

## Policy Flaws and Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*This article looks at policy flaws and kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria and finds that while there has been an uptick in kidnapping crime, there are no meaningful policy provisions to end or ameliorate the problem in Nigeria despite the fact that provisions exist within Nigeria's legal framework. The article makes use of secondary data such as articles and newspaper publications, and is discussed based on the lifestyle theory. The article recommends good policy to re-engineer and reorient Nigerian youths is one in the right direction. This calls for honest and deeper examination to uncover those socio-cultural elements which have distorted, disoriented and disarticulated our once cherished value system. The article also calls for policy on sanction directed at kidnapping is one that should be approached both coolly and dispassionately.*

**Keywords:** *Kidnapping for ransom, Policy flaws, Re-engineer, Reorient, Sanction.*

### INTRODUCTION

In couple of years, Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented level of kidnapping for ransom. It is in this note that Chukwuma (2019) observed that kidnapping for ransom has remained the most virulent form of banditry in Nigeria. It has become the most pervasive and intractable violent crime in the country.

Accordingly, Adeola (2012) disclosed that Nigeria accounted for a quarter of kidnap for ransom cases reported worldwide in the year 2011, and that the country had been designated as the global capital for kidnap for ransom due to the huge record of kidnap cases reported in the country yearly. Popoola, Adeoye and Alagbe (2017) observed that the number of kidnaps for ransom in Africa continued to increase. In the first half of 2011, Africa's proportion of the global total increased from 23 per cent in 2010 to 34 per cent. Nigeria is now the kidnap for ransom capital of the world, accounting for a quarter of globally reported cases.

Prior to the 1990s, kidnapping for ransom was not a major issue in Nigeria, though it may not be entirely true to say it did not exist. People had been kidnapped and sold into slavery during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, others were kidnapped from their homes and assassinated as

a result of quarrels over farmlands, child-kidnapping was also not uncommon as children were abducted and used for money-making rituals (Sanyaolu, 2009). However, kidnapping in Nigeria before the 1990s was so minimal that there was no mention of incidents in Nigeria in the eighth United Nations survey on crime trends and operation of criminal justice systems conducted in 2002 by the United Nations office on Drug and Crime (Graham, 2005).

By 2009, Nigeria's Inspector General of Police was quoted as saying that between 2008 and 2009 about 130 people were kidnapped in Nigeria and about N15 billion have been paid as ransom to the kidnappers (Inyang, 2009). Abugu, (2009) wrote that as at July 2009, more than 200 people had been kidnapped in the Southeast geopolitical zone and released at the payment of ransoms by their families or friends/associates. Current events ridicule this figure. City residents from Aba say that an average of two people were abducted by militants daily between July and September 2010, there were also regular incidents of kidnapping in Rivers, Abia, Imo, Enugu, Anambra, and Bayelsa States within that period (Ajah, Nwokeoma & Okpan, 2017).

Sadly, in spite of the measures put in place by the government, kidnapping for ransom has

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prevailed. These efforts have failed because of weak sanctioning and deterrence mechanisms (Chukwuma, 2019). Although; there is scholarship attention on kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. Most of these literatures are based on intuitive narrations on the causes, implications, epidemiology and patterns of their activities. Robust studies especially coming from policy flaw is certainly lacking. This gap needs not wait further, and it imposes serious limitation to not only efforts to design and carry out a truly scientific and systematic approach to the study of kidnapping for ransom but also on policy implication.

### Government Policies on Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria

There is a clear indication of government's interest in and commitment to increase security of lives and properties in order to ensure peaceful society in Nigeria. Ezugwu (2017) noted that because of the ravaging epidemic of kidnapping for ransom, state governors called for tougher sanctions or laws that would put a stop to kidnapping. Rivers State who have been feeling the heat more than any other state, first advocated for death penalty before other states, like Enugu State followed suit. Already the Rivers State House of Assembly has passed prohibition of kidnapping law of the state, making kidnapping an offence punishable by life imprisonment. Enugu state House of Assembly went further to making kidnapping an offence punishable by death. And in the case of kidnapping without gun the offence attracts 10 years imprisonment (Ezeaku, 2016).

