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A REVIEW OF THE PHENOMENON OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

OLOWOLAGBA LEKAN YUSUF¹ & AJOGWU PETER²

^{1&2}Centre for Peace and Security Studies, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria
E-mail: yolowolagba@alhikmah.edu.ng, peter2014crossbridge@gmail.com

Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive review of the phenomenon of kidnapping in Nigeria, an escalating security challenge that threatens national stability. The research identifies that the causes of kidnapping are multifaceted, rooted in socio-economic deprivation, high unemployment rates and pervasive poverty, alongside weakened security architectures and political patronage. These factors have transformed kidnapping into a lucrative criminal enterprise. Drawing from Anomie Theory and Frustration-Aggression Theory to explain how systemic societal failures and economic inequality drive individuals toward violent crime. Through a methodological approach involving the qualitative analysis of secondary data including crime statistics, media reports, and academic journals, the study systematically maps the geographical spread and evolution of kidnapping across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The findings reveal that kidnapping has shifted from targeted political abductions in the Niger Delta to indiscriminate mass kidnappings in the North, significantly impacting the nation through psychological trauma, loss of lives, and the stifling of foreign direct investment. The research concludes that the phenomenon has created a culture of fear, necessitating urgent reforms in intelligence gathering and the addressing of underlying economic disparities.

Keywords: Kidnapping, Security Architecture, Socio-economic Deprivation, National Stability, Ransom, Nigeria.

Introduction

Kidnapping in Nigeria has emerged as a grave societal concern with far-reaching consequences (Uloko et al., 2024). Beyond constituting a violation of the fundamental human right to freedom, the crime poses a significant threat to national stability, public safety, and socio-economic development. The persistent rise in kidnapping incidents across the country has created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, restricting free movement and undermining economic activities and social progress (Fadipe et al., 2021). The magnitude of the problem reflected in the high number of reported incidents. In 2014 alone, more than 1,000 cases of kidnapping were documented, highlighting the severity of the crisis (Abdul-Rahaman, 2019). The crime has affected all regions of the country, demonstrating its widespread and pervasive nature

(Toromade, 2019). Furthermore, the exponential increase in kidnapping incidents has intensified concerns regarding the capacity of the state to address the menace (Abdulkabir, 2017). Consequently, Nigeria has gained international notoriety as one of the most dangerous countries globally for kidnapping (Constellis, 2017). The frequency and brutality associated with these incidents have not only tarnished the country's image but have also raised critical concerns regarding the effectiveness of its security architecture (Gongs et al., 2021).

Though kidnapping has historical antecedents dating back centuries, its contemporary manifestation in Nigeria, particularly kidnapping for ransom, is relatively recent (Gongs et al., 2021). The current wave of kidnapping for ransom is closely associated with the Niger Delta agitations for resource control that emerged during the 1990s (Ikezue, 2023). Initially concentrated in the oil-rich Niger Delta region, where expatriates and wealthy individuals were the principal targets (Ayuba, 2020), the practice has since spread across the country and evolved into diverse forms, including terrorist-related, ritualistic, and herdsman-related kidnappings (Yakubu, 2020). The motivations underlying kidnapping in Nigeria are multifaceted and complex. Economic incentives, particularly the prospect of substantial ransom payments, remain a major driving force behind the crime (UNODC, 2017; John, 2020). In addition, political motives, such as attempts to exert influence, challenge state authority, or destabilise government structures, as well as acts of vengeance, have contributed significantly to its prevalence (Okoli and Agada, 2014).

The consequences of kidnapping extend beyond the immediate victims and their families, affecting multiple sectors of society. The climate of fear and insecurity generated by these incidents discourages business operations and foreign investment, thereby negatively impacting the national economy. Diplomatic relations are also strained as foreign governments issue travel advisories and express concerns regarding the safety of their citizens in Nigeria. Similarly, the tourism sector, which has the potential to contribute significantly to national revenue and cultural exchange, has suffered due to the persistent threat of abduction (Ikezue, 2023). At the community level, kidnapping has disrupted the social fabric through the trauma, grief, and uncertainty experienced by victims and their families. Many families are subjected to extortionate ransom demands, while survivors often endure long-term psychological and emotional trauma.

