

The Challenge of Kidnapping in Nigeria: A Conflict-Security Analysis of Causes, Consequences, and Strategic Responses.

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Abstract

This article examines the challenges of kidnapping in Nigeria: causes and consequences. The paper unveiled some common causes of kidnapping and their consequences in Nigeria as a nation state that is characterized by poverty, unemployment, insecurity, corruption, weak institutional framework and poor policy implementation. Qualitative source of data collection was employed for the realization of this work. This study indicates that the current wave of kidnapping has aggravated massive unemployment, worsened unemployment and creates an unfriendly environment for economic development. The Federal Government has yet to realise that massive job creation, improved political structure, and resolution of internal grievances are the measures that would cure or minimise the commission of this criminality. The government should thus become proactively visible throughout the nation via its security agencies and economic development agenda. We therefore recommend sound policy programs that are youth-friendly and such policies that will tackle major internal grievances among the nation's youths.

Keywords: Kidnapping, grievances, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, and criminality.

Introduction

The kidnapping of all manner of persons has gained ascendancy in Nigeria. A malady previously unknown to the people has rapidly become domesticated. In the last twenty years, the volatile oil rich region of the Niger Delta witnessed this phenomenon on a large scale with the target being mostly expatriates and Nigerians in the oil business. It has spread throughout the country, extending to places as far as Kano and Kaduna in the far Northern part of Nigeria. South-East and South-South Nigeria have become known as the kidnappers' playgrounds of Nigeria.

Kidnapping is a violent, terrible, sensational crime and poses a national security challenge for the country. Kidnapping gained momentum in Nigeria as a response to joblessness, moral decadence, hopelessness and frustration among the youths. The politicians and disgruntled individuals seized the opportunity to perpetrate criminality. The miscreants use this criminal model as the easiest method for intimidating human

beings to gain easy access to cash. Osumah and Aghedo (2011) argue that kidnapping is “an engagement for economic survival, securing political and business advantage over rivals and co-competitors” (p.277).

The widening scale of insecurity in Nigeria is a cause for concern as everyone is affected by it. Churches, mosques, markets, schools, homes and the highway, all are susceptible to this menace. The abductees and their families are traumatised by the ordeal of kidnapping. Foreign investors are scared away from Nigeria. Nigerians are paying the price of poor governance and failures of leadership. Davidson (2010) points out that the general state of insecurity in some parts of the country has no doubt reached a stage where virtually everybody is now worried about the direction the region is going. Presently, hardly can people sleep because of the fear of being robbed or kidnapped. Businessmen have taken flight with their businesses for fear of being kidnapped or robbed.

This study exposes various factors that are virtually standing as impediments to the solution [or eradication] of the problem of kidnapping behaviour in Nigeria. Several social factors that have hindered solutions to kidnapping behaviours are linked to massive unemployment, worsening political instability, internal grievances, get-rich-quick syndrome and perceived weaknesses of the state security outfits. Those social issues are the obvious impediments to the control of the crime of kidnapping behaviour in Nigeria. Our methodological approach is exploratory, by reviewing the existing literature to support our theoretical positions, exposing the kidnapping problem, security challenge for the nation, and the impediments to the solutions of kidnapping behaviour.

Concept of Kidnapping

The concept of kidnapping is viewed differently by various scholars. While some see it as an act embedded within the menace of banditry, others view it as another form of armed robbery. However, it is a cohabitant along with all forms of robbery within the umbrella of banditry. Fage and Alabi (2017) conceived kidnapping as “the forceful or fraudulent abduction of an individual or a group of individuals for reasons ranging from economic, political and religious to [struggle for] self-determination”.

