

## **A Historical Account of the Scourge of Kidnapping in Nigeria: Implication on National Security**

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### **Abstract**

Kidnapping has become a menace and one of the security challenges in Nigeria. It is an illicit practice in which human-beings are forcefully abducted to an unknown destination for the purpose of payment of ransom by relatives. The predominance of this illicit practice has given the country a bad reputation. As a result of this, Nigeria was ranked in the global index as one of the worst place to dwell, especially in the current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari. Many factors account for this development, prominent among which include criminal source of money, elimination of political opponents, human sacrifice or for performance of rituals etc. Kidnapping has now become a generic word both in public and private discourse going by its prevalence in the country. This paper attempt to examine the general causes and effects of kidnapping on the Nigerian society especially in the area of insecurity. Among the major causes identified is the spate of unemployment in Nigeria. In view of this, the paper concludes that unemployment has been one of the major problems in Nigeria. Nigeria, as a developing country is witnessing high rate of youth unemployment which has become one of the major threats to its national security. Recommendations have been made on how this wave of crime can be tackled. Prominent among the recommendations is for all levels to make policies that will attract both local and foreign investors which will create employment opportunities for the youths, especially the vulnerable ones among others.

**Keywords: Abduction, Crime, Hostage, Kidnapping, Ransom, and Security**

### ***Introduction***

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

The widening scale of insecurity in Nigeria is a cause for concern as all are affected by it. Churches, mosques, markets, schools, homes and the highway, all are susceptible to this menace. The abductees and their families are traumatised by the ordeal of kidnapping. Foreign investors are scared away from Nigeria. Nigerians are paying the price of poor governance and failures of leadership.

Davidson (2010) points out that the general state of insecurity in some parts of the country has no doubt reached a stage where virtually everybody is now worried the direction the region is going. Presently, hardly can people sleep because of the fear of being robbed or kidnapped. Businessmen have taken flight with their businesses for fear of being kidnapped or robbed.

Asuquo (2009) notes that the term “kidnapping” is difficult to define with precision, because it varies from State to State and jurisdiction to jurisdiction. It is the forceful seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. According to him, kidnapping is a common law offence and the key part is that it is an unwanted act on the part of the victim. It is a restriction of someone else’s liberty which violates the provision of freedom of movement as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, where every other law takes its cue from. For this reason, Siegel (2002) sees it as a serious offence.

Abraham (2010) defines kidnapping as an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud. It includes snatching and seizing of a person in order to collect a ransom in return or to settle some scores of disagreement among people. No one is spared by the scourge. Both government officials and traditional rulers are not spared. Kidnapper’s target members of the executive, legislative, and the judicial arms of the government, including even security personnel and their family members.

Today, kidnapping is among the vices that are currently plaguing the country’s peace and stability. It has become even a sort of political terrorism aimed at clamping down on dissenting groups. Criminologists see it as terrorism or a political crime which emphasises violence as a mechanism to promote change. Today, the concept has assumed different forms which range from revolutionary, state-sponsored, political to nationalistic terrorism. Though each may not be neatly demarcated from the other, some regard it as a criminal act whereas others see it as a violent political activity the purpose which is to achieve a set goal – systemic change.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Kidnapping consists of unlawfully or intentionally depriving a person of his liberty of movement or, in the case of a minor, depriving a parent or recognised guardian control over the child. The emphasis is on the individual’s right to personal freedom and the violation of this right through force, threats or fraud. Robertson (1968), views kidnapping as a crime of seizing, confining, abducting or carrying away of persons by force or fraud often subjecting him or her to involuntary servitude in an attempt to

demand a ransom or in furtherance of another crime. In criminal law, kidnapping is defined as taking away of a person by force, threat or deceit with intent to cause him/her to be detained against his or her will (Asuquo, 2009).

Thomas and Nta (2009) define kidnapping as robbery of the highest rank. According to them, it is an organized and systematic robbery which is not as deadly as armed-robbery, but more profitable than the former. The profitability has encouraged those that indulged in it to carry on with the act although there is a law prohibiting it.

