

SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION AND SOCIAL ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57233/gujos.v6i1.20>

Abstract

This study examined the spatial distribution and socio-economic consequences of kidnapping in Nigeria. The work adopted the descriptive approach and looked at the triggers and effects of kidnapping on public safety and national security. The study used secondary data collected from peer review publications, government and security reports. It covers a period of 2024-2025, and used ArcGIS version 10.8 for the production of maps. A total of 997 kidnapping incidents was recorded between 2024-2025 with the North-West zone having 425 incidents of all the national recorded cases. This zone was closely followed by North-Central zone with 255 cases. The North-East has 61 cases, while South-South and South-East zones each recorded 107 and 96 incidents respectively. South-West zone had the fewest number of kidnapping incidents with 53 cases. The sum of forty-eight billion, fifty-three million (N48, 053, 000,000) naira was demanded as ransom by kidnappers, while two billion, five hundred and sixty-six million (N2, 566, 000,000) naira was paid to kidnappers for the release of victims across the six geopolitical zones of the country for the period under review. Deaths, economic stagnation, emotional ordeal and financial burden and trust in governance are some of the negative impacts of kidnapping. The research indicates that the socio-economic fallouts of kidnapping transcend far beyond the primary victims and their immediate households. It recommends that governments at all levels should dismantle and shatter criminal recruitment networks by initiating and financing grassroots economic initiatives. It also recommended the introduction and enforcement of the application of geospatial intelligence into the operational activities of all security agencies; as well as strengthen prosecution, judicial efficiency, and enforcement of anti-kidnapping laws among others.

Keywords: Death, Kidnapping, Ransom, Socio-economic Consequences, Victims

1.0 Introduction

Kidnapping is one of the notable security issues that pose serious threat to peace and security around the world, including America, United Kingdom, Russia, Mexico, Cuba, Niger, Chad, Libya, Sudan and Nigeria (Brockett *et al*, 2019; Tadee *et al*, 2020; Adebola & Temidayo, 2023). Kidnapping and insecurity in Nigeria is a serious threat to its people, peace, development and security. Across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, there is no zone that is free from kidnapping incidents, however, the degree of such occurrences varies from zone to zone.

Originally associated with political militancy and agitation in the oil-rich Niger Delta region during the early 2000s, kidnapping has gradually evolved into a widespread criminal enterprise affecting virtually all geopolitical zones of Nigeria (Okoli & Agada, 2014; Ngwama, 2014, Anthonia, 2024; Adigwe & Adebawale, 2025).

In Nigeria, the phenomenon of kidnapping has assumed a dangerous dimension due to persistent insecurity, youth unemployment, poverty, weak law enforcement mechanisms, corruption, poor governance and the proliferation of armed criminal groups (Alemika& Chukwuma, 2005, Anthonia, 2024). Because victims of kidnapping are compelled to pay ransom before their release, kidnappers now see this crime as lucrative and enriching. In a report presented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, organized crime like kidnapping hinders economic and national development, and threaten the stability of a nation. Notably, the level of development and stability of a country depends on the state of its security and assured peace across all phases of human endeavours (Adigwe& Adebawale, 2025).

Ewetan&Urhie (2014) posited that kidnapping has multi-dimensional socio-economic effects. These scholars observed that kidnapping reduces the ability of the citizens to make economic purchases, as both local and international investors are usually discouraged from investing in the country. In the same vein, cases abound in Nigeria where commuters are targets of kidnappers, and the fear of traveling from one point to another across the country because of kidnapping is now indelible in the minds of the people. Abohet *al*, (2025) noted that kidnapping brings about fear, emotional trauma and anxiety, population dislodgement, lack of family bonding, and reduction in social trust. The scholars equally asserted that families of persons that are kidnapped always suffer emotional pains, financial destitution due to ransom demands. Adigwe& Adebawale (2025) posited that kidnapping has serious negative effects for national security and the corporate image of the country in the comity of nations. The continuous kidnapping incidents, according to them, weakens public confidence in state institutions, makes security agencies credibility to be doubted in addressing insecurity. Ibrahim & Mukhtar (2017) opine that kidnapping occur due to the inability of the youths to get job. Poverty, injustice and oppression, inequality and weak/corrupt criminal justice systems in Nigeria also induce kidnapping. This therefore calls for the formulation of a comprehensive model to effectively tackle the issue of kidnapping across the country.