Inyang and Abraham (2013) defined it as “the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. It is a common law offence and the key part is that it is an unwanted act on the part of the victim”. Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014) also defined kidnapping as the “act of seizing and detaining or carrying away a person or group of persons’ by unlawful force or by fraud, and often with a ransom demand. It involves taking a person from their family forcefully without their consent with the motive of holding the person or group of persons’ as a hostage and earning a profit from their families”. Bello and Jamilu (2017) analyze that kidnapping is usually

motivated by financial gain or political demand. Thus, opportunists or traditional criminals, as well as political dissidents, can resort to kidnapping to illegally obtain economic gains or have their demands granted.

It is however, worthy to note that as much as the menace of kidnapping could be illegal and would constitute an offence in line with Inyang and Abraham's view, the ransom demanded, which is also a fraud, could also constitute an offense. Thus, the views of these scholars aptly define the actions and reasons of the captor.

Okoli and Agada (2014) approached the concept of kidnapping with a synonymous description. They averred that there are terms that are used interchangeably to mean and connote kidnapping. These terms are hostage taking, abduction, captivity, and ransom. These scholars asserted that, as much as these terms may be used and seem to ordinarily mean the same thing, they do not connote the same meaning. They posited that while abduction refers to kidnapping where the victim involved is a minor, hostage-taking denotes keeping a victim in illegal confinement to gain an advantage over adversaries. Similarly, captivity means holding a victim usually during war or conflict to have a combatant advantage in terms of tradeoffs while ransom on the other hand is the false confinement of a kidnapped to demand payment in cash (bitcoins, money, valuables, etc.) or kind by placing certain demands such as the swop-over of captives (Okoli and Agada, 2014).

It is, however, necessary to note within this concept that while political and economic factors can instigate kidnapping, the economic reason is the actual germane and most common predisposing factor in the parlance of this concept. Therefore, this paper views kidnapping as the sudden attack, whisking away of a victim or target, whether suspecting or unsuspecting, without the consent of the victim to an unknown location or hideout, either for political or economic reasons, for ransom or a terminal vengeance of death.

Theoretical Framework

Situational Action Theory

Per-Olof Wikström popularized Situational Action Theory (SAT) in 2004 and its relationship to kidnapping, abduction, banditry, and terrorism in Nigeria. The theory aims to identify the reasons for violent crime in Nigeria and takes into account the disciplines of cognitive, bioethical, socioeconomic, and environmental factors. In essence, it seeks to understand why individuals make the decision to transgress the rules and regulations (Wikström, 2006; Bouhana and Wikstrom, 2011). A person's engagement with settings that encourage recidivism and their propensity for wrongdoing, or how much effort they expend in an uncontrolled or mismanaged environment, and how much consciousness

they have, interact to produce criminal activity, which is unlawful behaviour abhorred by society (Wilkstrom, 2014).

The situational action theory postulates that a person's personality and the environment in which they live are what motivate them to commit crimes, (Wilkstrom, 2006). Even though settings occasionally play a part in these causes, people are nonetheless responsible for their actions. Given what has been said so far, crime is committed when it is seen to be a good and suitable course of action, depending on the situation, or when a person lacks individual self-control (Wikström, Per-Olof, 2019). The circumstance, the environment, the person's character, and the degree of exposure are the four pillars upon which the situational action theory is built (Accord, 2022). These pillars determine whether a community is susceptible to crime or not, and in Nigeria, all of these factors are present and actively contributing to the hierarchical conspiracy.

The fact of the matter is that people are more likely to participate in unlawful activities if they are subjected to various forms of poverty, left unsupervised, and have access to resources that provide them some measure of freedom from poverty. It highlights the fact that every action a person takes is a result of the influence of their environment; in other words, the environment influences the patterns of human behaviour, (Wilkstrom, 2014). Following this, more people are vulnerable to being impacted by terrorist, kidnapping, or banditry activities in the most remote areas of the North (Uche & Iwuamadi, 2018). An individual with a low propensity for crime should be less susceptible to the reasons behind delinquent behaviour because of their high level of personal integrity and the presence of governmental authorities.

