KIDNAPPING IN NORTH WEST NIGERIA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE

Arnold Onyekachi David Okoro[1]

Abstract

This paper is a critical discussion on kidnapping in northwest Nigeria. The menace has engulfed the region and has continued to threaten the existence of lives, livelihoods, socio-economic activities, and governance. Kidnapping is a criminal act that entails the waylaying and seizure of a person or persons against their will for possible gains of ransom. It is an act carried out non-consensually. Aside from reasons for ransom, the purpose could also be to make political points or statements where political rivalry exists. As much as kidnapping could generally be viewed this way, nations view it differently based on their jurisdictive definitions as well as punishments for the committing of the act. An in-depth conceptualization of kidnapping was x-rayed and the queer ladder theory was explored for this study. This is because it satisfactorily theorizes the instrumental essence of organized crime as a desperate means of economic empowerment and social climbing. The historical perspective of kidnapping in both Nigeria and the northwest region in particular was examined. It was, however, discovered that the menace of kidnapping is not new but had existed over time. The types of kidnapping, reasons for which the criminals perpetrate this act as well as causes linking the perpetration to existing social issues and effects of the menace on the region were studied. Government efforts at curbing the menace were looked at and necessary ways forward believed by this study as strategies which, if put in place would mitigate this societal challenge, were also proffered.

Keywords: banditry, governance, Kidnapping, northwest, ransom

Introduction

[1] **Arnold Onyekachi David Okoro** is with the Department of Transformation and Innovation, Army Headquarters. Email: **aodng03@yahoo.com**

Globally, persistent violent crises and conflicts have continued to rock the peaceful existence of nations in recent times. These violent crises and conflicts occur in the forms of protests, agitations, and organized crimes such as banditry. Banditry is a type of organised crime carried out by either an individual or a group of persons referred to as bandits. They are often proscribed or outlawed by the affected nations. Bandits perpetrate heinous crimes such as armed robbery, wanton killings, murder, invasions, rape, destruction of properties, arson, and kidnapping, just to mention a few.

Kidnapping is a criminal act that entails the waylaying and seizure of a person or persons against their will for possible gains of ransom. According to Merriam-Webster's legal view (2021), kidnapping is defined as "an act, instance or the crime of seizing, confining, abducting or carrying away a person by force or fraud often with a demand for ransom or in furtherance of another crime". This simply implies that the act is carried out non-consensually. Aside from reasons for ransom, the purpose could also be to make political points or statements where political rivalry exists. As much as kidnapping could generally be viewed this way, nations view it differently based on their jurisdictive definitions as well as punishments for the committing of the act (Farlex, 2021).

Ngwama (2014) described that "this act is a malady which was previously unknown to the people and has rapidly become highly domesticated". He stated further that the menace affects all manner of people/persons and has gained ascendency in Nigeria with a robust occurrence in states in the northwestern part of the country which includes Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Niger, Kebbi, and Sokoto states. Kidnapping, amongst other crimes committed by bandits, seems much easier and more fulfilling to conduct. Davidson (2010) described its commission as "a group of criminals armed with guns and cell phones who apprehend unsuspecting victims, drag them into a secluded area and begin to make phone calls to whoever is related to the victims and demand for ransom. Again, people can hardly sleep because of the fear of being robbed or kidnapped". Thus, it would be apt to infer that the impact of kidnapping amidst other crimes, especially in northwest

Nigeria is significant and worrisome creating and causing untold traumatic situations. To this, Ngwama (2014) posited that:

> kidnapping can be seen as false imprisonment in the sense that it involves the illegal confinement of individuals against their 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. This involves taking away a person against the person's will, usually to hold the person in false imprisonment or confinement without legal authority. This is often done for ransom or in furtherance of another crime. No one is free from being kidnapped. The kidnappers are everywhere targeting both foreigners and non-foreigners alike with little or no resistance from law enforcement agents.

