



# Stopping Kidnapping

- Create a Tactical Team
- Govern the Ungoverned Spaces
- Take Policing to the People
- Leverage Technology

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## Overview

When in April 2014, Boko Haram abducted about 276 girls from their school in Chibok in Borno State, the world was outraged. The reality of the situation was difficult to comprehend. The nature and scale of the attack were difficult to comprehend. Eight years later, stories of shooters abducting entire schools barely get reposted in Nigeria’s very active social media. It has become the new normal. As of Q1 2021, all the public schools in northern Nigeria were shuttered, and the students were sent home in a public acknowledgement that the Government of Nigeria cannot protect its young.

Nigerians have accepted that roads in the country shouldn’t be plied by day or night. Even governors, the Chief Security Officers of their State and have detachments of well-armed security officers in their entourage do not ply those roads. The situation is the same in the farmlands. Heavily armed militia groups patrol those areas and kidnap whomever for ransom. The kidnapers, whose motivation ranges from economic considerations to political interests, do not discriminate by age, gender, ethnicity, or religion. Abducting vulnerable and innocent people for ransom is lucrative and has made the crime pervasive across the country.

Data from Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database<sup>27</sup> shows that in the twelve months to September 2021, Nigeria recorded 203 kidnapping incidents resulting in 2,542 kidnap victims. Four states – Zamfara, Katsina, Niger, and Kaduna - account for 44 percent of the kidnap incidents and 82 percent of the kidnap victims. Only four states did not report any kidnapping incidents in the period under review.

With the failure of the State to protect or retrieve the kidnapped, Nigerians have resorted to negotiating and paying the ransom. Unfortunately, this practice has made the crime attractive and increased kidnap incidents.

## Drivers of Kidnapping

Poverty, corruption, unemployment, terrorism, failure of the courts, and proliferation of small arms and light weapons have [resulted](#) in the high kidnapping incidents in Nigeria. During the Niger Delta militancy, several kidnapers claimed their actions were to seek redress for various forms of injustice by the Government of Nigeria and

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<sup>27</sup> Fatality figures were culled from the Nextier SPD Violent Conflict Database which sources its data from media reported violent conflicts. The database categorizes the conflicts into banditry, terrorism, farmers-herder crisis, extra-judicial killings, cultism, armed robbery, domestic violence, civil unrest, piracy, communal clashes.

the oil companies. There is no valid evidence that any of the criminal acts were carried out to improve the lives of ordinary people in the communities. Today’s kidnappers, mostly in the Northern part of the country, do not bother with such rhetoric of marginalisation or a fight for freedom. It is clear to all parties that they are a criminal enterprise interested in the unregulated and illegal mining activities in parts of the north or extracting ransoms from ordinary Nigerians.

## Prior Intervention Efforts

The government has deployed security personnel to the regions and adopted various approaches to the problem. At first, the security forces pushed back against the kidnappers by destroying their enclaves, killing and arresting many. However, while the measure checked the kidnappers, it did not stop them. Recently, the government suspended telecommunication operations in Zamfara and parts of Kaduna, Sokoto, and Katsina to disrupt the criminals’ communication flow. Furthermore, agitation for state police by some state governors led to the establishment of ethnic vigilante groups such as the *Amotekun* and *Ebube Agu* to complement the efforts of the state security agencies. However, given that these vigilante groups are not properly regulated, they could lead to [unintended consequences](#) such as rekindling ethnic conflicts within communities.

## Recommendations

### Create a Tactical Team

The government needs to equip a clandestine tactical force to collaborate with local communities to gather relevant and actionable intelligence for their work. Then, the team needs to hunt and contain the kidnappers proactively. This idea does not need to enlarge the bureaucracy; rather, it selects a special squad from the existing force and enables them to leverage intelligence and technology to thwart the kidnappers.

### Govern the Ungoverned Spaces

Kidnapping operations are mainly carried out from hard to access locations such as forests, rocky terrains, and other ungoverned areas. Whatever the case, the kidnappers must operate in populated areas to grab their victims. The government should improve its ability to use both intelligence and technology to track and subdue the criminal. Part of this effort is to create new strategies for maintaining government presence – no matter how skeletal – in the currently ungoverned spaces. The presence can be for intelligence gathering purposes.

### Take Policing to the People

It is also imperative to pay more attention to community policing, which will help to bring government presence and security to inaccessible communities in the country. This approach should include pseudo-security structures and guidelines that exist in rural areas.

### Leverage Technology

Adopting technology will also provide alternative measures to curb kidnapping. For example, the Nigerian security agencies must adopt technology to unravel kidnappers' locations and hideouts where victims are being held hostage and track online conversations to apprehend criminals.