Situational action theory offers the following specific statements about a person's surroundings, circumstances, setting, and behaviour: A person will either engage in criminal activity or live up to the law, depending on how these factors interplay. Situational action theory offers the following specific statements about a person's surroundings, circumstances, setting, and behaviour. However, the propensity to commit crime will not only emanate from personal disposition but can also be fuelled depending on the environment, engagement, and interaction with close relatives. Society and traditional authorities within the enclave form part of the environment and setting that can either encourage or discourage violent young people from getting involved in violent crime. Banditry, terrorism, insurgency, militancy, and piracy are all manifestations of the post-colonial state's inability and incapacity (across all tiers of government, from the federal to the state and local levels) to advance the welfare and security aspirations of the populace (Oyewole & Omotola 2022).

The Drivers and Enablers of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Weak State Presence/ Performance

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Democracy and social justice are amongst the principles upon which the Federal Republic of Nigeria is grounded. Following this, the security and welfare of the people are mandatorily within the primary purpose of the government (Section 14 (2)(b) Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as altered). An inability to secure certain parts of the country from the hands of criminal syndicates points to a failure in achieving this purpose, creating a weak state presence. Unfortunately, weak state performance have led to a high incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria, with dire security implications for the citizens.

Assessments by leading political scientists have revealed that the delivery of political goods such as order, civil rights and good governance is critical in shaping attitudes towards a democracy and sustaining said democracy. The concept of *political goods* is fundamental to appraising the strength or weakness of state presence, predominantly in vulnerable regions. In a foundational perspective, Pennock (1966) defines political goods as those outputs of a political system that fulfil “vital functions” such as “the attainment of ... collective goals”, adding that this fulfilment “makes the polity valuable to man, and gives it its justification”. In the same vein, among the essential political goods identified are “security, justice, liberty and welfare”, and their availability is a useful measure of state performance across various regions (Pennock, 1966). The idea is that where these goods are lacking, the state is seen as weak or failing.

Furthermore, Rotberg (2004) constructs a “hierarchy of political goods” in which the provision of security, particularly human security, is deemed the most critical. He argues that “no political good is as critical as the supply of security”, since citizens “cannot easily make private arrangements for political order”. Therefore, the state bears primary responsibility for ensuring peace by “repelling external invasions, eliminating domestic uprisings, and controlling crime”. This underscores the importance of security and states that its absence compromises other dimensions of governance. An inability and unwillingness to deliver the political goods to the majority brings about a distrust in the government, coupled with consequences resulting from a legitimacy crisis (Ogundiya, 2009).

The observation by various authors is that weak state presence, particularly in rural areas, is a significant contributing factor to the prevalence of kidnapping in Nigeria. Rural areas in various parts of the country are often not adequately controlled due to their vast and remote locations. Therefore, there is a gap when it comes to effectively providing the required law enforcement and governance, which then creates an environment where criminal activities, including kidnapping, can thrive with impunity. The rise and permanence of kidnapping in many parts of Nigeria is a result of a breakdown of law and order. Security forces charged with this primary function are faced with numerous challenges, such as a lack of resources, corruption, etc., in discharging

their functions (Ogbonna & Obasi, 2023). Consequently, criminals operating within the area remain unchecked and emboldened to carry on their terror activities. Punitive measures that ought to serve as a deterrent measure to the crime syndicate are unavailable and therefore present a weak state interference (Eze & Nnaji, 2021) (Mbam, Jacob & Amiara 2024).

Many areas in Nigeria have experienced a surge in armed militancy and kidnapping by several armed bandit groups due to a breakdown of security. There is a serious security vacuum in rural and forested areas, which kidnappers exploit. On 26th February, 2021, in Jangebe in Zamfara, 317 schoolgirls were abducted at about 1 am from the Jangebe government girls' secondary school. These abductors are known to operate with terror from forest hideouts that span north-western Nigeria into Niger by launching attacks, kidnappings, theft and sexual violence on rural towns and villages. These mass kidnappings for ransom from schools have become endemic. Similarly, on 17th February, 2021 in Kagara Town, Niger state 27 students, three teachers and a dozen family members of school staff, 42 people in total, were taken by heavily gunmen dressed in military uniforms who overran the all-boys Government Science College (GSC). Sadly, Killings, sexual violence and mass kidnappings for ransom continue to flourish due to a dearth of rural security and the shelter provided by a vast and mineral-rich forest (Guardian 2021).

