

Commoditizing of Human Beings: An Investigation into the Implications of Kidnapping on National Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study delves into the phenomenon of kidnapping for ransom within Nigeria's political economy, exploring how armed non-state actors exploit and victimize Nigerian citizens. Its objectives include identifying the root causes, examining motivations, and assessing the implications of kidnapping on national security. Qualitative research methods, including a survey research design and phenomenological approach, were employed in nine selected Local Government Areas of Taraba State. Through Focus Group Discussions involving victims, eyewitnesses, security personnel, traditional rulers, vigilantes, and journalists, primary data was collected. The study is anchored on the reformulated Organized Crime Theory (OCT) as its theoretical framework. Findings indicate that poverty, unemployment, and the state's weak security capacity are primary causes of kidnapping. Motivating factors for kidnappers include the payment of hefty ransoms, recruitment opportunities, and fulfilling sexual desires. Implications of kidnapping on national security include the proliferation of weapons, violence, damage to the national image, and the emergence of community militias. Recommendations include the establishment of state police, the introduction of new and more poverty alleviation programs, and adopting a bottom-up approach to tackle the menace effectively.

Keywords: Commoditizing human beings, kidnapping for ransom, national security

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Introduction

Nigeria has been confronting significant security challenges over the past decade, with a diverse array of criminal activities posing a complex threat. The country's security architecture has struggled to contain the activities of various criminal groups, including kidnappers, bandits, insurgents, separatist movements, cattle rustlers, and conflicts between farmers and herders. Since 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency has emerged as Nigeria's most prominent security challenge. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the insurgency has plunged the country into an asymmetrical warfare scenario, resulting in the loss of more than 350,000 lives and the displacement of over 2 million people internally (UNDP, 2021).

The concept of kidnapping originates from English root words, 'kid' (meaning infant) and 'napping' (to be caught sleeping), dating back to 17th century Britain. This historical practice involved wealthy families' infants being kidnapped for ransom (Tzanelli, 2009:931). However, modern kidnapping has evolved into a sophisticated and lucrative criminal enterprise, with perpetrators hailing from all social classes and operating primarily in urban areas (Peter & Osaat, 2021).

The prevalence of kidnapping in Nigeria has increased dramatically in recent years, with many cases going unreported due to fears of escalating the situation or endangering victims' safety. Nigeria ranks among the top countries globally for kidnapping incidents, indicating the severity of the issue (Chukwumeka, 2022). Additionally, kidnapping has become a profitable criminal endeavor, with Nigerians paying millions of dollars in ransom between 2011 and 2020 (Ibekwe & Alabi, 2021). Against the backdrop of escalating kidnapping incidents in Nigeria, this study aims to investigate the commoditization of human beings and its implications for national security.

Historicizing Kidnapping in Nigeria

Scholarly studies examining the history of kidnapping, abduction, and hostage-taking in Nigeria offer valuable insights into the motivations, causes, and evolving dynamics of this phenomenon. Understanding this trajectory is essential given the emergence of kidnapping as a criminal industry.

The first wave of kidnapping originated in the oil-rich Niger Delta region during the 1990s, fueled by grievances over environmental degradation and perceived neglect of the region's development needs. Youth in the area, feeling marginalized by oil exploration activities and government policies, resorted to various forms of violence as expressions of discontent. This included attacks on oil infrastructure and the abduction of expatriate oil workers and their families. Militant groups like the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) spearheaded these activities, initially driven by a sense of "resource nationalism" (Agbo, 2007; Okoli, 2013 & Arinya; Albert, Danjibo & Albert, 2020).

From 2007 to 2008, criminal elements within the Niger Delta began engaging in kidnapping purely for profit, leading to its spread to other parts of Nigeria. This escalation further deteriorated the security situation. The kidnapping of foreign oil workers, such as the abduction of ten Shell Petroleum Development Company workers in April 2002, marked significant milestones in this trend. These incidents highlighted the vulnerability of both expatriates and locals to kidnapping and underscored the pervasive nature of the phenomenon (O'Neil and Ombe, 2007). Notably, Yun (2007) noted that the previous perception of victims being exclusively employees of multinational oil corporations or affiliated subcontractors was no longer valid. Instead, anyone with the right hostage value became a target, prompting many to flee the Niger Delta region.

The second wave saw the spread of kidnapping to the Southeastern states of Abia, Anambra, Enugu, and Imo, driven by both financial motives and political rivalries. This period, roughly spanning from 2007 to 2011, witnessed a surge in kidnapping incidents, surpassing even armed robbery as the predominant criminal activity in many communities. The Southeast's proximity to the Niger Delta facilitated the rapid escalation of the kidnapping menace, compounded by political tensions within the region (Okoli, 2013; Raheem, 2008).

In the third wave, Lagos, Nigeria's commercial epicenter, became a focal point for criminal activities, particularly perpetrated by Area Boys in the early 2000s. Rural-urban migration, coupled with political rivalries and urban gang violence, contributed to the exacerbation of security challenges from 2007 to 2015. During this period, most kidnappings in Lagos and its environs were carried out for ransom, reflecting the increasingly lucrative nature of the crime (Albert et al., 2020; Okoli, 2013 & Arinya; Okoli, 2022).

The fourth wave witnessed the widespread proliferation of kidnapping across Nigeria, fueled by separatist movements like the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), the Boko Haram insurgency, and other armed groups. This phase, spanning from 2011 to the present, saw notable incidents such as the abduction of the Chibok School Girls in 2014, underscoring the grave security challenges facing the country (BBC, 2017; Jasper, 2019).

Lastly, the fifth wave emerged in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-2019 national elections, characterized by a hybrid form of kidnapping involving diverse groups with varying interests. This period, from 2020 to the present, has seen an escalation of mass school children abductions in the Northwest, with banditry continuing to plague the region and pose significant security threats (Rufa'I, 2021; Campbell, 2021; Bukarti, 2022).

The outlined trajectory of the evolution of kidnapping provides crucial context for this study focusing on Nigeria. It underscores the significance of previous research on kidnapping, shedding light on its nature, dynamics, and implications for national security. This contextual understanding underscores the importance of conducting the present study on Nigeria, as it aims to delve deeper into the phenomenon's specific manifestations and impact within the country's context.

Statement of Problem and Justification

Nigeria is grappling with a significant kidnapping problem, earning it a reputation as a global hot spot for this crime. In the first half of 2021 alone, over 3,000 people were reported kidnapped in the country. This issue is attributed to various factors, including the involvement of militants, youth gangs, insurgents, and organized crime groups operating nationwide. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), between 2020 and 2022, more than 1,436 children were abducted in Nigeria, with school children comprising a significant portion of the victims (Okoli, 2022; UNICEF, 2022).

