli 2002; Moncada 2019).

Militia Formation and Conflict Escalation in Northwestern Nigeria

Nigeria's northwest is one of the country's six geopolitical zones, and home to seven of the country's 36 states (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara). As figure 2 illustrates, the region is experiencing a destabilizing communal conflict. ACLED documented that 13,582 people were killed in militia-related violence in the region between 2011 and 2021, with Zamfara state accounting for more than 36 percent of the fatalities. As figure 3 shows, the conflict also keeps escalating as more than 2,255 people died in the region from militia-related violence in 2021, an

³The interchangeable use of these concepts distorts their differences. See Mampilly (2021) for an explanation of the distinction between rebel taxation and extortion and Paoli (2002) for the distinction between protection payment/racket and extortion. My use of spectrum is an attempt to provide a logic for comparing these concepts, particularly determining when one payment transforms into another.

increase of 81 percent from the 1,244 deaths in 2011, with Zamfara state accounting for 38 percent of the deaths.

Even though conflict between farming and herding communities is a long-standing feature of the conflict landscape in Nigeria, the current wave in Zamfara only started around 2011 in rural communities close to the Dansadau forest (Rufa'i 2018; Ejiofor 2022). The encroachment of cultivated land into grazing areas by Hausa farmers and crop damage caused by Fulani herders' passing livestock were the catalysts (Ajala 2020). The clashes were characterized by small-scale disputes, isolated hit-and-run attacks resulting in crop damage, livestock theft, and skirmishes with rudimentary weapons such as sticks, cutlasses, and locally made Dane guns (Ajala 2020; International Crisis Group 2020). These clashes are typical of communal conflict, a non-state conflict between social groups organized around communal identities (Krause 2018).

Due to the absence of law enforcement agents in its rural areas, in early 2012, some traditional rulers supported the formation of self-defense vigilante groups and repurposed the pre-existing anti-crime vigilante groups to address the communal conflict. However, many of the Yan Banga and Yan Sakai groups in Zamfara are dominated by Hausa ethnic groups, and some of them explicitly targeted Fulani herders (Lar 2019).

The activities of the Hausa-dominated Yan Banga and Yan Sakai vigilante groups exacerbated feelings of injustice and the desire for vengeance among the Fulani herders, which led to the formation of their own militia (Ejiofor 2021). The Fulani militia extends reprisals against Hausa farming communities through sporadic small-scale attacks and assassinations (Nwozor et al. 2021). In a recent BBC documentary on the conflict, one of the most feared Fulani militia leaders in Zamfara described these attacks as a protest. "We only protest with guns. We do not know where to see journalists or where to protest. Our only protest is to carry arms and storm villages" ([BBC Documentary] 2022). Starting in late 2014, the conflict spread from Zamfara to other states in the region with varying intensity, driven mainly by displacement and retaliatory attacks (International Crisis Group 2020; Hassan and Barnett 2022).

However, in early 2018, some Fulani militias began demanding protection payments from the communities. Through their traditional leadership or newly formed peace committees, many communities negotiated payment terms and agreed to pay the militias regularly to ensure their safety (Abdulaziz 2021; Hassan and Barnett 2022). While the protection payment initially reduced conflict in some communities, it resulted in the emergence of numerous militia factions competing to collect the payments. As a result, the conflict escalated as the militias demanded higher payments, acquired more weapons, and committed violence against civilians in many communities, including those not immediately linked to the initial flashpoint (International Crisis Group 2021). They morphed into many loosely organized

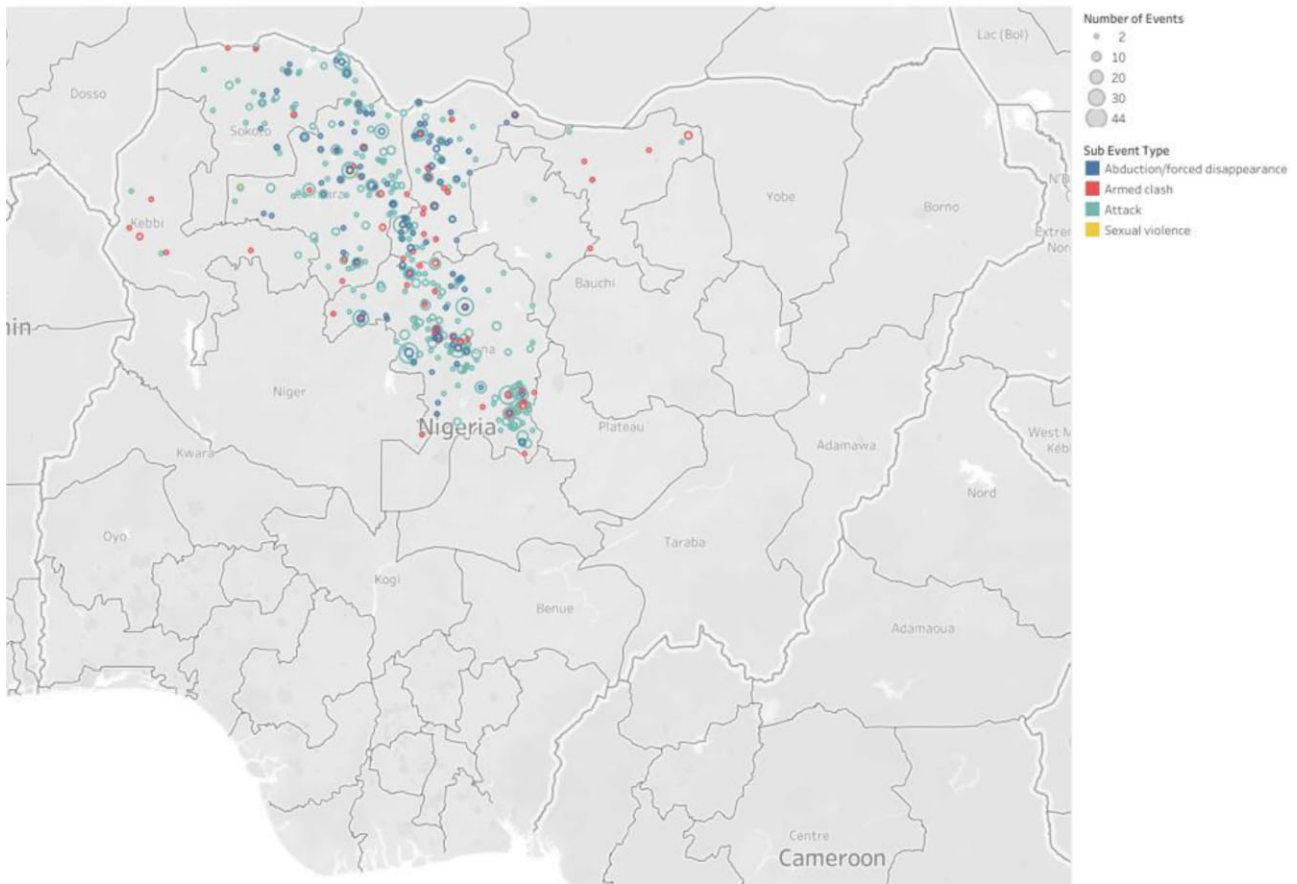


Figure 2. Map of Nigeria, showing the spatial spread of militia-related violence in northwestern Nigeria 2011–2021 (ACLED).