Despite various measures introduced by the Nigerian government, including the deployment of security personnel and the implementation of counter-kidnapping strategies, the problem persists. The adaptability of kidnappers, coupled with challenges such as porous borders and inadequate security infrastructure, has made the eradication of kidnapping particularly difficult (Fadipe et al., 2021). Addressing this menace therefore requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that tackles both its root causes and immediate manifestations. Socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality provide fertile ground for criminal activities, including kidnapping. Consequently, investment in education, employment opportunities, and social welfare programmes is essential in reducing the socio-economic conditions that facilitate the crime. In addition, strengthening law enforcement agencies, enhancing intelligence gathering, and improving border security are crucial measures in combating kidnapping. Community participation and public cooperation in reporting suspicious activities are equally important in preventing and disrupting kidnapping operations.

Statement of the Problem

Kidnapping in Nigeria has become a major security challenge that threatens public safety and hinders socio-economic development. Despite various government interventions, the crime continues to persist and escalate, driven by motivations ranging from financial extortion to political manipulation. The widespread occurrence of kidnapping across all regions of the country highlights the inadequacy of existing security measures and responses. High-profile abduction cases, including the kidnapping of school children, further underscore the urgent need for effective and sustainable solutions. The economic, diplomatic, and socio-cultural consequences of kidnapping are profound, as the crime undermines national security, weakens investor confidence, disrupts community life, and damages Nigeria's international reputation. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the root causes, modus operandi, and impacts of kidnapping in Nigeria with the aim of developing evidence-based recommendations for improving security and mitigating the crisis.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to provide a review and understanding of the phenomenon of kidnapping in Nigeria. While the main objectives of this study is to:

- i. Investigate the root causes of kidnapping in Nigeria, including socio-economic, political, and cultural factors.

- ii. Examine the modus operandi and tactics employed by kidnappers in different regions of Nigeria.
- iii. Analyze the impacts of kidnapping on victims, families, communities, and the broader society.
- iv. Assess the effectiveness of existing countermeasures and policies aimed at combating kidnapping.
- v. Propose evidence-based recommendations for addressing kidnapping and enhancing security in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of kidnapping in Nigeria, examining its historical roots, evolution, geographical distribution, and multifaceted impacts. It investigates the socio-economic, political, and criminal factors driving this phenomenon, along with the tactics employed by kidnappers. The study also assesses the effectiveness of current countermeasures and their impact on the economy, public safety, and national security.

Significant of the Study

This study offers valuable insights into kidnapping in Nigeria, benefiting scholars, policymakers, and security agencies. It provides a comprehensive understanding of the crime's motivations, methods, and socio-economic factors, informing the development of effective strategies and policies. The study also identifies gaps in current security measures, proposes recommendations for improvement, and highlights the economic costs of kidnapping. Additionally, it guides community initiatives, victim assistance programs, and contributes to enhancing Nigeria's national image and security.

Literature Review

The Concept of Kidnapping

Kidnapping, although as old as human civilisation itself, remains a concept that lacks a universally accepted definition due to its diverse manifestations across societies and legal jurisdictions. Notwithstanding these variations, the central element underlying all definitions is the unlawful abduction, detention, and confinement of an individual against his or her will through force, coercion, intimidation, or deception (Uloko et al., 2024). Scholarly, conceptualisations frequently associate kidnapping with related phenomena such as hostage-taking and hijacking, particularly because these acts involve the coercive control of victims in

order to compel compliance with the demands of perpetrators (Gongs et al., 2021). In this wise, kidnapping is not merely a criminal act of unlawful detention but also a strategic mechanism through which offenders pursue broader objectives.

A critical examination of existing perspectives reveals that kidnapping is driven by a multiplicity of motives that differ according to socio-political and economic contexts. Globally, kidnapping has been employed for financial gain, political bargaining, ideological assertion, religious extremism, revenge, debt recovery, sexual exploitation, and organised criminal activities (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017; Fage and Alabi, 2017). While economic motives dominate contemporary discussions, particularly in developing societies, political and ideological dimensions remain equally significant in conflict-ridden environments. This complexity demonstrates that kidnapping cannot be reduced to a singular explanatory framework, as its occurrence is shaped by the interaction of structural inequalities, weak governance systems, social dislocation, and organised criminality.

