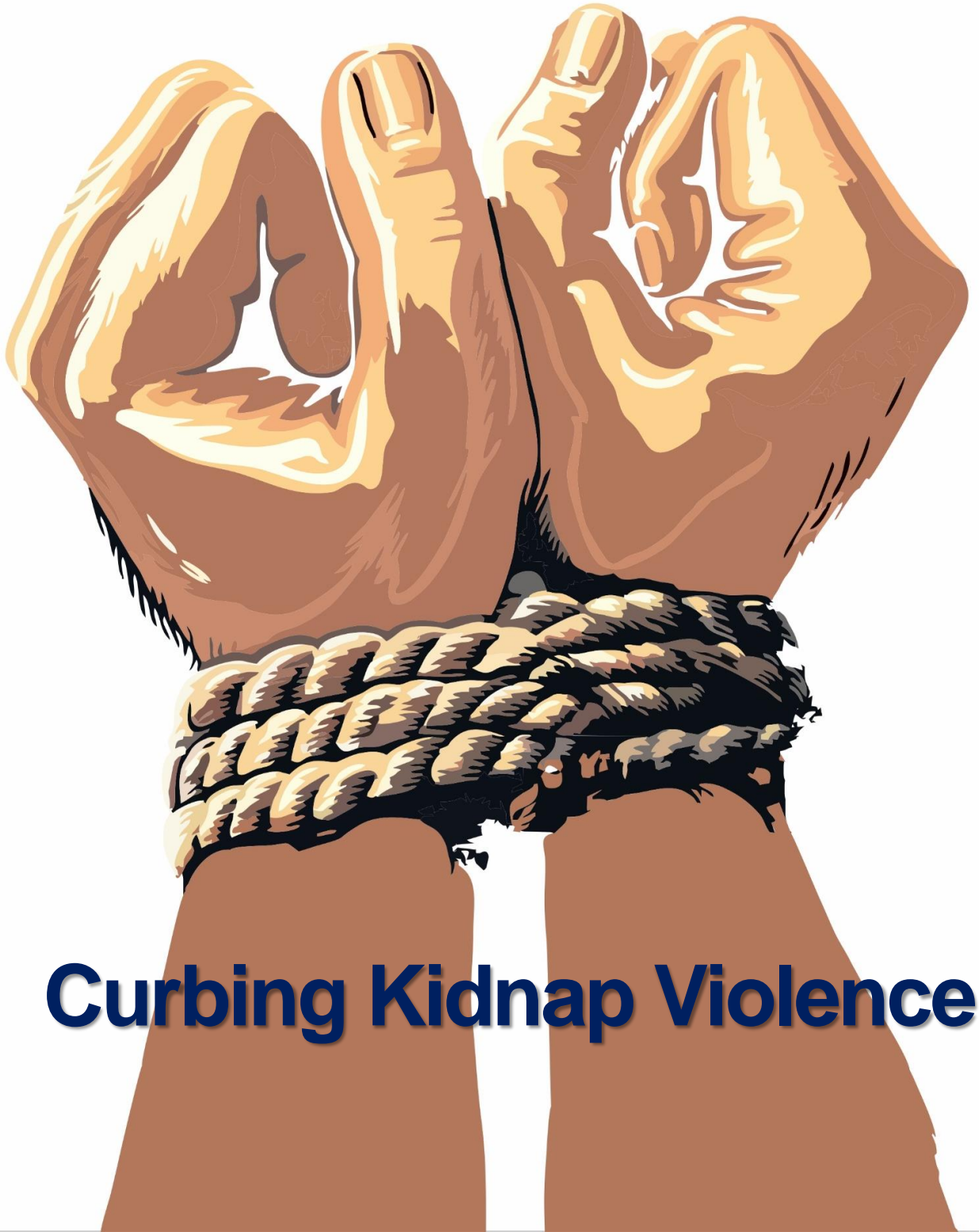


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# SPD Nextier

Security . Peace . Development



## Curbing Kidnap Violence

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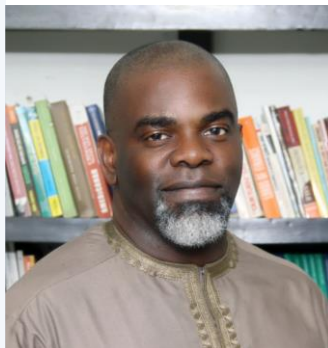
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## Editor's Note