Oyo state assented to a new kidnapping (prohibition) bill 2016, which prescribes death sentence or life imprisonment for any person who engages in kidnapping. According to the law, any kidnapper whose victim or victims die while in captivity will be liable to capital punishment while a convicted offender whose victim is released or rescued unhurt upon the payment of a ransom, will be liable to life imprisonment and be compelled to pay back the ransom.

The law further prescribes various punishment for any person threatens to kill, maim or cause bodily harm in order to compel another person, corporate body or organization to do or obtain from doing any act as a condition for the release of the victim similarly anyone who makes an attempt to kidnap, aids or abets kidnapping will be sentenced to not less than 15 years imprisonment.

In 2017, the Senate passed a bill which outlaws abduction, wrongful restraint or confinement for ransom. The Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria approved death sentence for whoever engages in the act and a 30 years jail term for anybody that colludes with an abductor. The bill in Clause 1 (3) stated:

“Whoever is guilty of the offence and then results in the death of the victim shall be liable on conviction to be sentenced to death.”

Clause 3 of the bill provides a 30- year jail term to anyone who colludes with abductor to receive any ransom for the release of any person who has been wrongfully confined (Busari, 2017).

In spite of the government's anti-graft war, government contracting remain rife with corruption and kick backs, and many state and local officials continue without stealing of public funds. By 2002, in spite of oil wealth the nation's percapita income had plunged to about one –quarter of its mid 1970s height, below the level at independence.

Official graft is rife because the institutions meant to fight the monster are weak and ineffective. In 2004, Nigeria was one of the four African Countries to sign up to the Extractive Industries Transparent Institute, an international effort to promote the publication of payments that oil and mining firms make to governments

### Some Notable Kidnapping for Ransom Cases in Nigeria

It is a difficult task documenting the statistics of kidnapped for ransom victims in Nigeria because traditionally, many kidnapping for ransom cases in Nigeria go unreported. However, Otu, Nnam and Uduka (2018), presented a comprehensive and informative diary of some prominent Nigerians who have fallen victims of kidnapping between 2007 and 2010, with emphasis on the South-eastern part of the Country.

## CAUSES OF KIDNAPPING AND ABDUCTION

### Militancy

Militancy in the Niger Delta region is said to be responsible for kidnapping in the country (Ilechukwu, Uchem &Asogwa, 2015). It has been revealed that militant groups began to adopt the option of kidnapping and abduction of oil workers for the purpose of subjecting oil companies to comply with their demands.

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**Table 1.** List of some notable kidnapping for ransom cases in Nigeria

S/N	Date of Kidnapping	Place/State of Kidnapping	Victims and Ransom Paid
1.	27 <sup>th</sup> January, 2007	Nsugbe, Anambra State	Hon Ego Cordelia, the then Anambra State Commissioner for Women Affairs, and her son, Kenechukwu, were abducted by hoodlums at Nsugbe in Anambra State with N50 million ransom demanded by the kidnapers.
2.	27 <sup>th</sup> January, 2007	Nnewi, Anambra State	Pius Ogbuawa was kidnapped and a ransom of N20 million was demanded.
3.	8 <sup>th</sup> June, 2008	Benin City, Edo State	Bob Izua, the Managing Director of Bob Izua Motors, was kidnapped and later released after a ransom of N5 million was paid.
4.	25 <sup>th</sup> August, 2008	Obingwa, Abia State	KelechiNwankpa, the Chairman of Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, was kidnapped together with his driver who was shot dead at the scene of the incident. The Chairman was released three days after the government paid a ransom of N10 million.
5.	15 <sup>th</sup> November, 2008	Aniocha, Anambra State	Joseph Dimobi, a member of the Anambra State House of Assembly, representing Aniocha II Federal Constituency, was kidnapped and a ransom of N30 million was demanded for his release.
6.	21 <sup>st</sup> November, 2008	MgbokoNgwaAmaise	His Royal Highness, Eberechi Dick, the traditional ruler of MgbokoNgwa Autonomous Community and the Chairman of Obingwa Traditional Ruler Council, was kidnapped. He was released seven days when a ransom of N10 million was paid.
7.	16 <sup>th</sup> August, 2009	Onitsha, Anambra State	Unknown gunmen kidnapped a movie star, Pete Edochie.
8.	20 <sup>th</sup> August, 2009	Nsukka, Enugu State	Grace Mamah, the wife of Ifesinachi Transport Chief Executive Officer, was abducted by two unknown gunmen.
9.	20 <sup>th</sup> August, 2009	Enugu-Port Harcourt Express	NkemOwoh (aka Osuofia), a veteran Nigerian actor, was kidnapped along Enugu-Port Harcourt expressway and the kidnapers demanded a ransom of N15 million from his family.
10.	September, 2009	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Mr WajeYayok, Secretary to the Kaduna State Government (SSG), was kidnapped in his country home. The kidnapers asked for N40 million as ransom for his release. It was the first high-profile kidnapping in Kaduna State.
11.	28 <sup>th</sup> October, 2009	Isofia, Anambra State	Simon Soludo, the father of former Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, Prof ChukwumaSoludo, who was at that time the Governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, was accosted and later kidnapped at his home. The kidnapers demanded for a ransom of N5 billion to cover 'political expenses' arising from the PDP primaries before Prof Soludo's father will be released.
12.	26 <sup>th</sup> May, 2010	Benin City	Medical doctors took to the streets, following the trend where doctors had become prime targets of kidnapers. Five doctors were kidnapped in one week. Prominent among the kidnapped doctors was Dr OsaroOsifo,
13.	13 <sup>th</sup> June, 2010	Umebulu, Rivers State	Sunday Njoku, the traditional ruler of Umebulu community in River State, was kidnapped during church service.
14.	13 <sup>th</sup> June, 2010	Ibesikpo, AkwaIbom State	EdetAkpan, a retired Major-General and former Director-General of National Youth Service Corps, was kidnapped while worshipping in a church in his home town.

