

THE RISING INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: INTERROGATING THE LINKAGE BETWEEN POVERTY AND KIDNAPPING

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Abstract

The increasing number of kidnappings and associated security threats in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. This has precipitated the death of many innocent citizens in rural and urban centers maiming and extortion of money or other valuables. The act of kidnapping entails the utilisation of physical coercion or the expression of menacing behaviour to accomplish a certain objective. Existing literature on kidnapping tends to focus more on weak security architecture and lack of peacebuilding mechanisms as the major cause of kidnapping in Nigeria and neglects the socio-economic factors. However, the study tends to shift away from what dominates the literature to focus on the high rate of poverty level in the country and interrogates kidnapping in Nigeria. The paper employs the use of secondary data in its discussion. The paper notes that the level of pauperism is very high in Nigeria, as this promotes crimes and other social vices in the country. Thus, the struggle for survival is the rationale for increasing kidnapping in Nigeria. It argues further that poverty is the major cause of incessant kidnapping, leading to Nigeria's insecurity of lives and property. The paper, therefore, concludes that not until poverty, unemployment, and impunity are reduced to the barest minimum, insecurity as generally represented by kidnapping in the state will still be on the rise. Therefore, there is no place to be safe in Nigeria. The study employed primary and secondary sources to elicit information on the complexity of the nexus between poverty and kidnapping as a concept. The primary sources will involve in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires. Secondary data was sourced through texts and journal articles to complement data from primary sources. Data collected was analysed through quantitative methods to articulate issues and intrigues that involved structured questionnaires, alongside the in-depth interviews were carefully evaluated to read between the lines to provide an accurate account of enquiry.

Keywords: *Insecurity, kidnapping, poverty, crimes, unemployment*

Introduction

The rate at which insecurity is increasing in Nigeria is alarming. This includes cattle rustling, armed banditry, armed robbery, terrorist activities, kidnapping, and many more. The primary objective of this article involves an in-depth analysis of comprehensive security concerns faced by Nigerians and also to delve into one of the commonest and rising security threats, which is kidnapping. According to Mary and Ndubuisi (2014), kidnapping is an act of force to take someone or people captive or hostage to achieve the desired objective. Poverty is indeed a significant factor that contributes to various forms of insecurity, including armed robberies, abductions, kidnapping, and

other criminal activities. The link between poverty and kidnapping requires a comprehensive approach that includes economic development, social reforms, and good governance

However, the occurrence of abduction is not a recent development in Nigeria or elsewhere. In the past, kidnapping in Nigeria was to press demands and show displeasure or grievances to the government such as the kidnapping in the Niger Delta region on February 25, 2006, over the incessant exploration of oil and marginalization of the region by multinational companies Babangida (2022). In short, kidnapping could not be regarded as a serious security threat and not pronounced in the country then (Obarisiagbon & Aderinto, 2018). However, It is indisputable that the occurrence of kidnapping has become a prevalent problem in Nigeria. Indeed, a day will not pass without a case of kidnapping and collection of ransom (economic gain) or death resulting from abduction recorded in Nigeria. According to Babangida (2022), the Northwest recorded 746 abductions, 547 in North Central, 61 in North East, 53 in South East, and 44 and 33 from South West Nigeria between January to March 2022. Indeed, Nigeria has turned into a 'criminal state' with security threats affecting the lives and property in the country. Based on this, Nigeria has been ranked as having the highest crime rate and 17th among the least peaceful countries in the world (Dokua, 2022).