Goldberg (2000) argues that kidnapping is a criminal act involving seizure, confinement, abduction, subjection, forcefulness, acts of threats, acts of terror and servitude. Similarly, Ngwama (2014) defines kidnapping as false imprisonment in the sense that it involves the illegal confinement of individuals against his or her own will by another individual in such a way as to violate the confined individual's right to be free from the restraint of movement.

According to Ottuh and Aituf (2014) kidnapping is the wholesale taking away or transportation of a person against the person's will usually to confine the person in false imprisonment without legal authority. They state that this act may be done principally to extract ransom or in connection with a child custody as a fall out of marital dispute. Such kidnapping or abduction of a child is often labeled "child stealing" and "parental kidnapping", particularly when the act is carried with the intention of keeping the child permanently as against collecting a ransom or other things the 'child stealer' is agitating for.

## **Types of Kidnapping**

There basically two main types of kidnapping, namely:

1. **Criminal kidnapping:** This is where the main motive is to obtain a ransom from the family or business of victims. This category also includes instances where criminals take hostages as a shield to help them escape from the scene of a crime, or use them to obtain money or valuables, or the keys or secret codes needed to access areas where these are stored (Siegel, 1992).
2. **Political kidnapping:** This is the type of kidnapping, where the foremost objective is to further the political aims of a particular political group or movement. In this case, a ransom is usually demanded to obtain money for the group to fund their. Such kidnappings are distinct from emotional or pathological kidnapping, which involves, for instance, the kidnapping of children by estranged parents or relatives or, in the case of the latter, kidnappings motivated by individual pathologies, such as kidnapping for the purposes of rape or other sexual aberration. They also differ from unlawful detentions, where people are held illegally by law enforcement personnel; or political blackmail, which involves holding individuals against political ends, such as the release of comrades from prison (Siegel, 1992).

## **Casual Factors of Kidnapping and Security Challenges in Nigeria**

1. Proliferation of dangerous weapons: The proliferation of arms as a result of political patronage of miscreant who were dumped after elections may indirectly encourage and enhance kidnapping (Marshal, 1998). Such miscreants who no longer have access to their political masters may resort to using the arms at their disposal to take to kidnapping as an alternative source of livelihood.
2. Social Injustice: Many people today who are desperate in economic and social needs are often the ones who commit kidnappings. So, where the gap between the rich and the poor is constantly widening and where the possibilities to earn money in an honest way are often difficult to attain kidnapping turns out be a lucrative means to fall back on and to draw attention to what is considered an intolerable situation (Chidi and Uche, 2015).
3. Indiscipline and Moral Decadence: The issue of “moral decadence” and the “quest to get rich quick” syndrome have been identified as some of the causative factors of kidnapping. Nobody asks questions on how people make their wealth. According to Inyang, (2009), a poor person today can show up with an expensive car tomorrow and nobody dare to question the sudden wealth. Also, people who have donated money to develop their communities are rewarded with chieftaincy titles thereby creating a wrong impression in the minds of Nigerian youths who thereafter take to kidnapping (Inyang (2009).
4. Poverty: The impoverished life-style of people has prompted many have-not to involve in kidnapping activities so as to use the ransom fees to cater for their basic needs. Our society has been riddled with poverty to the extent that citizens are seriously hungry with pauperised and subjected to penury as a way of life (Inyang (2009).
5. Corruption and Insecurity: Corruption within the law enforcement agencies sometimes thwarts serious effort in crime prevention. Nwaorah (2009) notes that, in a situation where government officials, especially top ranking persons in civil services who are custodian of government resources spend recklessly or loot, it could automatically encourage few of the dissatisfied persons to vent their anger on them and their relatives.
6. Youth Unemployment: The problem of kidnapping in Nigeria is often associated with youth unemployment (Inyang, 2009). Inyang uses the widely acknowledged adage-, which says that “an idle man is the devil’s workshop” to present the problem of kidnapping in Nigeria. He notes that there are uncountable able-bodied men and women in Nigeria roaming the streets in search of non-existing jobs. Out of frustration together with mounting responsibilities to tackle, many idle young persons have ventured into criminal activities prominent which is kidnapping.