In Nigeria, kidnapping has assumed an especially disturbing dimension that extends beyond conventional typologies observed in many parts of the world (Ezemenaka, 2018). Unlike contexts where kidnapping is predominantly politically motivated or linked to organised transnational crime, the Nigerian experience reflects a convergence of economic desperation, insecurity, political instability, and social fragmentation. The crime has increasingly evolved into a profitable criminal enterprise in which victims are deliberately selected based on their perceived wealth, social status, or strategic value, thereby transforming kidnapping into a “business” venture for criminal groups (Ekechukwu and Osaat, 2020; Olusa et al., 2023). This commercialisation of kidnapping illustrates the gradual institutionalisation of organised criminal networks that exploit the weaknesses of the state and the vulnerability of citizens.

Historically, the roots of kidnapping in Nigeria may be traced to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, during which individuals were forcibly abducted and commodified for economic exploitation. However, the modern form of kidnapping for ransom emerged more prominently during the Niger Delta militancy of the 1990s, where armed groups abducted expatriates and oil workers to demand concessions and draw attention to grievances concerning resource control and environmental marginalisation (Ikezue, 2023). Over time, kidnapping spread beyond the Niger Delta to virtually all parts of the country, evolving into different forms associated with terrorist organisations, criminal gangs, ritualists, and armed herdsmen (Yakubu, 2020). This

transformation signifies a shift from politically motivated abductions to more economically driven and socially destabilising forms of criminality.

The fluidity of kidnapping in Nigeria demonstrates the inadequacy of narrow legal or criminological definitions. Rather than functioning solely as an act of criminal deviance, kidnapping has become embedded within broader socio-economic and political realities characterised by unemployment, poverty, inequality, corruption, ineffective policing, and weak judicial institutions. Consequently, understanding kidnapping in Nigeria requires an analytical approach that situates the phenomenon within the wider context of state fragility, social exclusion, and the monetisation of violence. Such an understanding is essential for the development of effective policy responses and sustainable security interventions.

Features of Kidnapping

Despite variations in form, motive, and operational strategy, kidnapping incidents share several common characteristics. Central among these is the use of coercion, intimidation, or threats of violence to subdue victims and restrict their freedom of movement. Victims are relocated to isolated or concealed locations where they are deprived of their social liberties and subjected to varying degrees of physical and psychological abuse. In many cases, kidnappers employ torture, starvation, humiliation, and threats of death to pressure victims or compel families and associates to comply with ransom demands.

Another defining feature of kidnapping is its psychological impact, which frequently extends beyond the immediate victims to affect families, communities, and society. The pervasive fear generated by recurring incidents contributes to social anxiety, restricts mobility, discourages economic activity, and erodes public trust in state institutions. In this sense, kidnapping functions not only as a criminal enterprise but also as a mechanism of social destabilisation capable of disrupting everyday life and weakening collective security.

Types of Kidnapping

Social scientists have identified several forms of kidnapping based on their motivations, operational patterns, and intended outcomes. Although these categories often overlap in practice, they provide an important framework for understanding the complexity of the phenomenon.

Economic kidnapping is primarily motivated by financial gain and typically targets wealthy individuals or persons perceived to possess access to substantial resources. Closely related to this is ransom kidnapping, in which victims are abducted specifically for monetary exchange. While

both forms are economically motivated, ransom kidnapping often involves organised criminal syndicates or terrorist groups that use abduction as a structured source of income.

High net-worth kidnapping represents a more sophisticated variant in which affluent individuals are targeted through carefully planned operations executed by professional kidnappers. In contrast, express kidnapping is relatively spontaneous and involves forcing victims to withdraw funds from automated teller machines (ATMs) or provide immediate financial access. Although express kidnapping is usually shorter in duration, it remains highly coercive and traumatic.

Terrorism-related kidnapping differs significantly from economically motivated forms because it serves broader strategic objectives, including political leverage, propaganda dissemination, recruitment, prisoner exchange, and financing insurgent activities. Similarly, political or religious kidnapping targets influential individuals or symbolic figures to advance ideological causes, influence government policies, or project power.