Furthermore, Nigeria has been ranked to be the 3rd highest in kidnapping cases. This act is done through the collection of ransom, extortion, or commercialization of the victims. Also, cases are being reported of family members kidnapping each other for economic gains. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2003) divided the act into two types: kidnapping- for ransom and hostage-taking has provided a more precise definition of kidnapping, which encompasses the act of seizing or detaining an individual and using threats of harm or continued detention to coerce a third party into complying with specific instructions. To Ugwuoke (2011), and Walsh and Poole (2019), kidnapping is an act of abducting or forcefully capturing a person or group of persons with the intent of depriving them of their fundamental freedom. However, the most common or peculiar to Nigeria is kidnapping for ransom or economic gain depending on their level of affluence or influence. It is important to note that abduction victim is not limited to rich people alone but also to poor people in Nigeria. Thus, the ransom requested depends on how influential or poor the victim is. There is no doubt that kidnapping has become a normal business in Nigeria and occurs in an open space. People can no longer go with their normal daily activities without the fear of not being kidnapped.

Nigeria is regarded as a nation flowing with milk and honey, yet the majority of the citizens live in abject poverty. Government faulty policies pursued since 1999 have left the people pauperized and decimated. These are manifested in increasing poverty, kidnapping, the total collapse of social security, poor medical care, etc. Poverty and kidnapping as social problems have remained the major development challenges in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the relationships between poverty, kidnapping on national insecurity in the country. Thus this research study is divided into five sections, the introductory, conceptual clarification of terms, incessant kidnapping enterprise in Nigeria coupled with analysis and conclusion.

Contextualising Poverty and Kidnapping

There is a lack of consensus among scholars and experts regarding a universally accepted definition of poverty on a global scale. To some scholars, poverty could be defined using the economic state of the country, while others regard the political condition as the yardstick for defining poverty. According to the United Nations Organisation (2020), poverty encompasses more than just the absence of income or resources, extending to the absence of sustainable livelihoods. Poverty encompasses a range of interconnected challenges, such as inadequate food

security, malnutrition, restricted educational opportunities, limited access to essential services, social marginalisation, and exclusion from meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. World Bank (2001) refers to poverty as a lack of opportunity, empowerment, and security. Blackwood and Lynch (1994) define poverty using the criteria of consumption and expenditure. There is no doubt that from the definitions above, it could be deduced that the concept of poverty is multifaceted. Indeed, poverty contributed in no small measure to the act of kidnapping. This is because many youths see this act as a means of surviving the country's economic hardship. For instance, the World Bank 2022 reports that 4 in 10 Nigerians live below the national poverty line (World Bank Report, 2022). It was also reported that the poverty rate jumped from 40.1% in 2018/2019 to 42.0% in 2020 and 42.6% in 2022. The statistics here indicate that poor people in Nigeria will be 95 million at the end of the year 2022 (Olawoyin, 2022). It is also important to note that the end of the Covid-19 pandemic brought about an increase in the poverty rate in Nigeria in particular and the developing world as a whole. Therefore, Due to the substantial rise in poverty rates across the nation, kidnapping has now become an alternative for people to meet their basic needs and survive the hardship of the economy. There are countless cases of people being kidnapped for ransom, such as the kidnapped of the former deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Ibadan along with some two students demanding 50 million and 10 million for each student as a ransom (Oloniniran, 2022). Poverty and kidnapping cause social disquiet and it is the harbinger of the spate of crimes, perennial youth unrest and unstable socio-economic structure that have bedevilled several nations. Adeoye (2022) posits that economic deprivation, frustration, and desperation are the underlying causes of national insecurity in Nigeria's fourth republic.

Ibrahim (2007) opines that kidnapping is an act of forcefully taking someone hostage without the consent of the family to obtain ransom from the victim. Kidnapping as we have today in Nigeria is mainly for socio-economic relevance by those involved to ease the harsh economic realities in the country. Indeed, the lack of basic social amenities and a meaningful source of livelihood are the major causes of the incessant kidnapping in Nigeria. Thus, kidnapping is now seen as a means of strategy to cope with the economic hardship in the country, especially among the unemployed youths in Nigeria.