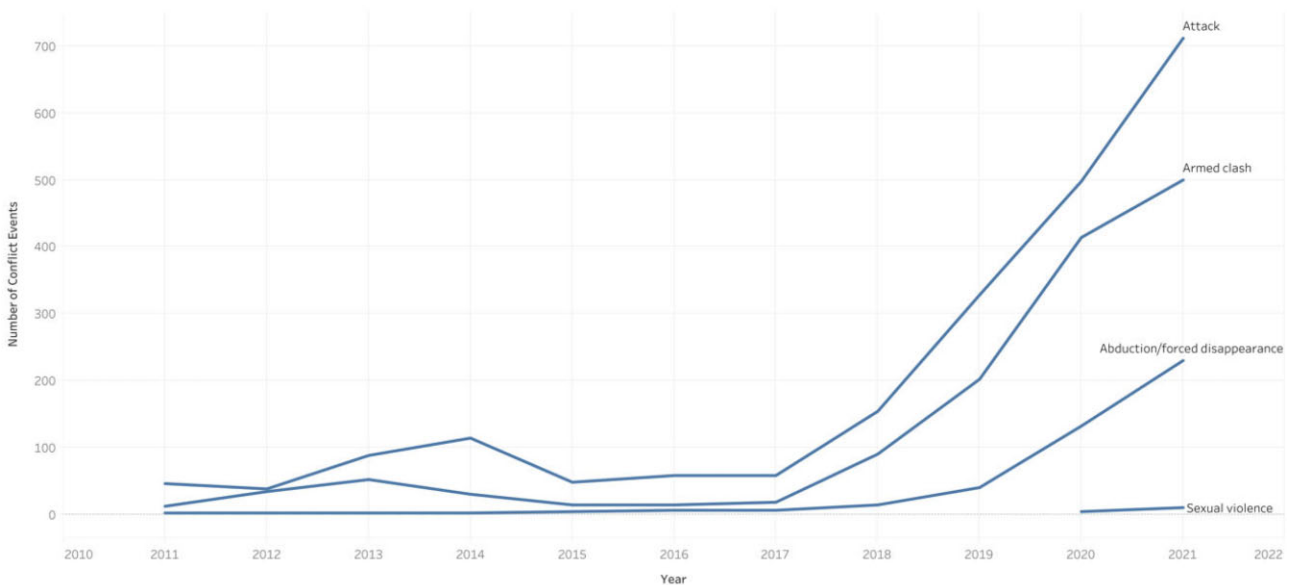


Figure 3. Temporal variation of militia-related violence in northwestern Nigeria 2011–2021 (ACLED).

factions now called “bandits”⁴ in the local parlance. They are reportedly over 120 factions with 28–2,500 members,

⁴In Nigeria, a bandit is a rural-based armed robber who uses force to intimidate a person or a group of people into robbing or killing them. When militias became predatory, some communities and local media began to refer to them as bandits.

many of which clash with each other regularly (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2021). The transformation of the communal conflict to organized crime changed the patterns of militia violence from low-intensity attacks characterized by skirmishes, crop invasion, and cattle rustling to large-scale attacks via mass killings, acts of sexual violence, burn-

ing of homes and barns, and forced displacement in many communities (Abdulaziz 2021; Adeyemi 2022). As figure 3 illustrates, violent events multiplied, as did their victims. Many vulnerable communities in the conflict zone have fled or continue paying the militias (Babangida 2022a, 2022b; Hassan-Wuyo and Muhammad 2022).

Two main explanations have been advanced to explain the conflict escalation. Some scholars have attributed the conflict's escalation to the increase in retaliatory attacks due to vigilantism, precisely the actions of Hausa-dominated Yan Sakai and Yan Banga vigilante groups (Rufa'i 2018; Lar 2019; Nwozor et al. 2021). Other analysts have blamed the presence of jihadists in the region (Ojewale 2021; Zenn and Weiss 2021). They believe that the presence of Boko Haram factions—*Jama'at Ansar Al Muslimin Fi Bilad al-Sudan* (Community of Defenders of Black Muslims) and *Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyyah* (the Islamic State's West Africa Province)—in some parts of the region and the broader Sahel has blurred the distinction between Fulani militia activities and jihadism, and is responsible for the conflict escalation (Zenn and Weiss 2021).

Even though multiple explanations can account for different aspects of a conflict, none of these explanations accounts for the impact of the civilian protection payment on the conflict dynamics. In the following section, I will present a theory explaining how protection payments contribute to escalating violence against civilians.

A Theory of Civilian Protection Payment and Conflict Escalation

I build my theory on civilian protection payment and conflict escalation inductively using analysis of fieldwork-based material, especially interviews with residents of the affected villages. The interviewees explained that in the wake of the communal conflict, many communities paid Fulani militias to avoid attacks. However, the militias became predatory over time, demanding more money than initially agreed and attacking more communities. I used an interpretivist approach to analyze the interview data, tying it to the literature on civilian agency, communal conflict, and criminal extortion to explain the conflict escalation pathways and mechanisms.

The scope of my theory is limited to payments made to militias that originated outside the community of civilians making the payments in areas with weak state capacity. It may, however, apply in whole or in part to similar non-state armed groups without a governance agenda. Thus, the theory will not apply to rebel groups that have clearly articulated political goals and control a specific territory because they are governed by some regulations to keep their civilian residents and non-supporters in the territory to achieve their political goals (Revkin 2016; Mampilly 2021). The theory also applies to collective payment by the community because violating a personal protection payment agreement may not lead to attacks against the whole community, as militias can engage in selective targeting of defaulters, for example, through kidnapping (Shortland 2019; Gilbert 2022).

In fragile communities where the state cannot protect civilians during armed conflicts, civilians use their agency to choose from a range of civilian self-protection strategies to prevent, mitigate, or eliminate a security threat (Jose and Medie 2015; Krause et al. 2023). However, because communities are heterogeneous, they have varying civilian capacities, i.e., the knowledge, expertise, and networks required to organize adequate protection (Krause and Kamler 2022, 4). Thus, they respond differently to similar violent experiences. Communities with a high civilian capacity organize

conflict prevention efforts or form vigilante groups to defend themselves (Kaplan 2017; Krause 2018; Jentsch 2022). However, because conflict prevention and violent engagement are typically ineffective in communities with limited civilian capacity (Kaplan 2017), they must choose between fleeing to safer areas and remaining in their communities to pay militias (Suarez 2017; Schon 2021; Verweijen forthcoming). Some communities would displace to safer areas rather than pay protection payments to militias; others would remain in the conflict zone to pay the militias because they perceive the government as corrupt and untrustworthy, which may not guarantee their safety even after displacement (Revkin 2021).