### PLATFORM FOR DISCUSSIONS

Welcome to the May 2019 edition of Nextier SPD Monthly publication. This magazine is designed to deepen our knowledge and insight on security, peace, and development issues in Nigeria. It brings to the fore thematic issues such as conflict, peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, and security sector reforms (SSR), disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), violent deaths, state building, environmental violence and natural resources-fuelled violent conflicts. Every month, this publication provides a step-by-step analysis of security and development issues using different narratives, research philosophies, methodologies and trajectories.

The fundamental objective of the publication is to provide a platform for evidence-based and scholarly discussions of contemporary security issues facing Nigeria in particular and other African countries in general. The publication provides evidence-driven research and proffers well-thought out policy recommendations. It is our desire that policymakers, practitioners, and development partners will use the ideas presented here to engage in discussions to improve their policies, programmes, projects, and operations.

This month's Nextier SPD Policy Monthly examines kidnap violence in Nigeria. Among various security threats witnessed in the country, kidnappings are experienced in all the six geo-political regions. They range from kidnapping for ritual, to ransom kidnapping, to politically motivated kidnaps, among other types. Using political economy theories of greed, grievance and criminality, the monthly policy brief argues that economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment are some of the drivers of this menace. Relying on observation and desk research, the monthly traces the origin, history and causes of recent kidnappings, especially the activities of militants in the Niger Delta region. Furthermore, this publication in citing and analysing other cases, such as adoption of school children in the North East by Boko Haram, demonstrates that kidnapping for ransom is now seen as an enterprise. Subsequently, it proffers recommendations on how to curb the violence, especially through entrenching good governance, fostering human capital development and provision of security.



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May 2019



# Curbing Kidnap Violence

## Introduction

Over the last decade, kidnapping for ransom has evolved into one of the most pervasive and atrocious forms of criminal violence in Nigeria. Whether in scale or frequency, kidnapping has metastasised into one of the most visible forms of security threats in the country (Osumah and Aghedo, 2012). These days hardly does a week pass by without media reports of various kidnap cases. Unlike in the mid-2000s when the crime was a core strategy for political expression and enterprise by militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, today's kidnappers have broadened to include Islamic insurgents, terrorists, herders, armed robbers, cultists and disgruntled students of higher institutions (Aghedo, 2015). Likewise, target victims have expanded from oil workers, politicians and their family members to almost anyone today.

Kidnapping is as old as human history. According to Tzanelli (2006), as cited in Ibrahim and Mukhtar (2017), the term came into common use back in 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain when infants ("kids") of rich families were taken when they slept ("napped") and held for ransom. The menace has been on an increase as indicated by a 2018 data from Control Risks.

Kidnap victimisation is, however, not peculiar to Nigeria as numerous cases in other countries (Israel, Iraq, Colombia, etc.) exemplify. Kidnapping in Nigeria, unlike in some of the global hotspots, is not perpetrated by insurgent movements and left-wing guerrillas alone; rather, it has become a form of enterprise simply for commercial gains. There are major expressways in Nigeria (such as the Kaduna-Abuja highway and the Ife-Ibadan road) that are now constantly under the siege of kidnappers with ineffectual responses from the government security agencies. This security threat has caused passengers to commute by train between Abuja and Kaduna to minimise their vulnerability to kidnapping for ransom. Even the trains must have armed soldiers in every coach to forestall any attacks.

Kidnapping comes at a huge cost to the society. Although most kidnapped victims in Nigeria are released upon payment of ransoms by their families and/or friends, there are a few who are maimed or even killed. Recent reports indicate that there may be an increase in the number of victims that suffer violence even when ransoms are paid. This could get worse with increased pressure from the government security agencies to stem the rise of the kidnapping.