Ritual kidnapping reflects the intersection of criminality and traditional beliefs, as victims are abducted for ritualistic purposes, including human sacrifice or spiritual practices believed to generate wealth, protection, or supernatural power. This form of kidnapping reveals the persistence of harmful cultural beliefs and the exploitation of superstition within criminal networks.

Unlawful detention constitutes another dimension of kidnapping and occurs when individuals are confined without legal justification, often by state agents or security authorities acting outside constitutional boundaries. Although distinct from conventional criminal kidnapping, unlawful detention similarly involves the deprivation of personal liberty.

Kidnapping for trafficking purposes has become increasingly prominent due to the expansion of transnational criminal networks. Victims are abducted for forced labour, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, or organ harvesting, reflecting the commercialisation of human bodies within global illicit markets. Advances in medical technology and the profitability of organ trafficking have intensified concerns surrounding this form of kidnapping.

More recently, technological advancements have facilitated the emergence of virtual kidnapping, a digital form of extortion in which perpetrators falsely claim to have abducted an individual in order to manipulate and extort money from relatives. Although no physical abduction occurs, the psychological manipulation and financial consequences can be severe.

Causes of Kidnapping in Nigeria

The causes of kidnapping in Nigeria are multidimensional and cannot be adequately explained through a single causal framework. Rather, the phenomenon emerges from the interaction of socio-economic deprivation, political instability, institutional weakness, cultural dynamics, and criminal opportunism. Socio-economic theories attribute the rise in kidnapping largely to poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion, which create conditions conducive to criminal behaviour (Nnam and Ordu, 2020; Oketa, 2018). In contexts where legitimate economic opportunities are limited, kidnapping becomes an alternative means of survival and wealth acquisition.

However, economic explanations alone are insufficient. While poverty may explain the vulnerability of some individuals to criminal recruitment, it does not adequately account for the organised and often sophisticated nature of kidnapping operations. Consequently, structural and institutional factors must also be considered. Weak law enforcement, corruption, ineffective policing, porous borders, and inadequate judicial systems have created an enabling environment in which kidnappers operate with relative impunity (Ilugbami and Nurudeen, 2020; Gaye, 2018). The perceived inability of the state to guarantee security has further emboldened criminal groups. Political motivations also contribute significantly to kidnapping in Nigeria. During election periods, political actors have reportedly employed violence and abduction to intimidate opponents, suppress dissent, or gain strategic advantage (Ngwama, 2014). In conflict-prone regions, kidnapping is sometimes used as a tool of political negotiation and resistance against perceived marginalisation.

Religious extremism and ritualistic beliefs represent additional dimensions of the problem. Terrorist groups such as Boko Haram have used kidnapping to spread fear, gain international attention, secure financial resources, and recruit members. At the same time, ritual kidnappings linked to beliefs in spiritual wealth and supernatural empowerment continue to occur in different parts of the country (Oyewole, 2016; Busari, 2018). These developments demonstrate the extent to which criminality intersects with ideology, religion, and cultural practices.

The growing “get-rich-quick” mentality among segments of the youth population has further exacerbated the crisis. The pursuit of wealth without legitimate means, reinforced by societal glorification of material success, has contributed to the normalisation of criminal activities such as kidnapping (Buba and Musa, 2023). Thus, kidnapping in Nigeria reflects broader structural and moral crises within society.

Effects of Kidnapping Activities in Nigeria

The effects of kidnapping in Nigeria are profound and multidimensional, affecting national security, economic development, social cohesion, and the country's international reputation. The increasing prevalence of kidnapping has contributed to Nigeria's image as a global hotspot for insecurity and violent crime (Ayuba, 2020). Initially associated with Niger Delta militancy, the crime linked with Boko Haram insurgency and violent herdsmen activities, thereby intensifying ethnic tensions and generating accusations of governmental failure.

At the societal level, kidnapping has created widespread fear and uncertainty, undermining public confidence in security institutions and reducing citizens' sense of safety. Communities affected by recurrent abductions often experience social fragmentation, distrust, and displacement. Furthermore, the persistent threat of kidnapping discourages investment, disrupts business activities, and weakens economic productivity, thereby hindering national development.

