KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM IN NIGERIA: CONSEQUENCES AND THE SEARCH FOR PERMANENT SOLUTION

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Abstract

The recent wave of kidnappings in Nigeria has become a lucrative business for some young people, fueled by widespread unemployment and the desire to accumulate wealth, highlighting the country's dire situation and the need for urgent action. This illegal activity, which began as hostage-taking in the Niger-Delta region of the nation in order to draw attention to the marginalization of the area, appears to have evolved into an extremely skilled form of armed robbery with the goal of kidnapping people and holding them for ransom. Many residents, businesses, international investors, law enforcement agencies, and the government are now finding it difficult to understand how serious of an insecurity issue this is becoming. Therefore, this paper examines this new criminal trend and its effects on the country. Kidnapping for ransom is a crime against citizens' fundamental human rights and requires swift action by security personnel. There is no denying that one of the reasons for the current state of affairs in Nigeria is the high youth unemployment and excessive ambition and greed. This unpleasant development has a far-reaching negative impact on the socioeconomic development of the nation because many businesses and individuals who would have developed industries in the nation are now reluctant to do so. Effective governance is crucial to addressing insecurity threats like kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. Urgent attention from the Nigerian government and citizenry is needed to address this issue and ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens.

Keywords: Insecurity, Kidnapping, Hostage taking, Crime, Ransom

Introduction

Kidnapping constitutes a critical threat to life in Nigeria, with kidnaps happening pretty much consistently in various states of the country. This issue is not peculiar to Nigeria, as kidnapping and ransom requests have become increasingly usual in unsteady nations like those in Latin America (Phillips, 2011) and Africa. Kidnapping is a type of coordinated wrongdoing, its patterns, event and occurrence vary across time and space. The high instances of kidnapping in Nigeria project the country in a terrible light to the world and it lessens Nigeria's capability to draw in foreign direct investments (FDI). The NYA24's (2018) information on kidnap for ransom uncovered that the Asian has the biggest number of announced kidnapping cases across the world, trailed by Africa. While Africa was accounted for to be the second most continent witnessing pace of kidnap for ransom cases, Nigeria occupies the second situation as the country with the biggest number of kidnapping occurrences all through the world (NYA24, 2018).

In criminal law, kidnapping is the transportation of an individual against the individual's will, typically to bind the individual in bogus detainment without legitimate power (Amaize, Dayo and Okutu, 2019). Akinwotu (2021) declared that kidnapping is a wrongdoing of unlawful, powerful seizure and confinement of an individual or people against his/her or their desire, fully expecting installment of ransom or to dole out certain retribution or conflicts.

The current state of insecurity in the country has presented a huge problem for the country's security architecture, which is why it requires further disclosure to address the new trend in violent criminal attacks in Nigeria. The duplication of banditry and terrorist attacks in Nigeria has not only placed a huge financial burden on fiscal policy but has also forced an increment in the national government's security expenditure, Nwangwu & Ononogbu, (2014). For example, on May 8th, Anambra state police discovered a kidnapped Imo businessman dead after paying the N10 million ransom (Abraham, 2023).

Kidnapping has significantly affected individuals from all friendly and segment foundations in Nigeria. Instances of kidnapping have been accounted for when individuals are abducted from their homes, work environments or business, schools, and during train or street assaults. Kidnapped victim can be subject to torture, violence, and even death depending on their gender, social status, and willingness to cooperate with the kidnappers. Frequently, casualties are moved to various areas while ransoms from their families are requested through calls and the pressure of family members (Tade, Ojedokun, and Aderinto, 2020).

According to Punch (2024), as at January 20, no fewer than 176 residents of FCT were kidnapped since the assumption of office of president Tinubu on May 29, 2023. Also according to Data obtained by The ICIR from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), over 380 persons were kidnapped between December 1, 2023, and January 3, 2024, across Nigeria under President Bola Tinubu. Beyond Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), which has recorded several cases of kidnapping recently, there is heightened fear in no fewer than 19 states of the federation following a spike in the activities of kidnappers and their kingpins. (Vanguard, 2024). So worrisome is the situation that both residents and travellers passing through affected states are worried about their safety. Loss of lives and payment of ransom are now more regular than ever. Families and friends of kidnapped victims are left traumatised over the fate of their loved ones and also the agony of raising funds for ransom payments.

