

Kidnapping and Human Security in Ondo State, Nigeria: An Empirical Assessment of Causes, Consequences, and Institutional Responses

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Abstract—Kidnapping has become a persistent security menace in Ondo State Nigeria, constituting a grave threat to human security and instigating obstinate chaos in local communities. This study aimed at revealing how kidnapping instigates human security in Ondo State. Its promoting factors, socio-economic and socio-psychological repercussions, law-enforcement efficacies and modifications across various facets of security were examined. A Cross-sectional mixed method research design was employed. A set of structured questionnaires was used to gather information from 280 valid respondents (out of 302 administered questionnaires; 93% response rate) in the three selected local government councils of Akure North, Akoko South-East and Akoko North-East while 20 key informants' interviews were conducted among security officials, community leaders and constituents of victims in Ondo State. The Structural-Functionalist theory of state stability as well as the Frustration-Aggression theory of violence formation were used to focus the research. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson Correlation test while qualitative data was analysed thematically. The findings were that corruption, youth unemployment, ineffective law enforcement agents, poverty and state infiltration by non-indigenes as well as local agency (community) collaboration were the topmost promoting factors of kidnapping in Ondo State. Disruption of agriculture, reverse of trade and commerce, scaling down in mobility and generally higher costs of living were the socio-economic ramifications. Correlation test showed statistically significant positive relationships between kidnapping and the economic ($r = 0.577$), food ($r = 0.621$), health ($r = 0.726$), transportation ($r = 0.555$) and general ($r = 0.227$) human security indices ($p < 0.01$). Community-based ranks of Amotekun enjoyed fairly high trust among Ondo State indigenes while the police and army were severely hamstrung by inadequate logistics, infrastructural deficits and weak prosecutorial follow-up. The paper recommends popular community-

based youth empowerment programmes, community policing, application of surveillance technology, judicial reform, strict regulation of the Nigeria border and cross-agency collaboration to boost human security in Ondo State.

Index Terms—human security; kidnapping: Ondo State; Nigeria; frustration-aggression theory; structural functionalism; correlation analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

While initially considered a sporadic criminal crime, kidnapping has metamorphosed into one of the most serious threats of insecurity to the human person in the Nigeria polity today. Kidnapping spans across human history, from the Middle Ages to Late 19th century and had extended to countries with different social, political and legal structures across the globe (Doan, 2021, Moorehead, 1980). While the genesis of kidnapping in Nigerian dated back centuries and went on in less publicised forms, especially in Nigeria east, it was the kidnapping of the white foreign oil workers in the Niger Delta in 2006 which caught global and the entire countries attention (Albert et al., 2020).

Kidnapping has since moved from the southern Nigeria to the northern part largely fueled by the spread of criminal organizations, prevalent poor economic condition, political unrests and the influence of copycat criminality (Teniola, 2021), resulting in politicians, schools' children, religious leaders as well as ordinary citizenry becoming targets (Okoro et al, 2017). The transnational data reveals the severity of the problem. For instance, Kidnap rate in Belgium, Morocco, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico and South Africa has remained consistently higher compared to

Japan, where both the level of governance and economic status are high with relatively no cases of abduction recorded. Similarly, to south Korea, whose level of governance as well as the control of arm has enhanced lower level of kidnappings (Global Economy, 2024, Hostage, US,2020)

Within Nigeria, kidnapping is now prevalent across all six geopolitical zones, and Ondo State in the south-west has emerged as a particular hotspot. Kidnapping incidents in the state date to the early 2000s, intensified between 2007 and 2009, and have persisted despite the enactment of anti-kidnapping legislation and the creation of the regional security outfit Amotekun. High-profile incidents — including the 2015 abduction of a former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief Olu Falae, the 2017 kidnapping of Chinese nationals in Ilaje, and repeated mass abductions of travellers along the Akure-Ikare and Owo-Benin corridors between 2019 and 2025 — have earned the state the unflattering label of the "kidnap capital" of the south-west (Opakunbi, Mohammed, & Osah, 2023).