Economic hardship and poverty exacerbate the problem, driving criminal elements to seek alternative sources of income. Boko Haram, for instance, engages in kidnappings to acquire labor, soldiers, wives, and financial resources, while militants in the Niger Delta often abduct individuals for ransom (Campbell, 2019). The

sophistication and variety of kidnapping methods employed by organized criminal groups pose a serious threat to Nigeria's national security and development. Given the widespread incidence of kidnapping for ransom, it has become a lucrative industry for criminals in Nigeria, as reported by SB Morgan (SBM) Intelligence (2023), with thousands of Nigerians kidnapped for ransom, resulting in substantial financial transactions within a relatively short period. Kidnapping for ransom is understood to have both academic and political implications which justifies this study as timely and important for national security and development concerns.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore the root causes, motivations, dynamics, and implications of kidnapping on Nigeria's national security with a focus on Taraba State. By investigating these aspects, the study seeks to identify effective solutions to address the challenges posed by kidnapping, thereby contributing to the country's pursuit of peaceful and sustainable development.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions among others:

1. What are the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria?
2. What are the factors motivating kidnappers in Nigeria?
3. What are the implications of kidnapping on national security in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate why human beings have been commoditized by kidnappers in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria
2. To examine the factors motivating kidnappers in Nigeria
3. To find out the implications of kidnapping on national security in Nigeria

Description of the Study Area

This study focuses on Taraba State in Northeast Nigeria, which has emerged as a key area in the ongoing security challenges related to kidnapping for ransom. To gain a deeper insight into the escalating issue of kidnapping, the state was divided into its three Senatorial Districts, with three sets of Local Government Areas (LGAs) selected for field surveys within each district. The selection of LGAs—Ardo-Kola, Jalingo, and Yorro in Taraba North; Bali, Gashaka, and Gassol in Taraba Central; and Takum, Ussa, and Wukari in the Southern Zone—was guided by a purposive sampling technique, informed by direct observations. These areas were chosen to systematically gather data from communities most affected by kidnapping, considering factors such as their sizes, locations, and populations, which render them prime targets for criminal activities. The geographical and political descriptions of the study areas are depicted in the map below for clarity.

Taraba State was established on August 27th, 1991, following the division of the former Gongola State by the Military Administration under former President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. Named after the "River Taraba," one of its principal waterways, the state spans an approximate land area of 60,000 km², ranking as the third largest in Nigeria, surpassed only by Niger and Borno States. Positioned between latitudes 6°30' and 8°30' north of the equator, and longitudes 9°00' and 12°00' east of the Greenwich Meridian, Taraba State boasts a diverse geographic landscape and strategic location within the country. Figure 1 presents the map of Taraba State showing the study areas, where kidnapping has been prevalent.

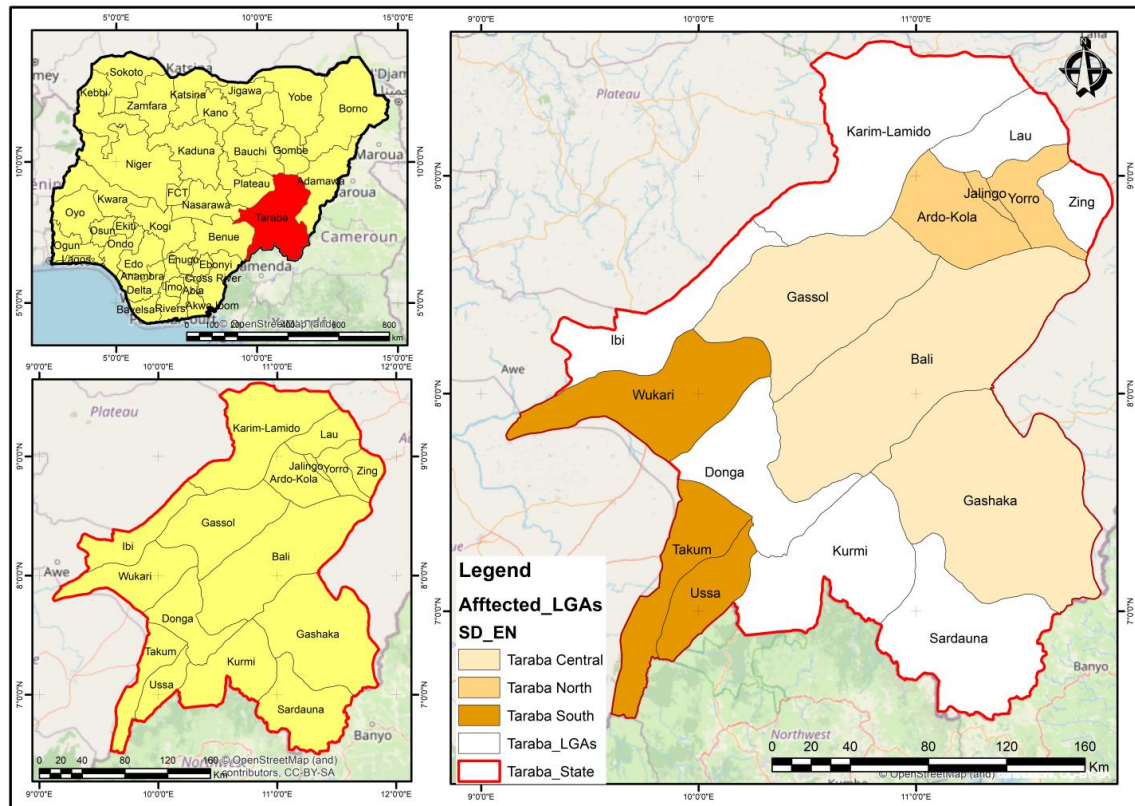


Figure 1: Map of Taraba State showing areas of kidnapping prevalence

Taraba State is bordered by Bauchi and Gombe States to the north, Adamawa State to the east, Plateau State to the northwest, Benue and Nasarawa States to the west, and shares an international boundary with the Republic of Cameroon to the south. According to the 2006 census figures released by the National Population Commission (NPC), the state's population was recorded at 2,300,736 people. However, projections suggest that the population has increased to approximately 3 million people as of 2016 (Taraba State Government, 2014; Taraba State Government, 2018a, 2018b; Mohammed & Oruonye, 2021).

Materials and Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing a survey research design to gather primary data through non-probability sampling methods. Purposive sampling techniques were employed to select participants based on their expertise, experience, and involvement in the phenomenon of kidnapping (Nnabugwu, 2006; Krueger, 1994; Creswell, 2013). The selected participants included victims (26), eyewitnesses (12), security personnel (6), journalists (5), traditional rulers (16), lawyers (3), vigilantes (22), community-based organizations (6), religious leaders (4), and observers of kidnapping incidents in the affected areas. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and documentary evidences were utilized to obtain local knowledge and data.

