

Nature and Patterns of Kidnapping for Ransom in Ekiti State, Nigeria

Ayomide Augustine Ilori and Joseph Olusola Adeleye

Research Article

ABSTRACT

Despite the criminalisation of kidnapping in Nigeria by the Nigerian criminal codes and an Anti-Kidnapping Act, Ekiti State continues to experience kidnapping schemes for ransom that have raised concerns among its residents. Using the routine activity theory, purposive sampling method, and qualitative findings, this study found that kidnappers in Ekiti State have similar criminal histories and are not highly organised criminals. The victims of kidnappings are varied, including kidnappers' family members, civil servants, business owners, and clergy. Therefore, it is recommended that affluent families and high-profile individuals in Ekiti State maintain a low profile and avoid disclosing their whereabouts to untrusted family members, acquaintances, or strangers. Residents of Ekiti State should invest in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) measures for their homes and work or business places to prevent kidnappings. Additionally, the Nigerian Police Force should establish a surveillance and response unit to combat kidnapping in Ekiti State. The state government should also procure state security infrastructure and recognise local security outfits to supplement the efforts of the Nigerian Police Force in addressing kidnapping for ransom in Ekiti State.

Keywords: *nature, patterns, kidnapping, kidnappers, ransom.*

INTRODUCTION

Kidnapping constitutes a significant threat to life in Nigeria, with kidnaps occurring almost every month in various states of the country. This problem is not unique to Nigeria, as kidnapping and

ransom demands have become increasingly common in unstable countries like those in Latin America (Phillips, 2009, 2011) and Africa. The severity of the issue requires a thorough investigation of its effects on security (Ebohon & Ifeadi, 2012; Ngwama, 2014). According to the kidnappers, the socio-economic situation in Nigeria has contributed to the frequency of these crimes (Otu, Nnam, & Uduka, 2018). The country's news reports contain verified and unverified accounts of kidnapping activities, even though kidnapping is a criminal offence under human trafficking law in more than 50 countries, including Nigeria.

Section 364 of the Nigerian criminal code and the Anti-Kidnapping Act 2017 expressly prohibit kidnapping activities in the country. Nevertheless, kidnapping remains a pervasive security issue in Nigeria, with many incidents going unreported or unresolved. The Nigeria Police Force has arrested over a thousand kidnappers and armed robbery suspects (Akinloye, 2017). This has further raised concerns for the safety of people in the country. Kidnapping has profoundly impacted people from all social and demographic backgrounds in Nigeria. Cases of kidnapping have been reported when people are kidnapped from their residences, places of work or business, schools, and during train or road attacks. Hostages can be subject to torture, violence, and even death depending on their gender, social status, and willingness to cooperate with the kidnappers (Tade, Ojedokun, & Aderinto, 2020). Often, victims are moved to different locations while ransoms from their families are demanded through phone calls and the coercion of relatives (Tade, Ojedokun, & Aderinto, 2020).

Kidnapping activities have increased in Ekiti State, Nigeria, with numerous reported cases from 2017 until now. In 2019, two twins were kidnapped at a notorious spot along the Aramoko-Erio-Efon Alaaye Road (News Agency of Nigeria, 2019), and a prominent figure in the state, the General Secretary of the Alumni Association of Christ School, Ado Ekiti, was also kidnapped (News Agency of Nigeria, 2019). Shockingly, a Methodist church pastor in Ado City was found to have masterminded his own kidnap and demanded ransom from his church members (Thecable, 2019). While a potential victim was rescued by the Southwest Security Network Corps (popularly called Amotekun) (News Agency of Nigeria, 2020), scores of people have been kidnapped and released for ransom in the state between 2020 and 2022.

Chukwuma (2019) highlighted the scale of the problem, describing kidnapping as a menacing form of banditry in Nigeria and emphasising the serious threat it poses to individuals and society. This study is considered important in Ekiti State, Nigeria because it is the first inquiry into the nature and patterns of kidnapping for ransom in the state. The study's objectives are to outline the strategy of kidnapping and the pathways taken by kidnappers in the state.