Effects of Kidnapping on the Education System in Nigeria

Kidnapping has had particularly devastating consequences for the Nigerian education sector. Educational institutions, especially schools and universities, have increasingly become targets for abduction, with students, teachers, and other personnel kidnapped for ransom (Ekechukwu and Osaat, 2020). Such incidents have generated fear and insecurity within academic communities, discouraging school attendance and undermining the educational process (Adofu and Alhassan, 2018).

The repeated abduction of students has also led to the closure of schools in some regions, thereby disrupting academic calendars and reducing access to education. Teachers are often reluctant to work in high-risk areas, resulting in shortages of qualified personnel and declining educational quality. Additionally, scarce resources that could have been invested in infrastructure and academic development are increasingly diverted towards security measures (Dantala, 2014). Consequently, kidnapping not only threatens the physical safety of educational stakeholders but also undermines human capital development and the long-term progress of the nation.

Effects of Kidnapping on the Economy of Nigeria

The economic implications of kidnapping in Nigeria are equally severe. Victims frequently suffer physical injury, psychological trauma, sexual abuse, and, in some cases, death (Kaylor, 2015; Ekechukwu and Osaat, 2020). Beyond the personal suffering of victims, families often

face enormous financial burdens associated with ransom payments, medical treatment, and psychological rehabilitation.

At the macroeconomic level, kidnapping discourages local and foreign investment, reduces tourism, increases the cost of doing business, and contributes to capital flight. Businesses operating in insecure areas are forced to spend heavily on private security, while some investors relocate entirely to safer environments. Public resources that could have been allocated to developmental projects are diverted towards security operations and crisis management. The resulting climate of insecurity weakens economic growth and erodes confidence in the state's capacity to protect lives and property.

Efforts Made by Government in Curbing Kidnapping Activities in Nigeria

Successive Nigerian governments have introduced various measures aimed at curbing kidnapping and restoring public security. These efforts include the establishment of special anti-kidnapping squads, counter-terrorism initiatives, inter-agency collaborations, and partnerships with international security organisations. Government interventions have also sought to address underlying socio-economic factors through poverty alleviation programmes, youth empowerment initiatives, and employment generation schemes.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of governmental responses has remained limited. Scholars argue that poor policy implementation, institutional corruption, inadequate funding, leadership inconsistencies, and weak coordination among security agencies have undermined anti-kidnapping strategies (Ekechukwu and Osaat, 2020; Fage & Alabi, 2017). Furthermore, the persistence of poverty, unemployment, and inequality continues to sustain the conditions that facilitate criminality (Shuaibu et al., 2015). This suggests that military and law enforcement responses alone are insufficient without broader structural reforms aimed at improving governance, economic inclusion, and social justice.

Highlight of Some Kidnapping Cases in Nigeria

Kidnapping in Nigeria has evolved into a widespread national security challenge affecting virtually every region of the country. Although the phenomenon initially gained prominence through the activities of Niger Delta militants, it has expanded over time to involve Boko Haram insurgents, armed herdsmen, organised criminal gangs, and other non-state actors. High-profile abductions, including the kidnapping of school children, religious leaders, traditional rulers, and political figures, have demonstrated the growing sophistication and brazenness of kidnappers.

The geographical expansion and diversification of kidnapping activities reflect the broader deterioration of Nigeria's security environment. They also underscore the inadequacy of existing preventive and response mechanisms. The persistence of these incidents highlights the urgent need for comprehensive and sustainable strategies that combine security reforms with socio-economic development, institutional strengthening, and community participation.

Table 1: Timeline of Notable Kidnapping Incidents in Nigeria from 2011 to 2021 according to various news reports, research articles and documented cases in existing literatures.