Haiti is a Caribbean country existing in the South American continent. It was a former French and a United States American colony The country has overtime over decades, faced waves of organised crimes by bandits. These crimes have transcended from bandits tasking communities for the provision of basics such as electricity, water, and financial contributions, they impose fees on small and medium size traders, vendors, public services, and private companies. They extort politicians and businessmen by either offering protection or kidnapping them for ransom. One of the major banditry gangs that caused serious social and political torture in Haiti is the 400 Mawozo bandits. They have continued to be responsible for 80% of kidnappings/abductions in Haiti as was buttressed by the Centre for Analysis and Research in Human Rights (2021) in Port-au-Prince (cited in Miriam, 2021). Miriam (2021) described that:

> The Haitian 400 Mawozo is a notoriously violent gang that has taken control of roads and communities in and around the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince. It controls part of Ganthier in Croix-des-Bouquets, an area outside the capital. From Creole, the gang's name loosely

> translates to "400 simpletons," or "400 inexperienced men." But the group is widely feared for using rape and assassination to maintain its grip on Haitian streets, businesses, and power players. It has also been associated with extortion and a new trend of mass kidnappings from cars and buses. And it has targeted clergy and churches — a red line for many in the Catholic-majority Caribbean nation (Miriam, 2021).

Many of the gang's kidnap victims were reported as being non-specific targets but rather bystanders. It has continued to use violence on both the young and the old which has tremendously traumatized and desensitized a wide generation of the Haitian populace. (Miriam, 2021).

Kidnapping in the west African country of Mali is not new. It has been growing at an alarming rate and claiming various types of victims both young and old (Ornella et al, 2021). According to the 2021 report of the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), more people have been kidnapped/abducted in Mali in the first eight months of 2021 than in any other year documented by the Project. The organisation has recorded 935 kidnapping incidents since 2017 including 318 kidnapping incidents that were reported to have occurred since January 2021. Although Mali has been in internal conflicts over time, the frequency of kidnappings somewhat reflects the interests of those driving the conflict. Additionally, while victims in the past were mostly foreigners, Malian nationals have presently become the prey of the crime.

In Mali, kidnappings are carried out for different reasons by different perpetrators. While many cases are attributed to Jihadist groups who isolate communities from the government and the outside world, taking hostages which they leverage upon as bargaining chips, militias and community self-defense groups also perpetrate the crime. Theirs is sometimes in retaliation against those they suspect of being involved in violence against a particular community, however, unidentified armed groups also perpetrate the crime (ACLED, 2021

cited in Ornella et al, 2021). Most incidents of kidnapping occur in areas heavily affected by other forms of violence, especially in rural central Mali where the government has a limited presence. Attacks are common along roads and river routes creating hardship and denial of social needs for the rural populace. Foreign hostages taken from Mali or neighbouring countries were held in the northern desert part of the country which has gained notoriety as a hideout for captives by jihadist groups waiting for ransom payment which is used for funding violent insurrections.

Following a geographical shift of the intense nature of kidnapping from the north to central Mali, the victims have also changed from foreign captives to local captives. The primary victims include village chiefs, religious leaders, journalists, local administration officials, police, soldiers, and civil servants (ACLED Report, 2021). It is essential to note that these victims when rescued, would require psycho-social support to rebuild their lives and regain normalcy devoid of their traumatic experiences.

Kidnapping in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. It has existed over time right from the period of the nativity to the slave trade era till the present day. According to Ayuba (2020) "it is one of the most dreaded forms of banditry in Nigeria... while the act of kidnapping is established as an old one, the trends and patterns it takes are what gains currency and accounts for variations in its forms as well as the multiplicity of its occurrences across time and space". The preponderance of kidnapping has engulfed the various regions of the country, especially the northwest region. The infestation of this menace in northwestern Nigeria has created serious fear and psychological trauma in citizens. This is because the menace has led to farmers abandoning their farms for fear of being kidnapped, creating less availability of food.