In acknowledgment of the earnestness and serious dangers kidnapping have caused to the security and welfare of individuals, the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 22 February, 2023 passed a bill which looks to amend the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, 2013, as well as restrict payment of ransom to kidnappers in the country. The bill recommends capital punishment for kidnappers for a situation where the casualty passes on. The Senate accepts that this will act as additional prevention and safeguard lives and property which is the essential obligation of any administration.

This paper is inspired by the need to do a scholarlyaccount on the pace of kidnappings as a rising crime in Nigeria over the couple of years and subsequently suggest critical solutions to this threat to human existence.

Concept of Kidnapping

Kidnapping in Nigeria is a difficult issue that has earned a ton of attention as of late. Kidnapping for ransom is presently a prospering undertaking for criminal components in the general public. Kidnapping like a few other sociology ideas has no general definition. Kidnapping is a lamentable occasion by which an individual is powerfully conveyed by another or gathering of people (abductors) who perhaps outfitted with perilous weapons, to an obscure area against the desire of their casualties with total disregard for anyone else (Abdulkabir, 2017). It is a serious criminal offense that involves the unlawful confinement or detainment of an individual against their will. Here is a more thorough definition. According to Fage and Alabi (2017), kidnapping is an intense or capture of an individual or a gathering of people because of reasons going from monetary, political, and strict to battle for self-determination. It is however believed that the people kidnapped are taken away as prisoners for ransom purposes. This suggests that, the rationale behind a kidnapping can change, yet it frequently includes ransom, political aims, or individual grudge.

There are common factors in the prior definitions. Kidnapping is forceful, against the desire of the person in question, and it is unlawful. It includes holding a person despite

their desire to the contrary and limiting their movement. This can be achieved through forceor trickery. Kidnapping can be executed by close partners, companions, friends and family members. The victim is denied their privileges to freedom of movement, access to partner, food and medical care. Many victims have died in the process leaving their loved ones traumatized and facing hardship occasioned by the loss of their breadwinner to kidnappers

As indicated by Nwosu and Elikwu, (2023), Kidnapping is additionally outlined to be of two kinds: one is simple and the other is aggravated kidnapping. While simple kidnapping involves moving an individual to a significant distance without the victim's assent utilizing power or threat, the aggravated kidnapping comprises of physical, mental torment and hardships which are rampant in Nigeria. The phenomenon is illegal, unacceptable and further typifies the weakness and failure of the state in protecting lives and property of citizens who despite being tax payers are also left to pay ransom for their release and freedom

Recently the nation has seen kidnapping of people in large scope. The first of its sort was kidnapping of the more than 276 Chibok young ladies in April 2014 from government girls secondary school situated in a town called Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria by the Boko Haram terrorist. A few other large-scale kidnappings have occurred from that point forward. There was the kidnapping of 110 Dapchi young ladies in March 2018 by a same terrorist group. Hence, criminal components like the bandits, killer herdsmen and the unknown gunmen began kidnapping individuals haphazardly with the end goal of gathering ransoms from the people in question or their relatives. Captured people were forced to pay ransom for their delivery. For example, when the Kaduna bound train was gone after on 28th March 2022; a portion of the travelers were killed and some other taken as prisoners, the kidnappers used that as a bargaining tool to free some of their members detained in several correctional facilities in the country. The captives had to pay extremely high ransom for their release. It very well may be contended that the greater part of kidnapping in the current period is for ransom. Notwithstanding, there are likewise circumstances where individuals were kidnap for ritual purposes or in any event, for a few other individual reasons.

Emergence and Prevalence of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Researchers are yet to settle on the specific year kidnapping started in the country (Nwoba 2019). The end of the nationwide civil war in January 1970 saw the rise and boundless utilization of guns in burglary in Nigeria'. The nationwide war gave a stage to the multiplication of hazardous weapons, which end up in the possession of vicious hoodlums. Accordingly, violent crimes like killing, assault, kidnapping for ransom, militancy, cultism, started to saturate the general public and gain unmistakable prominence in Nigeria.