KIDNAPPING EPIDEMICS FOR RANSOM IN NIGERIA

Kidnapping has been a long-standing issue in Nigeria since the early 1990s (Hazen & Horner, 2007), and it has profoundly impacted the country's social fabric (Dodo, 2010). Throughout Nigeria's history, kidnapping has been used for various purposes, including activism, business and political vendettas, revenge, and terrorism. In the past, it was predominantly associated with militancy when organised groups kidnapped foreign nationals and oil expatriates (Olofin, 2020). Their goal was to draw national and international attention to the region's social and environmental conditions (Alumuna et al., 2017; Ijediogor, 2010; Olofin, 2020).

However, kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria has become a lucrative industry, with criminal gangs frequently targeting prominent individuals, such as politicians, businesspeople, and foreign nationals (Olaniyan, 2018). Emewu and Anyanwu (2009) revealed that members of a political party kidnapped a former governor of Anambra State on 10 July 2003 to protest political differences. This highlights how kidnapping is sometimes used for political reasons in Nigeria and explains how people who do not generally engage in criminal behaviour drift into kidnapping for outcomes that are not pecuniary.

The scope of kidnapping in Nigeria has expanded in recent years, with notable high-profile cases. One such case was the kidnapping of 250 Chibok secondary school girls by Boko Haram in 2014 (Shuaibu, Salleh, & Shehu, 2015) and the subsequent ransom demand of \$50 million for the release of the kidnapped schoolgirls. In November 2013, Boko Haram demanded \$3 million to release a kidnapped French priest, Georges Vandebeusch, and a French family of seven (Barna, 2014). In 2017, one of the most coordinated kidnapers in Nigeria, known as Evans, was arrested for high-profile kidnappings with ransoms paid in millions of naira and dollars. He was also found to have coordinated bank robberies in different parts of the country.

Nigeria has been reported to account for a significant proportion of kidnaps for ransom, with many incidents and substantial ransom payments. According to Adeola (2012), Nigeria accounted for a quarter of kidnaps for ransom in 2011. The Catlin Group (2012) also reported that Nigeria experiences over 1,000 kidnappings annually, with many incidents likely going unreported. This alarming statistic demonstrates the pervasiveness of kidnapping in Nigeria and the urgent need for effective measures to address the problem. In 2009, the Inspector General of Police in Nigeria revealed that approximately 130 people had been kidnapped between 2008 and 2009, with kidnapers receiving around 15 billion nairas in ransom payments (Inyang, 2009). According to data from the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and National Security Tracker (NST), 4,616 people were kidnapped in Nigeria in 2022. Of these, 3,972 were civilians, 202 were military personnel, 186 were police officers, 154 were vigilantes, and 14 were security guards (Samad &

Ayodele, 2022). This highlights the lucrative nature of criminal activity and its significant financial cost to victims and society.

NIGERIAN KIDNAPPING INDUSTRY AND CURRENT EFFORTS BY THE NIGERIAN AUTHORITIES

Kidnapping for ransom has become a pervasive phenomenon in Nigeria and is attributed to several interconnected factors. One factor is the shift in the value system, which has facilitated various criminal activities, including kidnapping for ransom (Ugwuoke, 2011). Ugwuoke (2011) argues that the negative value system in contemporary Nigerian society results from factors such as colonialism, the Nigerian civil war, long military despotism, and media content. Ogbuehi (2018) identifies several causes of kidnapping in Nigeria, including greed, intolerance, reprisal motives, poor governance, unemployment, and poverty. These factors have contributed to the growth of kidnapping as a lucrative business in Nigeria's organised crime industry (Ogbuehi, 2018). Criminals demand exorbitant sums of money in exchange for releasing their victims, turning kidnapping into a lucrative industry (Samuel & Bamigboye, 2022).

The kidnapping epidemic in Nigeria has been attributed mainly to poverty, which is rising. According to the World Poverty Clock, almost 86 million people in Nigeria survive on less than \$1.90 per day, making it the country with the highest proportion of people living in severe poverty globally (Sunday & Adeyemi-Suenu, 2022). Many young people have resorted to criminal activities, including kidnapping, to survive this extreme poverty (Abiodun et al., 2020). Additionally, the lack of employment opportunities in the country has exacerbated the issue, with kidnapping being seen as a quick way to make money (Abiodun et al., 2020).