Both primary and secondary data were generated for this study. Primary data were obtained from FGDs, KIIs, and direct observations, while secondary data were sourced from journals, textbooks, government records, security agencies' press conferences, national dailies, online sources, blogs, and new media. These datasets were instrumental in constructing a comprehensive literature review and contributed significantly to the study's results.

To ensure broad coverage, FGDs were conducted in nine selected local government areas with higher incidences of kidnappings in Taraba State, as identified through a pilot study. These affected LGAs were distributed across three zones: Ardo-Kola, Jalingo, and Yorro in the Northern Zone; Bali, Gashaka, and Gassol in the Central Zone; and Takum, Ussa, and Wukari in the Southern Zone.

Each FGD consisted of 6 to 10 participants, with sessions lasting between 45 minutes to 1 hour. A total of over 10 FGDs were conducted across the 9 LGAs, involving precisely 100 participants. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 65 years on average. The gender composition comprised 15% women and 85% men. Three research assistants were trained by the researcher to facilitate FGD organization, note-taking, and data transcription. Most

discussions were held in English and Hausa languages, with participants who spoke either language having their views recorded and transcribed. Data collection occurred between October 2023 and December 2023, with market days and village centers frequently utilized to locate participants. Descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic analysis were employed to present the data.

Literature Review

Kidnapping stands out as one of the most terrifying and profitable crimes in Nigeria, perpetrated by criminals, terrorists, and ethnic militias. Particularly, the oil-rich Niger Delta region has witnessed a surge in the abduction of foreigners, driven by financial or political motives. Over the past two decades, scholars have delved into the empirical, economic, and psychological factors underlying this phenomenon (Charles, Onyemaechi & Igwilo, 2016). In the realm of contemporary statehood, ensuring national sustainability amidst a plethora of security threats poses a significant challenge. Foremost among these threats is organized crime, characterized by high-profile criminal activities orchestrated through transnational syndicates and racketeering (Okoli & Orinya, 2013).

Kidnapping typically entails two key elements. Firstly, the act must involve the unlawful movement, detention, or seizure of an individual, contravening the laws of the land. However, not all instances of seizure, detention, or movement fall under the legal definition of kidnapping, as certain actions such as police arrests or parental restrictions are permissible under specific circumstances. Secondly, kidnapping is characterized by the presence of aggravating circumstances accompanying the seizure, restraint, or movement. These may include demands for ransom or valuables, attempts to influence government functions, inflict harm on the abducted individual(s), commit felonies, or terrorize third parties.

According to Birell (2018), kidnapping for ransom occurs when a criminal abducts a person and holds them hostage, demanding payment from their family, employer, or even their country in exchange for their release. This practice is currently rampant in Nigeria. Akpan (2010) made an effort to distinguish between hostage-taking, hijacking, and kidnapping.

In practical terms, kidnapping involves abduction. It occurs when a person is seized, detained, or moved from one place to another against their will, or when they are confined to a controlled space without legal authority, with the intention to use the abduction for some other nefarious purpose (Protus & John, 2014). Abraham (2010) contends that kidnapping for ransom involves seizing, taking away, and keeping a person in custody, either by force or fraud. This includes snatching and seizing a person in order to demand a ransom or settle disputes among individuals. Kidnapping is undeniably a criminal offense perpetrated by criminals.

According to Bukarti, a senior analyst at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, kidnappings in Nigeria are primarily carried out by economically motivated groups, locally known as bandits, who have recently been infiltrated by elements of Boko Haram. Bandit groups have been active in the Northwestern part of Nigeria for over a decade, but they have grown in strength and sophistication in recent years, particularly in the past eight months. Official estimates suggest there are about 30,000 members across the affected states. They operate mainly in the Northwestern and central regions of Nigeria, where vast mountainous forests have been mismanaged for years (Bukarti cited in Arvin, 2021; Rufa'I, 2022).

Understanding kidnapping precisely poses several challenges because of variations in a nation's legal system and moral perspectives, as well as the presence of other related crimes such as hostage-taking and hijacking. In US Federal Law, kidnapping investigations typically categorize the crime into three types: (1) limited duration kidnapping where the victim is released unharmed; (2) kidnapping that occurs as part of another crime; and (3) kidnapping for ransom or political concession. Other legal considerations include the duration of the kidnapping, whether the victim was injured or sexually exploited, if a dangerous weapon was used, or if the victim was murdered during the kidnapping (TRADOC, 2008).

While kidnapping may seek to justify itself as a political action, it remains a criminal offense under virtually every national and international legal code (Ottuhand & Aitufe, 2014). Section 364 of the Nigerian Criminal Code states:

Any person who unlawfully imprisons any person, and takes him out of Nigeria, without his consent; or unlawfully imprisons any person within Nigeria in such a manner as to prevent him from applying to a court for his release or from discovering to any other person the place where he is imprisoned, or in such a manner as to prevent any person entitled to have access to him from discovering the place where he is imprisoned; is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment for ten years.

In the context of the political economy interpretation of kidnapping, Tzanelli (2009) views kidnapping as an exchange. He suggests that kidnapping is "a form of transaction rooted in contemporary socio-economic and

political structures of society” (2009: p.931). Furthermore, he observes that “...kidnapping is the illegitimate counterpart of a legitimate exploitation system that has been around for centuries; that of capitalist exchange” (Tzanelli 2009: p.933).

This concept of exchange is essential to understanding any kidnapping situation. However, in kidnapping scenarios, the exchange does not adhere to the principles of open market transactions, where terms are openly and freely negotiable. Instead, the exchange in kidnapping is coerced and dictated by the illegitimate desires of the kidnapper(s). This exchange can manifest in various forms, including material, political, or symbolic. This argument aligns with the perspective of this study, which posits that human beings are commoditized in Nigeria by kidnappers who have established a criminal economy thriving more than many legally sanctioned businesses. This underground economy has severely undermined the formal economy.

Kidnapping, as an organized crime, has a significant negative impact on national security, which encompasses national development and national interests (McNamara, 1968). According to Longley (2021), national security refers to the government's ability to safeguard its citizens, economy, and other institutions. In addition to defending against military attacks, national security in the 21st century includes various non-military missions, such as environmental protection, cyber security, energy security, food security, disease prevention, economic stability, water resource management, and homeland security challenges.

The current national security environment is further complicated by the proliferation of diverse violent non-state actors, including terrorists, political extremists, drug cartels, and those exploiting information-age technology to perpetrate threats and violence, including kidnapping. Osisinwa (undated) describes national security as the state's capacity to ensure the protection and defense of its citizens, but the contemporary world faces a complex security landscape. This complexity necessitates cooperation, synergy, and the sharing of actionable intelligence to counter the growing threats posed by armed non-state actors.