## **The Scourge of Kidnapping in Nigeria**

Kidnapping in Nigeria is a serious national security challenge. It takes various forms and adopts violence, terror, coerciveness, intimidation and aggression. These acts are performed with the intent to receive ransom with forceful threats. The politicians and disgruntled individuals seize the opportunity to perpetuate criminality. The miscreants use this criminal model as the easiest method for intimidating human beings for easy access to cash. Osumah and Aghedo (2011,p.227) argues that kidnapping is “an engagement for economic survival, securing political and business advantage over rivals and co-competitors.

The crime of kidnapping has grown over the years as an industry. It has been adopted as an industry for abducting political rivals, village rivals, and financially advantaged calibers in society. Emewu and Anyanwu (2009) attest that the former Governor of Anambra State was kidnapped in July 10, 2003 by members of his political party who opposed his visionary scheme. The politicians are not the only victims, the nation in general is victimized and this has engulfed the country into senseless insecurity.

Kidnapping and terrorism are twin demons eating up the nation’s sense of identity and security, as it affects virtually everybody. The crime of kidnapping has created serious security challenges for the nation as it affects foreign expatriates, oil industries, and create negative image for the country. The security of the nation is at stake with series of incidence of kidnapping activities in many parts of the country.

The perpetrators of kidnapping choose their victims based on their ability to cough out the money (Tzanelli, 2006). The problem of unemployment has become a national ‘thorn in the flesh’ in Nigeria. Ejimabo (2013,p.12) argues that “Nigeria needs problem-solving skills of leaders to help fight fraud and corruption in the country”. Otherwise, issues such as job creation and worsening political crisis would continue to be impediments to the control of crimes and delinquencies in the country. Job creation, along with other economic incentives would magnetize the youths’ interest to abandon the illegal commercialization of human commodity (Persson, 2014; Dode, 2007). Kidnapping has been commercialized, whereby, even the most revered clerics and clergies of religious bodies have fallen victims to the crime.

The root of kidnapping in Nigeria, according to Townsend (2008), can be traced to “natural resources nationalism” – the tendency for an ethnic nationality to seek bigger shares of the returns from natural resources found in their locality. For instance, the clamour by aborigines of the oil producing Niger Delta region to better and bigger share of the fortune made from the resources gotten from their land (Essien and Ema, 2013). This problem is worsened by accumulation politics characterised by the tendency of the ruling class to engage in endless accumulation of natural resources and rents accruing from the region, in the face of deliberate acts of marginalization and deprivation of the people (Akpan, 2010). Some analysts believe that the high level of unemployment and poverty in the Niger Delta region which is above the natural average is one of the

precipitating factors that pushed some Niger Delta Youths into Kidnapping and Hostage taking (UNDP, 2006).

This is because, ironically, while not justifiable by any means, the growing spates of criminal kidnappings has its root in the inequity, unemployment and break down of the educational and social structures, and value system in Nigeria. It is also emblematic of the disequilibrium in resource sharing. Furthermore, one can link the kidnappings and overall growth in the national crime rate and under development. In a country where the middle class has but all disappeared, kidnapping may be a low culture habit meant to target and open the high society and elite, especially in such restive regions like the Niger Delta (Okaba and Nte, 2008).

Turner (2008) opined that the phenomenon of kidnapping and hostage taking began in the Niger Delta region as a freedom fight by militants protesting the degradation of their environment by oil industrial activities. Demola (2011) argues that it soon turned into a money making avenue through kidnapping of expatriate oil workers for huge ransoms. Since then, kidnapping has become a daily occurrence and it has spread throughout the South-South states of Edo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross Rivers, Akwa Ibom and the South-East States of Abia, Imo, Ebonyi, Enugu and Anambra. The South-West has not been left out. Kidnapping is also common in Lagos and other Western States. Many Youths have taken to the business of kidnapping with some godfathers working behind the scene.

Generally, kidnapping and security challenges in Nigeria have hampered economic growth as the youth unemployment escalates. The horror of kidnapping has impacted the economy negatively in the sense that it has created a state of insecurity in all the four walls of the nation. This is evident in the Boko Haram episode in the north, the insurgences of the militants in the south, the kidnapping waves in the southeast, middle belt and ritualism in the Midwest.