Unemployment and Youth Marginalisation

The persistent shortage of employment opportunities for youths across various regions in Nigeria has been identified as a major contributing factor to the proliferation of kidnapping.

In Nigeria, the labour force participation rate is made up of a country's working-age population, which constitutes the labour force, either employed or seeking employment. This working-age population consists of persons aged 15 years and above (National Bureau of Statistics 2024).

The national unemployment rate in Nigeria for Q2 2024 declined to 4.3%, while youth unemployment during the same period was recorded at 6.5%. This translates to approximately 12.7 million young people unemployed out of a total population of 151 million aged individuals (National Bureau of Statistics 2024). Furthermore, the NBS captures the share of youth (ages 15 to 24 years) who have completed their education but are not pursuing further education or engaged in employment or training, known as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). This concept serves as a measure of youth marginalisation and disengagement. Therefore, the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rate in Q1 of 2024 was 14.4% (around 21.7 million

individuals), indicating the number of people unable to transition smoothly from education to employment (National Bureau of Statistics 2024).

Other interesting data shows that in Q2 of 2024, the underemployment rate was at 9.2%, down from 10.6% in Q1. In Q2 of 2024, informal employment remains high at 93%, while self-employment (mostly informal) accounts for 85.6% of all jobs. These figures indicate that unemployed young Nigerians and millions more underemployed or out of school/training create a fertile ground for criminal recruitment. It reinforces that kidnapping is a symptom of labour market failures and is utilised as a tool of desperation (National Bureau of Statistics 2024). The unemployment challenge in Nigeria has led youths to engage in various social crimes, including banditry and kidnapping. Nigeria's youth unemployment rate allows a reservoir of idle labour to be vulnerable to criminal ventures. Youth marginalisation has resulted in a lack of inclusion in governance, giving rise to resentment and a quest for alternative income through kidnapping-for-ransom (Mbam et al., 2024).

Inyang (2019) attributes the growing incidence of kidnapping to the structural problem of youth unemployment, illustrating the issue through the widely cited aphorism, "an idle man is the devil's workshop," which encapsulates the social risks associated with mass idleness. Likewise, Linus (2015) highlights the alarming reality of numerous physically capable young Nigerians who remain unemployed, constantly searching for non-existent job opportunities. (Mbam et al., 2024); (Yusuf & Abdulahhi, 2020)

Ayuba (2020), in an empirical investigation into the underlying causes of kidnapping in selected Northwestern states, found that the surge in kidnapping incidents in the region is largely attributable to limited employment opportunities for young people. A significant proportion of these youths have disengaged from agriculture, the region's traditional economic base and migrated to urban centers in pursuit of largely unavailable jobs. Many of them, after being used as political thugs during election campaigns and subsequently abandoned by their political sponsors, resort to kidnapping as an alternative means of survival (Ayuba, 2020).

Breakdown of Traditional Security Institutions

The disintegration of traditional security institutions (such as village vigilantes, community guards, age-grade militias, and the authority of traditional rulers), notably through neglect, lack of formalisation, and corruption, has undermined rural protection systems (Aina, 2023).

Historically, indigenous security frameworks across Nigeria played a crucial role in maintaining communal order and deterring criminal activity. Among the Hausa, the *yan banga* served as traditional watchmen; the Yoruba communities employed hunter-

guards, while the Igbo relied on structured age-grade groups. These institutions functioned effectively as localized security systems rooted in cultural norms and communal responsibility. Although their influence was diminished during and after colonial rule, many of these structures continued informally, underscoring their durability and local legitimacy (Aina, 2023).