Table 1: Selected Cases of Kidnapping in Nigeria for the Year 2022

NO	DATE	VICTIM	PLACE	RANSOME	RELEASED
1.	January 1	Binta (wife) 2 daughters (Maryam) and (Hafsat)	Zamfara	10 million	Released
2.	February, 17	Salimot Ajibola	Ogun State	3 million	Released
3.	March, 22	26 Residents	Kaduna State	Undisclosed	Killed
4.	March, 28	77 Train Passengers	Kaduna State	Over 6 billion	8 killed
5.	March, 30	David Tony	Kaduna State	5 million	Death
6.	May, 29	Samuel Kanu-Uche	Abia State	100 million	Released
7.	July, 18	Sikiru Ayinde	Osun State	500,000	Released
8.	July, 19	Christopher Bakare	Oyo State	5 million	Released
9.	July, 22	Dr. Rasheed	Oyo State	3 million	Released
10.	July, 28	Rachael Opadele	Oyo State	Undisclosed	Death
11.	July, 28	Olugbenga Owolabi	Oyo State	5 million	Death
12.	October, 5	Chief Asaolu	Osun State	Undisclosed	Death
13.	October, 23	10 Students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka	Enugu State	Undisclosed	Released
14.	October, 28	Hamza Harisu	Kano	5 million	Killed
15.	October, 30	Olayemi Adejare	Oyo State	2.2 million	Released

16.	October, 30	Oluwatobi Orekoya	Oyo State	2.2 million	Released
17.	October, 30	4 Travelers	Ekiti State	4 million	Released
18.	November, 5	Magistrate Jumoke Bamigboye	Kwara State	50 million	Released
18.	November, 7	80 Passengers	Zamfara State	Undisclosed	8 killed
19.	November, 7	Hannah Opeyemi	Ogun State	2 million	Released
20.	November, 8	Rev. Fr. Abraham Kunat	Kogi State	Undisclosed	Death
21.	November, 9	20 Children (4-10 Years)	Niger State		
22.	November, 19	Richard Omosehin	Ondo State	100 million	
23.	November, 21	Hon. Musa Markas Masoyi	Bauchi State		Not Yet Released
24.	December, 1	Oba Clement Jimoh Olukotun	Ondo State		Not yet Released