Additionally, the continuous transcending of kidnap up to school pupils and students calls for concern. According to an Aljazeera report of 1 September 2021, more than 1,000 students have been kidnapped from schools in northern Nigeria between December 2020 to September 2021. However, in Kaduna state, 140 students of Bethel

Baptist School and 20 students of Greenfield University were abducted on 5 July 2021 and 20 April 2021 respectively (VOA, 2021; Premium Times Newspaper of 29 May 2021), Kebbi state experienced the kidnap of 80 students and teachers in June 2021 (Premium Times Newspaper, 2021), 73 students were abducted in a school in Kaya village in Zamfara state prompting the state government to close down other schools in the vicinity (Premium Times Newspaper, 2021), in Katsina state, over 300 students were kidnaped on 11 December 2020 while in Niger state, 136 students were kidnaped in a school in Tengina town on 29 June 2021 (Premium Times newspaper, 2021). This has led to parents stopping their children from going to school thereby causing a high rate of out-of-school situations and bleak the future of educational development of the Nigerian child and the educational system in northwestern Nigeria.

The continuous waylaying of unsuspecting travelers on various roads that transverse the region cannot be left out. This has remained a pest that has bedeviled the region leaving captives either killed, maimed, or kidnapped for ransom. One such incident occurred on the Sokoto-Gusau road on 26 July 2021 during which over 50 travelers were abducted (Premium Times Newspaper, 2021). The Kaduna-Abuja expressway has also, on several occasions, experienced kidnaps of travelers at various times creating doubts in the mind of road users as to whether to ply the road or not. Recently, on 20 October 2021, there was an attempt to bomb the domestic rail track between Abuja and Kaduna which is an alternative travel route between the state and the capital city of Nigeria, by bandits. This is in the quest to distort the train coaches and possibly kidnap a large number of passengers. As much as this attempt was foiled, it remains an indication of the desperation and emboldened of these kidnappers at carrying out this act by all means. On the whole, the future of northwest Nigeria as well as the country in general seems jeopardized and threatened.

Conceptualization Of Kidnapping

The concept of kidnapping is viewed differently by various scholars. While some see it as an act embedded within the menace of banditry, others view it as another form of armed robbery. However, it is a co-

habitant along with all forms of robbery within the umbrella of banditry. Fage and Alabi (2017) conceived kidnapping as "the forceful or fraudulent abduction of an individual or a group of individuals for reasons ranging from economic, political and religious to [struggle for] self-determination". Inyang and Abraham (2013) defined it as "the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. It is a common law offense and the key part is that it is an unwanted act on the part of the victim". Uzorma and Nwanegbo-Ben (2014), also defined kidnapping as the "act of seizing and detaining or carrying away a person by unlawful force or by fraud, and often with a ransom demand. It involves taking a person from their family forcefully without their consent with the motive of holding the person as a hostage and earning a profit from their family". Bello and Jamilu (2017) analyse that kidnapping is usually motivated by financial gain or political demand. Thus, opportunists or traditional criminals as well as political dissidents can resort to kidnapping to illegally obtain economic gains or have their demands granted.

Turner's (1998) description of kidnapping lends support to the above conceptions where he describes it as seizing and transporting persons to a destination of unlawful imprisonment against their consent through force or enticement. This implies that apart from the forcible capture of persons, kidnapping also occurs by luring away the victims and eventually forcefully confining them into false imprisonment. Ngwama (2014) sees kidnapping as trampling of the fundamental human rights of a person by another person or persons through the use of force to subject the victim to false imprisonment and extortion of ransom. The conceptions of kidnapping by the above researchers corroborate the English common law website which defines kidnapping as an offense that connotes a forceful or fraudulent taking away of a person by another person without his/her consent or lawful excuse.

It is however worthy to note that as much as the menace of kidnapping could be illegal and would constitute an offense in line with Inyang and Abraham's view, the demand for ransom which is also a fraud could also constitute an offense. Thus the views of these scholars aptly define the actions and reasons of the captor.