Since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999, there has been a noticeable resurgence and evolution of vigilante activity. Pratten (2008) identifies the rise of groups such as the O'odua People's Congress (OPC), the Bakassi Boys, the Hisbah, and *yan banga* as part of this development. New initiatives have emerged across various regions, including Amotekun in the Southwest, Ebube Agu in the Southeast, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the Northeast. These formations represent a hybrid security model where community-based actors are co-opted, though not fully integrated, into formal state security efforts.

While these efforts illuminate the enduring role of community-based security actors, their fragmented nature, absence of formal oversight, and occasional collusion with political elites provoke inquiries regarding accountability. In Nigeria, 23 out of 36 states have these vigilantes; however, only a few are backed by any legal framework that institutes their roles and powers. They therefore carry on activities under state executive orders. This has proved dangerous as accountability issues and potential human rights violations have emerged. In the absence of structured integration into national security architecture, traditional and vigilante systems are at risk of becoming instruments for exploitation or even aggravating the insecurity they seek to alleviate (Nextier, 2025).

Also, the breakdown of traditional security institutions creates a security vacuum that encourages criminals to invade villages, forests, and rural routes. Kidnappers take advantage of the absence of both formal and informal law enforcement. The collapse of indigenous dispute-resolving customs, clashes remain unaddressed and often intensify (Nextier, 2025).

Ineffective Criminal Justice Response

The criminal justice system of Nigeria is faced with challenges hindering deterrence and addressing the issue of kidnapping. This could be attributable to systemic inefficiencies prevailing within crucial institutions. Low prosecution rates, police corruption, and judiciary delays are major culprits and sadly highlight how Nigeria's criminal justice apathy fuels kidnapping within Nigeria.

Low Prosecution rates of perpetrators of kidnapping undermine the punitive function of the Law. A 2018 Statista report documented that there were 838 reported kidnapping cases, with 176 cases charged to court and 140 under investigation in 2018

(Statista, 2018). This climate of lax enforcement not only emboldens criminal networks but also incentivises youth participation in such illicit activities due to the minimal risk of apprehension or prosecution (Eze & Nnaji, 2021).

A mounting security vacuum persists due to weak coordination, underfunding, and corruption in the police force, which allows perpetrators to go unchecked. As noted by Eze and Nnaji (2021), the weakness of law enforcement institutions, particularly in rural communities with limited governmental oversight, fosters conditions under which kidnapping can flourish. Additionally, the success of investigations is hindered by police departments that lack forensic capacity; one study analogised the police's situation to "going dark", highlighting their inability to analyse digital evidence. The term "Going dark" signifies the diminishing capacity of the police to lawfully (forensically) access and examine digital evidence, both at rest and in transit, due to various technical and non-technical barriers (Otu & Elechi, 2018). The Nigerian Police Force endeavours to combat crime and restore public feelings of security; however, serious repercussions arise from inadequate investigative practices, which occasionally lead to wrongful convictions and imprisonment of innocent individuals. In numerous instances, the absence of forensic investigative skills has resulted in misidentifying suspects based on false informants, unreliable tips, careless evidence collection, and coerced confessions or admissions. The current policing framework is ill-suited to address the requirements of a nation as vast, populous, modern and diverse and complex as Nigeria (Otu & Elechi, 2018).

The inadequacy of security infrastructure and the inefficiency of law enforcement mechanisms in various parts of Nigeria have significantly contributed to the escalation of kidnapping activities. In regions where security personnel are either insufficiently equipped or compromised by corruption, perpetrators of kidnapping operate with relative impunity (Ogbonna & Obasi, 2023).

Consequences and Security Implications of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Destabilisation/ Displacement of Communities

Kidnapping destabilises communities, leading to mass displacement and disruption of livelihoods and infrastructure. This epidemic in Nigeria in the last decade has posed a serious threat to its national security and sustainable development. It has led to the death and loss of resources, a grave threat to public safety (Okoli & Agada, 2014).