Besides the threat to life, kidnap victimisation reduces economic investment, social activities, and further worsens the already battered image of the country locally and internationally (Ojo and Aghedo, 2013). Although the crimes of kidnapping, abductions, and hostage-taking have generated intense social discourse, there are very few scholarly and policy literatures on the crimes. To bridge this gap, this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Monthly interrogates the key drivers of kidnapping and proffers policy recommendations on how to reverse the trend.



## Theoretical Framework

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Efforts by scholars and policy makers to explain the phenomena of rebellion and ransom kidnap have triggered a polemic. While some analysts blame the criminal motivations of rebels on greed, others emphasise the role of grievance. Advocates of the greed paradigm castigate rebels and kidnapers as criminals who reap where they did not sow by extra-legally capturing the wealth of others (Collier 2000). On the other hand, proponents of the grievance approach argue that the propelling motive of most rebellion and kidnap victimisation is to redress some injustice in the society. In the view of such analysts, operations of militants and kidnapers are underpinned by the quest for justice (Keen, 1998).

Exploring the greed paradigm, Collier (2000:98) dismisses grievance as a possible cause of rebellion because according to him, “justice, revenge, and relief from grievance” are public goods and are therefore susceptible to collective action problem which suffers from a free-rider problem. This means that aggrieved people are likely to resist fighting and allow other aggrieved people to do the fighting while everyone will enjoy the benefits. Collier therefore likens a rebellion to an organised crime

which requires enormous funds to succeed and “its main challenge is to secure funds in order to wage war...or the rebel group will wither away” (Bannon and Collier 2003: 3).

This report sees the ‘greed’ and ‘grievance’ arguments as mutually reinforcing rather than as exclusive variables. The Collier-centric greed strand of the debate relies mainly on rational choice theory and statistical quantification. The overriding salience of these approaches has been called into question. According to Ballentine (2003:260), “economic incentives and opportunities have not been the only or even the primary cause of these armed conflicts; rather, to varying degrees, they interacted with socio-economic and political grievances, interethnic disputes, and security dilemmas in triggering the outbreak of warfare” and kidnap victimisation.





## Origin of Kidnap Victimisation in Nigeria

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Kidnapping for sale into slavery was perpetuated in the area now known as Nigeria for centuries. Many of the slaves who ended up in the West Indies, America and Europe, etc. were kidnapped from Nigeria. Indeed, back in pre-colonial Nigeria, ransoms were demanded and paid to release victims especially if the communities were not eager to engage in another war. Similarly, thousands of Nigerians have been kidnapped for ritual sacrifices. (Ebohon, 2013) shows that this phenomenon of abducting human beings (especially children) for money-making ritual fuelled the sudden disappearances of many persons in the late 1970s.

Kidnapping in Nigeria witnessed a dramatic evolution when from December 2005 and May 2007, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) kidnapped over 100 foreign oil workers in the Niger Delta. Although MEND claimed that its aim was to draw the attention of the government, media, and international community to environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta, it received several millions of naira in ransom before releasing the abductees (LeVan, 2013).

Greed appears to be the dominant motivation for the crimes. Despite their professed political goals, MEND deployed several criminal tactics to ensure its economic survival. While it engaged in maritime piracy, armed robbery and political thuggery; however,

its main sources of incomes were from ransom kidnapping and oil bunkering. According to Campbell (2013), all factions of MEND were at one time or the other involved in these crimes. LeVan (2013) showed that between January 2006 and July 2007, about 319 hostages (including citizens of France, United States, Britain, India, etc.) were abducted by MEND and large ransoms demanded and paid. Campbell (2013:68-69) estimated that over one billion naira in ransom payments was made to militants between 2004 and 2007 in order to secure the release of oil workers abducted by insurgents. A number of oil companies, including Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, paid ransoms to various insurgents in the Niger Delta in a bid to forestall the kidnap victimisation of their staff or to secure the social license to operate.

The spate of kidnaps in Nigeria declined with the 2009 implementation of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) for ex-agitators in the Niger Delta. A significant number of the militants in the region accepted the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The menace has not been completely eliminated as there are still pockets of kidnap operations that have continued to occur in the Niger Delta even in the post-2009 Amnesty era.