In spite of aggressive military operations and crackdown on kidnappers, including anti-kidnapping legislations, kidnapping still spread across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria like

wide fire. The boldness of kidnappers and other criminal grids and the extension of kidnapping into new geographical zones needs a deeper reflection and with clear understanding. Different studies have looked at the security perspectives of kidnapping, however, much has not been done in the area of the wider implication of kidnapping in Nigeria, as it relates to the various geopolitical zones across urban and rural communities (Orjiakor, 2025; Umar, 2026). It is on the above premise that the study discusses and examines the spatial spread of kidnapping and how it affects economic activities, social stability, public safety, and national development across the geopolitical zones. It also explores the broader implications of the crime for governance, investment, and community well-being. The contribution of this study to the body of knowledge concerning kidnapping and insecurity issues in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Accordingly, the study will look at the spatial distribution of kidnapping in Nigeria, factors responsible for kidnapping in Nigeria; and the socio-economic consequences of kidnapping on communities and national development.

2. Geographical Scope of the Study

The study focused on Nigeria and its national security. Nigeria is located in West Africa, bordering the Gulf of Guinea to the south, Republic of Benin to the west and Cameroon to the east. At the northern part of the country, Nigeria is surrounded by the Republics of Niger and Chad. The southern part of the country is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean. All four countries are French speaking countries. Nigeria lies between latitudes 4° and 14° north of the equator and longitudes 3° and 15° east of the Greenwich meridian (Okpuvwie, 2022). With over 200 million people, Nigeria is officially the most populous black nation on planet earth. There are 6 geopolitical zones in Nigeria; namely – North-East, North-West and North-Central. Others are South-West, South-East and South-South. Notably, the 36 states and Abuja are subsumed into these 6 geopolitical zones (Okpuvwie, 2022). Petroleum is the mainstay of the nation's economy - largely explored and exploited in the Niger Delta region – South-South of Nigeria. However, agriculture is a significant sector, employing about 70% of the labour force. Major crops grown are cassava, yam, sorghum, rice and maize among others. The study area is shown at Figure 1.



Figure 1. Study Area

Source: Author (2026)

3.1 Methodological Approach

The study applies descriptive analysis which provided an in-depth insight on the subject under investigation. This approach entails the syntheses and interpretation of various scientific literatures and collected data to enhance a better understanding of the subject matter. Generally, the data were sourced from both published and unpublished works, policy studies, and government comments through security agencies and peer review journals. The choropleth method of analysis in ArcGIS version 10.8 was adopted for the study. In this method, data were presented in excel sheet and later exported into ArcGIS environment for further analysis.

4.0 Literature Review

4.1 Conceptual Clarification of Kidnapping

What we define today as kidnapping which is the illegal capture and confinement of an individual, usually for financial extortion-actually found its name in the 17th century. The word is a mixture of "kid" and "nap" (to steal), formerly describing a miserable historical reality where children were systematically snatched and sold into forced labour. Kidnapping started in Britain when, infants of wealthy families were 'napped' (caught in the sleep) for ransom (Tzannelli, 2006; Okoli & Agada, 2014; James & Ann, 2025). Kidnapping is the act of snatching, take away, and keeping a person in custody by force or deception (Abraham, 2010). Anthonia (2024) defined kidnapping as an "infringement and a violation of an individual's personal freedom by forcibly or deceitfully taking them without their consent and without any legal justification. Kidnapping is connected to an aggressive act of taking away of a person without his/her consent or lawful reason by another person or group of persons.

Inyang & Abraham (2013) stated that kidnapping involves conduct that is carried out for political leverage, personal vendetta or financial ransom. At the beginning of the manifestation of this crime, kidnapping was majorly targeted at the rich and well to do persons in the society. Regrettably, such dynamic has changed tremendously in recent years as both traditional rulers, students, pupils, farmers, commuters among others have become targets (Ezeibe *et al*, 2017). Ngwama (2014) cited in Arnold (2019) opined that kidnapping now affects every person in Nigeria regardless of social status, age and gender/sex, with a robust occurrence in states in the north-west geopolitical zone. The problem of kidnapping has spread across all the states of Nigeria; however, the degree of occurrence varies from state to state and region to region. In present day Nigeria, no one is free and immune from being kidnapped (Chimezie *et al*; 2023). Indeed, kidnapping incidents in Nigeria have become normal, however, governments at all levels are making frantic efforts to effectively combat this ugly menace.