An estimated 295,000 internal displacements associated with conflict and violence were reported in Nigeria in 2024. As in recent years, the north-western states of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara were the scene of criminal violence linked to cattle rustling, kidnappings and extortion, which led to almost 123,000 movements (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2025).

Farmers in the affected areas are unable to access their farms, which greatly impacts the country's food security and is vital to its development (Yakubu, 2022).

Another security implication of Kidnappings is the mass withdrawal of children from schools in Northern Nigeria. There is a noticeable setback in educational achievement in states like Zamfara and Kaduna. Parents are discouraged from enrolling their children in school due to security concerns, as they live in fear of having their kids taken by ruthless abductors (Baduku, 2024). This has destabilized the education of many children (Mohammad, Achirga, & Paravicini 2024).

Furthermore, the prevalence of kidnapping and insecurity in Nigeria has severely disrupted workforce stability within the industrial sector. A primary repercussion has been the sharp rise in employee turnover, especially in regions identified as high-risk. Many workers in these areas opt to relocate to safer cities or emigrate abroad, a trend popularly known as "Japa." According to Eze and Onuoha (2020), more than 40% of employees in major industrial centers such as Port Harcourt and Onitsha either resigned or sought transfers between 2018 and 2022 as a direct response to worsening security conditions (Onwuka and Achebe, 2025).

Also, insecurity has prompted the relocation of many industries to more stable regions, thereby compounding the instability of the local workforce. Such moves often leave behind unemployed populations and destabilize regional economies. For example, Ikechukwu (2020) reports that over a quarter of manufacturing firms operating in the Niger Delta relocated between 2015 and 2020, causing substantial job losses.

Psychological Trauma

Kidnapping in Nigeria imposes significant psychological and emotional burdens on both the victims and their families. Survivors frequently demonstrate long-term mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), severe anxiety, and depressive symptoms resulting from their traumatic experiences in captivity (Abadinsky, 2022; Ike & Onyekachi, 2019). These psychological effects persist even after physical release; consequently, they disrupt the individual's capacity to resume a normal life, thereby complicating reintegration into society. Victims may contend with ongoing fear, isolation, and mistrust. (Yusuf & Afolabi, 2020) (Kayode, Fadipe, Durosaro, & Uwadia, 2025)

Families of abducted individuals also suffer deeply, leading to stress and anxiety within the household. They experience chronic emotional distress because of fear and uncertainty regarding the fate of their loved ones. To worsen matters, the psychological toll is compounded by the financial and emotional tension of ransom demands and extended negotiations with the abductors (Ibrahim, 2021). The rest of the household

begins to develop an enduring sense of vulnerability, concerned that they could become future targets (Kayode et al, 2025).

The psychological imprint it has on the community is potent. Repeated incidents foster a climate of fear and erode public trust. Community members may limit their social interactions, withdraw from public spaces, and alter daily routines in attempts to avoid perceived threats. Once vibrant towns now become ghost communities because it is a collective psychological response; unfortunately, it diminishes social cohesion and disrupts communal networks (Ogbonna & Obasi, 2023).

At the national level, there is an avalanche of fear provoked by the frequent activities of kidnappers, therefore affecting economic activities, tourism, and civic life. Individuals increasingly avoid gatherings, businesses suffer from reduced patronage, and communities operate under heightened insecurity (Kayode et al, 2025).

Esther Joseph, a 51-year-old street vendor from Kaduna State, recounted the deep emotional trauma she endured when her 13-year-old daughter, Precious Sim, was abducted alongside other students from Bethel Baptist High School in northern Nigeria on July 5, 2021. In a desperate attempt to rescue her child, she ventured into the forest to search for the kidnappers but was intercepted and brought back by soldiers alerted by locals. Although Precious was eventually released after spending a month in captivity, both mother and daughter continue to suffer lasting psychological effects. Joseph revealed that her daughter experiences frequent panic attacks, is startled by loud noises, and often wakes in the night in distress, clinging to her for comfort—signs of trauma that reflect the enduring impact of the abduction (Mohammad, Achirga, & Paravicini, 2024).

