

Policyweekly

Changing the Game against Kidnapping



Policy Recommendations

- 1 There is a need for a shift to proactive security responses involving the broadest possible measures for preventing crime, including enhancement of intelligence gathering and improvement on the use of technology.
- 2 It is crucial to shift from the perception of kidnapping as a short-term crime to a long-term span and strengthen the special structures created to combat and prevent it.
- 3 Steps should be taken to stop rights abuses, such as the humiliating discharge of passengers when they reach checkpoints so they can walk across the checkpoint before rejoining their vehicles.
- 4 While the top-down approach is the dominant strategy for fighting crimes in Nigeria, there is a need for security agencies to learn the strategy of peaceful alignment with communities, especially in areas where kidnapping is endemic.
- 5 The government should invest in security by improving the conditions of service, supporting the procurement and maintenance of equipment for fighting kidnapping and other crimes, and training and retraining officers and men in the various services in the prevention and fighting of kidnapping.
- 6 The government needs to declare kidnapping a national emergency and bring all stakeholders on board in an attempt to wage war against the menace.

Introduction

The recent history of kidnapping in Nigeria goes back to the [1990s](#) when Niger Delta militants used it for political pressure on government and multinational oil companies and for ransom to finance their activities. It later became a line of business when other criminals adopted kidnapping and commodified the value of people's freedom and started exchanging it for ransom. It became a national nightmare when insurgents in the North East resorted to sourcing for comfort women and finances for their war chest. They introduced the dimension of mass abduction. The mass abduction practice of the insurgents, bandits, and suspected Fulani herdsmen does not respect boundaries, as their targets are mostly school children and women. It later extended to travellers on national and local highways.

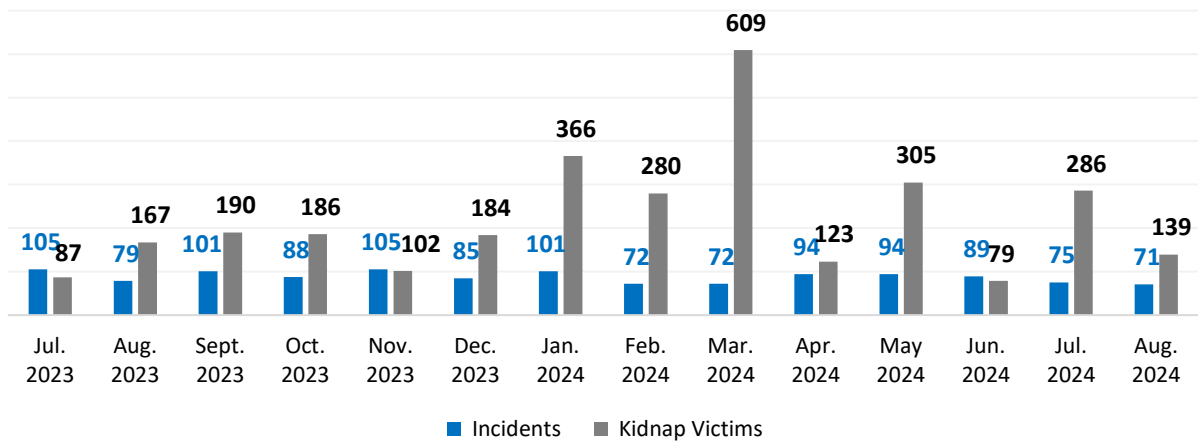
Since the last ten years, several [mass abductions](#) have taken place in the country, including those of 276 school girls in Chibok, Borno State in 2014; 110 school girls in Dapchi, Yobe State in 2018; 300 school boys in Kankara, Katsina State in 2020; 317 school girls in Jangebe, Zamfara State in 2021; 27 pupils, three school staff and their 12 relatives and a pupil killed in the process

in Kagara Niger State in 2021; 30 students in Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation in Kaduna State in 2021; 20 Students and two staff of Greenfield University in Kaduna state in 2021; 150 students of Salihu Tanko Islamic School, Tegna Niger State in 2021; 80 students and teachers of Federal Government College Birnin Yauri in 2021; [280 pupils](#) from Government Secondary School and Local Education Authority Primary School, Kuriga Kaduna State in March 2024. Also, [20 undergraduates, mostly medical students](#) travelling from the Universities of

Maiduguri and Jos to Enugu, were kidnapped in August 2024. Besides, [the mass abduction of travellers](#) on highways continues unabated. Beyond the highways, kidnapping also happens inside Nigeria’s urban cities like [Lagos, Abuja, Enugu, and Uyo](#), among other places. Between July 2023 and August 2024, Nextier’s Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database shows that no fewer than 3,103 people were abducted in 1,231 incidents across the country.