The persistence of kidnapping in Ondo State, despite considerable state and community-level investment in security, has direct implications for human security — understood in the human-development tradition as freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom from indignity (UNDP, 1994). Beyond its immediate physical threat, kidnapping disrupts farming and trade, discourages investment, degrades access to healthcare and transportation, and inflicts lasting psychological trauma on victims, families, and communities. Existing scholarship on Nigerian kidnapping has often addressed these dimensions in isolation or focused on other regions of the country (e.g., Kwanga et al., 2022, on Benue State; Audu, Gana, & Aliyu, 2023, on Katsina State), leaving a gap in empirically grounded, multidimensional assessments specific to Ondo State. This study addresses that gap by empirically assessing the factors promoting kidnapping, its socio-economic and psychological consequences, the effectiveness of law-enforcement responses, and its cumulative effect on human security across the economic, food, health, and transportation domains in three of the state's most affected local government areas.

1.1 Objectives and Hypotheses

The overarching objective of the study was to assess the impact of kidnapping on human security in Ondo State. The specific objectives were to: (i) examine the factors promoting kidnapping in Ondo State; (ii) ascertain the socio-economic consequences associated with the frequent incidence of kidnapping; (iii) examine the psychological consequences of kidnapping; (iv) determine the response and effectiveness of law-enforcement agencies in addressing and preventing kidnapping; and (v) assess the extent to which the rising incidence of kidnapping contributes to the deterioration of human security across the economic, food, health, and transportation dimensions. Correspondingly, three null hypotheses were tested: kidnapping has no significant socio-economic consequence in Ondo State; kidnapping has no significant psychological impact on victims and communities; and kidnapping does not significantly contribute to the deterioration of human security (economic, food, health, and transportation) in Ondo State.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

Broadly speaking, kidnapping involves the unlawful abduction, confinement, carrying away and detention of a person from their consent, normally for financial gain, ransom money, or to achieve some political objective (Abraham, 2013; Peter and Osaat, 2021; Ibrahim and Mukhtar, 2017). Among many forms it has taken are; kidnapping for ransom (financial) abduction, political or terror kidnapping, mass abduction, hostage-taking and more recently virtual kidnapping which does not involve physical abduction but extortion (Maras and Arsovska, 2023). Within the enclave of Ondo state, kidnapping perpetrators generally fall into two broad camps - criminal Fulani herdsmen operating on the highway and in farmlands and some elements associated with riverine militancy operating from creek communities (Usman and Johnson, 2021).

Security, narrowly conceptualised means the state of being free from danger, want, fear or deprivation. However human security broadens this state-centered definition of security by focusing on individuals and communities rather than on states. The concept first

gain prominence through the 1994 Human Development report of the UNDP identifying seven interconnected aspects of security – economic, food, health, environment, personal, community and political security (UNDP 1994; Hadgu, 2025) – all of which directly or indirectly suffer from kidnapping activities. The kidnapping of people has the effect of raising risk premiums to commerce, thus stymieing business operations and deterring investment; it affects food security as farmers are discouraged from cultivating vulnerable areas of their farmland; it increases health security risk as people are afraid to travel to see doctors and also induces health personnel to desert rural postings; it diminishes personal and family security as the threat of violence forces people to stay at home or in fear of travelling on any route; it corrodes transportation security as travelers divert to expensive alternate routes or stay at home; and it weakens personal and community security as trust dwindles in human relationships and community trust reduces as people shy from neighbours. Political security is undermined as the inability to secure its citizens at the federal and local levels is evident, and this has political repercussions as it causes distrust in the ability of the government to effectively provide the primary function of security.

2.2 Empirical Review

Cross-cutting drivers emerging consistently across these empirical studies are poverty; youth unemployment; corruption; ineffective law enforcement agencies (LEAs); politicized engagement with restless youths and hasty but poorly planned urbanisation (Anintah, 2023; Muhammad, 2024; Okwuwada, 2023; Abdulkabir, 2017). Nigeria's estimated 55.4 percent youth unemployment rate for 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics) has been demonstrably identified as an important component of recruitment to crime syndromes (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021). For Ondo, the porous state borders and the unique mix of relative affluence juxtaposed with lax rural security are seen to be added dimensions (Adeyemi, 2022; Adebayo, 2020). The findings regarding social-economic ramifications by Kwanga et al. (2022) in their study in Katsina-Ala (Benue State) indicate that the major outcomes are ransom, relocation and property loss.