Okoli and Agada (2014) approached the concept of kidnapping with a synonymic description. They averred that there are terms that are used interchangeably to mean and connote kidnapping. These terms are hostage taking, abduction, captivity, and ransom. These scholars asserted that as much as these terms may be used and seem to ordinarily mean the same thing, they do not connote the same meaning. They posited that while abduction refers to kidnapping where the victim involved is a minor, hostage-taking denotes keeping a victim in illegal confinement to gain an advantage over adversaries. Similarly, captivity means holding a victim usually during war or conflict to have a combatant advantage in terms of tradeoffs while ransom on the other hand is the false confinement of a kidnapee to demand payment in cash (bitcoins, money, valuables, etc.) or kind by placing certain demands such as the swop-over of captives (Okoli and Agada, 2014).

It is however necessary to note within this concept that while political and economic factors can instigate kidnapping, the economic reason is the actual germane and most common predisposing factor in the parlance of this concept. Therefore, this paper views kidnapping as the sudden attack, whisking away of a victim or target whether suspecting or unsuspecting without the consent of the victim to an unknown location or hideout either for the political, or economic reason of ransom or a terminal vengeance of death.

Theoretical Framework/Methodology

The queer ladder theory was influenced by an American sociologist, Daniel Bell (1919-2011), who coined the idea of the 'queer ladder' in an attempt to explain the instrumental essence of organized crime as a desperate means of economic empowerment and social climbing. This theoretical perspective has since fertilized into a popular theoretical framework widely used in contemporary crime studies. The basic assumptions of QLT can be highlighted thus:

i. Organized crime is an instrumental behavior; it is a means to an end.

ii. It is an instrument of social climbing and/or socio-economic advancement

iii. It is a means to accumulate wealth and build power (Mallory, 2007; Okoli & Orinya, 2013).

Often ascribed to this theory is the notion that organized crime thrives in contexts where the government's capacity to dictate, sanction, and deter crime is poor; where public corruption is endemic; and where prospects for legitimate livelihood opportunities are slim (Nwoye, 2000; Lyman, 2007; Okoli & Orinya, 2013). Under these circumstances, the incentive to indulge in crime is high, while deterrence from criminal living is low. In other words, the benefits of committing a crime surpass the costs and/or risks. This creates ample pretext and motivation for criminal impunity and franchise (Okoli & Orinya, 2013).

This work relied on opportunistic interviews of some persons (anonymous) who had been victims of kidnapping by bandits in the states of Kaduna and Zamfara. From their narration, their experiences were not far-fetched from other victims in other neighbouring states of Niger, Katsina, and Sokoto as were accounted for in the media. Data from secondary sources were also relied upon for the buttressing and corroboration of assertions.

Historical Perspective Of Kidnapping In Nigeria

Ngwama (2014) posited that kidnapping has now become a generic word both in public and private discuss going on its prevalence in the country. Literarily, the word, which has become notorious, putrid, and nauseating in the ears of virtually everyone has derived from "kid" meaning; child, and "nab" which means; to snatch. Adewale (2009) pointed out that kidnapping now appears to be an emerging concern in Nigeria though it is not a new phenomenon. It is as old as the word itself. But the motive may vary from country to country. Since 1673 the unfriendly world has been used to the practice of stealing children for use as servants or labourers in the American colonies. So, it has come to mean any illegal capture or detention of a person or people against their will, regardless of age.

The kidnappers, who can be very erratic, have been found to engage in criminality for several complex motives ranging from unemployment,

idleness, vengeance, rituals, monetary gains, and political reasons. Ngwama (2014) further historicized that as much as kidnapping is not a new phenomenon but has existed over time, the first occurrence of this menace in contemporary Nigeria occurred in 2006 when the militants of the Niger Delta took total hostage to protest the inequality in the region. According to the militants, Nigeria is built at the expense of the region which serves as the cash cow for the whole country. The action which started from the kidnapping of government expatriates has expanded to the kidnapping of Nigerian politicians and their children as well as religious leaders.