The Federal Government of Nigeria's National Security Strategy defines national security as "The aggregation of the security interests of all individuals, communities, ethnic groups, political entities, and institutions in the territory of Nigeria" (FGN-NSS, 2000). Bala and Ouedraogo (2018) highlight that Nigeria's National Security Strategy 2014 addresses two critical areas: National Security Interests, which include the security and welfare of the people and sub-regional security and economic cooperation, and Threats to National Security, encompassing global challenges such as terrorism, transnational organized crime, crude oil theft, Nigeria's borders, climate change, communal and ethno-religious conflicts, conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, political and federalism issues, governance, poverty, kidnapping, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

According to Albert, Danjibo, and Albert (2020), kidnapping poses both state and human security challenges, whether carried out for political or economic reasons. From a state security perspective, it damages a country's reputation and deters foreign investors and tourists, while from a human security standpoint, it inflicts trauma on the populace, endangering their physical safety, social stability, and economic welfare. The assertion by Albert et al. (2020) succinctly captures the ramifications of kidnapping on national security in Nigeria, shedding light on both the human security and state security implications. This perspective underscores the economic impact on foreign direct investment, which may suffer directly due to the prevalence of kidnapping.

Kidnapping may be orchestrated for either political or economic motives. Lipsedge provides valuable insights into distinguishing between these two dimensions, differentiating between the "expressive" and "instrumental" aspects of the phenomenon. The "expressive" motive entails using kidnapping or hostage-taking as a means to publicize grievances or express frustration, while the "instrumental" motive involves seeking specific benefits, such as ransom. Lipsedge contends that these motives often intertwine, as seen when terrorist groups seize hostages to both voice grievances and finance their extremist activities (Lipsedge, 2004: pp. 24-26).

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

According to the Organized Crime Theory (OCT), the key distinction between organized crime and other criminal activities lies in its organized nature. Unlike random, spontaneous acts, organized crime entails planned and deliberate actions orchestrated by groups of individuals. As the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) notes, organized crime manifests in various forms across different contexts.

The concept of organized crime was initially defined by the Special Crime Study Commission on Organized Crime, which described it as a method involving violence, intimidation, and corruption (1953, p. 11). Organized crime operates as a persistent criminal enterprise driven by the pursuit of profit from illicit activities, often catering to public demand. This enterprise relies on corrupting public officials and resorting to intimidation or force to safeguard its operations.

While organized crime may involve violence and coercion, its primary objective remains financial gain, although

power and control can also be secondary motives. Albanese (2016) underscores that organized crime is characterized by its pursuit of profit, with violence and coercion serving as means to this end. The reformulated basic assumptions of the Organized Crime Theory (OCT) revolve around the motives of the actors involved:

- Every crime presents an opportunity for profit.
- There is typically a designated leader within the group orchestrating criminal activities.
- The primary objective is to gain profits from criminal endeavors, whether through financial gain, material acquisition, or the accumulation of power.
- Violence, coercion, and even killings may be employed to achieve the group's objectives.
- Crimes are typically carried out by multiple individuals working together, rather than by a single individual acting alone.

The OCT has been criticized for falling short in predicting and explaining certain dynamics of kidnapping. For instance, it does not account for cases involving ritualistic motives or parental kidnapping, where financial transactions or ransom demands may not be involved. However, it is useful in this study in that it effectively elucidates the motives behind criminal actions, highlighting the pursuit of financial or material gain, power, and the use of violence. This framework aptly describes the behaviors of kidnapers, who typically demand ransom from their victims while also engaging in violent and criminal acts.

Results and Data Presentation

The data provided by SMB Intelligence offers a comprehensive overview of kidnapping incidents across Nigerian states over a twelve-month period. With the exception of Yobe State, every state experienced its share of this violent phenomenon. The report underscores that no state was immune to the negative impact and proliferation of this criminal activity. Zamfara State recorded the highest number of cases, with 765 incidents, while Gombe State had the lowest, with only 1 case reported. It's crucial to acknowledge that the report only reflects reported cases of kidnapping for ransom, indicating that many incidents may go unreported for various reasons (refer to Figure 2).



Figure 2: Number of kidnapped victims per state, adapted from SBM Intelligence, 2023.

The tracked data presented in Figure 2 vividly illustrates the pervasive nature of kidnapping across Nigeria. It serves as a stark reminder of the widespread occurrence of this criminal activity throughout the country. Within the intricate fabric of Nigerian society, the commodification of humans has become a distressing reality, permeating various facets of daily life. The data presented in figure 3 sheds light on the ransom payments made across all 36 states of Nigeria during the specified period. It reveals that kidnapers demanded over N5 billion in

ransom payments, with only N302 million, approximately 6 percent of the total, actually paid.



Figure 3: Ransom demands and payment per state in Nigeria, adapted from SBM Intelligence, 2023.

However, what is particularly striking from the report is the significant role played by Taraba State in ransom payments compared to both the states in the Northeast region and the country as a whole. In fact, Taraba State's kidnapping industry generates more revenue than that of six states in the Northeast combined, underscoring the magnitude, prevalence, and violent nature of the kidnapping epidemic in the region. The causes of kidnapping in these local government areas have been caused by factors such as unemployment, poverty, pre-existing crisis, weak state capacity and immigrant population infiltration into the state. This variables identified is presented in Figure 4.