In Katsina State, Abdullahi Gana and Aliyu (2023) confirm that school and business operations and agricultural practices are affected. Ojo (2022) too identified reduced social interaction, increased suspicion of unknown individuals amongst residents in Ekiti State. At the psychological level, Alokun and Atafo (2022) found the link between exposure to kidnapping and psychological distress in metropolitan Kaduna, while in north-western Nigeria, Muhammad, Abdulmalik and Jobe (2023) established the role of kidnapping/banditry in diminished academic performance of students. The nature of formal response, According to Akale (2025) and Bello (2021), logistics, inadequate intelligence sharing and delays in judicial processes are the main deficiencies in Nigeria's formal security apparatus. The evidence from Ondo State largely confirms this.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The study draws upon two complementary theories. The Frustration-Aggression Theory (Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer & Sears, 1939) asserts that aggression is provoked by the thwarting of goal-oriented behaviour. It supports the view of Kidnapping in Ondo State being part of the wider manifestation of youth Socio-Economic Frustration in Nigeria since opportunities are shut at their faces. This theory has also been successfully applied to the Nigerian kidnapping scourge (Okeke, Ikezue, & Oli, 2023; Opakunbi, Mohammed & Osah, 2024).

The Structural-Functionalist Theory (Spencer; Durkheim, 2013; Merton, 1968) works in tandem with the Frustration-Aggression Theory by viewing kidnapping in Ondo State as symptom of socio structural breakdown whereby institution support mechanisms (access to good economic opportunities, effective law enforcement, value integration etc) that sustain social stability weaken, thereby paving way for crime in its various dimensions. Therefore, when combined together, these two theories predict Kidnapping in Ondo State being as much an expression of individual frustration as it is a response to institutional failure-prediction which is consistent with the outcomes of this study.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The design was cross-sectional and mixed-methods using structured questionnaires and KIIs to elicit both statistically Generalizable patterns and context specific narrative detail. The study was conducted in three local Government Areas of Ondo State that are noted for the history of kidnapping; specifically; Akure North, Akoko South-East (Isua) and Akoko North-East (Ikare Akoko). Ondo State is located within latitude 545'N-8015'N, longitude 430'-6030'E; has a land area of about 14, 788.7 km² and an estimated 2024 population of 4,883,792 (Ministry of Planning & Budget, 2020; NBS, 2024). The estimated adult (18–65) population of the three LGAs was 801, 500 and applying the Taro Yamane (1967) formula gave a minimum required sample size of 400 at 5% error margin, allocated in proportions: 101(Akure North);163 (Akoko North-East); 138(Akoko South-East), later rounded up to 400 in overall calculation. However, due to perceived insecurity in certain parts of the study areas, 302 questionnaires were distributed but 280 were successfully completed and retrieved, giving a response rate of 93%; participants were selected through a stratified random sampling approach, stratified by;age, gender, occupation, and urban/rural setting within each LGA;while 20 key informant interviewees (security professionals, community leaders and members of the victims' families) were purposely identified and selected. Three focus group discussions were organized and each attended by 2-4 participants.

Quantitative data were collected via a structured, closed- and open-ended questionnaire comprising six sections covering respondent demographics and the

study's five thematic objectives. Qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews and analysed thematically, following the stages of familiarisation, coding, theme development, review, and definition. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and ranks) and Pearson product-moment correlation to test the relationship between kidnapping incidence and each dimension of human security, at the 0.01 significance level. Research instruments were subjected to face validation by the study's supervisory panel prior to administration.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Sample Characteristics

Of the 280 usable respondents, 61% were male and 39% female. The largest age cohort was 45–54 years (100 respondents), followed by 35–44 years (67) and 55–64 years (53); the 18–24 cohort was smallest (9). The majority were married (60.4%), and most held only secondary (132) or tertiary (102) education. Farming (101) and trading (86) were the dominant occupations, and 66% of respondents had resided in their community for more than ten years, indicating a sample well positioned to report on long-term local dynamics.