I contend that paying militias for protection is a “weak” and dangerous self-protection strategy that can contribute to the immediate protection of civilians but, in the long run, transforms into extortion and escalates militia violence against civilians. By escalation, I mean a rise in the intensity of conflict as shown by the observed frequency and scale of attacks or a widening of the repertoire or the targeting of violence (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017). Empirically, we can observe increasing fatalities and cases of rising sexual violence, population displacement, asset destruction, and disruption of social and economic systems.

I suggest that it is safer for communities to organize their displacement (planned flight) as an alternative to paying militias to protect them, for example, by moving out of the conflict zone entirely to live elsewhere. This “planned flight” is a civilian self-protection initiative of preemptive self-displacement triggered by a few initial attacks and early warnings (Barrs 2010). By contrast, communities that stay in conflict-affected areas and offer protection payments until the conflict escalates and becomes unbearable will resort to “unplanned flight,” triggered by large-scale attacks and human and material losses. Once a community agrees to the initial payment, its further response to militia demands ultimately lead to militia attacks and conflict escalation. I identify two pathways of conflict escalation: (1) *Acquiescence* and (2) *Resistance*. A community's conflict escalation path is determined by whether the initial payment was made to secure protection against threats from other militias or threats from the militia receiving the payment. The former is more likely in communities that experience conflict later and where militias have recently been formed. In contrast, the latter will be more prevalent in communities that experienced conflict earlier and where older militias exist. Although both are risky, payment to the same militias threatening the community is more dangerous. Using figure 1 to illustrate their difference, payment to secure protection against threats from other militias is at the right end of the protection payment spectrum and very close to rebel taxation, while payment to secure protection against threats from the militia receiving the payment at the left end of the protection payment spectrum and very close to extortion.

Acquiescence: Militias increase predation and demand higher and higher payments. If a community agrees to pay a militia to secure protection from attacks by other militias, then the community will experience some short-term safety as the militia attempts to protect the community to justify its role as protector. However, this can lead to the militia becoming predatory, demanding more payments from the community, and allowing some attacks to succeed in order to keep demand for their protection services as high as possible. This is due to two factors. First, the militia will amass more weapons as the community continues to make regular protection payments (Mburu 1999). Because of the availability of lethal weapons, the militias will become more co-

ercive toward civilians, and more militia factions will form to collect payments from the same community (Paoli 2002). If the community always pays, then different militia factions will compete for collection from the same community, and residents will be at risk of becoming victims in the cross-fire of militia warfare (Shortland 2019). Some opportunistic militia members will even use the community's willingness to pay to personally extort the community residents by demanding individual protection payments (Smith and Varese 2001). Second, because the community will continue to make protection payments out of fear of security threats, the militias are likely to allow some successful attacks or even secretly attack the community themselves to increase the demand for "protection" (Krauser 2020). When there are multiple militia factions competing, this will increase the frequency of attacks and make the security situation even worse (Kløve and Mehlum 2022).

Resistance: Militias attack communities to punish non-compliance and spread fear to neighboring communities. If a community initially agrees to pay a militia to secure protection from attacks by members of the same militia, then the community will feel some safety if they continue to pay the militia. If the community is attacked, possibly by a competing militia faction, they are likely to refuse further payment because they interpret the attack as a breach of the protection agreement. However, for two reasons, this resistance may lead to increased violence in the community. First, the militia will use violence to punish the community for refusing to continue making payments (Paoli 2002). They will raid the community and engage in targeted kidnappings of its residents to instill collective fear to punish them, as well as pose a threat to other communities that may be considering resisting (Moncada 2019; Gilbert 2022). Even though attacking and displacing communities may do more harm than good to Olsonian "stationary militias" looking to maximize revenue, it will benefit "roving" militias that operate in many communities by increasing their reputation for violence and compliance among other communities (Shortland 2019; Moncada 2022). Second, communities that refuse further payments are more likely to be targeted by other militia factions (Kløve and Mehlum 2022). Militias that continue to collect payments from neighboring communities may attack non-paying ones to establish their credibility as protectors of the communities that agreed to pay (Krauser 2020).

The theory is summarized schematically in figure 4.

Research Design and Methodology

This research is based on fieldwork conducted in July and August 2022 in three villages—Keku, Gada, and Furfuri—in the Bungudu local government area (LGA) of Zamfara state (see online appendix for a detailed discussion on the fieldwork and research process.) I used ACLED to analyze the spatial and temporal variations of militia violence in northwestern Nigeria to guide my case selection and illustrate the patterns of conflict escalation that the fieldwork data explain in detail. I conducted the fieldwork in Zamfara because the current wave of communal conflict started there in 2011 and thirteen of the fourteen LGAs pay protection levies to militias (Adeyemi 2022). I selected villages because farmer-herder conflicts over land and water resources predominantly occur in rural areas where the majority of the population relies on animal husbandry and crop production.

As figure 5 illustrates, all the LGAs in Zamfara have been affected by the communal conflict, and Bungudu is one of

the hardest hit, with many people losing their lives and property. Bungudu is only 21 km from Gusau, the state capital. The communal conflict began in the LGA in early 2013 when Fulani militias attacked some villages in Tungar Dorawa.⁵ Bungudu has seen increased violence, particularly in villages, despite its proximity to, and sharing borders with, the capital city. According to ACLED, over 439 people (75 percent civilians) died in militia-related violence in Bungudu LGA between 2011 and 2021.

Figure 6 illustrates temporal variation of the militia-related violence, and we can see some increase of attacks and cases of sexual violence in 2021. It is in this dire context that many communities make protection payments.

To examine the impact of the protection payments on the conflict dynamics, I adopted a micro-comparative research design (Kalyvas 2004, 190). After selecting Bungudu, using the ACLED data, I conducted preliminary interviews to understand the conflict dynamics, demographics, and civilian self-protection strategies of the eleven wards and villages within Bungudu. Wards are a collection of villages representing sub-divisions of the LGA. They are administered by a councilor to address their unique community development needs (Yohana and Inuwa 2021), some of which link with the socio-political aspect of the conflict (Olayoku 2016). The preliminary interviews assisted me in developing the sampling frame from which I chose the three villages across different wards. As shown in Table 1, I chose three comparable villages, two of which engage in protection payment (Keku and Gada) and one that does not (Furfuri). I chose these villages for practical as well as methodological reasons: because these villages are closer to the state capital, I was able to travel more safely there than in other villages farther from the capital. Due to their relative safety and accessibility, they can also be considered "hard cases." If my theory explains the situation in these villages, then it implies that it can be applied to other, more remote and insecure, villages.

