



A Synopsis of the Escalating Menace of Kidnapping in Nigeria: Implications and Way forward

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Abstract

Among the various social vices that are endemic to the development of the country, kidnapping has emerged as a dominant form of criminality evolving from an isolated incident into a nationwide security crisis in Nigeria. It was initially linked to a political militancy but it has spread across socio-economic and geographical lines. Despite the efforts of the government to combat the heinous crime of kidnapping, the menace is still escalating tremendously due to poverty, unemployment, ineffective judicial system, moral decadence and the use of hard drugs as revealed in this paper. Consequently, it is for this reason that this study examined the theoretical background, causes, implications, recent incidences and way forward to curbing the menace and the descriptive survey method was adopted to discover necessary information highlighted in this study. The paper therefore, recommended the way forward to eradicating the menace such as provision of poverty alleviation programme, security sector reform like purchasing of sophisticated weapons and re-training of security agents, judicial reform and public awareness campaigns for the citizens.

Keywords: Kidnapping, Menace, Security, Poverty, Social-vices

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of Nigeria as an independent state in 1960, the federal government has been carrying out a lot of efforts to maintain peace, stability and security in the country but the country is still experiencing a lot of high rate of civil strife and high level of crime especially the organized crimes such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, ritual killings, farmers/herders, conflict clashes, kidnapping, economic crimes and systemic official corruption in both the private and public sectors of the country. Among these crimes, one of the most outrageously bad is kidnapping, which is a dominant form of criminality in the country Nigeria, evolving from isolated incidents into a nationwide security crisis.

Kidnapping is a common law offence that requires that one person takes and carries a minor away by force or fraud without the consent of the person taken and without lawful excuse (Kaplan, et al, 1991). However, in Nigeria, kidnapping is becoming everyone's nightmare as we read nightmarish stories of people being abducted as they go about their daily business. Kidnapping for ransom has become an alarming trend in Nigeria, affecting individuals, families, and national development. According to the Armed Conflict

Location and Event Data Project (ACLED, 2023), the phenomenon that has escalated prominently was once limited to the Niger Delta but has now virtually spread to all regions with insurgents, criminals, and politically motivated actors exploiting it for financial and ideological gains.

In a bid to increase the ransom payable after kidnap, the kidnappers surreptitiously resulted to kidnapping wealthy businessmen, politicians and children traditional rulers and relatives from rich homes that could be blackmailed into coughing out a very huge ransom. There is no doubt that Nigeria is today becoming one of the major kidnapping capitals of the world and this has obvious negative implications for investments, the country's development trajectory and even the quality of governance (Raji, 2011).

The recorded cases of kidnapping in Nigeria as revealed by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2024 shows that between May 2023 and April 2024, no fewer than two million, two hundred and thirty five, nine hundred and fifty four (2,235,959) cases of kidnapping were recorded in the country.

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The Crime Experience and Safety Perception Survey (CESPS) 2024 study revealed that among the cases of kidnapping investigated, only the households that were victims of kidnapping, 65% of them paid ransom and

that the average ransom for kidnapping paid by them was N2.7m per incident, from an estimated total of N2.2 trillion paid during the period being reported and that the zone that paid highest ransom was the Northwest with N1.2 trillion while the South-East recorded the least payment of N85.4 billion ransom payment.

Base on the above escalating record of kidnapping cases in the country and the various approaches that the government have been putting in place to combat the menace like setting on Joint Task Force (JTF), open confrontation by security personnel that had proved abortive, hence this paper combat examining the theoretical background, highlight the causes, incidences, and its effects and then and to highlight and then identify some steps that are being taken by the government to tackle the heinous crime.

2. Theoretical Framework

To explore the escalating menace of kidnapping in Nigeria, several theoretical frameworks can be applied to support the menace. The following theories will be examined.