According to Catlin Group (2012), statistically, Nigeria records more than 1,000 kidnapping incidents a year, and there are undoubtedly many that are unreported. The British government has decried the fact that at least 25 British and dual British citizens and more than 200 other foreign nationals have been kidnapped in the Niger Delta area since January 2007 alone (Catlin Group, 2012). No wonder Fage and Alabi (2017) recognized that one of the elements of militancy and/or insurgency in the Niger Delta is kidnapping.

Catlin Group (2012) further narrated that from the unstable situation in the Niger Delta, kidnapping has spread across the country. These kidnappings can either be for financial or political gain. Victims were originally foreign oil workers, but today many are locals, often employees of international oil and oil service companies, and not necessarily wealthy; anyone whose family might pay a ransom can be targeted. In June 2012, police rescued international footballer Christian Obodo who had been kidnapped in front of a church (Catlin Group, 2012).

This was buttressed by a 2020 report by SB Morgen, a Nigerian consulting firm, using data gathered from a variety of open sources, including the Council's Nigeria Security Tracker, which presented that in the past, kidnapping victims tended to be wealthy and the prominent, and so kidnappers had every interest in keeping their victims alive to extract the maximum ransom possible, however, over time, the pool of potential victims has greatly expanded. Now, victims are often poor villagers, sometimes kidnapped

indiscriminately, a departure from the targeted kidnapping of wealthy people. They struggle to pay ransoms quickly because of their relative poverty, and victims are much more likely to be killed. The report also presents a valuable attempt to quantify the costs of kidnapping and to map its spread. Between 2011 and 2020, it concludes that over $18 million had been paid in ransom. The amount of ransom accelerated in the latter portion of that period: between 2016 and 2020, around $11 million was paid out. It shows that kidnapping has spread from the oil patch to the entire country and that the army is now stationed in almost every Nigerian state, essentially to keep order.

In many parts of the country, kidnapping appears to have become a business, especially for otherwise unemployed youth. SB Morgen expresses concern that kidnapping will increase as Nigeria falls into recession driven by the coronavirus and the fall in oil prices, putting more people out of work. Perhaps a surprise is that the total spent on ransoms—$18 million over nine years—is so low, especially compared to ransoms Sahelian kidnappers extract from European states to free their kidnaped nationals, which can reach millions of dollars per victim. It may be that current Nigerian victims are so poor that ransoms are low. The report cites an estimate that ransoms can range from $1,000 to $150,000, depending on the economic situation of the victim and their family. The SB Morgen report also shows that Nigerian anxiety about kidnapping is well-placed. Wealthy Nigerians and expatriates are subject to much larger ransoms than poor farmers. Though they have tight security, they are not immune from the general crime wave, of which kidnapping is just one part. In December 2019, for example, attackers attempted to extort and murder the manager of the shipping giant Maersk in Nigeria in his home. He survived his injuries, but his wife did not.

According to a publication by Teniola and Pelumi (2021), Nigeria's South-South region, the source of the country's oil wealth, the Niger Delta region, has historically been a hotspot for politically motivated

kidnappings. The high rate in this region contributed to Nigeria's position as one of the top 10 countries for kidnapping as far back as 1999. It is generally accepted that this was the epicenter from which kidnappings spread to other southern regions. Like the north, the entire southern region has experienced an uptick in this crime, with perpetrators ranging from militants to sophisticated criminal gangs. Victims are often members of Nigeria's middle class, including politicians and government officials.

It further elaborated that in Nigeria's north, kidnappings in the past decade were originally concentrated in the northeast and perpetrated mainly by violent extremists for ideological, political, and economic reasons. The most recent incidents, however, have been predominantly carried out by criminal gangs popularly referred to as 'bandits' in the northwest and north-central regions. Their motives appear to be purely economic, and their increased focus on schools can be viewed as an attempt to maximize gains. School kidnappings shine a spotlight on governments, putting them under pressure to secure students' release by all means. And a government-backed ransom payoff - although always denied - will often outsize an individual one. There are however other affected demographics such as the fact that travelers are often picked up on inter-state journeys, and community members are kidnapped from their villages (Teniola and Pelumi, 2021).