Before the current wave of communal conflict in the region, the three selected villages had not experienced any significant armed conflicts, and despite the violence in neighboring villages, they remain relatively safe. Tensions began in 2018 in Gada and 2020 in Keku and Furfuri, with crop damage, livestock theft, and skirmishes between Fulani herders and Hausa farmers resulting in injuries but no fatalities. However, after the start of protection payments in Keku and Gada in late 2020 and early 2021, the conflict escalated from isolated hit-and-run attacks to daring raids, cattle rustling, arson, mass murders, and ransom kidnappings. For example, in 2020, ACLED reported only 15 deaths associated with Fulani militias in Bungudu; this increased to 150 deaths in 2021, representing a staggering 900 percent increase in 1 year.

I conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) and individual interviews in the three villages and additional individual interviews with some displaced residents at internally displaced person (IDP) locations in Gusau. I conducted twelve FGDs, four in each village. The FGDs were co-facilitated by six participants and lasted for about 1 hour, with broad questions designed to elicit participants' perspectives on the communal conflict, protection payment, militia attacks, and civilian victimization. To reduce social desirability bias, that is, a tendency to present reality in ways that align with what is perceived as socially acceptable (Bergen and Labonté 2020), I grouped the participants who already knew each other and were from a similar demographic population. I also explained the purpose of the research. I stressed that my focus

⁵KII-10, male journalist, Gusau, August 2022.

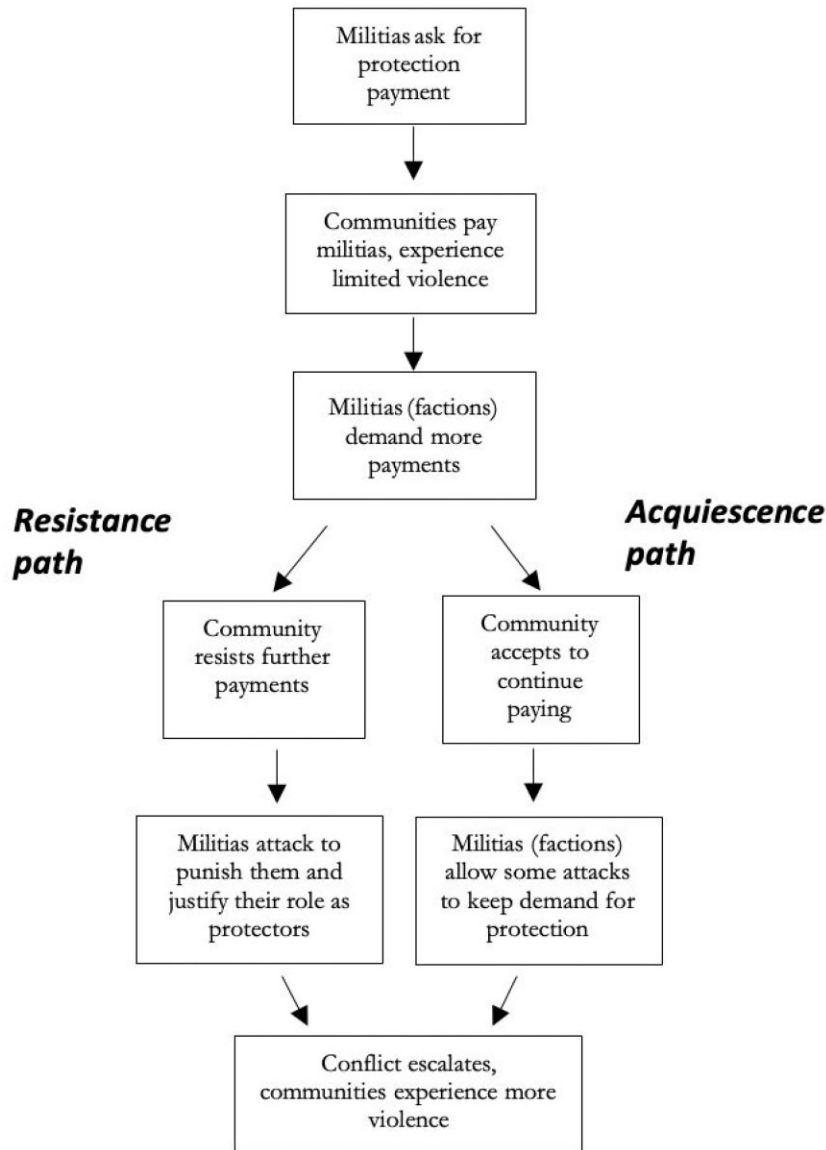


Figure 4. Pathways of conflict escalation because of protection payments.

Table 1. Case selection

<i>Selected villages</i>	<i>Proximity to LGA headquarters (km)</i>	<i>Prior experience of major conflict</i>	<i>Population estimate</i>	<i>Onset of current conflict</i>	<i>Civilian protection strategies</i>
Keku (Bingi north ward) <i>Acquiescence case</i>	15.5	None	5,500	Early 2020	Local peace committee, local vigilante group, protection payment, and unplanned flight
Gada (Karakkai ward) <i>Resistance case</i>	10.8	None	6,000	Early 2018	Local peace committee, prayer sessions, protection payment, and unplanned flight
Furfuri (Furfuri/Kwai-Kwai ward) <i>Non-payment case</i>	13.8	None	6,000	Early 2020	Local peace committee, local vigilante group, and planned flight

is on community issues rather than individual involvements or experiences of the conflict.

In addition, I conducted sixteen more extended individual interviews of about 45 minutes to 1 hour with individuals who have knowledge and understanding of the conflict dy-

namics to collect more detailed information to understand contradictory arguments and inform, extend, and refine emerging analytic themes from the FGDs (Charmaz 2001). The individual interview questions were semi-structured (to allow for in-depth probing) with prompts relating to protec-