4.2 Spatial Distribution of Kidnapping in Nigeria

In this part, the study systematically looks at the geographical distribution and spatial spread of kidnapping incidents across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Kidnapping has now become a nightmare, painful and horrific types of violent crime to Nigerians, as it has continued to violate human dignity and posed a serious threat to Nigeria's national security

imperatives. Over 20 years, kidnapping incidents has expanded from localized militancy in the Niger Delta region to a nationwide criminal enterprise disrupting both urban and rural communities. The incessant kidnapping recorded along highways, residential communities, schools, and commercial centers has generated public anxiety and undermined economic and social activities across Nigeria (Okoli& Agada, 2014; Okpuvwie, *et al*, 2021, James & Ann, 2025).

Due to unequal geographic distribution of this threat, it is therefore necessary to look at the spatial spread of kidnapping in Nigeria. Certain regions, states, transportation corridors, and forested environments have become highly vulnerable to kidnapping activities. Such areas have become a no-go zone for human activities. Major highways such as the Abuja–Kaduna Expressway, BirninGwari axis, Benin-Ore, Lokoja-Abuja and several interstate road networks among others have repeatedly experienced incidents of kidnapping. Significantly, current research using GIS has shown that kidnapping cases show concentrated spatial patterns across nationwide. Notably, socioeconomic, environmental, and security-related factors are accountable for this.

GIS, remote sensing, geospatial intelligence and spatial statistical analysis as part of geospatial technologies have increasingly become useful tools in crime mapping and security management. With the aid of GIS, security agencies can easily visualize, analyse, and interpret crime patterns across geographical space (Okpuvwie *et al*, 2021). It will also enable security forces to identify high-risk zones and deployment of security resources. The Kernel Density Estimation method and spatial clustering model are basically used in security studies to identify concentrations of criminal activities and predict future occurrences of crimes. In Nigeria, kidnapping doesn't have a distinct location. In the past, kidnapping incidents were not so rampant as we see today in Nigeria, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, which was formerly known as a safe haven. Arnold (2019) observed that the first kidnapping incident in present day Nigeria was in 2006 when Niger Delta militants kidnapped oil workers in protest against regional exploitation and injustice. At first, politically motivated kidnapping in Nigeria was concentrated in the South-South region (Teniola&Pelumi, 2021). Since then, kidnapping has rapidly expanded throughout Nigeria's six geopolitical zones.

In today's contemporary Nigeria, the North-West and North-East zones are seen as the epicenters of kidnapping for monetary and other gains, mostly in states like Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto and Borno. The North-Central states of Niger, Plateau, Kwara and Benue, all have significant rates of kidnapping in recent years. Also, urban centers and commercial

corridors in parts of the South-East, South-West and South-South regions have equally experienced cases of targeted kidnapping. Pertinently, kidnapping hotspots are usually created by bad road networks, dense forests, poverty, unemployment, porous borders, and inadequate policing. Pinpointing these clusters through hotspot analysis has changed how researchers and police approach crime prevention, allowing them to focus entirely on high-risk zones (Okpuvwie *et al.*, 2021). This spatial clustering is the core focus of environmental criminology. The theory of environmental criminology reminds us that a crime pattern is rarely a coincidence; it is actively shaped by the layout of the land, how people move through it, and how easily a criminal can exploit those dynamics. This theoretical perspective explains why kidnappers often operate in isolated highways, forest corridors, border communities, and poorly policed regions where opportunities for criminal activities are high (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1991).

To brutally confront the incidents of kidnapping, governments at all levels in Nigeria have supported security agencies to aggressively pursue these criminal elements and bring them to justice. In spite of aggressive military operations, anti-kidnapping laws, and increased security deployments, kidnapping continues to spread across many parts of Nigeria. The study observed that lack of a comprehensive geospatial intelligence knowledge and data-driven crime analysis systems among security operatives capable of identifying kidnapping incidents among others are attributed to the inability of security forces to effectively put an end to crimes in Nigeria. This underscores the need for effective GIS and hotspot analysis techniques to enable a clear understanding of the spatial dynamics of kidnapping and improving security responses.