Undermining Local Economies

The disturbing trend of insecurity and kidnapping diminishes productivity, increases business costs, disrupts many sectors such as agriculture, and thwarts national economic performance. The persistent threat of kidnapping in Nigeria has created an environment of dread that significantly weakens workforce productivity, especially in regions prone to criminal violence. Abubakar et al. (2019) report that approximately 70% of workers in high-risk zones experienced diminished workplace stability and performance due to the fear of being abducted.

Industrial output has also seen a marked decline in areas plagued by insecurity. Frequent production interruptions are common, as workers often face roadblocks, curfews, and fear-induced absenteeism. Such disruptions undermine operational efficiency and escalate production costs Adeyemi (2022). Moreover, the mental strain associated with commuting and working in volatile environments has lowered job satisfaction. For example, a recent survey by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023)

found that 67% of employees in Lagos and Rivers states reported feeling unsafe due to increased kidnapping incidents (Onwuka and Achebe, 2025). This heightened sense of insecurity has driven up employee turnover rates, as many professionals seek employment in more secure regions or choose to emigrate. Okoye and Nwankwo (2023) found that turnover in the oil industry in Rivers State surged by 30% as a result, causing workflow disruption and escalating recruitment costs.

In Anambra State, known for its agricultural and commercial activities, insecurity has also impacted farming productivity. Kidnapping threats have discouraged farmers from accessing their fields, leading to a 20% reduction in agricultural labor and contributing to food insecurity (Ibeanu, 2023). Organizations have been compelled to allocate significant financial resources to protective measures, such as hiring private security, installing surveillance infrastructure, and providing safety gear for staff. While necessary, these investments strain operational budgets, diverting funds from innovation, research and development, workforce training, and technological advancement (Ikechukwu, 2020).

Long-term, these trends have negatively impacted Nigeria's industrial competitiveness. Adebayo et al. (2022) observe that firms operating in high-risk environments struggle to meet international benchmarks, which impairs their capacity to export goods and attract foreign investment. Consequently, the industrial sector's contribution to national GDP remains well below its potential, further deepening economic fragility.

More than 40% of employees in major industrial centres such as Port Harcourt and Onitsha either resigned or sought transfers between 2018 and 2022, leading to the loss of institutional knowledge and experienced personnel. Industries have moved to more stable regions, and such moves often leave behind unemployed populations and destabilize regional economies (Onwuka and Achebe 2025).

Delegitimisation of Government Authority

The persistent inability of Nigeria's security forces, particularly the police, to curb the widespread menace of kidnapping highlights a deepening crisis of state incapacity and eroding public confidence in formal institutions. Studies show that many incidents go unreported due to the widespread perception that security agencies are either ineffective or untrustworthy (Nweke & Stephen, 2014; EnactAfrica, 2019). As a result, the responsibility for resolving such crimes often falls to victims and their families, who resort to direct negotiations with abductors (Pires et al., 2014). This shift contributes to the weakening of state legitimacy, as citizens begin to question the relevance and reliability of government authority (Ezemenaka, 2018). The consequence is a vicious cycle where public bitterness fosters the rise of criminal syndicates that exploit

institutional weaknesses. Moreover, individuals increasingly arm themselves for self-protection, fueling the proliferation of small arms and compounding threats to national security (Yakubu, 2022). The unchecked nature of these developments suggests that large portions of Nigeria are becoming effectively ungoverned. The state's inability to provide basic services such as education, health, and safety exacerbates its legitimacy. With life expectancy at just 53 years and over 10 million children out of school, especially girls in northern Nigeria, governance failures are stark (Financial Times, 2024). Survey findings from Afrobarometer (2022) affirm these fears: 84% of Nigerians identify kidnapping and abduction as a major national concern, with 74% noting a rise in incidents and 58% rating police handling of such crimes as poor. Collectively, these patterns point to a gradual delegitimisation of the Nigerian state, raising alarms about a possible descent into a 'Hobbesian state of nature' where violence prevails in the absence of functional authority (Yakubu 2022).