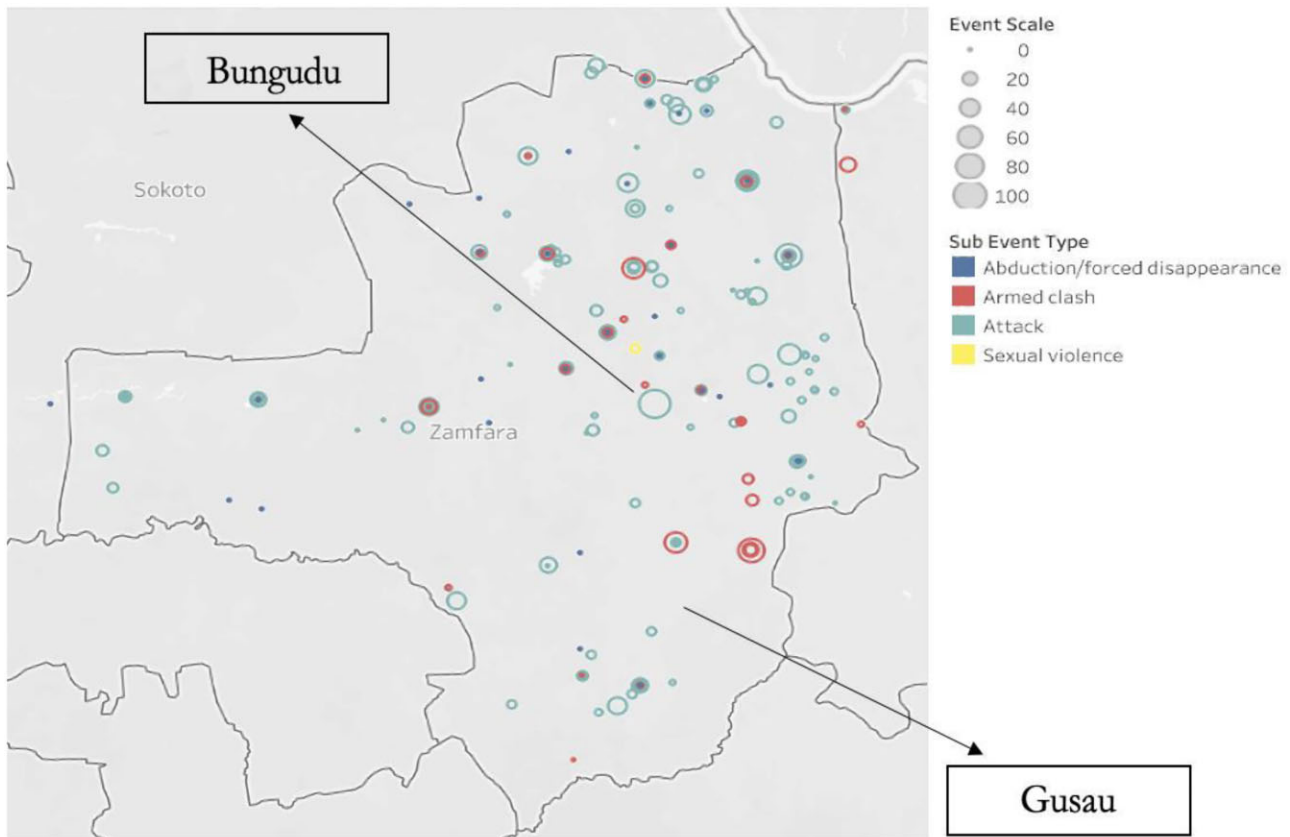


Figure 5. Map of Zamfara state, showing a spatial spread of militia-related violence 2011–2021 (ACLED).

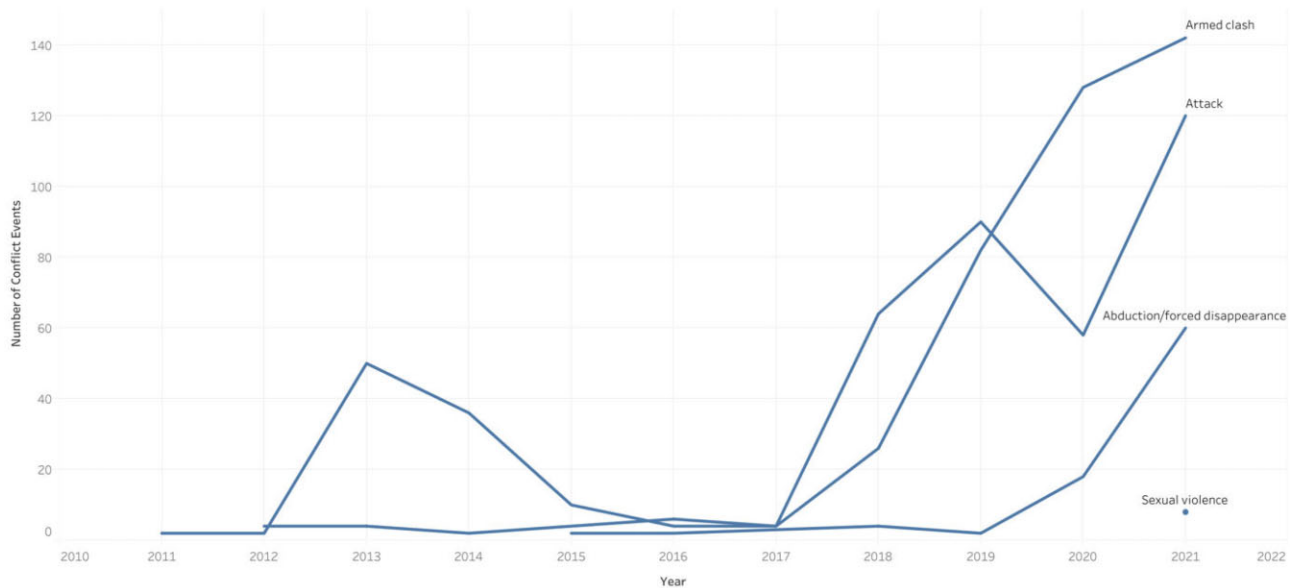


Figure 6. Temporal variation of militia-related violence in Zamfara state 2011–2021 (ACLED).

tion payment, militia attack patterns, civilian victimization, and the response to violence against civilians. I selected the respondents using a purposive sampling technique, including community residents, traditional leaders, displaced persons, journalists, NGO representatives, and academics and experts on the conflict. Due to safety concerns, I did not in-

terview the militias, as they all reside in forests outside the communities (see online appendix). I used a combination of structural, process, and causation coding to systematically analyze all the qualitative data for narrative patterns and causal mechanisms (Saldaña 2013). Information quoted verbatim from respondents was triangulated and the veracity

was confirmed by two or more sources (individual interviews or focus groups) across stakeholder groups (Kapiszewski et al. 2015).

Civilian Protection Payment and the Escalation of Violence against Civilians

Acquiescence and Conflict Escalation in Keku Village

Keku, like other villages in Zamfara, relies heavily on farming and local trade. The village has about 5,500 people who speak Hausa as their primary language. Residents of the community have positive relationships with their village elders and report community issues to their traditional leader, the village head. According to community members, there were no deep divisions in the village prior to the start of the communal conflict in early 2020.⁶

According to Keku villagers, when the tension began in early 2020, it was primarily due to Fulani grievances against Hausa community members. The pattern of violence by Fulani militias includes attacks on farmland and stealing cattle, but usually excludes abduction, rape, and murder.⁷ In response, the village formed a peace committee and a youth vigilante group in early 2020 to address the conflict. The community members support the peace committee and vigilantes through monetary contributions to purchase the necessary equipment to defend their farms from invasion by armed Fulani militias.