Chinwokwu and Michael (2019) expressed that on 4th July 1984, the Nigerian government supported the kidnapping of Alhaji Umaru Dikko, a previous minister of Transport in Alhaji Shehu Shagari's National Party of Nigeria government. This kidnapping adventure was ordered by General Muhammadu Buhari, the then head of state in Nigeria, with the help of the Israeli Mossad in London (Ogefere, 2015). That maybe, denoted as the first recorded instance of kidnapping in Nigerian.

The agitations being canvassed by the Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta for resource control claiming that Niger Delta is in disarray as a result of marginalization, environmental degradation and deficiencies in infrastructure. While battling for the marginalization of the Niger Delta region occasioned by year periods of disregard and environmental degradation, those developments transformed into aggressiveness keeping oil workers locked down, and kidnapping for ransom (Alumuna et.al., 2017).

Recently in 2017 a Pastor's wife named Victoria Elijandu was captured and detained that very day that she was saved by officials of the ant- kidnapping crew after an examination embroiled her in her kidnap. She admitted that she coordinated the kidnapping to collect N3m from her church members since she was an orphan from a poor background and needed to collect the cash to help her kin in giving their parents befitting burial.

The rate of kidnapping in Nigeria has kept on rising unabatedly and its spread has kept on standing out across the nation and beyond. Accessible literature uncovers that the pace of kidnapping has dramatically increased up until this point. For example, statistics uncovered that there were 484 kidnapping casualties in 2017, the figure increased to 987 the next year then 1,386 in 2019 and 2860 in 2020 (Adebajo, 2021). Between January 1 and June 30, 2021, somewhere around 2, 944 individuals were purportedly kidnaped (Adebajo, 2021).

Ezegwu et al. (2022) uncovered that somewhat recently, in excess of 8,000 individuals have been killed in the provinces of Kebbi, Sokoto, Niger and Zamfara. It is accounted for that between January to December 2020, more than 3,312 individuals (counting 373 females and 574 youngsters) were kidnapped across the 36 States in the nation including Abuja which is the Federal Capital Territory (WANEP, 2021). In this period, the Northern part of the nation represents the most noteworthy figure in kidnapping (1,070). This is trailed by South-South (73) South-West with 36 casualties. Although the Southeast recorded the most reduced number of kidnappings, the new spate of kidnappings and killings has continued to trigger unrest across the Southeast States as the inefficiency of the security intelligence and poor surveillance system of security agencies is being brought to the fore (WANEP, 2021).

In a further assessment of the frequency of kidnapping, Okoli (2022) stressed that more than 3000 individuals were hijacked in the first six months of 2021, the figure for January 2021 alone has been accounted for as 571. Kidnapping keeps on adding to insecurity in the country. It has advanced among terrorists and bandits in Northern Nigeria, militant and cultists in the Niger Delta as well as ritualist of the western and eastern parts of the country. The rise of kidnapping is likewise reflected in how much cash paid by captives and their families to releasehostages. For example, it was assessed that more than $18million was paid as ransom in Nigeria between January 2011 and March 2020 (Okoli, 2021). Comparably Oguntola 2022 announced that Nigerians paid 653.7 million naira ($1.2 million) as ransom between July 2021 and June 2022. The security report additionally revealed that 6.531 billion was requested in ransom between 2011 to 2022.

Factors Contributing to Kidnapping in Nigeria

Researchers have distinguished many elements that are responsible for kidnapping in Nigeria. One of the social determinants of kidnapping is social instability. The civil war gave an open door to the multiplication of dangerous weapons, which end up in the possession of lawbreakers. Thus, crimes like, murder, assault, kidnapping and so on became the other of the day. Ugwuoke, (2019) contended that the rise of militant groups was at first pointed toward making mindfulness and setting expectations for compensation and expanded infrastructural advancement. This has developed into kidnapping with youth involving in hostility and kidnapping for ransom has becoming normal and a thriving business for young people in many urban communities across Nigeria.