4.3 Factors that Influence the Spatial Occurrence of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Kidnapping in Nigeria has transformed into a complex security challenge caused by both socioeconomic, political, governance, environment, and moral factors among others. Several scholars have adduced various drivers of kidnapping in Nigeria. Slack, (2016); and Inyang & Abraham (2013) observed that kidnapping occurs as a result of variables like unemployment, political instability and economic insecurity. Chimezie *et al.*, (2023) noted that criminality and ritual killings, political ambitions, lack of requisite consequences for offenders, general insecurity, and involvement of security agencies, unemployment and poverty were some of the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria.

According to Jamilu & Bello (2017), youth unemployment and poverty have engineered an increase in kidnapping as a source of generating income. Corrupt politicians exploited

jobless youths as political thugs who then turn into kidnappers. Ogunremi, *et al.*, (2023) observed that kidnapping poses a significant threat in Nigeria-usually associated by lack of local crime data, potential compromise on the part of security forces, and unwillingness to report kidnapped cases to authorities. Anthonia (2024) in her study stated that unemployment, poverty, and greed are associated with kidnapping in Nigeria. Kidnapping is a reflection of a wider socio-economic inequalities and systemic failures, including unemployment, poverty, and weak law enforcement structures (Eze, 2023). In his view, Ohakhire (2020) attributed kidnapping to the pursuit of ransom, vengeance, and ritual. SB Morgen in its August 2025 report in the economics of kidnap industry stated that poverty, unemployment, and weak law enforcement are the root causes of kidnapping in Nigeria. Notably, social factors such as declining moral values, organized criminal networks, normalization of ransom payments and compromise on the part of some security personnel and government officials have further entrenched kidnapping as a lucrative criminal enterprise in Nigeria. Other causes of kidnapping in Nigeria include: weak state capacity to enforce existing laws, inequality, corruption and impunity, proliferation of weapons and get rich quick syndrome among others (Onuohia & Okolie-Osemene, 2019; Babalola, 2026).

4.4 Socio-Economic Consequences of Kidnapping on Communities and National Development

Udechukwu&Ofoke (2024) observed that the shocking and hurtful effect of kidnapping is not only on victims but to their families and friends. Kidnapping for ransom is now a money-spinning venture in many nations of the world (Brockett, Golden, Zaparolli& Lum, 2019; Chinwokwu& Michael, 2019), and has grown particularly worrisome in Nigeria, because of the country's weak security apparatus (Adebola & Temidayo, 2023). Kidnapping can affect victims psychologically, physically, financially and even physiologically. The psychological effects include the period of captivity which comes with trauma, emotional torture for fear of be killed or released (Tade, Ojedokun&Aderinto, 2020). Victims of kidnapping also battled with the issue of sleeplessness, impaired memory and concentration, shock and numbness, hopelessness, anger, depression, and irritability (Alexander & Klein, 2009; Shekwolo, *et al*, 2020).

Kidnapping imposed serious financial strain on both the victims and their family/friends including the government. According to SBM Intelligence report of August 2025, the sum of N48 billion naira was demanded by kidnappers as ransom for the period of 2024-2025. Out of this total, victims and their families had to pay N2.566 billion naira just to secure their

freedom. Notably, loss of money in the payment of ransom, emotional trauma for both victims and their loved ones, decline in the number of potential investors, forced/early marriage of victims and above all, deaths were identified as consequences of kidnapping (Chimezie *et al*, 2023). Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics reveals that Nigerians paid a staggering sum of N2.23 trillion in ransom to kidnappers between May 2023 and April 2024; showing a significant rise of criminal activities across the country, despite continuous government huge spending on security (Babalola, 2026). Pertinently, most kidnap cases are not reported to the police for fear of murder of the victims, thus, families of victims opt for payment of ransom to avoid death of their loved victim(s). A case in point is the kidnap of an industrialist in Nnewi, Anambra State in 2009 where the sum of N70 million naira was allegedly paid before he was released. There was also a case of a Kano-based multi-millionaire business man who paid the sum of N80 million-naira ransom to the kidnappers without informing the police (Ngwama, 2014).

Furthermore, kidnapped victims are susceptible to health hazards, illness, sadness and sexual abuse among others (Adigwe & Adebawale, 2025). Nigeria's reputation for kidnapping has also damaged diplomatic relations with international governments. Nigeria's image in the comity of nations have been battered due to insecurity including kidnapping. Olaniyan (2017) noted that kidnapping in Nigeria has become a source of indignity, humiliation and disgrace. Kidnappers have continued to look for expatriates as their target believing that these group of persons have huge sum of money in foreign currency. It is in the belief of the kidnappers that when such foreigners are captured, good ransom will be paid by their family or their home government (Odeku, 2020). Regrettably, no foreigner will want to risk his/herself to travel to a country where they stand the risk of being kidnapped or even killed in the process. No wonder then, countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada among others usually issued travel advisory to their nationals cautioning them to avoid coming to Nigeria due to this menace (Ojo & Oluwole, 2024). These advisories affect international trade, cultural exchanges, and the conduct of diplomatic activities.