Monthly Overview of Kidnaps

Period: July 2023 - August 2024



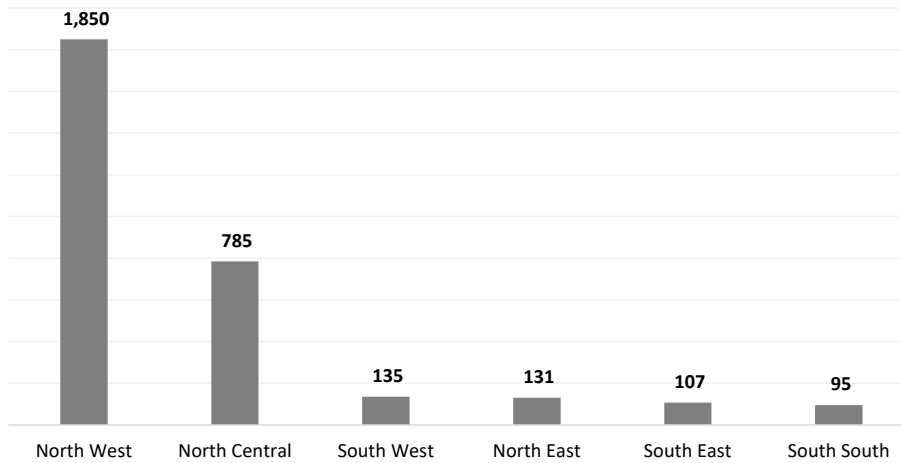
Source: Nextier’s Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database

The long list of other kidnap victims includes politicians, traditional rulers, and persons from all facets of society, the most recent of which is the [Emir of Gobir in Sokoto State](#), whose captors gruesomely murdered them for the failure of his family to pay a ransom of 1 billion Naira. High ransom demands, which victims’ families usually struggle to pay either alone or through [crowdfunding](#), sustain the commerce of ransom for freedom. Between July 2023 and June 2024, Nigerians have paid an estimated ransom of [₦1,048,110,000](#), according to an SBM report. Also, further analysis of the kidnap figures within this period, by geo-political zones, states, and Local Government Areas (LGAs) according to Nextier’s Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database in terms of victims shows the three top rankings

as North West, North Central and South West for (geo-political zones) Kaduna, Zamfara and Katsina (for states) and Chikun (Kaduna), Kajuru (Kaduna) and Munya (Niger) for LGAs. Although underreported, Kidnap for Ransom (KFR) in the country happens virtually daily. Our interviews with some victims show that those kidnapped in many rural communities and some urban areas do not even bother to report the abduction to security agencies. They find a way of paying the ransom and moving on (Key Informant Interviews).