With instruments of brutality in the possession of political hooligans, some frustrated and disregarded youth set up militant camps, and became engaged with the annihilation of oil establishments, kidnapping and abducting expatriate oil workers for ransom. A few researchers have contended that it was on this stage that militant leaders in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta, arose (Ebienfa, 2011; Manby, 2016).

As per Obarisiagbon and Aderinto (2018), there are a few flaws in the justice administration; they blamed the legal officials for deliberately not applying the rule of law after cash has traded hands. The Nigeria's justice process is laced with corruption thus, empowering suspected kidnappers to go on in their rule of dread and unlawful lucrative endeavor. Corruption seems, by all accounts, to be the worst thing about the justice system as a few appointed judges even at the supreme court have been blamed for corrupt practices with the help and conspiracy of very senior legal practitioners.

Aminu, et al. (2020) examined the antecedents of kidnapping incidents in Nigeria from the viewpoint of security personnel in Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed

that, the topmost precursors of kidnapping incidence in Nigeria as perceived by security personnel in Kwara State are unequal distribution of common wealth, high prevalence of poverty and the lack of basic needs of citizens. In a related development, Nwoba (2019) adopted mixed method research design in examining governance, security and kidnapping in Southeast of Nigeria: The focus on imperative for State Police. The study found that kidnapping was triggered by centralization of security outfits which promoted lack of knowledge of local security peculiarities and inadequate personnel as some communities live without police post. A critical look at the research outcome reemphasizes the need for community policing.

As indicated by Buba and Musa (2023), A few reasons have been proposed to explain the hidden reasons for kidnapping in the Nigerian setting, which include:

(a) Societal devaluation: The decline in respect for human existence and a preference for lavish behavior has led to an increase in contemporary crimes and social maladies in Nigeria. The prevalence of kidnapping is attributed to a social tendency towards materialism and covetousness. (Okoli (2014).

(b) The issue of an inadequate policing system in Nigeria can be attributed to several factors. One of the primary drivers is the inadequate funding allotted to security institutions in Nigeria. This absence of monetary assets hampers their capacity to complete their obligations successfully. Inadequate funding to security institutions hampers their ability to fulfill their obligations, while bribery and corruption among security agents exacerbate the problem. Insufficient technology utilization in policing operations also contributes to the system's inefficiency. Additionally, the lack of a cohesive framework within Nigerian security institutions undermines the effectiveness of security measures, as regional governments lack direct authority over security facilities (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018).

(c) The rising prevalence of abduction incidents in Nigeria is attributed to the government's inability to address issues of insecurity, such as poverty, unemployment, and high inflation rates. This failure to address these fundamental concerns has led to a significant challenge to the government's responsibility of ensuring sufficient security measures to effectively address kidnapping (Agunyai & Ojakorotu 2021).

(d) The escalating incidence of unemployment in Nigeria can be attributed to a multitude of variables. Adebayo's (2013) research highlights the widespread impoverishment and unemployment in Nigeria, attributed to the government's failure to provide adequate infrastructure and industries. Factors such as the expansion of the educated workforce, rural-urban mobility, and rapid population increase contribute to the emergence of kidnapping as a lucrative activity. Jobless young individuals may resort to abduction activities to sustain their livelihood. Poverty also plays a role in the occurrence of abduction incidents, as parents' inability to provide sustenance, education, health-related concerns, and other adversities render young individuals susceptible to exploitation and recruitment by delinquent elements within society.

(e) Illiteracy significantly contributes to the issue, as many individuals lack formal education or have stopped it. Education is crucial for moral development and cognitive abilities, but lack can lead to negative attitudes.

(f) The "get rich quick syndrome" is a phenomenon characterized by young individuals who desire to accumulate significant financial resources without effort or proper procedures, leading to questionable methods to achieve their financial goals.

Challenges Battling the Control of Kidnapping in Nigeria

The performance of law enforcement agencies in combating kidnapping and violent crimes is influenced by various factors, including endemic corruption, inadequate manpower, low education and training, lack of expertise, inadequate equipment, poor appearance, poor training facilities, and poor

service conditions (Adegoke, 2014). Additionally, poor attitudes, lack of trust between police and citizens, and endemic corruption among officers contribute to constant conflicts and tension(Kamiru, 2014).