Corruption is another factor contributing to the increase in kidnappings in Nigeria. The country's law enforcement agencies are commonly viewed as corrupt and have even been found to be complicit in kidnapping cases and other illegal activities (Omoniyi et al., 2019). In some cases, police officials have provided logistical assistance to kidnappers by sharing information about their victims or guiding them to and from the kidnapping site (Olubade & Ogunnoiki, 2020).

The epidemic of kidnappings in Nigeria has had a devastating impact on the nation's economy and security. According to Ojo (2020), the insecurity caused by these kidnappings has resulted in Nigeria losing billions of dollars in ransom payments and missed investment opportunities. Additionally, the increase in kidnapping has led to a surge in other criminal activities, such as armed robbery and terrorism, further harming the security situation in the country.

To address kidnapping, the Nigerian government has implemented various measures, including creating a Joint Task Force (JTF) that consists of the military, police, and other security organisations to address the issue (Chinwokwu & Michael, 2019). Additionally, the government has passed legislation toughening the nation's anti-kidnapping laws and increasing the penalty for offenders (Nwankwo & James, 2016). Along with deploying monitoring technologies and hiring and training more security people, the government has also invested in building the nation's security infrastructure. Adopting legislation that toughens the country's anti-kidnapping laws and increases the penalty for offenders is another tactic the Nigerian government has used (Akingbe & Akwen, 2016). For instance, the Anti-Kidnapping Act 2017 mandates the death penalty when the victim perishes during a kidnapping (Achi, 2022). This is a deterrence for potential kidnappers and shows that the government is prepared to impose harsh penalties on offenders.

Aside from the Anti-Kidnapping Act 2017 and to improve its capacity to gather intelligence, react swiftly to kidnapping situations, and prevent future kidnappings, the Nigerian government has invested in the country's security infrastructure (Ebonine, 2022). This investment includes the installation of surveillance tools such as closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras, the creation of emergency response facilities, and the recruitment and training of additional security professionals (Ojo, 2020). Installing the emergency response facilities is to respond swiftly to kidnapping incidents, increasing the chances of rescuing the victims and apprehending the offenders.

In 2020, the governors of Southwestern Nigeria introduced the Southwest Security Network, popularly known as Amotekun, in response to residents of the region identifying 48 kidnapping hotspots across the six states, including highways and farmlands (Tribune, 2021). The primary aim of Amotekun is to tackle kidnapping and other forms of criminality, demonstrating a proactive approach to improving the security situation in Southwestern Nigeria (TheGuardian, 2020). By establishing and funding a regional security network, the governors have demonstrated their commitment to ensuring the safety of their constituents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in the routine activity theory. The theory, introduced by Felson and Cohen (1979), is a sub-division of crime opportunity theory that centres on the conditions for the perpetration of criminal activities. The theory of routine activity highlights the fact that the presence of three factors is required for a crime to occur. These factors are a motivated offender,

a suitable or vulnerable target, and the lack of a capable guardian to prevent the crime. The routine activities of both the offender and the victim are considered in this theory in the convergence of these three elements. This theory, therefore, suggests that the presence or absence of these elements can influence the occurrence of crime in a particular setting, such as kidnapping.

Kidnapping can be explained within the framework of routine activity theory taking cognisance of the three elements that create opportunity for the perpetration of crime. A motivated offender has the intention and capability to commit a crime, in the case of kidnapping, the offender may be motivated by various factors, such as financial gain, revenge or personal gratification, a political agenda, etc. The second element, the suitable target, refers to a person, object, or location vulnerable to criminal attack. Suitable targets for kidnappers could include vulnerable persons, such as wealthy individuals or individuals with high social status. The suitability of the target in the case of kidnapping is often determined by the offender's assessment of the potential reward and risks involved in the crime. According to Tade, Ojedokun and Aderinto (2020), kidnappers are rational individuals who consider the costs of kidnapping a person against the ransom demanded to determine the potential benefits. The decision to kidnap a victim is influenced by the perceived level of risk involved in the act, as well as the ability of the victim, their family, and other significant individuals to pay the ransom. As a result, a kidnapper calculates the Kidnap Ransom Value (KRV) of the victim before the kidnapping. Finally, the absence of a capable guardian, which is the lack of effective measures to deter or prevent criminal activity, could include environmental designs that can prevent crime, law enforcement agents or security personnel, or a concerned significant guardian who can deter or prevent kidnapping.