The Organized crime Theory (OCT): This theory provides a framework for understanding the kidnapping menace in Nigeria. The theory refers to a complex network of individuals and groups engaged in illicit activities, often with hierarchical structure and division of labour. These groups use violence, intimidation and corruption to achieve their goals of financial gain ransom demand being a primary objective. In this theory, kidnappers use technology like phones and social media to communicate with victims' families and negotiate ransom demands and corruption within the law enforcement agencies can enable kidnapping groups to operate with relative impunity.

Strain Theory: The theory was developed by Robert Merton and it states that societal pressures and strain can lead to engage in deviant behaviour. Merton states that when individual experience strain, they may feel frustrated, angry or desperate, leading them to seek alternative means to achieve their goals. Hence kidnapping can be seen as a deviant behaviour which individual can turn to when they feel strained and unable to achieve their goals through legitimate means. Hence, with poverty, unemployment, economic inequality and the emphasis material wealth in Nigerian culture, can create unrealistic expectations and pressure on individual that will lead to kidnapping to achieve their goals.

Anomie Theory: The theory was developed by Emile Durkheim and it states that breakdown in social norms and values can lead to deviant behaviour due to confusion and disorientation among individuals. Anomie can lead to deviant behaviour, including crime and violence, as individuals seek to achieve their goals through alternative means which may not be legitimate. The weakening of social norms and values and the prevalence of a get-rich-quick mentality in Nigeria can create an environment in which individuals are more

likely to engage in deviant behaviour including kidnapping.

Generally, the practice of kidnapping in Nigeria is related to the above analysis as justified in the various theories as the kidnappers have some of the factors identified in their analysis to back up their motives for embarking on their nefarious kidnapping business due to the economic melt-down in the country which they would use as an excuse for embarking on their activities.

3. Causes of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Many reasons have been identified as the motives for kidnapping in the country but among them are economic hardship and unemployment, political instability, proliferation of small arms, terrorism and banditry groups and ineffective judicial system among others.

3.1 Economic Hardship and Unemployment

The dwindling economy has increased the high rate of unemployment and the epileptic power supply is forcing many existing industries to close down thereby leading to mass- retrenchment of workers. As the economy continue to worsen, jobless young men took to crime and as such became ready-made tools in the hand of dubious people. Inyang (2009) posits that kidnapping in Nigeria is often associated with unemployment as he acknowledged the adage that "an idle man is the devil's workshop" to present the situation of unemployment in Nigeria as many able-bodied men and women are roaming the Nigerian streets in search of jobs that do not exists. With young unemployment, over 40% (NBS, 2023), economic desperation drives many young Nigerians into criminal activities. Kidnapping presents a lucrative, although illegal, alternative (Akinyemi and Akinbobola, 2022).

3.2 Weak Security Architecture

Corrupt practices within the law-enforcement agencies occasionally thwart serious efforts in crime prevention as the security personnel lack adequate resources to cope with criminal activities. Specifically, poor equipment, lack of training and inadequate personnel plague Nigeria's security forces. Corruption within the ranks further hinders effective policing (Ewa & Obiyan, 2021).

3.3 Political Instability and Corruption

In a country where there is political instability, poor governance, economic failure and corruption will be the order of the day and this will consequently lead to increase in the rate of social problem such as prostitution, armed robbery and kidnapping among others. Raji (2018) in Otuya (2010) states that poor leadership being provided by the country's leadership have resulted in mass-poverty, unemployment and unfair distribution of the nations resources that are potential causes of kidnapping in Nigeria. These factors have made the youths to engage in kidnapping and other criminal activities as a way of getting their share

of the nation's wealth.

3.4 Proliferation of Arms and Military Uniform

Political patronage of miscreants by the politicians during elections has always led to the proliferation of arms as these politicians often supplied weapons to these miscreants to use during campaigns and elections but after the elections these groups are always dumped or abandoned. These miscreants will have nothing to do with these arms than to use in kidnapping innocent people (Inyang & Ubong, 2013). Hence, the availability of over 6 million illegal small arms in Nigeria contributes to the rise in violent crime, including kidnapping (Small Arms Survey, 2021).