The low-risk, high-reward model that usually drives kidnapping economies means that higher net-worth individuals should be primary targets. This requires a careful selection of victims to ensure a high payoff. Before 2018, this was largely the case in Nigeria. But there's been an increase in less-targeted mass kidnappings countrywide, particularly in the north. This often entails rounding up a group who are sometimes of low economic means through community invasions or highway kidnappings. Relatives of victims in Zamfara and Kaduna states during an interview have said that some kidnappers accepted ransoms as low as ₦30,000 because the victim's family couldn't afford more. In some cases, abductors

instructed household members to sell their appliances to raise small ransoms (Teniola and Pelumi, 2021).

The increased victimisation of low-income and already vulnerable individuals isn't the only emerging threat. Ransoms are the lifeblood of the kidnapping economy as they serve as rewards that reinforce criminal activity and help secure arms for future operations. The government allegedly paid at least ₦30 million to secure the release of 344 boys abducted from Government Science Secondary School, Kankara. The growing links between criminal gangs and violent extremists in the north mean that ransoms, directly and indirectly, fund violent extremism. Kidnap-for-ransom has been used as a source of revenue for violent extremists in Nigeria's north (Teniola and Pelumi, 2021).

Types Of Kidnapping

There are two types of kidnapping as buttressed by Zannoni (2003). These are criminal and political kidnappings.

Criminal kidnapping

Criminal kidnapping involves the whisking away of a victim and the subsequent demand for ransom from the victim's family in exchange for the victim's release. In this instance, victims are normally used as bargaining chips, baits, or shields to either help them escape from the scene of a crime or as hostages to assist them in accessing secret codes as in bank robbery, just to mention a few. In some parlance, it becomes an indirect method of achieving their illicit goal through opportunistic kidnap.

Political kidnapping

Political kidnapping is carried out by organised criminals called political gangsters (political gangsterism). Their utmost aim in practice is to continuously carry out acts of political gangsterism as is fueled from time to time by their political masters. Where their masters have an interest in a state or locality, the gangsters kidnap a political target which is used for bargaining or negotiating their

positions. Often when these kidnaps take place, it is meant to further and foster political aspirations as well as make political statements.

Reasons And Causes Of Kidnapping

Kidnappers have aggressive tendencies, erratic reasoning, spontaneous in reaction, and are merciless at victims. All of these are geared towards their aim of achieving quality ransoms in return for captives from families. One would wonder why a person or a group of persons would choose to engage in this sort of crime. The reasons indeed abound and they range from the desire by the bandits to abduct persons to play certain roles in their criminal activities, it could also be for reasons of organised begging parties and for purposes of slavery. Other reasons include the need by the kidnappers to carry out illicit rape and intercourse, especially against girls and women, forced marriage against the will of the victim, prostitution, ransom, revenge, selling body parts, unlawful activity, and murder. This is in tandem with the view of Hazen and Horner (2007) who posited that hostages are taken for two primary reasons which are political bargaining and economic gain, amongst other reasons.

Aside from criminal-mindedness being the major cause of the crime of kidnapping, Ayuba (2020) averred that "the complexity of the phenomenon and the new dimensions it takes makes its motivating factors somewhat unending. These factors include unemployment, idleness, rituals, monetary gains, political reasons, leadership failure, poor security system, loss of societal value, and economic deprivation. They all rest on socioeconomic, environmental, and societal bases as issues. This was buttressed by Bello and Jamilu (2017) who averred that political factors, poverty, and lack of legal/available employment opportunities among the youth are also playing a fundamental role in the rise of kidnapping. In line with the above, Tepperman (2006, as cited in Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2016) observed that northwestern Nigeria has a large number of adolescents living and making a living on the streets. This has been attributed to economic factors and exposure to all forms of risks. Catlin Group (2012) also inferred that economic deprivation and a sense of desperation have planted the seeds of kidnapping as a

way of getting money in poor communities. It can then become a way of life, even when legal options become available. Furthermore, the disparity between rich and poor is growing and this fuels resentment and a desire for a bigger share by the poor from the rich (Catlin Group, 2012).