Source: compilation done by the authors 2023

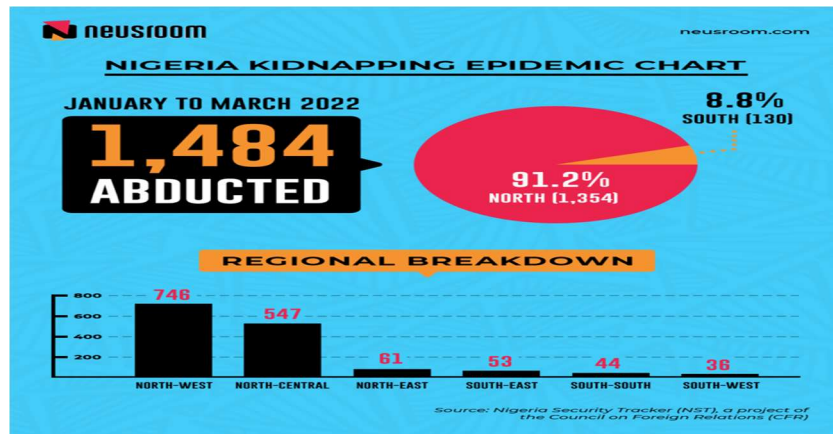


Figure 1: Nigeria Kidnapping Epidemic Charts

This mustn't be a comprehensive list of kidnappings in the year 2022. From Figure 1, 1,484 Nigerians were abducted between January to March 2022. From Table 1 and Figure 1, it could be deduced that kidnapping has become a major activity in Nigeria, especially for ransom or economic gains. This also resonates with Dakucus (2022) argument that kidnapping is a lucrative business in Nigeria because 95% of those involved, do it with impunity and enjoy the proceeds accrued from the act. Furthermore, he divided kidnapping in Nigeria into three types. First, is retail kidnapping, which involves family, friends, and many more. In this case, the main person (who in this case could be a spouse) arranged for the husband or wife to be kidnapped for immediate financial gains. Second, medium-scale kidnapping has to do with the hijacking of buses on the road to abduct the passengers as well as attack the communities. Lastly, terrorist abduction could be referred to as an organised crime on a large scale involving multiple actors to seek government attention. To him, kidnapping has been able to thrive due to a lackadaisical attitude prioritizing the needs and welfare of the citizens. Beyond this, is the act of corruption that has eaten deep into the society among those at the corridor of power, limiting the poor to be poorer leading youth to engage in unlawful means to accumulate wealth for societal survival. Therefore, the inability to survive or meet basic needs made the act of kidnapping a popular profession, as it remains the easiest way to make money without being punished in Nigeria.

The Flourishing Kidnapping Enterprise in Nigeria

Adeoye (2022), argued that kidnapping which started as a low-level insecurity in Nigeria has now become a multibillion-naira business and expanding with impunity. This has been associated with the rising number of youths and other graduates who are not engaged in any meaningful economic activities. According to Bello (2017), empirical evidence indicates a lack of qualitative economic policies for Nigerians and a high rate of unemployment have resulted in a notable increase in the participation of a substantial number of young individuals in criminal activities. The negative impact on the economy is particularly evident due to the participation of both men and women who possess physical capabilities in the act of kidnapping, which is driven by its profitability. According to Daily Trust in 2020, a total of 1,570 Nigerian individuals were claimed to have been abducted in 366 separate incidents between January and November. Daily Trust research further finding indicates that within this specified timeframe, the enterprise of kidnapping generated total revenue of more than N311 million through the collection of ransom payments from the relatives of the abducted individuals. It is worth noting that the perpetrators initially wanted a sum of over N6.9 billion from their victims. It has been determined that the monetary compensation received did not encompass the substantial sums of naira disbursed by certain families who choose to remain silent due to intimidation or solely for the sake of maintaining tranquillity.

In the study conducted by Adeniyi et al. (2020), it was found that throughout November in 2020, a total of forty-one instances were documented. According to Adeniyi et al. (2020), in terms of frequency, reported this:

...there has been an upsurge in kidnapping in Nigeria with 41 cases reported in November. The trend has spread to some tertiary institutions in Kaduna State while the Federal Capital Territory was also not spared with 31 reported cases in 11 months. Major arteries including the Abuja-Kaduna and Abuja-Lokoja roads have turned into kidnappers' hotspots, raising fears in commuters. The young and old have been victims. From the seven-year-old boy kidnapped in Katsina for which N3m ransom was demanded, to the 60-year-old Zainab Musa kidnapped in Niger State, many Nigerians are living in fear of the unknown.

The situation is more alarming, particularly due to the involvement of national security organisations in the ongoing siege to revamp the country from the guillotine of kidnappers. In the year 2020, security personnel were also subjected to incidents of abduction. The individuals who were affected by this incident were a group of 12 Assistant Superintendents of Police (ASPs) who were forcibly apprehended and subsequently transported to an undisclosed location. Furthermore, it is worth noting that an additional incident involves the abduction of 10 officials from the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and four officers from the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in September and February, respectively. In September 2020, a member of the Department of State Security (DSS) was subjected to a kidnapping incident. The Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar, expressed concern about the significant level of insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in Northern Nigeria, which is considered the agricultural hub of the country. The frequency and severity of this issue have raised alarm about its impact on the nation. According to the leader's perspective, the actions undertaken by the kidnappers have resulted in a state of insecurity for both the general populace and the agricultural community. The Sultan of Sokoto is a prominent figure in Nigerian society, Alhaji Sa'ad Abubakar was quoted thus:

.... The North is currently experiencing a significant increase in bandit activity, as local inhabitants remain vulnerable and unaware. These bandits effortlessly

navigate around various locations, including residential areas, villages, and marketplaces, openly brandishing AK-47 rifles. They brazenly engage in transactions for essential goods and services, even going as far as collecting small denominations of money, all without encountering any resistance from the security forces. The security situation in Northern Nigeria has become a cause for concern. Several weeks ago, a tragic incident occurred in Sokoto, resulting in the loss of life for over 76 individuals within a single day. I accompanied the governor to express condolences and solidarity with the impacted community. Regrettably, narratives about the North are not prominently featured in the media. It is well acknowledged that the Northern region lacks a robust media infrastructure to effectively report on the heinous acts committed by these criminal groups. There exists a prevailing belief among individuals that the Northern regions are characterised by a high degree of safety. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that this assumption does not align with reality. Indeed, it can be said that this particular location represents the most unfavourable setting inside the nation since it is plagued by the presence of marauders that traverse the towns, residences, and commercial areas brandishing their AK-47 rifles, all while facing minimal opposition. (Adeniyi et al, 2020:20).

The aforementioned phenomenon is shown by the occurrence that transpired shortly after the aforementioned testimony was provided, whereby a group of individuals alleged to be affiliated with Boko Haram perpetrated the killing of more than 44 rice farmers who were harvesting their crops in Zabarmari, a village in the northeast region that is renowned for its high output of rice farming activities (Murtala, 2022). The agricultural workers were subjected to an assault while engaged in rice cultivation activities at the location known as Garin Kwashebe. Despite the United Nations' estimation of 110, the Nigerian government categorically refuted this claim. Nevertheless, a further 39 corpses were subsequently unearthed in the vicinity (Abdulkareem, 2022).

Before the occurrence involving the act of slicing the throats of rice farmers, reports were indicating that bandits in the northern region of Nigeria were requesting obligatory "harvest fees" from farmers as a prerequisite for accessing their farms both at the commencement and the end of the farming season. According to a report by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC 2020), it has been observed that a limited number of farmers who engage in cultivation activities are prohibited from harvesting their crops unless they fulfil a financial obligation ranging from N300,000 (about \$800) to N900,000 (approximately \$2,400) every village. Based on the BBC report, it has been observed that peasant farmers in Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina states incur expenses of up to one million Naira for crop harvesting. In certain instances, criminal organisations resurface, abducting a portion of the agricultural workers, and subsequently requesting an increased sum of money as a form of ransom. A subset of agricultural workers has vocally appealed to the government for assistance. As an illustration, the inhabitants and agricultural farmers of Dankurmi Village, located in Maru Local Government Area of Zamfara State, are obligated to remit a substantial sum of N800,000 as taxes and N900,000 as fees for their harvest activities. The assurance of protection for these individuals was not ensured, since they were occasionally subjected to abductions and their agricultural lands were encroached upon after making payments. In the context of the Sabuwa Local Government area in Katsina state, farmers are compelled to engage in negotiations with bandits as a prerequisite for crop harvesting activities. This necessity arises from the unfortunate occurrence of multiple farmer fatalities at the hands of bandits within the aforementioned local government area during the year 2020. The

prevalence of the actions conducted by these abductors and marauders has reached a level of notoriety wherein they communicate their intentions to assault communities or extort substantial sums of money from them as a prerequisite for granting permission to engage in agricultural activities.

Similarly, farmers residing in Yankara in the Faskari Local Government Area of Katsina state, as well as many neighbouring communities, were also subjected to payment demands in exchange for a four-week extension to complete their harvesting activities. Certain state governors have faced allegations of disbursing public funds as ransom payments to criminal groups. In a recent development, the inhabitants of the Dan Aji hamlet located in the Faskari Local Government Area of Katsina State witnessed the successful intervention of Governor Bello Matawalle of Zamfara State. This intervention resulted in the liberation of 26 abducted girls, following a monetary transaction amounting to N6.6 million (equivalent to around \$17,000) (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020).