Kidnap Victims: Regional Overview

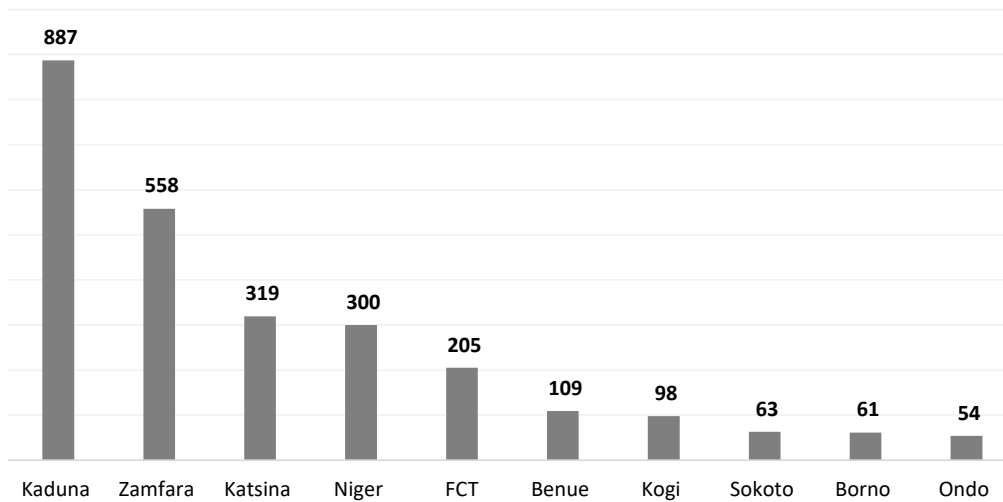
Period: July 2023 - August 2024



Source: Nextier's Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database

Top 10 States by Kidnap Victims

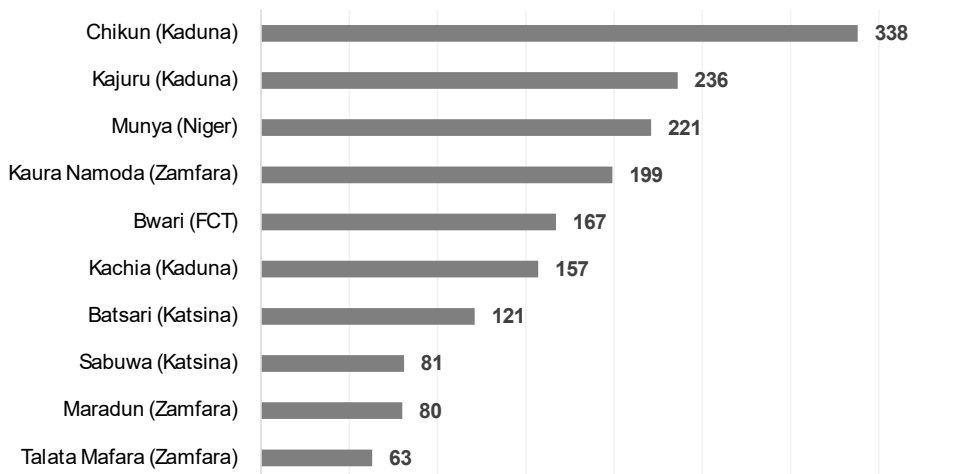
Period: July 2023 - August 2024



Source: Nextier's Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database

Top 10 LGAs by Kidnap Victims

Period: July 2023 - August 2024



Source: Nextier's Nigeria Violent Conflicts Database

The government's approach and attitude to the crime of kidnapping is reactive, takes the form of ad-hoc intervention, is top-down and lacks inclusiveness. The resulting gaps in managing the crime nurture its continuity and, unfortunately, make citizens see kidnapping and ransom payment as a new part of their everyday existence. However, further insights show that Nigerians are at a breaking point as their resilience has been badly battered. Therefore, this week's edition of Nextier SPD Policy Weekly looks at the approaches and attitudes of the government that permit the continuity of kidnapping and explore exit routes from the crises.

State Approaches and the Loopholes Explored by Kidnappers

Three features characterise the state's response to kidnapping in Nigeria. The first is the reactive approach, in which the government waits for kidnapping to occur before responding, even when all indicators of its potential are high. The government hardly employ any significant proactive measures to degrade security dangers. For instance, it is alleged that the office of the [Chief of Defence Intelligence](#) received prior intelligence regarding the kidnap of Dapchi school girls by Boko Haram but could not prevent the abduction. As insurgency was spreading, security experts should have seen that they would seek expansion when they exhausted their vital supplies in the areas under their control. In particular, when they commenced kidnapping for ransom, it pointed to thinning funds and supplies. However, adequate measures in manpower deployment, intelligence network expansion and technology were hardly used. This created room for both insurgents and bandits to spread across the country for the highly rewarding trade in kidnapping.

The second feature of the approach in responding to kidnapping is that it is usually ad-hoc or task force in nature and treats the expanding abduction crime as though it is a temporary problem that would soon disappear. Thus, whenever kidnapping starts in an area, the government sends the army, which applies their common approach of checkpoints with sandbags that delay traffic. They also adopt punitive measures that require commuters to alight from their vehicles and walk some distance before re-entering their vehicle, no matter their condition,

such as being sick, pregnant, or too old. This is a source of human rights concern, especially in the South East of Nigeria. Despite these measures, kidnapping is not only alleged to be increasing but also kidnappers operate [near army checkpoints](#) in the South East. The ad-hoc or hot spot security approach offers more than short-term results and may sometimes be counter-productive by creating resentment, as in the South East of Nigeria.

The third feature of the official response to kidnapping is a top-down approach that does not organically connect with the citizens. The security architecture is not properly tied to the needs and expectations of the citizens. Thus, security emergencies are hardly approached from the angle of community-centredness supported by the state. This refers to making communities important sources of materials for intelligence. For instance, communities with spaces where kidnappers and bandits have operational bases may hardly provide vital information for fear that their reports may not be professionally managed. In a few instances, they use vigilantes like the Civilian Joint Task Force in the North East, which comes. While the practice is good, a lot could still be gained by integrating communities into security strategies to eliminate kidnapping.

Elements driven by the [nature of Nigerian security forces](#) also hamper success in reducing or stopping kidnapping in Nigeria. These elements include non-sustenance of the use of information technology in tracking kidnappers during ransom negotiation. The police [tracking machine](#) for locating points of telephone calls is domiciled at the office of the Inspector General of Police. The equipment was functional under IGP Solomon Arase and the present IGP. However, some IGPs have different priorities or approaches, making them ignore the payment of subscription fees, which left the machine redundant for a while despite increasing abductions in the country. Besides, having such important equipment in only the national police headquarters is insufficient, given the urgent need for more. A related challenge is that even where the location of kidnappers is established, security forces still require arms and ammunition with other operational equipment and sufficient protection to be able to combat them. The absence of these needs renders the forces vulnerable. Mindful of these dangers, [security forces, especially the police, have low response to distress calls](#), including kidnapping.