The socioeconomic effects of kidnapping are deeply damaging to both communities and overall national growth and development. Kidnapping dampens and weakens the morale of local and international investors; increase the cost of conducting business, and disrupts transportation systems. It also affects sectors like agriculture, education and tourism. The horror associated with kidnapping has restricted the fundamental freedom of movement and reduced economic viability of citizens of Nigeria around urban and rural communities. These

observed problems weaken social stability, cohesiveness and hamper sustainable national development. Agriculture, which remains a major support and backbone of the nation's economy has been affected- as some farmers flee their farmlands due to the fear of being kidnapped (Anthonia, 2024).

5.0 Theoretical Framework

5.1 Routine Activity Theory

This section examines the core theoretical framework that explain criminal motivations, identify the specific environments where these criminal networks thrive, and isolate the structural factors keeping the enterprise profitable. As an organized crime, kidnapping for ransom relies on syndicated networks driven by a shared criminal ideology. These groups don't operate at random; they execute operations through meticulous and strategic planning; and the deliberate deployment of both human intelligence and material resources. Adebola & Temidayo (2023) observed that no single theory can explain all forms of crimes-thus, this study adopts a theoretical bridging approach that uses the Routine Activity Theory (RAT). The Routine Activity Theory was developed by Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979. The theory postulated that motivated offenders, a suitable target and absence of a capable guardian must be present before a crime can occur. In this wise, when motivated offenders encounter suitable targets in the absence of capable guardianship, crime will definitely occur. A specific vulnerability window must open for any crime to occur. This happens when a willing criminal crosses paths with a vulnerable target in a location where security forces, community oversight, or defensive barriers are entirely missing. If you remove just one of these factors, the criminal opportunity collapses.

This theory clearly shows how the crime of kidnapping occurs in Nigeria. Importantly, kidnappers are motivated by ransom and economic gain; as travelers, students, businessmen, and communities become suitable targets, and weak policing and inadequate security coverage create opportunities for the crime to occur. The theory also supports spatial hotspot analysis, highway kidnapping studies, and regional crime concentration. The theory reveals a context where all three elements are frequently present. Motivated offenders which include disgruntled youth, criminal gangs and former militants, insurgents are numerous. Suitable targets which are abundant because of poor urban planning, absence of reliable transportation, inadequate surveillance and communication infrastructure. Capable guardianship is often lacking due to the limited presence of law enforcement in rural and peri-urban areas, as well as the widespread perception that the police are not ready to

appropriately intervene. The RAT offers a useful crystalline lens through which kidnapping crisis in Nigeria can be examined and analysed. From the perspective of this theory, crime occurs when three variables occur in space.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Spatial Distribution of Kidnapping in Nigeria