3.5 Poverty

In Nigeria, poverty is generally believed to be one of the prime causes of kidnapping as stated by Arewa (2013) that where a society is characterized by pervasive poverty and social injustice, the majority of the citizens will suffer untold hardship that may lead to criminality in order to survive. Globally, poverty is said to be a motivating condition to criminal activities. Many Nigerians are suffering from high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty and endemic conflict. Most of the kidnappers are lured by poverty. Poverty frustrate them into harsh and uncivilized thought and actions which later leads to choosing kidnapping as a profession.

3.6 Moral Decadence and Quest to Get Rich quick Syndrome

Moral decadence and quest to get rich quick syndrome, These have been identified as factors responsible for kidnapping. In Nigeria, nobody asks questions on how people make their wealth. A poor person today, can show up with an expensive car tomorrow and nobody dare to question him about the sources of his sudden wealth. Inyang (2009) asserts that people who have donated money to develop their communities are rewarded with chieftaincy title thereby creating a wrong impression in the minds of Nigerian youths who thereafter take to kidnapping. Inyang and Ubong (2013) also believed that greed is one of the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria as they stated that greed has caused many person to take part in the heinous criminal acts. According to them, it is greed that pushes perpetrators to brutalize and torture stranger and put his family through a cruel ordeal for a long duration.

3.7 Ineffective Judicial System

This is a major motive behind kidnapping as many cases especially that of kidnapping that are taken to court are often delayed unnecessarily thereby encouraging others to embark in the act. Ugwueze and Eze (2022) stated that delayed trials and weak prosecution always embolden criminals as many cases are dismissed or stalled indefinitely, thereby reducing deterrence thereby reducing deterrence (Ugwueze and Eze, 2022).

3.8 The Use of Hard Drugs

The habit of taking hard drugs by the youths often lead to violent crimes such as armed robbery, and kidnapping within the country. Various drug sale joints are emerging daily where criminal activities, are planned, perfected and executed. Some streets have been turned to no-go areas for law-abiding residents in the country as unscrupulous miscreants have turned them into ghettos and hide-outs for their hard drugs operation. After taking drugs, the addicts became high, fearless, bold and inhuman and can perpetrate kidnapping under this state of mind without qualms of conscience.

4. Recent Trends of Kidnapping in Nigeria

The kidnapping phenomenon has taken an alarming dimension in the country such that it has become a big business due to the fact that kidnapping that was hitherto known only in the Niger Delta is not only a daily occurrence in many parts of the country but that has greatly escalated in the Northern part of the country and that it has led to numerous live lost, which also crippled the socio-economic activities in the country (Yusuf, K. I. & Abdulahi A. A. 2020). Mass kidnapping by insurgents and other criminal groups have been a problem across the country's Northern regions since Boko-Haram abducted 276 school girls from Chibok in 2014 but of recent, the menace has been of great concern that the National Bureau of Statistics (2024) released an alarming recorded cases of kidnapping to be 2,235,954 cases between May 2023 and April 2024 in the country. This disturbing data was revealed in the crime, experience and safety (CESPS) 2024 recent notable escalating incidents of kidnapping across the country are presented below to show the prevalence of the crime in the country.

1. Train Passengers: Over 60 train passengers abducted in July 2022.
2. Traditional Rulers: Two traditional rulers killed in Ekiti State with kidnappers abducting some pupils from a private school.
3. 200 people, primarily women and children abducted in Borno state.
4. 287 pupils abducted from a government secondary school in Kunga town in Kaduna State.
5. 15 children abducted from a boarding school in Gidan Bakuso village, Sokoto.
6. Over 87 people kidnapped in Kajoro community
7. Over 200 internally displaced people abducted by suspected Boko Haram insurgents.
8. Over 50 women and children kidnapped in a raid on Kakin Dawa village.
9. Over 78 people killed and 80 others kidnapped across different states in the first week of (2025).
10. Over 100 people were kidnapped mostly women and children, Gana village of Shinkafi LGA of Zamfara State.
11. 2 Catholic Reverend Sisters kidnapped on Ufuma Road in Orumba North LGA of