In general, this theory suggests that kidnapping occurs when motivated offenders identify suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians or proactive measures. This theory is therefore important to this study as it adumbrates the importance of proactive measures, such as increased surveillance, security architecture, and community involvement, to reduce the occurrence of kidnapping.

RESEARCH SETTINGS AND POPULATION OF THE STUDY

This study is based in Ekiti State, Nigeria, which has been plagued by kidnapping and other crimes that threaten the safety of its citizens. In November 2021, the Nigerian Police Force Command in Ado Ekiti arrested and paraded six suspected kidnappers and recovered guns and ammunition

(Dyepkazah, 2021). The inclusion criteria for the six suspected kidnappers in this study were based on their confession to operating in Ekiti State during their interrogation by the police, as revealed in videos of their confessions to the crime. They also disclosed that they keep their victims in Ado Ekiti and neighbouring towns, and other states.

METHODOLOGY

In this exploratory and qualitative study, we aim to investigate the nature and patterns of kidnapping for ransom in Ekiti State, Nigeria, using police evidence. This exploratory study is the first to examine kidnapping schemes in Ekiti State using videographic materials of confessions from suspected kidnappers. The study is qualitative in nature because we used videographic data and analysis to dissect the constituent parts of the confessions and examine how they interact. To achieve the study's objectives, we purposively selected six arrested suspected kidnappers, whose confessions in a video released by the police for public consumption were used as primary data. We intentionally selected these individuals because they had the information that would meet the study's objectives – to identify the strategy of kidnapping and pathways of kidnappers for ransom in the state. During the procedure for data collection, it is pertinent to explain that eliciting data from the videographic materials of confessions from suspected kidnappers was particularly challenging.

To extract the data, the first stage involved becoming familiar with the videographic material of the confessions made by the arrested and interviewed suspected kidnappers. In the second stage, the video was carefully watched and the confession was listened to repeatedly to extract useful data that could interrogate the nature and patterns of kidnapping for ransom in Ekiti State. This stage was achieved by identifying themes that could shed light on the nature and patterns of kidnapping in Ekiti State. In the analysis stage, the extracted data under the identified themes were explored to draw and merge relationships between them to sufficiently identify, explain, and describe the strategy of kidnapping and pathways of kidnappers for ransom in the state. Videographic analysis is a methodology for scrutinising audiovisual material, including film, television, and digital video, by dissecting each constituent part and examining how they interact (Kawaf, 2019). This technique was used to identify how the audiovisual texts express meaning and to detect common themes and patterns about kidnapping for ransom in Ekiti State in the suspects' narratives. Verbatim quotations of some of the most significant confessions made by the arrested suspected kidnappers were used for clarity in the presentation and discussion of the findings.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the nature of this study, anonymity was granted to the data obtained from the police evidence of the arrested suspected kidnappers' confessions regarding kidnapping for ransom in Ekiti State. In adhering to international research ethical standards, this study also incorporated the principles of ethical treatment of human subjects in social research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the major findings from qualitative data collected through videographic material of the confessions of arrested kidnappers in Ekiti State, Nigeria. It covers two objectives: identifying the strategy of kidnapping, and the pathways taken by kidnappers for ransom in the state. By discussing and logically presenting these findings, the section provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of kidnapping for ransom in Ekiti State.