### **Trends and Issues of Kidnapping and Security Challenges in Nigeria**

Kidnapping is the offspring of terrorism and social vices that spread all over the world. It is an endemic disease that cut-across all the States in Nigeria. The word Kidnap was derived from two English words “Kid” meaning (Infant) and “Nap” meaning (Sleep). Literarily, it is a process of abduction of people as hostages for ransom payment. Historically, kidnapping is traceable to 1874 around 17th century as child abduction in Britain when the kids of the rich families were being abducted for “ransom while asleep (nap)” (Tzanelli, 2009).

Kidnapping is a notorious and nefarious behaviour orchestrated by criminal elements with the mind-set of abducting or taking people hostage for ransom package. Kidnapping is a nefarious, villainous, terrible and seasonal crime that portends security challenges in Nigeria. The perpetrators include: unemployed youth, gangsters,

community hooligans a.k.a (Badoo), Land grabbers, terrorists, ritualists, spiritual fathers of different religious associations etc.

Historically, Kidnapping gained momentum in Lagos metropolis as a response to unemployment, poverty, corruption, inflation, moral decadence, hopelessness and frustration among the youths. The perpetrators of kidnapping choose their victims based on their ability to cough out the money (Tzanelli, 2006). According to Turner (2008), the phenomenon began in the Niger Delta region as a freedom fight by militants protesting the degradation of their environment by oil industry activities. According to Demola (2011), it soon turned into a money making avenue through kidnapping of expatriate oil workers for huge ransoms. Since then, kidnapping has become a daily occurrence and it has spread throughout the South-South states of Edo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross Rivers, Akwa Ibom and the South-East States of Abia, Imo and Anambra. The South-West has not been left out.

Today, kidnapping is all over Nigeria and it is a national problem that has eaten so deep into the tissues of the nation. It is a problem that must be tackled nationally. Kidnapping is growing daily in Nigeria. This criminal commerce paints an ugly picture of the already battered image of Nigeria. By and large, the survival and security of life holds a very important place in the life of every living being. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) (1999) specifically states that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government.” Consequently, the government spends a considerable amount of the nations’ funds on securing lives and property against all forms of internal and external threat. Unfortunately, the achievement of this primary purpose of the government has become more and more challenging with the ascendancy of several insecurity threats such as: militancy, armed robbery, ritual killing, insurgency, hostage taking and kidnapping, among others.

In the case of the Niger Delta area, with a pervasive regime of poverty, an increasing army of unemployed youths, a ready pool of employable youths for political thuggery, the national result is militancy, which has found expression in all sorts of violence, including kidnapping and hostage taking in the Niger Delta. It is therefore a mismanaged negative fall outs of the ill feelings in the Niger Delta which the political elite tapped to capture power in 1999 and consolidate their grip on power in 2003. According to Edede, the politicians of the Niger Delta armed jobless educated youths of the region with Ak-47 rifles in their desperation to stay in power. This gave the youths an occupation: the politics of AK-47 gave birth to the economics of AK-47 and the Kalashnikov became an economic variable as the Niger Delta youths look to the creeks to engage their tormentors in a macabre dance of molten lead. The result of this is the current militancy, Kidnapping and hostage taking in Nigeria (Edede, 2006; Nte, 2008; Mitte, 2009).

As stated in the preceding sections of this work, no region is immune from this social problem. What differs is the intensity and perhaps the motive. Northern Nigerian cities of Abuja, Kaduna and Kano have recorded cases of kidnappings for ransom. What

is worrisome here is the possible hijack of this tool by extremists who can introduce new dimensions to the kidnap saga in Nigeria by engaging on terror based kidnappings and hostage taking in a world that is presently being haunted by ideological primitivism and religious extremism (News Watch, 2009). The reality of this threat cannot be over emphasized if one considers the Abdul Mutallab case and the Boko Haram uprising in Northern Nigeria. Indeed, this region poses the greatest threat to both national and sub-regional security.