**Source:** Otu, Nnam and Uduka (2018).

### Unemployment

In yang and Ubong (2013) posit that kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria is often associated with youth unemployment. They used the acknowledged adage, which says that “an idle

man is the devil's workshop”, to present the situation of unemployment in Nigeria. Uncountable able bodied men and women are roaming the Nigerian streets in search of jobs that do not exist. Out of frustration and

mounting responsibility to tackle, many idle young persons have ventured into criminal activities of which kidnapping and abduction is not an exemption.

### Poverty

According to Hino (2005), in Nigeria most indicators of social and economic progress, including real per capital consumption, literacy, access to clean water and income distribution, show that poverty has worsened since 1960. Despite its human and natural resources, Nigeria has become one of the poorest nations of the world. Per capital income was lower in 2002 than in 1975. Poverty in Nigeria is generally believed to be the prime cause of kidnapping and abduction in the country as perpetrators demand ransoms before the release of their victims.

### Corruption and Poor Governance:

Arewa (2013) succinctly pointed out that consequently upon the collapse of the parliamentary system in Nigeria in 1966 through degeneration and revolutionary ouster, the state, its laws and institutions became dedicated instruments of despots and political forces and allowed to slip deeper and deeper in the mire of corruption and malfeasance far beyond the transformation. The state of Nigerian economy is very worrisome. There is social infrastructural decay and inability of governments to provide the needed dividends of democracy. State funds and resources are embezzled by individuals in highly placed positions of political authority. Funds meant for state projects are often misappropriated. This often has a far reaching effect on the citizens.

### Equipped Law Enforcement Agency

The law enforcement agencies in Nigeria are ill equipped. The Nigerian Police, the Military and other paramilitary organizations are not given equipments that would help them fight crime totally. For instance, it is an irony that terrorism has existed in Nigeria over many decades now. The Nigeria as the giant of Africa could not wipe out the menace called terrorism. Thom-Otuya (2010) argued that in most of the kidnaps carried out by the militant, their victims are always ferried to the creek for custody. She further stated that the Nigerian Navy does not have enough functional equipment to monitor and secure the porous water ways.