4.2 Factors Promoting Kidnapping

As for kidnapping, respondents gave highest mean rating to corruption, followed by unemployment (3.95), poor enforcement by law enforcing agencies (3.80), poverty (3.66) and instability of political structure (3.50), though it got lower mean rating on the factors education (2.30) and drug abuse (2.50) while for comparatively minor contributors (Table 1).

Table 1: Rating of Factors Contributing to Kidnapping in Ondo State

Factor	Min	Max	Mean	Rank
Corruption	1	5	4.35	1
Unemployment	1	5	3.95	2
Inadequate law enforcement	1	5	3.80	3
Poverty	1	5	3.66	4
Political instability	1	5	3.50	5
Peer pressure / influence	1	5	3.30	6

Drug abuse	1	4	2.50	7
Lack of education	1	5	2.30	8

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

These quantitative findings were confirmed by the interviews given with a variety of key informants who on several occasions linked idle youth, the re-integration issue with political thugs' post-election period, difficult forest terrains for tracking, and the role of non-indigenous fighters with their continued perpetration of kidnapping. The question was raised by an Amotekun officer at Akure North; 'during elections, some of these boys were given guns and money to intimidate rivals. The question now is what have they used these weapons after the election and again for, I tell you, these weapons are used in the act of kidnapping to perpetrate heinous crimes and blackmail innocent citizens.'. This phenomenon was complicated with an aspect of poor information and intelligence sharing that stemmed from an individual's fear of retaliation or willing complicity with criminals.

4.3 Socio-Economic Consequences

The leading socio-economic consequence of kidnapping cited was an increase in cost of living (241) followed by a decline in local businesses (217). These were closely followed by migration of local residents (180), although job losses (43) and a decline in investment (32) were less frequently reported. 76.1% of those interviewed considered the economic

impact of kidnapping to be severe and a further 22.5% regarded it to be significant. A staggering 93.9% said that kidnapping had scared investors from doing business in the state. Similarly, 78.2% stated that kidnapping had had a severe impact on food security, and 21.1% reported a significant impact. 31.5% of those mentioning an impact on transportation chose avoidance of high-risk areas, while 25.6% cited delays/ disruptions, 22.6% an increase in costs and 20.6% a decline in services.

4.4 Psychological Consequences

At the individual level, fear and anxiety (mean=4.85) was highest for psychological impact and this was followed by the feelings of incapability, powerlessness and insecurity (4.18), post-traumatic disorder type of symptomologies (4.16), loss, depression and distress (4.06) and low level of confidence with neighbours (3.78). Among communities, widespread panic creating disharmony among people in the society (mean=4.75) and disruption of everyday life and work life (4.63) were found to have the highest severity, whereas higher distrust and suspicion (3.70), decline participation to community (3.56) and deterioration of family tie (3.28) followed at lower level respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Psychological Impact of Kidnapping on Individuals and Communities

Psychological Impact	Level	Mean	Rank
Increased fear and anxiety among residents	Individual	4.85	1
Feelings of helplessness and insecurity	Individual	4.18	2
PTSD symptoms among victims and families	Individual	4.16	3
Depression and emotional distress	Individual	4.06	4
Reduced trust in neighbours	Individual	3.78	5
Widespread panic disrupting social cohesion	Community	4.75	1
Disruption of daily routines	Community	4.63	2
Increased suspicion and mistrust	Community	3.70	3
Decreased participation in community events	Community	3.56	4
Strained family relationships	Community	3.28	5

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Qualitative narratives reinforced these findings: several participants described insomnia, nightmares, and social withdrawal among returned victims, while security officers reported emotional exhaustion following failed rescue operations. Access to professional mental-health support was reported as virtually absent in the study communities, with most victims and families relying instead on informal coping mechanisms such as prayer or withdrawal.