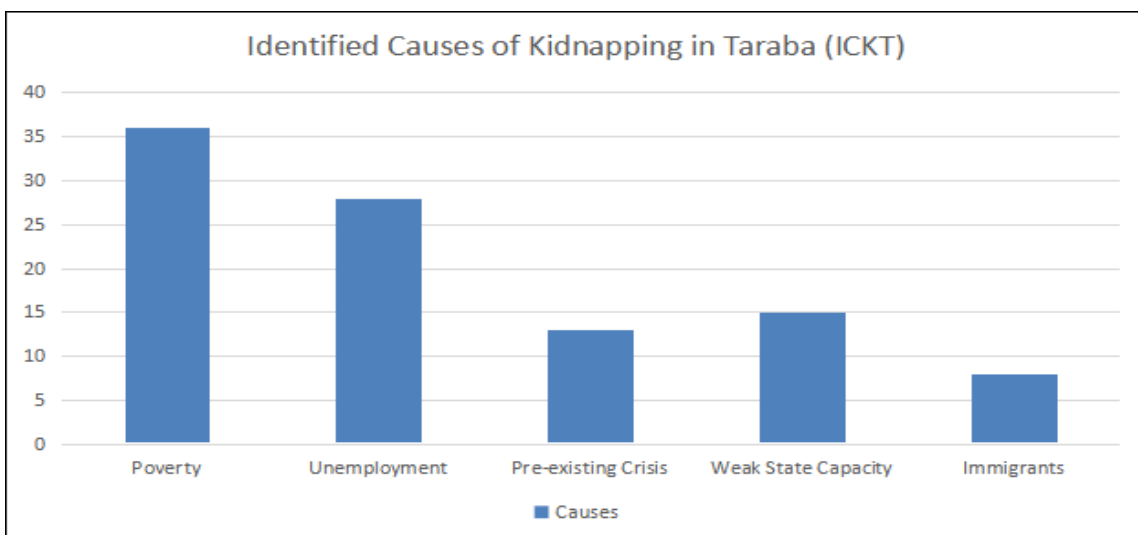


Figure 4: Identified causes of kidnapping in Taraba State, Field Survey, 2023

The bar chart presented in Figure 4 illustrates the identified causes of kidnapping in Taraba State (ICKT). Data gathered from Focus Group Discussions conducted across nine selected Local Government Areas with high

incidences of kidnapping indicate that participants identified poverty as the primary cause, with 37 per cent. This was closely followed by unemployment, with 28 percent. Participants expressed varying opinions on whether preexisting crises could be exploited by locals to engage in kidnapping for ransom as a profitable crime.

Approximately 13 percent of participants agreed that preexisting crises also contribute to kidnapping for ransom, linking it to the availability of weapons and long-standing animosities among the people. On the other hand, weak state capacity with 15 per cent, resulting from the failure of the state to exert full control and enforce laws to provide security and ensure the welfare of its citizens as mandated by the constitution, was identified as another significant factor.

Findings reveal that the influx of migrants and criminals fleeing various conflicts, such as insurgency, ethno-religious clashes, farmers-herders disputes, banditry, and illegal mining, to Taraba State contributes to the perpetuation of kidnapping for ransom as they struggle to survive in their new host communities. Although it accounts for 8 per cent the smallest percentage of the causes of kidnapping, there is potential for utilizing security measures to address this menace.

Various factors motivating kidnapping have been identified, including the demand for substantial ransom payments, recruitment of new members, fulfillment of sexual satisfaction needs, and as a means to acquire funds to meet various needs. These findings are visually represented in Figure 5.

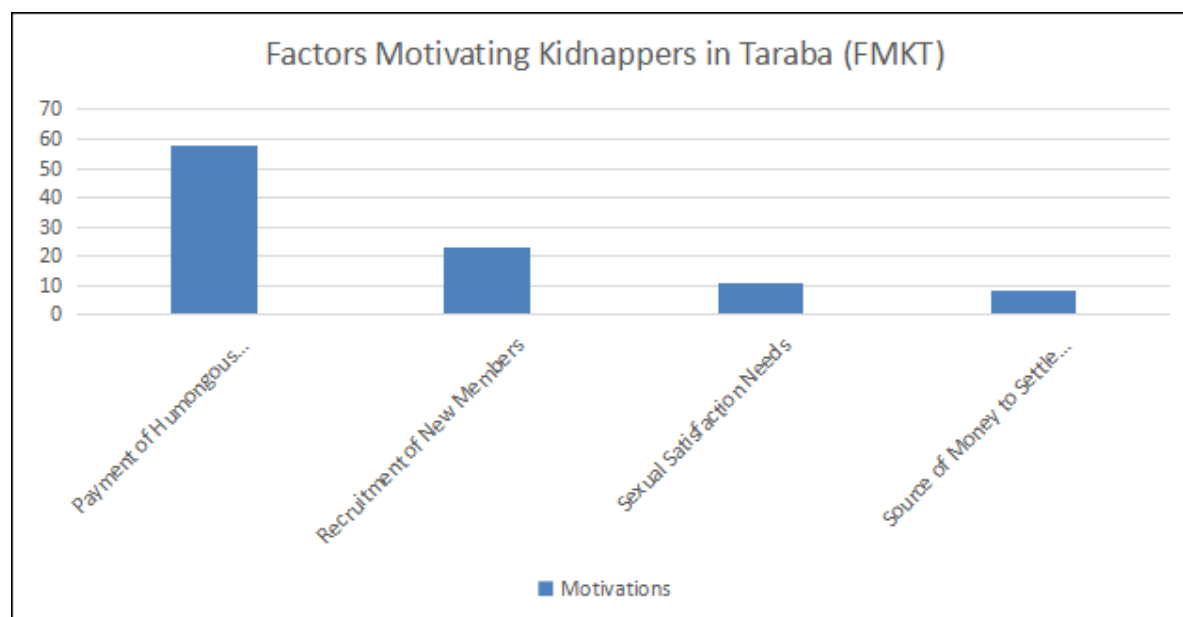


Figure 5: Factors motivating kidnappers in Taraba State, Field Survey, 2023

The data provided in Figure 5 sheds light on the motivating factors behind kidnapping, as reported by victims, eyewitnesses, and through direct observations. Participants overwhelmingly identified the payment of substantial ransom amounts by victims as the primary motivating factor for kidnappers. In many instances, the exact ransom amount remains undisclosed, as kidnappers caution victims against revealing such details to the press or public, aiming to keep potential victims uninformed about previous ransom amounts.

This secrecy surrounding ransom payments accounts for over 58 percent of the reported motivating factors. Additionally, kidnapping for the purpose of recruiting new members ranks as another significant motivation, comprising 23 percent of the reported factors. Sexual satisfaction needs serve as a motivating factor in 13 percent of cases, while kidnapping as a means to acquire funds for various purposes, such as payments to fighters, informants, purchasing food, or bribing security agencies, constitutes a notable motivation at 8 percent.