STRATEGY FOR KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

The kidnapping incident in Ekiti State has shed light on the modus operandi of kidnappers in the state. Contrary to popular belief, the kidnappers are not necessarily Fulani herdsmen. Typically, kidnappers in the state kidnap their victims from their homes, work or business places and hold them hostage in remote locations. Their modus operandi typically involves holding their victims captive for extended periods, from several days to weeks, until a ransom payment is made. This is consistent with Olofin (2020) who reported that kidnappers often transfer their victims across state borders to evade law enforcement. The kidnappers then demand a ransom from the victim's family or friends in exchange for their release (Tade, Ojedokun, & Aderinto, 2020). Potential targets of the kidnappers include businessmen, clergymen, public figures, senior citizens, and even family members, such as in-laws. This underscores the need for improved security measures in the state to protect its citizens from these criminal activities. One of the kidnappers narrated how they often kidnap their victims:

When kidnapping our victims, one of us will be disguised as a Fulani man because he resembles Fulani and speaks the Hausa language very well. And we often take hostage of our victims in one of the family houses of our gang at waterworks in

Ado Ekiti. The family house belongs to the father of one of us who often disguises himself as a Fulani man during kidnap operations. We also once kidnap the in-law of our gang members that do take hostage of kidnapped victims in his family house. (KII/Male/Kidnapper)

In another response, it was revealed thus:

When we kidnapped the owner of a petrol dealer in Ado Ekiti at his petrol station, he was taken hostage on the farm of one of our kidnap gangs in Kabba, Kogi State. The farm belonging to one of us is acres of land. We collected over N7,000,000 (\$15069.97) from the petrol dealer as ransom instead of the N8,000,000 (\$17222.82) we demanded for his release. (KII/Male/Kidnapper)

Another kidnapper testified that he was involved in the kidnap of a known clergyman in Akure, a nearby city to Ado Ekiti:

What led to my arrest by the Police Force Rapid Respond Squad (RRS) is that I was involved in the kidnapping of one deeper life pastor in Akure. One of our members who attend his church arranged that we kidnap him because the pastor is rich. We brought the pastor from Akure to Ado Ekiti and took hostage of him the family house of one of us at the waterworks in Ado Ekiti. I did not know the amount the pastor was charged but I was given a million naira. I bought a motorcycle out of my share of the money but eventually, the motorcycle was stolen from where I parked it. I also cultivated some farms from the money. (KII/Male/Kidnapper)

In a similar narration, it was revealed that the respondent was involved in kidnapping and armed robbery:

I was involved in the kidnapping of a pastor at Akure, and the wife of Ekiti State's late surveyor general. The pastor was kidnapped at Akure and spent 7 days with us and ransom was collected for his release in Kogi State. The wife of the late surveyor general was kidnapped in his house at Adebayo in Ado Ekiti and was kept in the house of one of us at Waterworks in Ado Ekiti. The woman spent 7 days there before the ransom was collected for her release in Ado Ekiti at Mathew Street in AUD Secondary School. (KII/Male/ Kidnapper)

The above narrative demonstrates that kidnappers target family members and well-known or prominent people. This is consistent with Oluwajenyo et al.'s (2022) claim that the status of the target and the prospective ransom demand are the driving factors in most kidnapping cases. This foretells that the primary motive behind such kidnappings is the prospective ransom demand, which is likely to be higher when the target has a higher social status. In this sense, kidnappers frequently target people of high social prestige, such as CEOs, elected officials, and celebrities, hoping to extort a significant ransom from their relatives or friends. According to the study, victims are seen by kidnappers as having the ability to pay the ransom, which boosts the possibility of a successful ransom negotiation. Before initiating a kidnapping scheme, the kidnappers consider the target's ability to pay a ransom, known as the KRV (Okoli & Agada, 2014). This strategic net worth of the victim often determines their vulnerability to being kidnapped. These findings are consistent with routine activity theory, which suggests that individuals with high social status and wealth are more likely to be targeted by kidnappers.