The service condition and reward system for security forces is hardly motivating. But also, there are reports of complicity in [kidnapping for ransom by some members of security forces in Nigeria. Consequently, citizens are left on their own as kidnapping flourishes.](#)

Recommendations

The game-changing approach to fighting kidnapping warrants a shift from the dominant approaches and attitudes around security response to it. The measures will include:

1. Shift to proactive security responses involving the broadest possible measures for preventing crime, including enhancement of intelligence gathering and improvement on the use of technology, such as GPS tracking of calls from kidnapers with the use of technology. The tracking machines should be available at least at all police headquarters across the entire 36 states of the Federation. Cameras should be installed in major parts of every state in the form of a command-and-control centre, and hidden ones should be mounted in major spots on the highways. There should be increased synergy among security forces and with banks and data storing institutions in the country to easily track criminals and kidnapers. Also, there should be transparent prosecution of kidnapping cases in the country.
2. Shift from the perception of kidnapping as a short-term crime to a long-term span, one that has emerged and expanded as part of evolving crimes in the Nigerian state and, as a result, strengthening the special structures created to combat and prevent it. Such structures include the anti-kidnapping squad, Intelligence Response Teams of the Nigerian Police and other related structures among sister security agencies.
3. Steps should be taken to stop rights abuses, such as the humiliating discharge of passengers when they reach checkpoints so they can walk across the checkpoint before rejoining their vehicles. This creates resentment against the security agency involved. Besides, such an approach is not known to help solve the kidnapping problem.
4. The top-down approach is the dominant

strategy for fighting kidnapping, banditry and other crimes in Nigeria. However, security agencies should learn the strategy of peaceful alignment with communities, especially in areas where kidnapping is endemic. This would open their doors to helpful information that could support the anti-kidnapping campaign. The game changer in this regard would be to liaise with the community to comb their forests or volunteer information about dangerous spots that may be used as a kidnapper's base. Sometimes, community action can achieve uncommon success because people understand their terrain and know who does what in their community.

5. The government should invest in security by improving the conditions of service, supporting the procurement and maintenance of equipment for fighting kidnapping and other crimes, and training and retraining officers and men in the various services in the prevention and fighting of kidnapping. Above all, established cases of the collaboration of serving security officers in kidnapping should be dealt with severely.
6. The government should declare a national emergency on kidnapping, according to the nation's strategy for dealing with it. Kidnapping should be made a National pandemic with the involvement of all stakeholders, including the media, religious bodies, and other non-state actors. This will raise the nation's consciousness of the need to collectively wage war against the menace.

Conclusion

The current official approach to kidnapping will continue to yield minimal short-term results and later relapse. The strategy fails to connect with and encourage citizens' active support organically. Other lapses in the approach include poor motivation of members of security services, dependence on the rule of thumb method for security in a world that has moved far in information technology, and lack of consistency in the use of modern technology of crime tracking; all combine to create an ebb and flow trend in the kidnapping. The crime may be arrested by declaring a national emergency on kidnapping and investing in human and non-human resources relevant to fighting it.

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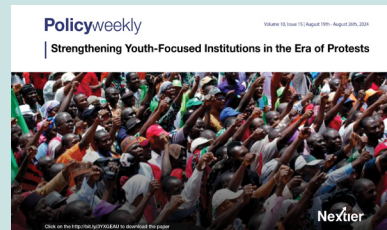
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Nextier Sample Publications



Impact of Debt Servicing on SDG Implementation in Africa

When one thinks of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, the mind often conjures images of makeshift camps in the northern region, teeming with victims of relentless violent conflicts. Yet, this image, while stark, is incomplete.



Strengthening Youth-Focused Institutions in the Era of Protests

When one thinks of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, the mind often conjures images of makeshift camps in the northern region, teeming with victims of relentless violent conflicts. Yet, this image, while stark, is incomplete.



The Invisible Population: Displacement in South East Nigeria

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Red Flags from the #EndBadGovernance Protest in Nigeria

Several federal government economic policies since May 2023 have rubbed off adversely on the citizens. These policies include the removal of the oil subsidy, increase in fees paid in public tertiary



Nigerians in Distress: Before, Now and Later

On August 1, 2024, dozens of Nigerians trooped out to protest against the government. Armed with social media and youthful resilience, the protesters are against bad governance and economic hardship



The Clashes of Authorities: The Political versus Traditional Authorities in Nigeria

Recently, there has been a resurgence and intensification of conflicts between political and traditional authorities in different parts of the country. These power clashes, occurring at different times,