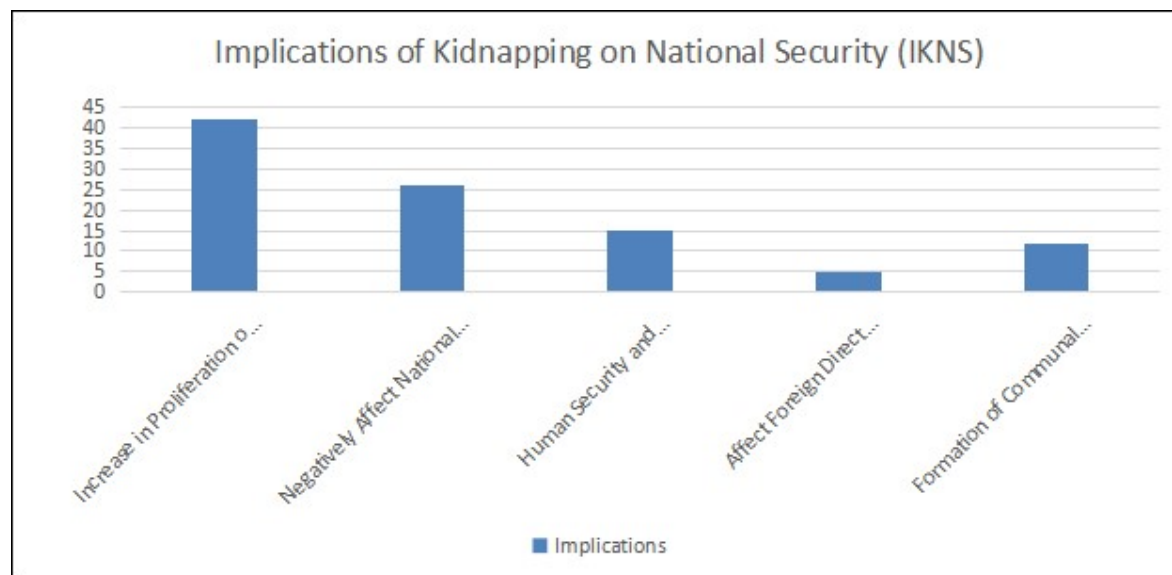


Figure 6: The implications of Kidnapping on National Security, Field Survey, 2023.

The data provided above illustrates the diverse implications of kidnapping on national security in Nigeria. Foremost among these implications is the heightened threat to national security posed by the proliferation of illegal weapons, constituting over 42 percent of the identified threats. Secondly, the negative impact on Nigeria's national image is evident in two aspects: the country's inclusion among highly terrorized and violent nations worldwide, as well as its declining ranking in the Global Peace Index. These factors collectively damage Nigeria's reputation irreparably, accounting for 26 percent of the implications identified.

Another significant implication of kidnapping is its impact on human security, particularly through population displacement, resulting in the internal displacement of individuals fleeing conflict and violence. The policies of taxation, attacks, kidnappings, and killings employed by kidnapers contribute to a climate of fear and extortion, with forced displacement comprising 15 percent of the identified implications.

The data also suggests a limited impact of kidnapping on Foreign Direct Investment, accounting for 5 percent of the implications. Additionally, participants noted the emergence of community or ethnic militias for self-defense in response to the ungovernable spaces and violence created by kidnapping activities. These militias with different nomenclatures, often referred to as vigilantes or community guards operate outside the confines of the law and are prevalent in both homogeneous and heterogeneous communities, constituting 12 percent of the identified implications.

The emerging dynamics of kidnapping in Taraba State present a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires careful examination. In recent years, Taraba State has experienced a notable increase in kidnapping incidents, reflecting shifting trends and motivations within the criminal landscape.

One emerging trend is the diversification of kidnapping motives beyond mere financial gain. While ransom demands remain a primary objective for many kidnapers, there has been a noticeable rise in cases driven by other factors such as inter-communal conflicts, political rivalries, and ideological agendas. This expansion of motives adds layers of complexity to the issue, making it increasingly difficult to address through traditional law enforcement approaches alone. This emerging dynamics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Emerging Dynamics of Kidnapping Typology in Taraba State

Types	Manifestations
Political kidnapping	It usually occurs during political activities and affects only the political class
Kidnapping for ransom	Occurs to all classes of people that are financially buoyant to pay ransom
Fake kidnapping	It is a stage-managed kidnapping to dupe family and others
Hybrid kidnapping	This is carried out by all criminal elements for extortion
Kidnapping for ritual	It is aimed at removing any part(s) of the body of the victim(s) for ritual purpose

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Within the literature, various typologies of kidnapping have been identified, and this study has uncovered two additional categories. Firstly, there is the phenomenon known as stage-managed or fake kidnapping. In these cases, the victim orchestrates their own abduction with the intention of extorting money from relatives, spouses, family members, or even religious congregations or organizations. This deceptive tactic exploits the emotional

vulnerability of loved ones and seeks financial gain through manipulation.

Secondly, there is the hybrid form of kidnapping, which represents a departure from conventional perceptions. While kidnapping is often associated with specific criminal groups such as kidnapers and bandits, accounts from victims challenge this notion. In the hybrid model, kidnapping for ransom is perpetrated by a diverse range of criminals, including insurgents, herders, farmers, ethnic militias, bandits, illegal miners, and even corrupt security personnel. This multifaceted approach to kidnapping underscores its pervasive nature and highlights the involvement of various actors across different sectors of society.

In recent years, Taraba State has witnessed several significant kidnappings, involving high-profile individuals like politicians, traditional leaders, and business figures. These incidents have raised concerns among the public and authorities. Additionally, mass abductions of groups like travelers have instilled fear and panic in communities, worsening the security situation. Taraba's proximity to neighboring states and countries has also led to cross-border kidnappings, posing challenges for law enforcement. Ransom demands are common in these cases, requiring complex negotiations and prolonging the ordeal for victims and their families. The major incident of kidnapping in Taraba State is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Major Incidences of Kidnapping in Taraba State 2016-2024

Year	Name of Victim	Alleged Ransom Paid (Naira)	Source
Feb. 2016	Hajiya Belli Manu	15 million	Daily Trust
Dec. 2017	Barr. Hosea Ibi	20 million	Daily Trust
Feb. 2019	Hassan Mijinyawa	10 million	Premium Times
Feb. 2019	Chief Uche Obi	5 million	Independent
Mar, 2019	Alhaji Usman Mayo	100 million	Taraba Truth & Facts
May, 2019	Hon. Maijama'a Mayo Selbe	8 million	Family
Jul. 2020	Sen. Ambuno Zik Sunday	20 million	Tribune
Aug. 2020	Abdulrazak Musa & Gladys Musa	2 million	Victims
Oct. 2020	Ardo Sali of Njaram	10 million	Family
Nov. 2020	Hon. Tanimu Bala & two others	3.5 million	Family
Dec. 2020	Andami Cattle Merchants	10 million	Daily Trust
Dec. 2020	Barr. Hon. Bappe M. B	5 million	Taraba Truth & Facts
July, 2021	Comrade Peter Jediel	3 million	Nairaland
Jan, 2022	Barr. G.T Katap's children	10 million	Channels
Feb. 2022	Alhaji Uba Zip's son	5 million	Dailypost
May, 2022	Engr. Yahaya Mafindi's wives	3 million	Family
June, 2022	Sunday Igbo	2 million	Family
April, 2023	Hon. Dinshiya Aboki Gargea	5 million	Family
June, 2023	Isa Usman Maigoro	1.5 million	Family
July, 2023	Dr. Isa Sidi Attahiru	10 million	Family
Oct. 2023	Rev. Father Thaddeus	3 million	The Nation
Dec. 2023	Pupule in Yorro mass kidnap	10 million	TVC News
Dec. 2023	Alhaji Musa Munchi	15 million	Family
Apr. 2024	Fed. Univ. Wukari Students	1 million	Vanguard

Source: Author's Compilation, 2024 Note: Exchange rate: 1 Naira = 0.00087 USD.