4.5 Law Enforcement Response and Effectiveness

Awareness of law-enforcement agencies operating against kidnapping was high (96%), but satisfaction was mixed: 36% of respondents reported being somewhat dissatisfied, against 28% somewhat satisfied and 28% very satisfied. On effectiveness, 38.2% rated agencies "not very effective" and 36.1% rated them "very effective," indicating a genuinely divided public perception. Despite this ambivalence, 85.4% believed law-enforcement agencies had achieved some success against kidnapping, and 80% believed agencies were engaged with local communities on anti-kidnapping efforts. Key informants attributed persistent weaknesses to inadequate vehicles, fuel, and communication equipment; slow judicial follow-through that

discourages witness cooperation; and comparatively higher trust in community-based outfits such as Amotekun, whose local knowledge and rapid, unbureaucratic response were repeatedly praised over conventional policing.

4.6 Kidnapping and the Deterioration of Human Security

The study hypotheses were tested by using Pearson correlation coefficients for abduction and all dimensions of human security (Table 3). All correlations were positive and statistically significant at $p < 0.01$ level which suggests a negative co-relationship between kidnapping occurrence and each domain of human security; i.e., increases in the number of kidnapping incidents result in a decline in that aspect of human security. Health security had the largest correlations ($r = 0.726$) which was followed by food security ($r = 0.621$), economic security ($r = 0.577$) and transport security ($r = 0.555$) while the general/overall security correlation was relatively weaker ($r = 0.227$) although it also remained statistically significant. From these, the null hypotheses that there is no socio-economic, psychologically or human security consequence associated with kidnapping in Ondo State are rejected.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between Kidnapping Incidence and Human Security Dimensions (N = 280)

Human Security Dimension	r	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Economic security	0.577	$p < .01$	Significant
Food security	0.621	$p < .01$	Significant
Health security	0.726	$p < .01$	Significant
Transportation security	0.555	$p < .01$	Significant
General human security	0.227	$p < .01$	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Within each dimension, specific mechanisms stood out: disruption of local businesses and livelihoods (mean = 4.83) drove economic insecurity; disruption of agricultural activity (4.73) drove food insecurity; shortages of healthcare personnel fleeing to safer locations (4.24) drove health insecurity; and disruption of the movement of goods and services on major routes (4.68) drove transportation insecurity. For general human security, the undermining of the overall

sense of safety (4.73) was the most salient mechanism, followed by declining community cohesion and trust (4.35) and worsening poverty and inequality (4.33).

4.7 Qualitative Synthesis

Thematic analysis of the key informant interviews converged on six themes: the structural, political, and environmental drivers of kidnapping; its socio-economic toll on farming, trade, and household assets; its psychological burden on victims, families, and

security personnel; the constrained but community-anchored nature of law-enforcement response; the cumulative erosion of economic, food, health, and transportation security; and a shared set of community-generated solutions centred on youth empowerment, community-based intelligence, strengthened law-enforcement capacity, surveillance technology, and public awareness and psychosocial support. The consistency between these qualitative themes and the quantitative rankings and correlations strengthens confidence in the study's overall findings.

V. DISCUSSION

The study further finds that kidnapping in Ondo State is directly triggered by the underlying conditions of poverty, joblessness and the absence of effective law enforcement – consistent with Adebayo (2020) and Obaro (2019) who identified weak economic capacity and poor state presence as a basis of rural insecurity and Anintah (2023) who found poverty and unemployment to lead to kidnapping as a life support system. The tendency of the politically engaged youth to transition into kidnapping in the aftermath of election cycles further resonates with Muhammad (2024) thereby supporting the Frustration-Aggression readings on the event where failure to attain economic and political demands are translated into organized criminal aggression and hence the strong relationship between kidnapping and economic security ($r=0.577$). The more people grapple with economic frustrations relating to security, they continue the cycle of discontentment and criminality in turn. The Socio-economic implications identified through abandoned farms, stunted trade as well as selling assets to pay ransom correlate to the works of Okeke, Ikezue, and Oli (2023) with the addition of empirical evidence in agrarian and semi-urban communities of other Nigerian states that has been documented before (Kwanga et al., 2022; Audu, Gana, & Aliyu, 2023) in a context of its current focus in Ondo State. A key socio-economic implication is the strong correlation of kidnapping with food security ($r=0.621$) which comes to the fore in our research area's context due to its agrarian nature where the abandoned farms lead to low domestic food availability and increasing costs.