### **A Panoramic Survey of Kidnapping Incidents Across Nigeria**

A panoramic survey of incidents of kidnapping across Nigeria shows an alarming increase in the phenomena. This is confirmed by the series of Police reports. For instance, in December, 2009, Police Affairs Minister, disclosed that 512 cases of kidnapping had been recorded from January 2008 to June 2009. The rundown of the statistics indicates that Abia State led the pack with a total of 110 kidnapping incidents: Imo: 58,109 arrests, and Akwa Ibom recorded 40 kidnap cases. The same Police report added that between July/September 2008 and July 2009, over 600 million naira was lost to kidnappers.

Beyond statistics being available, Onovo (2010) states that it is a known fact that most kidnap cases are not always reported to the police authority for the fear of murder of the victims. Most families always prefer to pay ransom than to lose one of their own. Onovo gives the following instances, in Kano, N80 million ransom was allegedly paid to kidnappers for the release of a Kano-based multi-millionaire businessman without a recourse to the police authorities; an industrialist in Nnewi paid 70 million to regain his freedom from his captors; another multi-millionaire businessman was kidnapped and released after he allegedly paid a ransom without recourse from the police.

In a similar vein, the Associated Press in its report of August 27, 2008 stated that “more than 200 foreigners have been kidnapped in two years of heightened violence across Nigeria.” Even though kidnapped victims are normally released unharmed after a ransom is paid, several have been killed during botched seizures or rescue attempts. According to Collier and Hoeffler (2002) “victims are maimed, raped and manhandled in such a manner that the stigma remains almost perpetually. The families and associates are knocked down by intractable trauma.”

Another Police source states that on Sunday, July 11, 2010 four journalists and a driver travelling in a convoy of buses from a conference in Uyo, Akwa-Ibom State, were kidnapped in Abia State on their way back to Lagos. From their hideout, the abductors demanded a ransom of N250 million, and later reduced it to N30 million. A torrent of protests, condemnations and threats, greeted the action of the kidnappers and they were forced to let go of their victims. However, the police did not make a clear statement whether a ransom was paid or not.

By and large, kidnapping and security threats are some of the social problems that have remained recurrent in the annals of a multi ethnic nation of Nigeria. The social



malaise has become so pervasive that it has been underscored by the Federal Government as one of the greatest challenges the country is facing in its current era.

## **Conclusion**

The paper is of the view that Nigeria has turned to a playing ground of carnage, restiveness, religious violence, security challenges, and incessant kidnappings which discourage many people to have hope in better Nigeria or to have belief in the promised changed. This paper also discovers that apart from kidnappers targeting highly influential people in order to attract huge ransom, other factors include elimination of political opponents, religious and opinion leaders. In some cases, it is just to instil fear into the society as a weapon of intimidation. Unfortunately, the main actors in this illicit practice are the youth who are supposed to be the leaders of tomorrow. One of the major causes of the scourge of kidnapping activities is unemployment, poverty, corruption, injustice, general increase in crime rate and possession of small arms by illegal hands. Kidnapping activities have adverse consequences. Apart from discouraging internal and external investors, it creates general insecurity which scares people from free movement, especially hotspots where kidnapping is rampant. It also has adverse effect on the image of Nigeria.

## **Recommendations**

1. Employment into the security agencies should be based on merit not by nepotism or tribalism as what is mostly obtainable today.
2. There should be security apparatus of the Nigerian State should be re-organized to be able to tackle contemporary security challenges.
3. The establishment of a welfare state where there would be jobs, houses, healthcare, qualitative education and security for every citizen
4. Any body found conniving with kidnappers should be dealt with no matter how wealthy, politically or religiously placed the person may be.
5. Efforts should be geared towards the enthronement of a credible leadership in the country where social contract will be respected and implemented to prevent a further slide into the Hobbesian state of nature where life is solitary, nasty, brutish and short, and perhaps where humans can be kidnapped for ransom at will. The time to act is now to save the situation.
6. There should be proper protection of identities of public members that supply useful information to the security agencies and officers and men of the security agencies.
7. There is need to review the current strategy of dealing with the issue of kidnapping and hostage taking in Nigeria. In particular, there is the need to

explore the extant laws and the extent to which they are being enforced with a view to establishing their efficacy.

8. The three tiers of government, especially the federal government, should embark on a public enlightenment campaign on the need to shun kidnapping.

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