During the period from 2016 to 2024, a total of 15 major kidnapping incidents occurred in Taraba State, resulting in ransom payments amounting to over 277 million Naira. However, considering that many kidnapping cases go unreported, it is likely that the actual amount paid to kidnapers could be much higher, possibly doubling or even tripling the reported figure. This highlights the alarming growth of kidnapping for ransom as a criminal industry, exploiting money from innocent and vulnerable citizens.

Security forces in Taraba State intensified efforts to apprehend suspected kidnapers operating within the region. Through targeted operations and intelligence-gathering initiatives, law enforcement agencies have made significant strides in identifying and arresting individuals believed to be involved in kidnapping activities. These security operations have led to the apprehension of several suspects, including alleged kingpins and accomplices, who are now undergoing investigation and prosecution. The efforts of security forces, particularly the police is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Police Arrest of Some Suspected Kidnappers in Taraba State

Year	Headings	No of Suspects	Sources
April 26 th , 2019	Harvest of Arrest as Taraba Police Parade Kidnappers, Other Suspects	30	Cachina Press Centre
May 15 th , 2019	Police Parades 49 Suspected Kidnappers in Taraba	49	The Punch
Aug. 29 th , 2019	Army Hands Over Suspected Kidnappers to Police in Taraba	3	This Day
Oct. 5 th , 2019	Police Parade Undergraduate, Others for Kidnapping	22	Guardian
July 8 th , 2020	Taraba Police Parade Kidnappers, Assassin, Other	6	The Sun
Sept. 19 th , 2020	Suspected Taraba Kidnap Kingpin Wadume Arrested	1	Inside
Feb. 25 th , 2021	Nine Kidnappers of Taraba Lawmakers Arrested Collecting 30m Ransom	9	Independent
Dec. 20 th , 2021	Police Arrest 11 Kidnappers, Recovers Rifles, Ammunitions in Taraba	11	Chronicle
Sep. 22 nd , 2023	Police Parade 20 Suspected Kidnappers in Taraba	20	Daily Post
Jan. 31 th , 2024	Police Arrest Suspected Kidnapper with 8.5m in Taraba	1	Vanguard
Feb. 2 nd , 2024	Police Arrest 23 Suspects for Kidnapping, Banditry, Others in Taraba	23	Channels
Feb. 9 th , 2024	Female Kidnapper arrested while Picking Ransom in Taraba State	1	TVC News
Feb. 27 th , 2024	Police, Hunters Rescue 40 Taraba Kidnap Victims	10	The Punch
Dec. 1 st , 2024	Traditional Ruler, Others Pressure Police to Release Arrested Kidnapper	8	Taraba Truth and Fact

Source: Author's Compilation, 2023.

The data presented in Table 3 spans from 2019 to the present day and is derived from open source intelligence (OSINT) gathered from online national dailies and blogs. While this data provides valuable insights into the efforts of law enforcement agencies, it lacks information regarding the number of individuals who have been prosecuted and sentenced for the crimes they were charged with. Despite requests for such data being denied by the Police on national security grounds, the available information indicates that during the period under review (2019-2024), over 195 suspected kidnappers were arrested and paraded in Taraba State, according to police reports.

Discussion of Findings

This study reveals how the security landscape in Nigeria has been further complicated by the emergence of kidnapping as a lucrative criminal enterprise. Empirical evidence, such as the SBM Intelligence report of 2023, highlights the economic dimensions of Nigeria's kidnapping industry. The report indicates that kidnappers demanded over 5 billion Naira in ransom across 3,620 incidents nationwide, with 302 million Naira paid out. Notably, Taraba State recorded the highest number of kidnapping victims (35) in the Northeast and paid the highest ransom (60 million Naira) in the region. However, it is believed that many kidnapping cases remain unreported, emphasizing the magnitude of the issue.

One of the most popular case of kidnapping in Taraba State occurred on 9th July, 2002 with Joshua Kalla (coordinator, National Poverty Eradication Programme, Taraba State) who was alleged to have been kidnapped by political opponents within government by the Bani-Israeli boys (The News, 2002).

The study also uncovers unique insights into the causes of kidnapping in Taraba State. It identifies poverty as the primary driver, with a staggering 36 percent rating among respondents. This is closely followed by unemployment at 28 percent. Additionally, pre-existing crises and weak state capacity are cited as contributing factors, accounting for 13 percent and 15 percent, respectively.

These findings align with broader socioeconomic challenges highlighted by the National Bureau of Statistics, which reports high levels of poverty and unemployment in Taraba State. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the motivations of kidnappers, with ransom payments emerging as the predominant factor, motivating kidnappers to demand exorbitant sums from victims. Other factors include recruitment of new members, sexual satisfaction needs, and the need to meet operational expenses. Such insights provide valuable context for understanding the complex dynamics of kidnapping in Taraba State and beyond.

Regarding the implications of kidnapping on national security, the study underscores the proliferation of illegal

weapons as a major concern, exacerbating security challenges across the country. The illegal circulation of weapons enables not only kidnapers but also other armed non-state actors to perpetrate violence, posing a significant threat to public safety. Additionally, the negative impact on Nigeria's national image, population displacement, and the hindrance of foreign direct investment underscore the multifaceted consequences of kidnapping on national security.

Moreover, the formation of community or ethnic militias in response to kidnapping highlights the erosion of trust in state security institutions and the resort to vigilantism as a means of self-defense. Insights from security personnel further underscore the challenges faced in combating kidnapping, including corruption, adaptability of kidnapers, and the exploitation of social media for intelligence gathering.

Human rights lawyer Barrister Bilyaminu Maihanchi emphasizes the necessity of constitutional reform in Nigeria as a solution to the growing problem of kidnapping. He highlights the current strain on conventional security forces, leading states to adopt alternative measures like vigilantes and community guards. The emergence of civilian Joint Task Forces (JTF) underscores the inadequacy of existing security structures in combating threats such as banditry and insurgency, exposing a systemic failure in meeting the government's obligation to safeguard citizens' security and welfare.

However, Maihanchi acknowledges the challenges in achieving constitutional reform, including political complexities and historical divisions based on tribal and religious affiliations. These obstacles hinder efforts to implement comprehensive national reforms aimed at decentralizing power and redistributing authority within the federal system. Overcoming these hurdles is essential for establishing a more responsive security framework that empowers states to address localized security threats effectively.