### Normlessness of the Nigerian State

According to Arewa (2013), since 1966, Nigeria crossed the threshold into a latent state of

normlessness. In this state, its laws and legal institutions lack majesty, authority and legitimacy. The politic is anarchical and characterized by a pervasive state of normlessness. The citizenry have not internalized the laws of the state and lack the psychological acceptance of the authority of the state. The state has progressively lost its moral authority to socialize the citizenry away from criminality; hence there is an upspring in the incident of the crime of kidnapping and abduction.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The theoretical framework for this study is lifestyle theory. The major premise of lifestyle theory is that victimization risk is increased when people have a high-risk lifestyle. The theory contends that “placing oneself at risk by going out to dangerous places results in increased the likelihood of victimization” (Siegel, 2010, p. 81). Thus, victimization risk is increased by such behaviours as associating with young men, going out in public places late at night, and living in an urban area. Conversely, one’s chances of victimization can be reduced by staying home at night, moving to a rural area, staying out of public places, earning more money, and getting married (Siegel, 2010). The basis of lifestyle theory is that crime is not a random occurrence but rather a function of the victim’s lifestyle.

In this context, kidnapping for ransom is thriving in the country and has become an ‘industry’ due to the desire to survive by unemployed and disgruntled Nigerian youths. According to Ajao(2019), research has shown that criminals are harbored within the community for a give a way token or with threat of coming back for reprisal if their identity or existence is revealed. Some of the natives even volunteer to carter for the hostages or source for intelligence information for the kidnappers as a result of economic hardship and ignorance of the evil being perpetrated.

## CONCLUSION

A segment of the Nigerian society has been quarantined by the growing scourge of kidnappings for ransom. Nightlife that had already been hard hit by the menace of armed robbery and the banning of Okada has taken a further pounding as a result. The well to do now stay indoors and when they do venture outside they do so incognito for fear of being kidnapped. Although, kidnapping is not the disease, rather it is a symptom of the abysmal



decadence that has enveloped the country. It is a symptom of the recklessness and abandonment with which successive governments have handled the issue of training and employment. It is a symptom of the greed and corruption that have brought the country to its knees.

It is a reminder of the brutal techniques employed by electioneering politicians who armed their supporters with guns and ammunitions in order to realize their “do or die” ambitions of “winning” elections at all costs. Most of all, it is the biggest symptom of a police force whose morale and professionalism have been devastated by low pay, outdated equipment and poor working conditions to the extent that they have become willing accomplices of armed robbers and kidnappers (Adega, 2009).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Solution to the problem of youth unemployment must therefore be found in the diversification of the economy from oil to agriculture and agro-allied industries. If employment must be generated, the curriculum in both secondary and tertiary institutions must be reviewed in line with the demands of economic diversification.
- Good policy to re-engineer and reorient Nigerian youths is one in the right direction. This calls for honest and deeper examination to uncover those socio-cultural elements which have distorted, disoriented and disarticulated our once cherished value system.
- The government should revamp NDE programmed; this will assist in providing training for young people who were out of school and out of work, but caution that the training had to provide the young people with marketable skills. Inadequate and faulty educational system in Nigeria is really a source of concern, there is a disturbing and growing mismatch between the skills of those looking for work and the skills employers seek to hire. If left unchecked, this could lead to a situation of a "lost generation," where those with the necessary skills do very well while those without the desired skills will struggle economically for the remainder of their lives. We may be seeing a shift in the labour force widening the gap here between haves and have-nots. As long as this situation is unchecked, it will be difficult contending with restiveness,

crimes, kidnapping and other negative tendencies associated with our young people.

- Government at all levels should collaborate with experts to train stakeholders who will help to ensure the realization of security policies of government.
- Collectively, we can rid our country of kidnapping or reduce the operation to the barest minimum if we come together as a team and give information that will enable the police. The police in other developed countries count on their people for accurate information sharing without holding back a bit and this can be replicated in Nigeria. The police need to build the confidence of the people in doling out information. Kidnappers are not spirit, but human beings with hardened minds who are getting back to the society for their perceived grievances and inability to make a livelihood.
- The government should ensure that the resources of the country are harnessed and they should also promote national prosperity. This government has a responsibility, without being told, to ensure that every Nigerian is secured.
- Policy on sanction directed at kidnapping is one that should be approached both coolly and dispassionately. Criminologist Walker (2006) explained that many crime policies are simply unrelated to the most serious part of the crime problem.
- The government should partner with the private investors to boost security in the country.
- Finally, the security agencies must collaborate with community leaders to monitor the activities of criminals in all flashpoint areas and identify their hideouts. This way, the bad eggs can be easily fished out.

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