- Anambra State.
12. Over 33 passengers kidnapped in Enugu-Ezike Community in Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area of Enugu State.
 13. Urban Kidnappings: Kidnapping now extends to urban centres, with wealthy individuals, expatriates, and politicians frequently targeted (Daily Trust, 2023).
 14. 20 medical and dental students were kidnapped by gunmen in North Benue, but were later released.
 15. 50 local vigilante were kidnapped by bandits who ambushed vehicles along Anka- Baggega Road near Darita Forest, Anka Local Government.
 16. 24 Federal University Students were kidnapped by bandits from their local campus accommodation in Sabon Gida Village, Gusau Local Government Area, Zamfara State.
 17. A gang of gunmen kidnapped 50 women and children in a raid on Kakiu Dawa in Nigeria's Zamfara State, according to police and residents.

5. Implications of Kidnapping in Nigeria

With the recent escalating trends of kidnapping in Nigeria, it is now obvious that the crime has assumed a very dangerous dimension which if allowed to continue unchecked might threaten the existence of the country. The kidnappers have spread their tentacles to all nooks and crannies of the country to the extent that there is no where that can be regarded as being safe in the country including Abuja, the federal capital. With this incident, Raji (2010) stated that Nigeria is like a nation at war with itself as "freedom is under arrest" in many part of the country, due to the fact that kidnappers have turned the many hitherto peaceful cities and towns to theatres of absurdity as the rich and famous are their targets. With this situation on ground, the menace has diverse undesirable implications on the citizens and the country as a whole. Some of these effects are highlighted below:

5.1 Psychological Trauma

Kidnapping always create physical and psychological fear of insecurity among the citizens as it enables almost all the citizens to live in fear of the possibility of being kidnapped anytime the kidnappers strike. This trend will retard the development of the nation as oil workers, the wealthy people and contractors will abandon their job for their safety at the detriment of discharging their duties especially the oil workers will not be able to produce oil which is the source of the country's economy. Moreover, victims of kidnapping and their families suffer from long-term emotional distress and anxiety (Okeke, 2021).

5.2 Economic Consequences

Economic activities in the country is currently in a state of disarray and the efforts of the government in attracting foreign investors into the country will be a mirage due to the nefarious activities of the kidnappers as many kidnapped people paid a lot of money as

ransom and this situation always affect both the state and individual economy drastically especially as some people use to go and borrow money to bail their relations out from the hand of kidnappers. The country will also loose a lot of money when expatriates working in the multi-national companies are kidnapped because this may lead to fear which will make many people to stay clear from their working environment and the adverse effect is always on the economy as a lot of revenue would be lost by the nation. There is no doubt that, these ransom payment, business disruptions and relocation contribute to economic instability (Obarisiagbon and Adebayo, 2022).

5.3 Social Consequences

General movements of the citizens during the day and night travelling have become a high risk and people are forced to present an unfinished look of poverty by not painting the external walls of their houses and many people are afraid of buying or using new vehicles for the fear of being kidnapped. Consequently, the citizens especially the wealthy ones have resorted to living fake like such as not displaying their wealth like spraying various currency denominations during social outings as a way of preventing a hostage taking. The social life of the people such as holding night parties or marketing in the evening had been abandoned. From the on-going, one could see that peace security are being seriously threatened in the country as people now live in perpetual fear, as people cannot move around freely despite their freedom of movement.

5.4 Educational Disruption

Due to the state of insecurity created in the land as a result of the activities of the kidnappers, parents always find it difficult to send their children to school as they could be abducted on their way to schools or while returning to their various homes. Cases of secondary school students mass abduction in their various schools such as the Chibok (2014), Dapchi (2018), Kankara (2020) and (Kuriga (2024) illustrate a disturbing trend of school kidnappings especially in the Northern part of the country. Hence, fear of abduction leads to school closures and reduced enrolment, particularly among girls (UNICEF, 2022).