The vigilantes used to defend the village with locally manufactured firearms and cutlasses, but the Fulani militias eventually acquired more dangerous firearms. When the state government reaffirmed the ban on local vigilante activities in mid-2020, Fulani militias continued to attack the village, and neighboring ones, severely disrupting their main socioeconomic activities and livelihoods. Respondents alleged that many unemployed residents in the village became “informants,” providing the militias with information on potential targets and the movements of strangers and travelers in exchange for payment.⁸

In late 2020, community members decided to pay the Fulani militias’ levies in cash, cattle, and livestock to protect themselves from attacks by other militia groups. The militias stationed some of their members in the nearby forests to ensure that the villagers could harvest their farms without interference. “They levy us whenever a new farming season approaches; they collect levies for farm clearance and later for farm cultivation up to harvesting.”⁹

Within a year, the villagers made several payments. They initially paid 2 million Naira (~4,519 USD) for farm clearance. Then, after the first rain, another 3 million Naira to cultivate the farmland. They also paid a further 3 million Naira to harvest the farm products during the harvesting period.¹⁰

The militias imposed a small amount for the first 3 months, but after a few months, they increased it and threatened not to protect any community that refused to pay. Many residents are tired of the conflict and are willing to pay any amount to live in peace. This was emphasized by many respondents:

“The outside world has no idea what we are going through or why we support the protection payment. All the security agencies we have in our LGA are stationed in the LGA head-

quarters, not far from the village. However, when we report an attack or levies collection, the security agents will ask us not to pay but will not come to our rescue.”¹¹

“I have wives and children, and I will do everything I can to protect them.”¹²

In the first few months, the payment guaranteed some peace in the community. However, according to the villagers, it later strengthened the militias and made them attack more communities to make them continue to pay the protection levies:

“We can say that at the beginning, it guarantees peace in our community by letting us carry on with our economic and social activities, but the number of dangerous firearms and hard drugs they later acquired with the money makes them stronger and ready to attack any village they wish to.”¹³

There are also various militia groups collecting the payment, which leads to more attacks as they compete to demonstrate their power. “In a given year, we may pay a levy to more than five different militia groups.”¹⁴

“If one group attacks a village and takes money and livestock, the other group will attack another village because they do not want the other group to gain influence over them.”¹⁵

Members of the same group also collect levies more than once: “After we have paid the levies to the militia leaders, the young boys will return after a day to ask for their payment, which is different from the previous one.”¹⁶ Furthermore, residents of villages that agreed to pay cannot associate with those who did not: “We are not at liberty to associate with any village that is not paying the levies to the militia. They will attack us if we do so.”¹⁷

In addition to this communal payment, some younger militia members (young boys aged 12 to men of 25) began collecting directly from individuals whenever they went to the farm. Farmers paid a minimum of 20,000 Naira and a maximum of 200,000 Naira. These individual payments are primarily associated with the use of force. “Unlike the regular community contribution, we are forced to pay the individual levies because they use force to collect them.”¹⁸ “They told my farm laborers to inform me that they wanted me to pay 100,000 Naira as harvest fees or else the crops would be burned.”¹⁹ If the militias do not succeed in collecting levies from farm owners, then they move around the farmlands with lighters and matches, burning the crops.

At the time this research took place, many community members believed payment to be counterproductive. The protection payment resulted in an escalation of violence against civilians because it strengthened militias, allowing them to acquire more heavy weapons, food, and drugs. Despite the payment, some militias continued to attack the community. As one community elder explained:

“We agreed to pay, but if we do not raise the money in time, they will allow other militia groups to attack us, burn down our crops, and rape our wives and daughters.”²⁰

In February 2022, militias attacked the Keku village, rustling animals, blocking roads, and seizing a truckload of goods after kidnapping the driver and passengers. They at-

¹¹KII-6, male community elder, Keku, July 2022.

¹²KII-7, male community resident, Keku, July 2022.

¹³FGD-2, male community resident, Keku, July 2022.

¹⁴KII-5, female community resident, Keku, July 2022.

¹⁵KII-10, male journalist, Gusau, August 2022.

¹⁶KII-7, male community resident, Keku, July 2022.

¹⁷FGD-2, male community resident, Keku, July 2022.

¹⁸FGD-2, male community resident, Keku, July 2022.

¹⁹KII-8, displaced male community elder, Keku, August 2022.

²⁰KII-6, male community elder, Keku, July 2022.

⁶FGD-2, male community residents, Keku, July 2022.

⁷KII-6, male community elder, Keku, July 2022.

⁸FGD-1, male community residents, Keku, July 2022.

⁹FGD-2, male community residents, Keku, July 2022.

¹⁰FGD-2 male community resident, Keku, July 2022.

tacked again in May 2022, killing three people and chopping off the hand of a 13-year-old girl, who later died from severe bleeding. They also injured and kidnapped numerous other people. The villagers are not sure about who is behind these incidents. However, they speculated that it might be members of the militia faction hiding in nearby forests who want to demand more protection payments. Some residents have remained in the village to continue paying the levies, but many have realized that the payments cannot guarantee their safety. They moved to safer areas in Gusau and other cities.

Resistance to Protection Payment in Gada Village

Gada's primary economic activities are also farming and local trade. The village has a population of around 6,000 Hausa-dominated residents. There was no deep division in the village prior to the communal conflict in early 2018, and Hausa and Fulani got along well.²¹ When there was a misunderstanding, Hausa and Fulani elders would come together to resolve it. Many interviewed residents reminisced about how the two ethnic groups attended each other's naming and wedding ceremonies.

From the initial few cases of crop damage and skirmishes as reprisal attacks for blocking grazing routes, some Fulani militias began livestock theft, armed robbery, and kidnapping for ransom. The once peaceful and busy village road quickly became dangerous, with travelers abducted and only released after paying a ransom. Some of the militias are known to the villagers: "We know who to contact when someone is abducted because we know the militia leaders."²²

The village head formed a peace committee in 2018. The committee held numerous town hall meetings to discuss dialog and conflict resolution methods between farmers and herders and to offer religious prayers to avoid violent conflict. In early 2020, the committee decided to approach the militia leaders and offer a protection payment to ensure peace in the village. At that time, some other communities were already paying them, so Gada residents also agreed also to pay to prevent attacks. "Our peace committee approached the militia camp and offered levies for our protection."²³ The militia leaders agreed and accepted levies in the form of cash, cattle, and livestock.

For payment, the militias send letters to the village head, leaving a phone number to contact when the villagers are ready to make the payment. The village head would call his council members and the peace committee members to determine how much each resident should contribute. If the sum is too high, they contribute what they can. Residents willingly pay the levies. First, they paid 4 million Naira to the militias. They paid an extra 10 million Naira for a second round. One respondent recalled that:

"The protection payment has made it possible for us to live peacefully in our village, but they continue to raise the levies and threaten to attack communities that do not pay."²⁴

The police were perceived to be highly corrupt and ineffective, frequently arriving long after the attackers had fled or, in many cases, extorting the victims again. Commenting on this gross inefficiency of formal security forces in protecting communities, one community elder alleged:

"If members of the community report to the police, they will do nothing. The cops will even tell you to go pay the levies."²⁵

The militias collect grains and other farm products in addition to cash payments. "There is a household in our village that has nothing to contribute but one bag of millet; he was crying with his children during collection because he has nothing else to eat."²⁶ Some residents sell their farmland to make ends meet and pay the levies. Others ask their relatives from town and other villages to contribute for them.