# Metamorphosis and Implications of Kidnaps

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As the scale of kidnap victimisation declined in the Niger Delta, it spilled over to other parts of the country especially the adjoining South-East region. The phenomenon boomed in the area (particularly in Anambra, Imo and Abia states) because of the high concentration of successful business men and women. Several armed robbery gangs switched to ransom kidnapping. The victimisation of the rich and their relatives by kidnapers resulted in the relocation of a number of entrepreneurs to other parts of the country especially Lagos and Abuja. The security threat associated with kidnapping also drastically reduced the number of people from the region who made the annual migration to their villages for the Christmas holidays (Osumah and Aghedo, 2012). The extrajudicial killings of many of the alleged kidnap kingpins brought some respite to the region.

Kidnap victimisation witnessed an upsurge in the North-East and North-West regions of the country. The mass kidnappings in Chibok (276 school girls), Damasak 300 children, and Dapchi (110 school girls) illustrate the enormous scale of abduction and hostage-taking in the region. In July 2017, Boko Haram insurgents killed 40 people and kidnapped three others from a team of oil explorers. Army chief Buratai revealed that between 2015 and 2017, security agencies rescued over 300,000 hostages from Boko Haram. Kidnap ransom has been estimated to be one of the major sources of Boko Haram finance. For example, \$3.15 million was allegedly paid to the sect for the release of the French family of seven on April, 2013. Over 3 million Euros was also paid to the insurgent group for the release of some Chibok schoolgirls on May 6, 2017.

Kidnapping for ransom is now seen as an enterprise. In a bizarre twist to the kidnapping saga, many locals and foreigners now 'arrange' their kidnap to swindle their employers or affluent relatives. For example, an Indian national, Mr. Vishwanath Mishal, arranged his own kidnap in Enugu and demanded for ₦10 million ransoms from his employer in Lagos using another person's phone. He was arrested in the bank as he went to collect the negotiated sum of ₦7 million ransom. Upon interrogation, he confessed that he needed the money to take care of personal problems.



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# Drivers of Kidnap Violence

As stated above, greed and grievance models offer appropriate lens for understanding the deepening crisis of kidnapping in Nigeria. The examination of kidnap origin and metamorphosis in Nigeria reveals that greed has been a core driver of the crime. This shows clearly in the number of those kidnapped and the huge ransoms demanded by MEND insurgents in the Niger Delta - over 50 expatriates were kidnapped in January 2007 alone and this had increased to over 100 by March of the same year (Obi 2009). Similarly, the revelation by Campbell (2013:68-69) that the militants claimed over one billion naira in ransom between 2004 and 2007 is an indication that greed played a paramount role in their so-called political struggle.

In the same way, Boko Haram's mass abduction of persons, particularly, young girls in Chibok, Damasak and Dapchi reveal a level of greed. Boko Haram's award of kidnapped girls as 'wives' to incentivise its foot soldiers was contradictory to their so-called quest for religious piety. Besides, there was initial targeting of Christian women in the Gwoza area for kidnapping. A number of the abducted Christian women were gang-raped in contradiction of the doctrines of Islam. Boko Haram dehumanises its victims by calling them infidels who deserve to be killed. The sect members deploy this strategy of moral disengagement to insulate themselves from the human consequences of their nefarious actions.

As noted above, greed and grievance are mutually reinforcing rather than exclusive. Grievance has played a

fundamental role in the dynamics of kidnapping. Certainly, poverty amongst many Nigerians contrasts sharply with the resource endowments of the country. The daily frustration and grievance of ordinary Nigerians are further compounded by the poor and inadequate availability of basic necessities such as food, housing, healthcare and electricity. The great expectations that the return to democratic rule would engender better life for young Nigerians have remained unrealised in the two decades of civilian rule.

Nigeria's economy remains largely in a parlous state on account of corruption and poor fiscal management. For example, the country earned net revenue of ~~N~~41.04 trillion from oil between 1999 and 2016, yet, these significant revenue earnings have not translated to higher quality of life for the people. The wealth of the state is drained by the monumental culture of corruption (Diamond, 1991). Following these debilitating conditions arising from failure of governance, some Nigerian youth have resorted to desperate tactics such as kidnapping for survival.