Jauro Baba, a traditional ruler from Jalingo, emphasizes three crucial steps in combating kidnapping, which included: firstly, addressing poverty and unemployment is paramount for government intervention. Secondly, there's an urgent need to declare a nationwide state of emergency on insecurity, as Nigeria finds itself in internal conflict. Criminals are increasingly brazen, targeting even high-security locations like Presidential Guards, military bases, and prisons. This escalating insecurity leaves ordinary citizens vulnerable and nowhere to turn for safety. Thirdly, implementing a bottom-up approach through community policing is essential for engaging local communities in security efforts. These strategies are vital for curbing the spread and negative impacts of kidnapping on national security. The pervasive threat of kidnapping has severely impacted Nigerian citizens, restricting them psychologically, economically, and socially. The ransom-driven kidnapping epidemic not only jeopardizes security but also exacerbates food insecurity. As people are fearful to venture out, agricultural activities suffer, leading to food shortages and inflation. The rising cost of living coupled with looming hunger paints a grim future for the nation.

The former Governor of Taraba State Arch. Darius Dickson Ishaku who signed the Anti Kidnapping Law in 2019 did that with the hope of ending the menace but to no avail. The present Governor, Dr Agbu Kefas has sought for collaboration and partnership with military and the police to fight the kidnapers terrorizing the State. However, despite these efforts kidnapping for ransom has increase in the early of 2024. Observers believed that the new government and the redeployment of Commissioner of Police and Commandant Civil Defence created vacuum of leadership with experience to handle the security threats posed by kidnapers and other criminals.

Conclusion

This study delved into the phenomenon of kidnapping for ransom and its ramifications on national security in Nigeria. Its objective was to analyze the motivating factors behind kidnapers' actions, as they exploit human beings for financial gain, thereby challenging prevailing narratives on the causes and consequences of kidnapping on Nigeria's security landscape. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study conducted field surveys to gather primary data, employing a phenomenological framework to extract critical insights. The culmination of 10 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving 100 participants and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across nine selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Taraba State underscored the methodological robustness and appropriateness of the study.

The findings of this investigation underscored poverty, unemployment, preexisting crises, weak state capacity, and the influx of immigrants into Taraba State as primary drivers of kidnapping in Nigeria. Notably, the exacerbation of preexisting crises and the influx of criminal immigrants further fueled the kidnapping business across the state, as evidenced by the resurgence of conflicts such as the Tiv vs. Jukun crisis in Southern Taraba. Moreover, the study revealed that many kidnapers hail from impoverished backgrounds, driven by instrumental motives to justify their criminal actions.

The study identified ransom payment as the primary motivator for kidnapers, followed by efforts to recruit new

members. Ransom payments are typically made discreetly, as victims are threatened with immediate harm if money is not quickly sourced. Negotiators, often inexperienced in dealing with criminals, hastily arrange payments in cash or through bank accounts, driven by fear and urgency. Other motivating factors such as sexual needs and funding for commanders, informants, and weapons procurement align with existing literature, confirming kidnapping as a lucrative criminal enterprise driven by financial gain. The insecurity in Nigeria has created a lucrative market, with its political and economic dynamics contributing to the proliferation of kidnapping (SBM Intelligence, 2023; Omotola & Oyewole, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Consequently, the implications of kidnapping for ransom on national security are multifaceted. The increased proliferation of weapons and violence is a primary concern, exacerbated by the collapse of states in Africa and the rise of violent extremism, which have facilitated the spread of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) across Nigeria and West Africa. Additionally, kidnapping has tarnished Nigeria's national image, negatively impacting its ranking among highly terrorized countries and the Global Peace Index. Population displacement resulting from kidnapping is reshaping settlement patterns, with migration becoming a common response. While the impact on foreign direct investment is limited according to the study, the formation of ethnic and community militias is widespread. Overstretched security forces have prompted the creation of these militias, operating illegally and often resorting to extrajudicial killings, exacerbating violence and insecurity.

This study revisited the landscape of kidnapping in Taraba State to gain fresh insights into its typology. It identified various forms of kidnapping, including political kidnapping, ransom-based kidnapping, fake kidnapping, hybrid kidnapping, and ritual-based kidnapping, orchestrated by criminal gangs. Particularly prevalent was stage-managed kidnapping, often uncovered by law enforcement agencies. Contrary to common belief, kidnappings were not solely carried out by dedicated kidnapping groups; evidence from victims and witnesses revealed involvement by diverse criminal factions such as bandits, insurgents, illegal miners, farmers, herders, and ethnic militias, engaging in hybrid kidnapping schemes to extort money.

Analysis of open-source intelligence revealed that the Nigeria Police publicly paraded 195 suspected kidnappers between 2019 and 2024, with limited subsequent prosecution and sentencing. This raises concerns about the enforcement of anti-kidnapping laws in Taraba State and Nigeria as a whole. Despite the existence of legislation, including the Kidnapping and Abduction Prohibition Act of 2010 (amended in 2019 to include death penalty and life imprisonment provisions), no executions or life imprisonments have been carried out, highlighting a lack of robust enforcement.

Kidnapping for ransom has burgeoned into a multi-billion Naira industry in Nigeria, employing a vast network of criminals, unemployed youths, and the impoverished. The insecurity spawned by kidnapping surpasses that caused by insurgency and separatist movements. In Taraba State in the period under review over 277 million has been paid as ransom to kidnappers. However, the amount was just for the reported cases on the media, eyewitnesses and family sources.

A significant challenge is the convergence of criminal groups forming mutual alliances to escalate violence, blurring traditional distinctions between kidnappers, insurgents, bandits, separatists, and illegal miners. Proposed solutions to kidnapping, gleaned from this study, include the establishment of state police forces, fostering international cooperation, enhancing inter-agency collaboration, implementing poverty reduction initiatives, and creating employment opportunities to stimulate economic growth and mitigate inequality.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and objectives, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Federal Government should prioritize the initiation and execution of poverty eradication programs with clear, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound targets. These initiatives should be encouraged at the state level to address the root causes of kidnapping.
- Government at all levels, in collaboration with the public, should discourage the payment of ransom to kidnappers. Despite its associated risks, this action could deter kidnappers and disrupt their operations, thereby enhancing security.
- Federal Government should implement a new policy aimed at retrieving the estimated 6 million illegal weapons circulating in the country. This could involve offering direct incentives to individuals who surrender their weapons voluntarily. And government should technology particularly National Identification Number (NIN) to track phone lines of kidnappers. Additionally, the introduction of a whistle-blower policy could aid in tracking the movement of illegal weapons by armed non-state actors across the nation.

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