Militia activities further resulted in coerced labor and forced marriages. When the villagers did not have money to pay the protection levies, the militias gathered them with people from over fifteen other villages to work on their farmland. The protection payment also exacerbated the commodification of women, as some families gave their daughters (many of whom were still teenagers between the ages of 12 and 14) to militia leaders as brides in exchange for protection. Most of such "marriages" are arranged by families, with some girls resisting and others accepting, often considering it "the will of Allah" and preferable to being kidnapped and raped.²⁷

While the village continued to pay the militias in the nearby forests in cash and kind to avoid attacks, the same militias began abducting the villagers, mainly when they went to farms. The villagers stated that they had begun to "live in fear" and that the protection payment encourages militias to demand higher payments and threaten them with attacks. "They understand that the more they pay, the more they contribute to the conflict's escalation."²⁸ As a result, some village elders objected to the continuous payment of levies in mid-2021 and advised that the money be used to purchase arms for their vigilante for self-protection. One resident recounted:

"When they informed the community that they would be coming to collect the levies, the village elders responded that they would not pay a dime."²⁹

In response to community members' refusal to continue paying, the militias mobilized their men to attack the village. They murdered twenty-six people in the village and kidnapped a village elder and his wife, demanding a ransom of 2 million Naira. They later reduced it to 1.5 million Naira, but after collecting the ransom, they nevertheless killed them. After that, they returned, took away ten people, including pregnant women, and demanded 10 million Naira as levies for the entire village. "We paid the first ten million Naira for the kidnap victims, and they were all released shortly after."³⁰ They also collected 21 motorcycles, 30 bags of grain, and 300 cattle in addition to the cash payment.

Aside from the ransom kidnapping, militias attacked the village in December 2021 and moved from house to house on motorcycles, looting, killing, and raping women at will. They would chase both Hausa and Fulani residents, knock them down, and riddle their bodies with bullets as they fled. The militias killed the village head and his two sons during the invasion of the community. The gunmen operated for about 4 hours and abducted many people from the community. "They slaughtered many people before fleeing to nearby Karakai village, where they spent hours shooting and killing people."³¹

Residents of the community have become helpless because of the attacks and ongoing threats. "They rape women

²⁵KII-3, male community elder, Gada, July 2022.

²⁶FGD-2, female community resident, Gada, July 2022.

²⁷FGD-2, female community resident, July 2022.

²⁸KII-10, male journalist, Gusau, August 2022.

²⁹FGD-1, male community resident, Gada, July 2022.

³⁰KII-3, male community elder, Gada, July 2022.

³¹KII-11, displaced male resident, Gada, July 2022.

²¹FGD-1, male community resident, Gada, July 2022.

²²KII-3, male community resident, Gada, July 2022.

²³FGD-1, male community resident, Gada, July 2022.

²⁴FGD-1, male community resident, Gada, July 2022.

and children in front of their husbands, and we have no recourse.”³² They sought refuge in Gusau because they lacked the strength to fight back, and the protection payment could not guarantee their safety. When I conducted this fieldwork, the village was almost entirely deserted, with only a few remaining inhabitants. One of the displaced respondents recounted: “We discovered our families had left while attending a funeral. As a result, we followed them. You must leave even if you do not know where you are going and have no one or food.”³³ Many of the displaced people have become impoverished in Gusau. They seek shelter in football fields and school buildings, where essential services and items such as safe water sources, toilets, and sleeping tents are unavailable.³⁴

Non-Payment in Furfuri Village

Furfuri has a population of around 6,000 Hausa-dominated residents who raise livestock and farm. The village had also never experienced any conflict prior to the current communal conflict. There is also a good relationship between the people and the community leaders. They have a peace committee that is led by the village elders and overseen by the village head. The committee was formed in early 2020 to prevent insecurity.³⁵

Despite all the efforts of the committee to mediate disputes between farmers and herders, as well as to address other community grievances and needs, Fulani militias from other communities began rustling cattle from the village in late 2020. After attacking other nearby communities, they also hid in the village forest. Residents of the community reported incidents to security agencies at the LGA headquarters in Bungudu, but the response of security personnel was not encouraging: “Sometimes the attack can last for more than 12 hours, and there will still be no response from the police.”³⁶ To address the situation, the village peace committee formed a youth wing and a vigilante committee in early 2021 to assist the central committee with patrolling the village at night. Every household sends a representative to join the vigilante group or contributes money to buy local firearms and other material support.

Even though the community residents supported the vigilante group, it did not help much. They were no match for the militias’ more advanced weapons. Sometimes the men sleep in trees away from their homes, and when the militias arrive in the village, knowing there are no men, they steal cattle and livestock. Later, they began kidnapping their women for ransom.

The militias offered to place levies on the village, allowing them to farm and travel safely to other villages. “They said that to negotiate with us and stop the attack against us, they need 5 million or 10 million Naira and that in exchange, they will allow us to continue our farming, ranching, and weekly marketing.”³⁷ However, the community rejected the offer because it would simply encourage them to attack them more to gain further money, which they would then use to buy more weapons. Some community residents reflected:

“It will never ensure our community’s safety. Because if we pay, they will continue to oppress us to get what they want for their operation.”³⁸

“We never paid levies as a village, but some people paid ransoms to save their family members when they were kidnapped.”³⁹

Many displaced people from Furfuri believed that the only way they could survive was to leave everything behind and start over somewhere else. Narrating her experience, a displaced widow with five children observed that: “It was a difficult choice, but anything less would have been an invitation to death.”⁴⁰ They packed everything they owned and relocated to Gusau and other urban areas to live with extended families and host communities.

The cases show that protection payments offer only a short-term reprieve rather than long-term security. While paying militias for protection may help community members avoid immediate violence, it may also allow the militias to commit more violence in the long term. Consequently, protection payment is not a viable civilian protection strategy. This finding adds empirical support to the observation that “not all self-protection strategies have positive outcomes”; some may have a negative impact on other civilians (Baines and Paddon 2012, 243). It also echoes Jose and Medie’s caution that some civilian self-protection strategies could place civilians in unpredictable relationships with armed actors, which could be dangerous (Jose and Medie 2016).