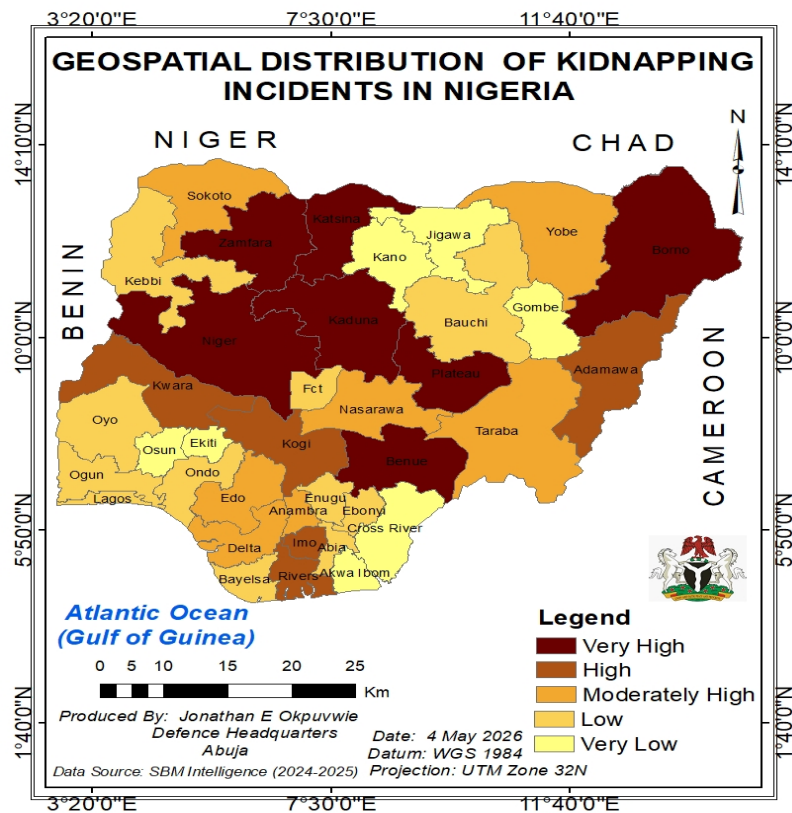


Figure 2: Spatial Distribution of Kidnapping Incidents

Source: Author (2026)

Figure 2 reveals the spatial spread of kidnapping incidents across Nigeria. The North-East, North-West and the North-Central geopolitical zones record very high incidents of kidnapping between 2024 and 2025. States like Borno, Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Niger, Benue and Plateau are noted for high incidents of kidnapping in these zones. Also, Kwara, Kogi, Adamawa, Imo and Rivers states equally have high records of Kidnapping incidents. Jigawa, Gombe, Kano, Osun, Ekiti, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom states record few cases of kidnapped incidents for the period under review. This reflects the spatial dispersion of

kidnapping incidents across Nigeria. Figure 2 was categorized with the aid of the natural breaks (Jenks) classification scheme in ArcGIS version 10.8 for the period 2024-2025. This method was used because it statistically enhances the boundaries between classes - thereby effectively demarcating extreme high-incidence security areas from low-risk zones without clustering disparate data - with the choropleth symbology featuring a graduated colour ramp which ranges from light yellow to deep brown as shown in the legend. The light yellow shows areas with a low frequency of kidnapping incidents—typically indicative of localized or opportunistic crimes - deep brown identifies extreme hotspots driven by deep-seated structural vulnerabilities and active kidnapping syndicates. Furthermore, to ensure geometric accuracy, eliminate spatial distortion, and maintain true areal measurements across Nigeria's landmass, all spatial data were projected to the WGS 84 / Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) Zone 32N coordinate system. The spatial analysis was conducted at a national operational scale of 1:5,000,000 - allowing for an expansive view of transnational and interstate kidnapping corridors. The underlying geospatial workflow began with data acquisition, during which raw kidnapping incident logs were systematically extracted from established security repositories, including the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and SBM Intelligence. Finally, the cleaned data were imported into the ArcGIS environment for spatial aggregation, where a spatial join tool was used to structurally aggregate individual incident points into Admin 1 (State) administrative polygon layers to calculate the total incident frequencies per administrative unit.

Notably, the prevalent cases of kidnapping in these states are attributed to several reasons such as porous international borders connecting Nigeria with Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republics. Dense and large expanse of vegetation in these states also aid kidnappers to seamlessly carry out their criminal activities with less resistance. Additionally, poverty and unemployment occasioned with high population, act as bait for the crime of kidnapping to fester in these states. The findings supports James & Ann's (2025) research on the temporal and spatial trends of kidnapping occurrences along Nigeria's Abuja–Kaduna expressway. The findings of this study also corroborated the report of the 2021 Institute of Security Studies on Nigeria's kidnap situation, which stated that kidnapping occurrences that began in the Niger Delta region had migrated to other parts of the nation. The findings of the study support the studies and reports of Arnold (2019), Chimezie *et al.* (2023), Anthonia (2024), and SB Morgen (2024-2025).