While the aforementioned cases have been focused on the northern region, it is important to acknowledge that the repercussions are experienced throughout, since there has been a persistent increase in the prices of food items and other agricultural products. This was also reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBC) in November 2020, on the increase in food prices such as chicken products, eggs as well other commodities during the period under review. The report estimated a year-on-year increase of 5.48 per cent and a month-on-month increase of 1.47 per cent, which resulted in an average cost of N480.76 in September 2020.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the mean cost of one kilogramme of tomatoes exhibited a year-on-year growth of 31.81 per cent and a month-on-month increase of 7.22 per cent, reaching N307.63 in October 2020, compared to N286.92 in September 2020. According to the report, there was a year-on-year increase of 38.62% and a month-on-month increase of 2.75% in the average price of 1kg of imported high-quality rice sold in loose form. Specifically, the price rose from N516.13 in September 2020 to N530.32 in October 2020. In a similar vein, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that there was a year-on-year increase of 35.11 per cent in the average price of 1kg of yam tuber. The price, however, exhibited a month-on-month reduction of -1.12 per cent, declining from N245.62 in September 2020 to N242.87 in October 2020 (Ejike, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

In a similar vein, Nigeria, formerly a significant producer has undergone a transition of a substantial importer of all its consumable goods, including tropical produce. Until the end of the 1970s, Nigeria held a prominent position as a significant producer of palm produce. Currently, despite the imposition of restrictions by the Federal Government on the importation of palm oil, there has been a significant increase of 24.5 per cent in the influx of edible products (Adegbesan, 2021). The results of the study indicated that the nation had imported a total of 1.2 million metric tonnes of crude palm oil, with an estimated value of N368.8 billion, during the period spanning from 2018 to October 2020. Based on statistics provided by the United States Department of Trade (USDOT), the quantity of imports in the United States amounted to 397,000 tonnes in 2018 and increased to 400,000 tonnes in the subsequent year. During the period spanning from January to September 2020, the cumulative import volume amounted to 420,000 tonnes, representing a growth rate of 14.29 per cent compared to the previous year's shipping. In 2019, it was determined that importers expended approximately \$500 million to transport 600,000 tonnes of palm oil into the nation from leading worldwide producers.

Conclusion

The situation in Nigeria presently is such that the people are living in fear of food insecurity. This is because the act of kidnapping has become a lucrative business and coping strategy for the economic hardship of the country. It is recognized that a great number of challenges impeding the growth and development of Nigeria are self-induced, such as the lack of Nigerian government efforts to address developmental problems in the country. This includes a high rate of unemployment, lack of basic infrastructure, high cost of food commodities and state of underdevelopment in the sub-region, high level of indebtedness of countries in the sub-region, uneven economic development, lack of industrial and technological break-through, poverty and governance challenges among others. Nigeria's security situation has over the years deteriorated owing to poor governance, political desperation and the government's inability to address the challenges of poverty, kidnapping and other social vices in the country.

Furthermore, the study concluded that poverty-induced insecurity impacted negatively the developmental process truncated the cultural evolution and disorientated the mentality of an average Nigerian man. The study asserts that economic deprivation, frustration, and desperation among the youths especially are the underlying causes of insecurity in Nigeria.

The research, therefore, argued that the challenges could be resolved through conscientious and passionate considerations of the totality of what constitutes the panacea to the problem of insecurity in Nigeria. If all these are done, Nigeria will be safe again and enjoy the benefits of the dividend of democracy.

Recommendations

Governments should adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of poverty and kidnapping this may involve economic policies that promote job creation, education, healthcare, and social safety nets. Thus, ensuring access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, healthcare, and education is crucial. Policies that focus on improving infrastructure and providing essential services can significantly impact the well-being of the population. Laws should be designed to promote social justice and reduce inequality. This may involve reforming legal and judicial systems, ensuring equal opportunities, and protecting the rights of marginalized groups. Good governance is essential for sustainable development. Transparent and accountable institutions, as well as effective public administration, are critical components. Anti-corruption measures are also vital to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and fairly.

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