Date	Incident
2011	On May 12, 2011, the Boko Haram insurgents abducted the Chibok school girls in Borno State.
2012	In March 2012, Italian engineer Franco Lamolinara and British national Chris McManus were kidnapped and later killed in Sokoto by Boko Haram militants.
2013	In February 2013, French family of seven, including four children, were kidnapped in Cameroon and brought to Nigeria by Boko Haram militants.
2014	On April 14, 2014, over 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped by Boko Haram from Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State
2015	On February 20, 2015, Boko Haram insurgents kidnapped 105 schoolgirls from Government Science and Technical College, Dapchi, Yobe State
2016	On May 13, 2016, Fulani herdsmen kidnapped and killed a former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief Olu Falae, in Ondo State.
2017	On October 16, 2017, five lecturers from the University of Maiduguri were kidnapped by Boko Haram militants during a research trip to Lake Chad.
2018	On June 3, 2018, Fulani herdsmen kidnapped the Chairman of the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) in Kaduna State, Apostle Emmanuel Bako, and his wife.
2019	On January 2, 2019, the Catholic Bishop of Ahiara Diocese, Most Rev. Peter Okpaleke, was kidnapped in Anambra State and later released.
2020	Armed Bandits invaded a Government Secondary School and abducted 344 schoolboys from the town of Kankara in Northwest Kastina State.
2021	- 279 School girls abducted from Jangebe Government Girls Secondary School, Jangele, Talata – Mafara LGA, Zamfara State.

	- Gunmen barged into the Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Afaka, Igabi LGA, Kaduna State, and seized 29 students. - Unspecific numbers of primary school pupils and their teachers abducted by Bandits in Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State. - Gunmen abducted 80 schoolchildren at the Federal Government College in Birnin Yauri in Kebbi state according to Police Spokesman Nafiu Abubakar. - Bandits abducted 121 boarding students of Bethel Baptist High School in Damishi, Chikun LGA, Kaduna state. - 9 Students were kidnapped by bandits in Sakkai, Faskari LGA, Kastina State. - Gunmen suspected to be bandits abducted, over 73 students of Kaya Junior secondary school, Maradun LGA, Zamfara State.
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Source: Adapted from Ilugbami and Nurudeen, (2021) and modified by the author

Kidnappings have become increasingly frequent in Nigeria, particularly in the north, with over 1,680 students abducted since 2014. Mass abductions have surged since 2019, affecting all regions, even the capital. Nigeria's high kidnapping rate has long been recognized globally, ranking among the top countries at risk.

Table 2: Top 10 Kidnapping Countries (1999)

Country	Global Ranking
Columbia	1 st
Mexico	2 nd
Brazil	3 rd
The Philippines	4 th
Venezuela	5 th
Ecuador	6 th
Former Soviet Union	7 th
Nigeria	8th
India	9 th
South Africa	10 th

Source: Okoli and Agada (2014)

Ten years later, another global ranking of the top 12 kidnapping countries placed Nigeria at 11th on the list. Table 3 below illustrates this ranking:

Table 3: Top 12 Kidnapping Countries (2008)

Country	Global Ranking
Mexico	1 st
Iraq	2 nd
India	3 rd
South Africa	4 th
Brazil	5 th
Pakistan	6 th
Ecuador	7 th
Venezuela	8 th
Columbia	9 th
Bangladesh	10 th
Nigeria	11 th
Haiti	12 th

Source: Okoli and Agada (2014)

However, a ranking conducted by Constellis (2017) revealed that Nigeria ranks 2nd among the top 10 countries at risk of kidnapping for ransom in the world. Table 4 below illustrates the Constellis (2017) world ranking of the top 10 countries at risk of kidnap for ransom:

Table 4: Top 10 Kidnapping for Ransom Risk Countries

S/N	Country	Rank	Ransom Demand		
			Low-Medium Profile Individual	High Profile Individuals	Foreign Nationals
1	Libya	1 st	\$100,000-150,000	\$150,000-1 million	\$ 5 – 8 million
2	Nigeria	2 nd	\$27,600-276,000	\$50,000- 1 million	\$200,000-950,000
3	Venezuela	3 rd	\$450,000 & above	\$10 million	Unknown

4	Mexico	4 th	\$26,300 & above	\$211,000 & above	\$500,000-1million
5	Yemen	5 th	\$<100,000	\$100,000 & above	\$1 – 20 million
6	Syria	6 th	\$2,000 & above	\$20,000 & above	\$100,000
7	Philippines	7 th	\$6,500 & above	\$65,000 & above	\$108,000-21.5m
8	Iraq	8 th	\$<65,000	\$300,000	\$2 – 10 million
9	Afghanistan	9 th	\$<100,000	\$100,000 & above	\$20 million
10	Somalia	10 th	\$<30,000	\$30,000 & above	\$20 million

Source: (Ayuba, 2020).