6.2 Factors that Influence the Spatial Occurrence of Kidnapping in Nigeria

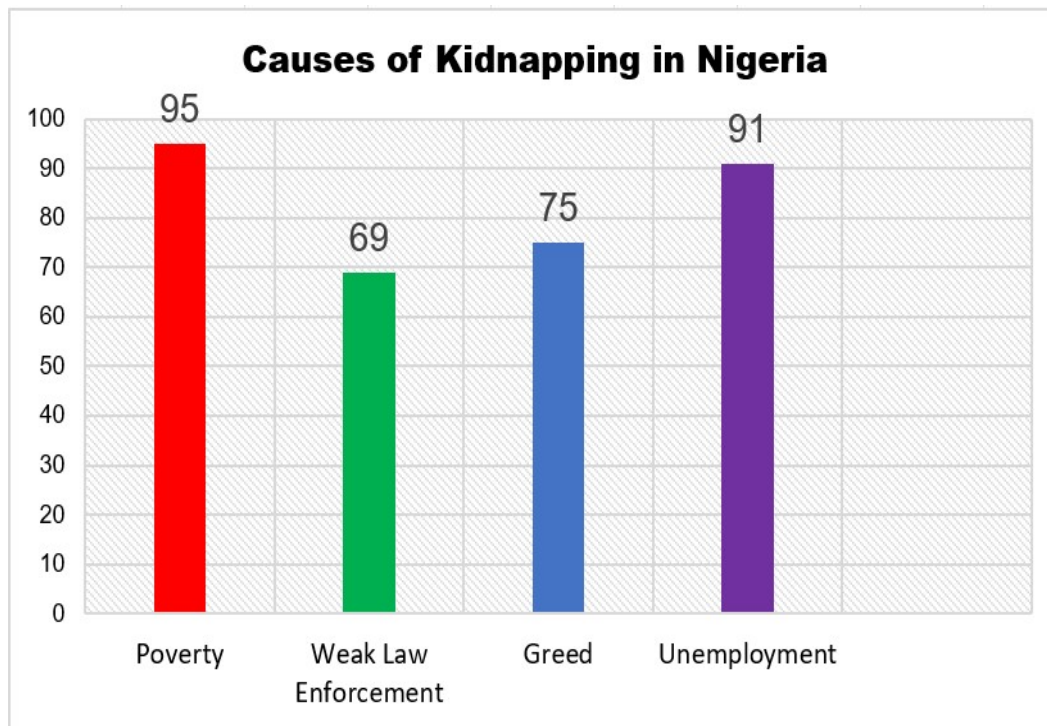


Figure 3: Causes of Kidnapping

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from Jamilu & Bello (2017); Anthonia (2024); SBM (2025)

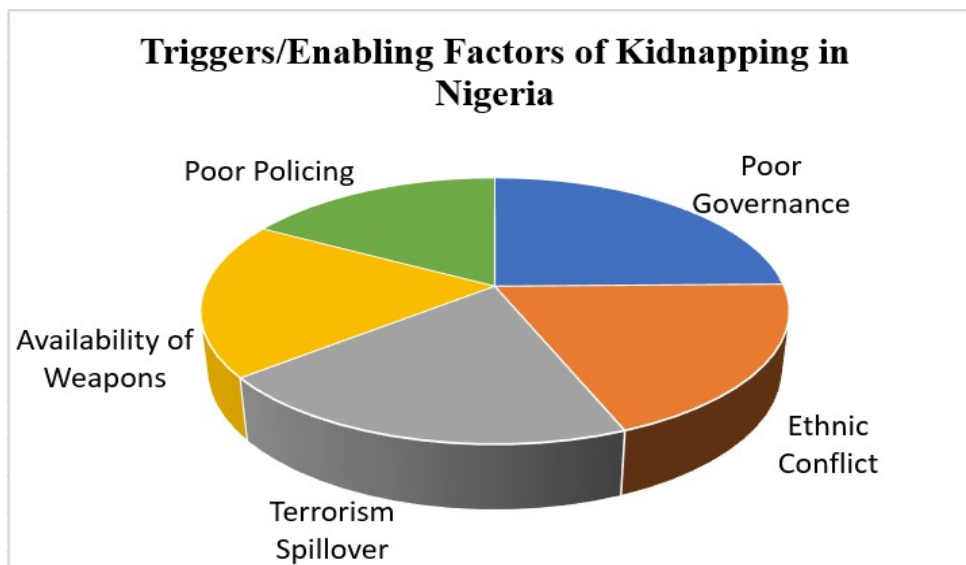


Figure 4: Triggers of Kidnapping

Source: Author's Analysis (2026)

The causes and triggers of kidnapping incidents in Nigeria are depicted in Figures 3 and 4. The study discovered that kidnapping is encouraged by porous borders, weak legal system, "get rich quick" mentality, and the availability of weapons. Poor governance, greed, unemployment and compromised security personnel also motivate kidnapping. In certain cases, some people staged their own kidnapping in order to take advantage of their loved ones. The continuous payment of ransom to kidnappers before victims can regain their freedom is another factor. This practice encouraged the kidnappers to continue in this crime, hence the need to stop it. In Nigeria, kidnapping is one of the deadliest social vices and a major threat; and this has broken the spirit of law-abiding citizens.