In the Niger Delta, the insensitivity of the Nigerian state and oil companies operating in the area, accentuated the perception that only an armed struggle could liberate them from environmental degradation and economic marginalization (Ukiwo, 2011). The destruction of Odi by soldiers under democratic rule further convinced Niger Delta agitators that even civilian administration would not be able to deliver the needed amicable solution to

their problem. This led to the proliferation of arms “to overpower poorly armed security agents and defend their communities” (Ukiwo, 2011: 24). Thus, kidnap victimisation of oil workers and pro-government politicians was strategically deployed by the militant groups including MEND.

The poverty profile of northern Nigeria is worse. Hansen (2016) estimates that about 60 million out of the 90 million populations of the region are absolutely poor. Despite having occupied political powers in Nigeria for several years, Northern Nigeria is characterised by “inter-generational divide of alarming proportions” because of mass youth unemployment, abysmal illiteracy, and mass poverty (Ayoade, 2014:158). The North has the highest rate of out-of-school children in the country, with the North-West and North-East as the worst hit with the “highest percentage of females aged between 15 and 24 years who cannot read or write”.

Thus, poor governance and inadequate human capital development in Northern Nigeria provided a fertile ground for insurgent kidnap victimisation. The repressive stance of counterinsurgent troops has further radicalised the jihadists. Even the abduction of girls and women by Boko Haram were retaliatory attacks in response to government’s arrest of the sect’s leaders’ wives and children including Shekau’s spouses in 2012. Thus, Shekau vowed to sell kidnapped girls.



# Policy Recommendations

Having established that kidnap violence is a major challenge in Nigeria, there is need to discuss policy measures required to stem the tide. These policy options will require collaboration between both the public and private sectors.

First, there is need to reduce the high level of mass poverty in Nigeria. According to Brookings Institute in 2018, Nigeria has over 87 million people living in abject poverty. Both the public and private sectors should demonstrate commitment to poverty reduction which is often used as an excuse for kidnap victimisation. The government should rise to the challenge of maintaining law and order and providing the needed infrastructural development to attract investors.

Second, there is need for a review of the laws against kidnapping violence. Harsher penalties should be meted out on those convicted of the crime in order to deter others. In fact, a number of states in Nigeria have adopted the death penalty. There are inconclusive debates on the efficacy of capital punishment as a deterrent to crime.

Third, there is need to make it more difficult for kidnappers to operate and transact their business. For instance, all mobile phone SIM cards should be registered with the appropriate authorities. This will make it easy to track both victims and kidnappers. The government should maintain a zero-exceptions policy with the telecommunications companies responsible for registering the SIM cards. It is the failure to register the cards that make it easy for kidnap perpetrators to negotiate ransoms with unregistered SIM cards.

Fourth, there is need for better policing of kidnap hotspots. Areas known to be used by kidnap perpetrators, such as the Abuja-Kaduna highway, Ife-Ibadan road and other notorious forests where abductees are held hostage should be placed under surveillance. The security forces should work closely with the communities to gather intelligence, and the spots should be frequently raided by law enforcement agencies.

Fifth, Nigeria should deploy technology to detect kidnappers' hideouts. The security agents should invest in technological gadgets which could trace kidnappers' hideouts through phone call signals.

Finally, to stem the tide of kidnap violence, there is need for value re-orientation among Nigerians that industry precedes wealth. The belief that it is the end that justifies the means (that one could be wealthy without legitimate source of income) should be condemned.

## Conclusion

Increasingly kidnapping has become a huge industry in Nigeria. It has become a source of unearned wealth for criminal syndicates (as well as insurgents and terrorist organisations) that prey on both locals and foreigners. Apart from the loss of lives, kidnap victimisation retards economic growth in the country as well as worsens Nigeria's image. Improved policing strategies, stricter enforcement of SIM card registration, harsher penalties for convicts, and value re-orientation are recommended to stem the tide of kidnap violence.

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