Effects Of Kidnapping On North West Nigeria

The massive effect the crime of kidnapping has had in northwest Nigeria cannot be overemphasized nor can it be exhaustively mentioned nor described. These effects include abandonment of schools, mass internal displacement of persons, unavailability of food, loss of confidence in government and its agencies, increase in poverty and unemployment rate, counter-productive to foreign investments, presenting the country in a bad light to global communities, psychological stress, and trauma, political instability.

This was corroborated by Kaylor (2015) who posited that "irrespective of the type of kidnapping and the motive for its perpetration, the psychological and financial impact of the problem can be quite devastating, both for the victims and their significant others. Victims of kidnapping differ in age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, level of education, and country of origin. Although anyone can become a victim of trafficking, certain populations are especially vulnerable to this form of victimisation (Kaylor, 2015). One common effect of this menace which seemed memorably traumatic for those concerned was the lack of contact for many parents with their children during the period that they were away (Freeman, 2006). Child sexual abuse as a result of kidnapping also exposes a child to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases". Another guided form of sexual molestation of kidnapped children is that the abducted underage victims are often subjected to forced marriage with older husbands. Clark (2004) on the other hand averred that the child brides are married to older, more sexually experienced men with whom it is difficult to negotiate safe sexual behaviours, especially when under pressure to bear children.

Concerning socio-economic circumstances, Catlin Group (2012) stated that "apart from psychological trauma on the victim and the victim's family, as well as physiological implications, kidnapping is also accompanied with huge economic or financial implications. It was estimated that globally, ransom payments could be worth US$500 million annually, especially when the total number of incidents is open to great uncertainty". However, they observed that the vast majority of kidnaps across the world, perhaps 70 percent, go unreported due to fear of reprisals or lack of confidence and incapability of the police. At most times, during incidences of kidnapping of persons especially children, parents resort to finding solace through religious faith while others struggle with their inability to possibly raise ransoms or the desired needs of the captors. The families of the captives also suffer from psychological torture or derailment which most often keeps them either hopeless or thoughtful at wishing for the return of their loved ones from the kidnappers.

It is pertinent to note that a successful kidnapping could embolden other lesser criminals within society. To this effect, criminal groups begin to rise with an emboldened venture into the act of kidnapping. This becomes so due to economic gains, however, the effect becomes that the society or environment becomes untenable and unsafe and law enforcement agencies' responsibility to citizens on the need to ensure safety abruptly increases.

Government Response

Owing to the grievous and intense nature of the effects of kidnapping in northwest Nigeria, the federal government as well as the governments of affected states have continued to respond against the menace. This was buttressed by Crisis Group in their 2020 publication where they stated that "for the Nigerian government and security forces, securing towns and communities across the vast north-western region affected by kidnapping is an enormous challenge". While the federal government has launched a kinetic force against perpetrators through the establishment of various operations coordinated by the Defence Headquarters, the state governments of northwest states

have continued to approach the handling of the menace through non-kinetic means of persuasion, deprivation, and massive calls for dialogue. Persuasion and dialogue efforts by the states within a time seemed somewhat ineffective. This assessment was made following massive kidnap occurrences that have continued to occur. Based on this, the state governments resorted to deprivation of some factors that helped fuel the kidnappers' operation. These factors include communication, logistics supply of both food and fuel, imposition of curfews in necessary locations, banning of cutting of trees as well as the massive orientation of villagers (common victims) on the need to raise alarm or call for help once the kidnappers are at them. Additionally, they were to also raise internal vigilante mechanisms to carry out the first line of rescue operations before the arrival of law enforcement agencies. More interesting is the fact that some governors such as the Kaduna State government have remained adamant about not negotiating with kidnappers, however, other governors have continued to have elements of negotiation for the release of victims for ransom. They also used the opportunity to want to convince the kidnappers to turn a new leaf and abandon this menace for the betterment of the state, society, and environment. Despite these processes, Non-Governmental Organisations and Civil Society Organisations which include religious bodies have continued to make immense efforts to intervene in the call for a peaceful non-destructive, and non-kinetic approach to resolving the preponderance of kidnapping in northwest Nigeria. It is noteworthy to understand that the bridge between kinetic and non-kinetic efforts is that an overwhelming kinetic effort would be required to cause the kidnappers to forcefully lay low and voluntarily surrender to the state for further non-kinetic procedures which naturally would include disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration into the society.