PATHWAYS OF KIDNAPPERS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

Abiodun et al. (2020) suggest that kidnappers are typically recruited for their expertise in criminal activities, including kidnapping individuals for ransom. Based on available evidence, it appears that most individuals responsible for kidnapping have a criminal history, and those who do not act as informants. One of the kidnappers revealed this:

I was introduced to kidnapping by my friend who is my customer. He always pumps his motorcycle tires in my workshop. He inquired me if I know who can be kidnapped for ransom and I suggest we kidnap a petrol dealer who owns a petrol station opposite where I have my vulcaniser workshop. When the petrol dealer was to be kidnapped, I did not go for the operation but when the ransom was collected from the victim, I was given N400,000 (\$861.14). After the kidnap, I gave them information about the wife of the survey general and was given N150,000 (\$322.93) from the ransom collected from the woman. (KII/Male/Kidnapper informant)

Another kidnapper expressed that:

My driving skill led me to kidnap. I am an indigene of Ado Ekiti, I started the act of kidnapping in January 2021 when I met one of us that introduced me to kidnapping because I can drive very well. The first kidnap I participated in is the kidnap of a

petrol dealer, the second one was the wife of the late survey general, the third one was of a victim that jumped out of the boot of a vehicle, and the fourth one was when we kidnap a pastor from Akure and the fifth one is my uncle's wife. (KII/Male/Driver and Kidnapper)

In the words of another kidnapper who is an armed robber and an ex-convict:

I am an ex-convict just released from prison for a robbery case. It was when I came back from prison that I was introduced to kidnapping. What led to my arrest by the Police Force RRS is the woman we kidnapped and took hostage in Kogi State. We kept her in a bush for five to six days before the ransom was collected. When we collect the ransom, I was told it is N2,000,000 (\$4,305.71) and had a share of N300,000 (\$645.86), which caused a fight between us because when negotiating the ransom, we asked for N5,000,000 (\$10,764.26), and we were told we can only get N4,000,000 (\$8,611.41). But the excuse given to me was that they did not count the money when the ransom was paid to know if the money was 4 million nairas. (KII/Male/Armed Robber and Kidnapper)

The above suggests that the perpetrators of kidnappings in Ekiti State are individuals recruited for kidnapping due to their pre-existing relationships and information about the victims. Hence, they exhibit some degree of planning and coordination in carrying out their crimes when they target victims who would likely pay a ransom for release. This finding aligns with routine activity theory, which posits that the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and a lack of capable guardians increases the likelihood of criminal activity (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Specifically, the pathways to kidnapping in this context suggest that the offenders are acquaintances who rely on their social or business/professional networks and bonding criminal intent to engage in kidnapping for ransom in Ekiti State.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although this study has limitations due to the small sample size of only six kidnappers, its findings still offer valuable insights into kidnapping schemes in Nigeria and can inform further research. To build upon these findings, it would be beneficial to conduct additional studies that involve interviews with both kidnapped victims and the police.

Despite these limitations, this study advances our knowledge of criminal activity by shedding light on kidnapping as a major economic crime in Ekiti State, Nigeria. As a result, it can serve as a reference point for future studies that focus on kidnappers' activities, particularly from the perspective of routine activity theory.

CONCLUSIONS

The widespread incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria has led to a climate of insecurity that now affects all regions of the country beyond the Niger Delta militancy and Northeast Boko Haram. Crime continues to thrive, posing significant threats to the security and economic stability of Ekiti State. High-profile individuals are particularly vulnerable to kidnapping due to their status, and kidnappers often leverage their victims' ability to pay a ransom.

The kidnappers in Ekiti State are semi-organised, recruiting individuals with similar criminal histories and relying on informants and the driving skills of gang members and the availability of houses and farmlands for hostages. To prevent kidnappings, it is essential for residents in the state to keep a low profile, not flaunt their status and wealth, avoid sharing information about their daily routines or whereabouts with extended family members or close associates, and invest in CPTED measures such as "target hardening installations" like visitor screening, security locks, and CCTV cameras, etc.

Furthermore, the Nigerian Police Force should create a surveillance and response unit dedicated to combating kidnapping in Ekiti State, and the state government should invest more in security infrastructure and emergency response facilities to improve their capacity to gather intelligence, respond swiftly to kidnapping situations, and prevent future kidnappings. Local intelligence is also crucial, and locally recognised state security outfits should be procured to complement the efforts of the police force and help locate kidnappers' hideouts in local forests and farm settlements.

About the authors:

Ayomide Augustine Ilori, Peace and Security Studies, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology Ikere Ekiti, Nigeria

Joseph Olusola Adeleye, Educational Foundations and Management, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology Ikere Ekiti, Nigeria

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