5.1 Interpretation Within the Theoretical Framework
The frustration-aggression theory could explain why many citizens especially the economically

marginalized youth engage in this business for lack of better opportunities to survive, where our evidence suggests politically empowered youth transition to kidnapping for failing to be subsequently integrated back into normal society following election cycles; another angle where individuals pursue criminal options for the denial of legitimate political and social opportunities which is consistent to the perspective of (Muhammad 2024) and hence the correlation between kidnapping and economic security ($r=0.577$). The structural functionalism theory can shed light on this situation from a broader systemic level where breakdown of major social institutions to check behavior or restore order creates dysfunctionality in the society. Hence, the finding that communities do not trust the formally organized law-enforcement and reposed more confidence on 'community security apparatuses' such as Amotekun, thereby contributing to fragmented inter-agency activities where one is at cross-purposes with another in addressing security issues which have been documented for Nigeria's various security outfits (Ibrahim, 2021), comes to bear in the analysis of kidnapping in the State. The combined quantitative and qualitative data therefore suggest that kidnapping in the Ondo State is neither just an isolated security issue but also a complex development and humanitarian crisis with cascading impacts across the various components of human security, as noted in the discourse on the nexus between insecurity and human security (UNDP 2020). This conception implies that the response should focus not only on security solutions but also on simultaneously addressing youths' livelihood and employment opportunities; enhancing the justice sector; providing psychosocial assistance, among others; to effectively combat the problem without further exacerbating it by relying on security alone.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research aimed at investigating the influence of kidnapping on human security in Ondo State Nigeria, in the area of study (Akure North, Akoko South-East and Akoko North-East). It was concluded that kidnapping is caused by interplay of some factors namely corruption, unemployment, poverty, porosity of Nigerian security system and complex and rough topography of the area of study, politicizing idle youth. These effects are profound, varied and touch on

several aspects of the life of the Nigerian citizen including, breaking of the living cycle, reducing livelihood and increasing cost of living, creating feeling of insecurity, traumatization of victim and their relatives and the state security apparatus as well, confidence in legal security institution while there is strong reliance on community self-help groups and a decrease in the economic, food, health and transportation security of humans. Kidnapping in Ondo State cannot be viewed as isolated criminal acts, but as a threat to the process of development, security and public trust in Ondo State Nigeria.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends: (i) targeted youth-empowerment and skills-acquisition programmes, alongside microcredit and grant schemes, to reduce the economic desperation that feeds recruitment into kidnapping networks; (ii) formal recognition, funding, and regulated integration of community-based security outfits such as Amotekun alongside conventional policing, with clear accountability and human-rights safeguards; (iii) investment in logistics, surveillance technology (GPS tracking, drones, and a centralised offender database), and inter-agency coordination to close the operational gap between community and formal security responses; (iv) judicial reform to accelerate prosecution and reduce the erosion of witness cooperation that follows perceived impunity; (v) strengthened border and inter-state route monitoring to curb the infiltration reported by respondents; (vi) integrated trauma-recovery and mental-health services for victims, families, and frontline responders, who currently have little access to professional psychosocial support; and (vii) sustained public-awareness campaigns, delivered in local languages, to strengthen community reporting and early-warning capacity.

6.2 Limitations and Directions for Further Research

As with most community-based studies of a sensitive and actively threatening phenomenon, this research faced constraints including reliance on self-reported data subject to recall bias, restricted access to some communities for security reasons, and the likely under-representation of the most severely affected or reticent victims. Official statistics on kidnapping incidence, used to contextualise the study, are

themselves incomplete due to under-reporting. Future research should pursue longitudinal and geospatial analyses of kidnapping trends and hotspots in Ondo State, examine the role of social media in ransom negotiation and the propagation of fear, and undertake comparative cross-state analyses to identify transferable best practices across Nigeria's kidnapping-affected regions.

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