Strategies For Curbing Kidnapping

Kidnapping is a business that has attracted massive attention across facets of society, especially in northwest Nigeria. As much as its reasons and the causes for the commission of this crime are obvious, its effects on a nation, state, or region such as the northwestern part of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Moreover, its destructive strides in a nation, state, society, families, and entities range from psychological, emotional, and socio-economic fronts. Therefore, to curb this menace to the barest minimum, if not totally:

a. Affected states as well as the nation should employ robust kinetic efforts to facilitate easy non-kinetic drive
b. Ungoverned spaces should be occupied through the use of ICT drone coverage manned by stakeholders of security for monitoring and domination of these spaces.
c. Judiciary should have an active drive for the trial of kidnappers in conjunction with speedy investigative processes by necessary law enforcement agencies.
d. Capital punishment of the death sentence should be made appropriate in law by state and federal legislatures concerning the crime of kidnapping and others associated with it. This will serve as deterrence as no right-thinking citizen would wish to face the shame of a death sentence either by handing or firing squad as the case may be.
e. The extended links of kidnappers to whom collected ransoms are taken to (sponsors) should be tracked, arrested, investigated, and prosecuted and should face a similar sentence as that of their instruments (kidnappers).
f. Mass enlightenment should be intensified in communities, societies, states, and the nation as a whole. This is necessary to educate the northwest citizens on this crime and its attendant consequences as well as what to do when accosted by the perpetrators of the crime.
g. The Nigerian Government should come up with poverty alleviation programs and employment opportunities, targeting youths who are mostly involved in abductions and kidnappings out of economic frustration, such as unemployment.

h. The government should also fight insurgency because the various insurgent groups in the northern and southern parts of the country are all resorting to the kidnapping of innocent populations in their efforts to further their causes. This would make the crime unattractive and unlucrative.
i. The law enforcement agents, such as the police as well as other agencies meant for anti-human trafficking should also intensify surveillance in the fight against kidnapping. They should be receiving special training on how to identify victims of kidnapping and be able to take them from the kidnappers without them being hurt.
j. Local government governance should be made autonomous from the states and viable at ensuring that it provides leadership, governance, and security at the grassroots level. This could be enhanced through the creation of various clusters of neighborhood watches.

Conclusion

Kidnapping has become one of the most traumatic acts of banditry in Nigeria and the northwest in particular. Its experience is devastating to both the captive and their families. As much as the perpetrators of this menace have reasons as well as adjudged underlying cause that has made it thrive, suffice to state that they are not and cannot be commensurate to its attendant effects. The views of scholars on the subject are interesting. This is so because they all point in the same direction. Thus, the call for unrelenting solutions cannot be overemphasized.

According to Thomas Fuller's 1783 statement that "a stitch in time saves nine", there is a need for urgent critical actions against kidnapping in northwest Nigeria to avert the effects and consequences of the menace in that region and across Nigeria in general. This is because it has continued to make the region an untenable zone for both human and socio-economic settlement. It has also made the zone a no-go area for both investors and tourists whose presence was supposed to creative industries as well as foreign

income through tourism and visits to our once revered Kamuku and Dansadau forests which were one of the nation's game reserves. Additionally, the need to rid the region of this menace is indeed important to also ensure that the educational system within the region remains active with children returning to school without fear of being kidnapped. It would also be important to farmers as they will return to their farms invariably increasing food availability and increased economic activities in the region.

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