Further illustrating the daunting nature of the issue, Between July 2023 and June 2024, Nigeria witnessed an alarming escalation in kidnapping incidents, which have become more violent, widespread, and financially motivated. According to recent data, there were 1,130 reported kidnap incidents, resulting in the abduction of 7,568 individuals and the deaths of 1,056 civilians. On average, at least one person was killed in each kidnapping attempt. Over this period, ₦10.9 billion was demanded as ransom, yet only ₦1.048 billion, a mere 9.5%, was paid. This significant disparity suggests that kidnapping is no longer targeted primarily at elites or high-profile individuals but has evolved into a more indiscriminate and opportunistic activity affecting everyday citizens (SBM Intelligence, 2024).

Recommendations

1. The government needs to expand its security personnel especially in rural areas. Also, deploying advanced technologies like drones and geo-mapping for early threat detection will enable proactive, intelligence-driven responses to insecurity.
2. It is key that security approaches that prioritize collaboration between state agencies and traditional security networks to enhance presence, state authority and legitimacy in underserved rural regions is adopted.
3. Much action has to be put in motion to revitalize traditional institutions by formally integrating them into local security governance structures through legal recognition and capacity-building. This helps restore their authority, mediate local disputes, and bridge the trust gap between communities and the state.

4. Attempts must be made to protect and intercept illegal movements in all the entry points (borders) in Nigeria to ensure a sustained government presence and early response to security threats in rural areas.
5. The government's dedication to providing security and welfare must be evident through policies, implementation, agencies, and development throughout the country. Government must visibly extend development, infrastructure, amenities and institutions to rural communities to boost economic stability and public morale. This reduces feelings of alienation that fuels insecurity, and weakens criminal influence in neglected areas.
6. The community should actively monitor and report suspicious behaviour. Condemning unexplained wealth fosters a culture of transparency and safety.
7. The government must prioritise inclusivity by providing equal opportunities for all irrespective of tribe, ethnicity, and religion. There must also be deliberate attempts by stakeholders and policymakers to tackle poverty, unemployment, and religious extremism.
8. To curb the unemployment epidemic, it is vital to invest in preventive measures such as vocational education, entrepreneurship schemes, and targeted empowerment programmes to address youth disenfranchisement.
9. Authorities must create basic amenities across the length and breadth of the country to prompt action against criminal elements within the system. Appointments must meet the provisions and principles of federal character based on merit.
10. Accelerate judicial reforms by reducing case backlog, ensure timely trial, and improve accountability towards the prosecution of kidnapping and violent crime cases. This ensures swift justice and deterrence.
11. To foster an effective justice system, early warning systems and intelligence-sharing among local, state, and federal agencies to prevent and respond swiftly to abduction threats can be strengthened.
12. To cope with the psychological trauma faced by victims of kidnappers, attention has to be paid in providing mental health interventions and community healing strategies, including psychosocial support services in schools, communities and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps.

Conclusion

The conversation around the growing threat of kidnapping in Nigeria is far from new. Its persistence reveals that it is both a symptom and a driver of governance, socio-economic, and security challenges. This paper has explored the dimensions of this phenomenon, including weakened state presence, youth marginalisation, criminal justice failures, and the breakdown of traditional security systems. The ripple effects swift and destabilising disrupt communities, inflict deep psychological trauma, and weaken local economies. Moving forward, only a comprehensive and coordinated approach that addresses root causes, strengthens institutions, and promotes inclusive development can turn the tide. Through collective efforts by government, communities, and regional partners, Nigeria can begin to reinstate stability, rebuild legitimacy, and renew public trust.

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