Ajayi (2014) emphasized the stress on Nigeria Police's effectiveness due to inappropriate policing, reactive strategies, brutality against citizens, corruption, and poor intelligence analysis. Alemika (2013) argued that structural, political, socio-economic, and cultural factors, along with institutional inadequacies, prevent the Nigeria Police force from performing their duties satisfactorily and complying with the rule of law, contributing to the deepening crime rate in the country.

The Nigeria police has been criticized for its ineffective and corrupt practices, leading to a growing issue of kidnapping in the country. Unemployment is cited as a contributing factor to the rise in kidnapping, as many able-bodied individuals are seeking non-existent jobs. This frustration and mounting responsibilities have led to the involvement of many idle young persons in criminal activities, including kidnapping (Ikezue, 2023). Eke and Christopher (2019) argued that increased inequality, injustice, ethno-religious conflicts, porous borders, rural urban drift, poverty, and unemployment contribute to the rise in kidnapping in Nigeria.

According to Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014), the most obvious challenges that the Police and other law enforcement agencies in the country face in kidnapping include:

* Insufficient intelligence within the Nigerian police force. The Nigeria Police Force faces a significant challenge in identifying, infiltrating, recruiting, and gathering actionable intelligence, which is crucial for an accurate onslaught against abductors in Nigeria, particularly in the south-east. Intelligence work is strategic and requires long-term investment, including keeping sleeper agents in place. It is physically, emotionally, and intellectually demanding, requiring self-service, discipline, and dedication from operational commanders and agent handlers. Solomon Arase, a police expert in crime onslaught strategy, argues that modern policing is intellectually driven due to factors like globalization, technological advancement, and increasing crime dynamics, necessitating the emergence of novel policing concepts.
* Lack of sophisticated equipments in the Nigerian Police Force hinders effective tracking of kidnapping incidents, thereby hindering the speed and accuracy of investigations.
* The incapacitation of network providers in giving data about their network users who utilize their phone lines in each criminal and kidnapping activity to execute the business that starts and ensures the payment of the ransom requested for the release of their captive.
* Porous border surveillance and control, which brings about the transportation and proliferation of modern arms and ammunition in the nation that out-powers those utilized by the security experts to battle the crime.
* Insider or collaborator's variable of a few trustworthy agents in the Nigeria Police Force and other security institutions, global organizations, banks and bureaus of finance, which makes data effectively open for the criminals and furthermore makes crime inquiry and tracking difficult.

Conclusion

The frequency of kidnapping in Nigeria is believed to be on the increase, with a predominance across every single region of the nation. It is argued that no area in Nigeria is excluded from the unavoidable nature of this issue. This issue is a reason to worry, as seen by the circumstances in the South-South, South-East, North-East, North-West as well as South-West regions of Nigeria. Kidnapping is a violent crime that threatens peace, law, and order in Nigeria. It can be planned for ransom, resulting in many deaths and forcing people to sell their livelihoods to pay ransoms. Poverty has a causal relationship between kidnapping and crime, with jobless young people engaging in kidnapping activities for financial gain. The fast money syndrome and moral degradation contribute to the prevalence of abduction in Nigeria. The crime is driven by the financial gain from ransom payments, which serve as a

means of sustenance. The prevalence of this crime is a cause for concern and a call for action.

Recommendations

This paper suggests addressing the issue of kidnapping in Nigeria by promoting attitudinal change and addressing various income sources. It suggests that individuals should be encouraged to recognize their children's sources of income and support the destitute. Jobless individuals should be provided with skills and innovative abilities, and human strengthening programmes should be established by wealthy individuals, the government, and a coordinated private sector to reduce the country's joblessness rate. Government organizations should be fortified to control shortcomings and insufficiencies, with policing leading the fight against corruption and other indecencies that fuel guilt. The focus should be on strengthening joint efforts between security forces and the public, particularly in identifying individuals involved in illegal activities. The government should prioritize the acquisition of modern technology to enhance their surveillance capabilities. The established structure should clearly outline strict discipline for individuals involved in kidnapping, thus, preventing those currently involved in these illegal activities.

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