Discussion

These three cases illustrate how communities in northwestern Nigeria paid militias to protect themselves and secure their livelihoods and how the payments contributed to an escalation in violence against civilians. The three villages are not isolated cases; their experiences are consistent with that of many other villages in the region. A recent Nigerian journalistic investigation in hard-to-reach communities of Zamfara and Sokoto states identified civilian protection payments as one of the primary sources of revenue that militias use to finance their operations. Journalists estimated that communities in thirteen of the fourteen LGAs of Zamfara had paid over 538 million Naira (~121,3625 USD) in protection levies in less than a year (Adeyemi 2022). The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime reported that locally manufactured and imported AK-47 rifles (primarily smuggled in from the Sahel through porous borders) are sold in the region for 80,000–180,000 Naira (~180–406 USD) and 300,000–500,000 Naira (~676–1127 USD), respectively (Bish et al. 2022). This means that the 538 million Naira protection payment can purchase thousands of AK-47 rifles readily available on the illicit arms market in the region (Ojo 2020; Okoli and Abubakar 2021; Bish et al. 2022). Some of my interviewees explained that in the earliest stages of the conflict, the militias employed primarily metal bars, arrows, machetes, and locally crafted firearms. Nonetheless, the rising demand for protection from rival militias drove the acquisition of sophisticated weapons, particularly AK-47 and AK-49 rifles (Rufa’i 2021; Adeyemi 2022). Nigeria’s National Small Arms and Light Weapons Survey (2021) reported that the government recovered 5,870 firearms in Zamfara state (NSALWS 2021). A repentant leader of one of the militia factions disclosed that “getting a gun is as easy as buying bread” (Sahara Reporters 2021). Thus, the militias became more aggressive toward civilians due to the availability of weapons.

³²KII-4, male community resident, Gada, July 2022.

³³KII-11, male displaced resident, Gada, July 2022.

³⁴KII-9, female researcher, Gusau, August 2022.

³⁵FGD-1, male resident, Furfuri, July 2022.

³⁶FGD-2, male resident, Furfuri, July 2022.

³⁷KII-12, male community elder, Furfuri, July 2022.

³⁸FGD-2, male community resident, Furfuri, July 2022.

³⁹KII-12, male community elder, Furfuri, July 2022.

⁴⁰KII-13, displaced female resident, Furfuri, July 2022.

Furthermore, the payments encouraged civilian denunciation in targeted communities. Many militias use part of the money generated from the communities to recruit informants or collaborators who provide them with information to plan attacks. This illustrates Kalyvas' observation on how denunciations exacerbate violent conflict (Kalyvas 2006), and is also similar to how militias in Jos (northcentral Nigeria) obtained all the information they needed from residents of the targeted areas before attacks (Krause 2018). However, whereas the militias in Jos that Krause analyzed collaborated with their co-ethnics, in northwestern Nigeria, the informants of the Fulani militias include residents and displaced people of various ethnicities in the conflict-affected communities (or safer communities that militias plan to attack). They get paid in exchange for providing intelligence to the militias.

Even though protection payments transformed into criminal extortion, many communities agreed to continue paying the militias out of fear of being attacked by other militia groups if they did not. The payments emboldened the militias to continue attacking other nearby communities, causing the conflict to disperse, in order to demonstrate their role as "protectors" of the communities that pay. Thus, rather than evolving into "stationary" militias to embrace regularized taxation and protection (Tilly 1985; Olson 1993), the militias turned it into massive looting and more anarchy. This transformation of the communal conflict into organized crime illustrates the "escalation logic" that links different forms of political violence (Kalyvas 2019). It also demonstrates variations in patterns of violence (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017) as the militias switched from low-intensity violence against opposing ethnic groups to large-scale violence against a broader civilian population.

It is important to caveat that the proposition that protection payments escalated conflict in the region does not imply that militias would not have engaged in violence against civilians in the absence of protection payments. Even though many complex and interrelated factors triggered and exacerbated the communal conflict, I argue that protection payments bolstered militias and fueled competition among various militias, transforming the communal conflict into organized crime and escalated violence in the region. Let us revisit the alternative explanations of conflict escalation in light of the evidence to see how they compare to my theory.

Firstly, the activities of the vigilante groups. While some members of the Yan Sakai and Yan Banga vigilantes harassed and attacked Fulani herders, leading to the formation of Fulani militias, ethnic profiling occurred only in a few villages. It was also part of the initial communal conflicts, as most Fulani militia retaliation attacks were against Hausa farming communities that had formed vigilantes. Over time, the Fulani militias evolved into organized criminal gangs that fight primarily for personal gain. Even after state governments banned self-defense groups in July 2019, the militias continued to attack communities (International Crisis Group 2020). Some communities, such as Gada, did not form any vigilante groups; the militias only attacked them because they refused to continue paying the protection payment. Contrary to their original mission of defending Fulanis and their cattle, many Fulanis who are not members of the numerous militia factions are now victims of their attacks. As a result, vigilantism alone cannot account for the militias' continued violence against civilians.

Secondly, the presence of jihadist insurgents in the region. Although in some Sahel countries, insecurity has been driven by the radicalization of ethnic militias into terror-

ist groups or militant interpretations of Islam to take over or secede from the state (Benjaminsen and Ba 2021), this is not the case with the Fulani militias in Nigeria (Higazi 2020). Due to the militias' lack of ambitious political goals and the significant differences in the modes of operation of the militias and jihadists, jihadism holds little intrinsic appeal for them. In fact, in Kaduna state, the only state in the region where jihadists and militias coexist, they frequently fight each other (Isenyo 2022). I argue that the protection payment resulted in the emergence of numerous militia factions competing to collect the payments, making them too fractious and powerful for jihadis to co-opt easily (Barnett et al. 2022).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that civilian protection payment is a non-violent civilian self-protection strategy with unintended negative consequences for violence against civilians. In the case of northwestern Nigeria, civilian protection payments have contributed to conflict escalation by transforming the communal conflict over land into profit-driven organized crime, thereby endangering the safety and well-being of civilians. Keku village offered to pay the militias in exchange for protection from other militia groups. For the first few months, the strategy resulted in less violence and encouraged more communities to pay the protection levies. However, the militias gradually began to demand more payment, and more militia groups emerged (competing against one another) to forcefully demand protection against their attacks. Gada village resisted further payments to the militias. This resistance provoked the militias to punish them and threaten other communities that might have been considering resisting, reinforcing the collective incentive to pay up or be punished. These villages' experiences are consistent with other villages in the region and explain why several lives have been lost, women raped and kidnapped, and farmers chased away from their fields.

Beyond the escalation of direct violence against civilians, protection payments as a self-protection strategy have profound negative long-term implications for civilian well-being. When the residents of Furfuri village refused to pay the protection fees, they resorted to "planned flight." They gathered all their belongings and relocated to safer areas to live with their extended families and host communities. On the other hand, residents of Gada and Keku villages were forced to flee due to large-scale attacks and human and material losses when the conflict escalated and became unbearable. Some displaced villagers have already sold their farm produce and cows and borrowed money from relatives in safer areas to pay for the protection money demanded. Those who take this "unplanned flight" leave their communities without valuables. Most live in informal IDP camps on football fields and school buildings in deplorable conditions.

Even though the article focuses on Nigeria, there are compelling reasons to believe the findings may apply to other African countries (especially in the Sahel region) with limited state presence and recurring communal conflicts. For example, in some communities in northern Burkina Faso, western Niger, and north and central Mali, there are many escalating conflicts over land, water, and grazing rights. The affected rural communities also use various self-protection strategies, including protection payment. Thus, the findings will be relevant to policy on violence prevention in the continent more widely.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *Global Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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