From Table 4 above, it is evident that Nigeria occupies the second position on the list of the top 10 countries at risk for kidnapping for ransom. This ranking is corroborated by the high number of kidnapping incidents recorded daily in the country, with unreported cases likely being even higher. The increase in kidnappings for ransom is closely linked to numerous socioeconomic factors, particularly the poor living standards of the majority of citizens.

In 2024, another global ranking of the top 10 kidnapping countries placed Nigeria at 2nd position on the list. Table 5 below illustrates this ranking:

Table 5: Top 10 Kidnapping Countries (2024)

Country	Global Ranking
Iraq	1 st
Nigeria	2nd
Pakistan	3 rd
India	4 th
Venezuela	5 th
Colombia	6 th
Philippines	7 th

Mexico	8 th
Brazil	9 th
Haiti	10 th

Source: Bschorly, 2024

Theoretical Framework

This study uses an integrated theoretical framework to understand kidnapping in Nigeria, drawing on political economy of crime theory, frustration-aggression theory, relative deprivation theory, and routine activities theory.

- i. The political economy of crime theory highlights how systemic issues like poverty, unemployment, and inequality, stemming from a dysfunctional political and economic system, contribute to kidnapping (Yakubu, 2020; Okoli & Agada, 2014).
- ii. The frustration-aggression theory suggests that these socio-economic frustrations can lead to aggression and criminal behavior like kidnapping (Nnam and Ordu, 2020; Ayegba, 2015).
- iii. The relative deprivation theory further explains how feelings of injustice and discontent due to social inequality can also motivate kidnapping, particularly among those who feel structurally deprived (Nnam and Ordu, 2020).
- iv. The routine activities theory emphasizes the interplay of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian in facilitating kidnapping incidents (Bamidele et al., 2024).

By integrating these perspectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors driving kidnapping in Nigeria, ultimately informing effective countermeasures to mitigate this threat.

Empirical Review of Literatures

Existing literature on kidnapping in Nigeria highlights its complex nature and devastating impact. Studies have employed various theoretical frameworks to understand its causes, including poverty, unemployment, political motivations, and ineffective policing (Ayuba, 2020; Ilugbami and Nurudeen, 2020; Yakubu, 2020; Nnam and Ordu, 2020). The consequences of kidnapping are far-reaching, affecting individuals, families, communities, and the nation as a whole. Victims experience trauma, insecurity, and economic hardship, while the broader society faces social tension and a loss of confidence in the government's ability to provide security.

(Ekechukwu and Osaat, 2020; Oghuvbu, 2021). Proposed solutions include addressing socio-economic inequalities, enhancing security measures, implementing legal reforms, and promoting community engagement (Fadipe et al., 2021; Gongs et al., 2021; Agbaje, 2022; Otu and Adedej, 2022; Olusa et al., 2023; Ikezue, 2023; Buba and Musa, 2023; Ilori and Adeleye, 2023; Uloko et al., 2024). A multidisciplinary approach that integrates these recommendations is crucial for effectively combating kidnapping and restoring peace and security in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This review examines the multifaceted phenomenon of kidnapping in Nigeria, drawing on diverse theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. The research highlights the complex interplay of social, political, economic, and religious factors that contribute to the prevalence of kidnapping. The devastating impacts of this crime are evident in the trauma experienced by victims, the financial burden on families, and the erosion of public trust in the government. Various studies have proposed solutions ranging from addressing socio-economic inequalities to enhancing security measures and implementing legal reforms.

Key findings include:

- **Causes:** Poverty, unemployment, political motivations, ineffective policing, and religious extremism are identified as major drivers of kidnapping.
- **Impacts:** Kidnapping has severe consequences for individuals, families, and communities, including psychological trauma, economic hardship, and social tension.
- **Theoretical Frameworks:** The research draws on the political economy of crime theory, frustration-aggression theory, relative deprivation theory, and routine activities theory to understand the root causes and dynamics of kidnapping.
- **Solutions:** Proposed solutions include addressing socio-economic inequalities, strengthening security measures, implementing legal reforms, and promoting community engagement.

This study underscores the urgent need for a multidisciplinary approach to combat kidnapping in Nigeria, combining socio-economic development, enhanced security, legal reforms, and community involvement.

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