5.5 Public Distrust in Government

Despite the efforts of the government in tackling the challenges of the kidnappers through the law enforcement agents, some citizens still doubt the sincerity of the government to put an end to kidnapping because the state has failed to ensure safety of lives and properties of the citizens. Not only this in order for politicians to perpetuate themselves in office, they always, equip their political thugs with arms to use in intimidating their opponents, through this way, kidnappers amass firearms and ammunitions for the effectiveness of their horrible act. With this action of politicians, the citizens always distrust the sincere intention of the leaders in solving the problem of kidnapping.

5.6 External Effect

The incidences of kidnapping since the advent of democracy in the country in 1999 has been negatively affecting the image of the country in the global scene as it will be difficult or almost impossible to attract foreign investors to Nigeria with its poor and dented image. This is reflected in Odey (2001) but quoted by Raji (2018) that “everywhere in the world, Nigerians are generally focused like dogs, dreaded like criminals, continuously approached like snakes and avoided like leper. This view presents Nigeria in a negative form as people globally are not only afraid of coming to Nigeria due to the activities of kidnappers but also for the general insecurity situation in the country as apart from the kidnappers activities, Boko Haram, sect, bandits and armed robbers have taken over some parts of the country especially in the Northern part of the country. This situation has negatively affected the image of the country to the outside world.

6. Way Forward/Government Efforts at Tackling Kidnapping

In order to eradicate the menace of kidnapping in the country, many steps have to be taken which will involve the government, the security agents and the citizens must be seriously involved as its worth noting that kidnapping remains a significant security concern in Nigeria, with various regions affected including the Northwest, North Central and Southwest. Base on the escalating trend of kidnapping in the country the following steps should be taken.

Security Sector Reform: The federal government has to intensify its efforts more at curbing kidnapping by improving funding, equipment and training for security agencies; recruitment should be merit-based (Aliyu & Usman, 2023). Moreover, there must be synergy among the various security agents in their efforts at combating the menace and modern sophisticated weapons should be purchased for them to overpower the kidnappers.

Installation of High Technology Equipment in the country to track down criminals in their place of abode as it is practiced in the developed countries such as Russia, America, Britain among others. The use of Technological Deployment Surveillance systems, biometric, and digital data bases can aid in detecting and preventing crimes.

Community Policing should be vigorously pursued to enable the citizens be vigilant in monitoring and reporting the activities of kidnappers as they live in our midst. This step, Agbiboa 2021, reiterated that local intelligence gathering and collaboration between the local people and the law-enforcement can enhance security.

Socio-Economic Investment: The government must take decisive steps to improve the economy in order to reduce the poverty level in the country. Poverty alleviation through education, job creation, empowerment programmes and skills development would be a great steps reducing criminal activities.

Public Awareness Campaigns: The government should carry out public awareness campaign to all nooks and crannies of the country to educate the citizens on safety measures through the National Orientation Agency. Through this step the citizens especially the youths would participate in the efforts at curbing the menace of kidnapping.

Judicial Reform: The government should make frantic efforts to carry out judicial reforms that will not only protect the lives of judges during the process of carrying out their duties but the judges should also hasten the process of their judgements in kidnapping cases as fast-tracking trials and enforcing harsher penalties for kidnapping will serve as a great deterrent.

Attitudinal Change: Considering the unabated increase in kidnapping inspite of all government efforts, there is the need for attitudinal change of the citizens through education when subjects such as Social Studies which is value-laden and charged with the responsibility of assisting learners in finding solutions to societal problems such as kidnapping are introduced as stated by Ogundare (2010). Social studies as a value-laden subject has the capacity to build sound morals and integrity in all facets of the society and it can serve as an aid to changing the attitude of the people towards eradicating kidnapping in the society.

7. Conclusion

Despite the various efforts of all the levels of government to curb the menace of kidnapping, the kidnapping activities are still thriving in the country, with its horrendous effects that pose threat to national cohesion and developing. Thus, there is the need for a coordinated response involving the government, civil society and international partners. It is only through integrated policies that address the root causes and consequences can Nigeria overcome this security crisis.

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