The findings of the study corroborate the works of several scholars like Slack, (2016); Inyang&Abraham, (2009) who observed that kidnapping occur as a result of variables like unemployment, political instability and economic insecurity. Chimezie *et al*, (2023) noted that criminality and ritual killings, political ambitions, lack of requisite consequences for offenders, general insecurity and involvement of security agencies, unemployment and poverty were some of the identified causes of kidnapping in Nigeria. In the same vein, Jamilu& Bello (2017) identified youth unemployment and poverty as major drivers of kidnapping. Potential involvement of some security operatives as well as government officials according to Ogunremi, *et al*, (2023) also fueled kidnapping. Additionally, the works of Anthonia (2024); Ohakhire (2020); and SB Morgen (2025) all supported the findings of the study, as kidnapping has become a lucrative business enterprise across the country. This unholy business has continued to threaten the nation's national security.

6.3 Socio-Economic Consequences of Kidnapping on Communities and National Development

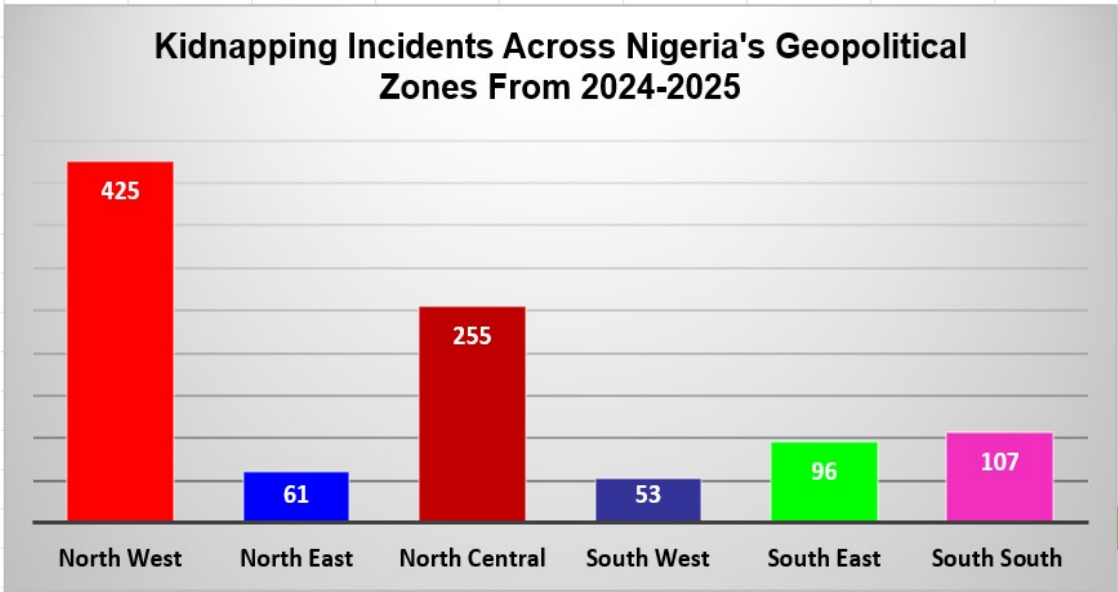


Figure 5: Kidnapping Incidents Across Geopolitical Zones

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

Figure 5 clearly shows that one cannot deny and feign ignorance of the regional disparity in kidnapping incidents across Nigeria. The North-West zone sits at the absolute center of this crisis, recording 425 cases, accounting for 42.6% of all recorded kidnappings between 2024 and 2025—a massive concentration compared to the rest of the country. With 25.6% of all kidnapping instances, the North-Central zone was in second place nationwide with 255 recorded cases. This was closely followed by South-South with 107 cases (10.7%) and South-East that recorded 96 cases (9.6%) for the period under review. The North-East and South-West zones from the study, recorded the least cases, with each having 61(6.1%) and 53 cases (5.3%) respectively of all incidents during the study period. However, kidnappers are gradually infiltrating the South-West region that was once peaceful and relatively safe.

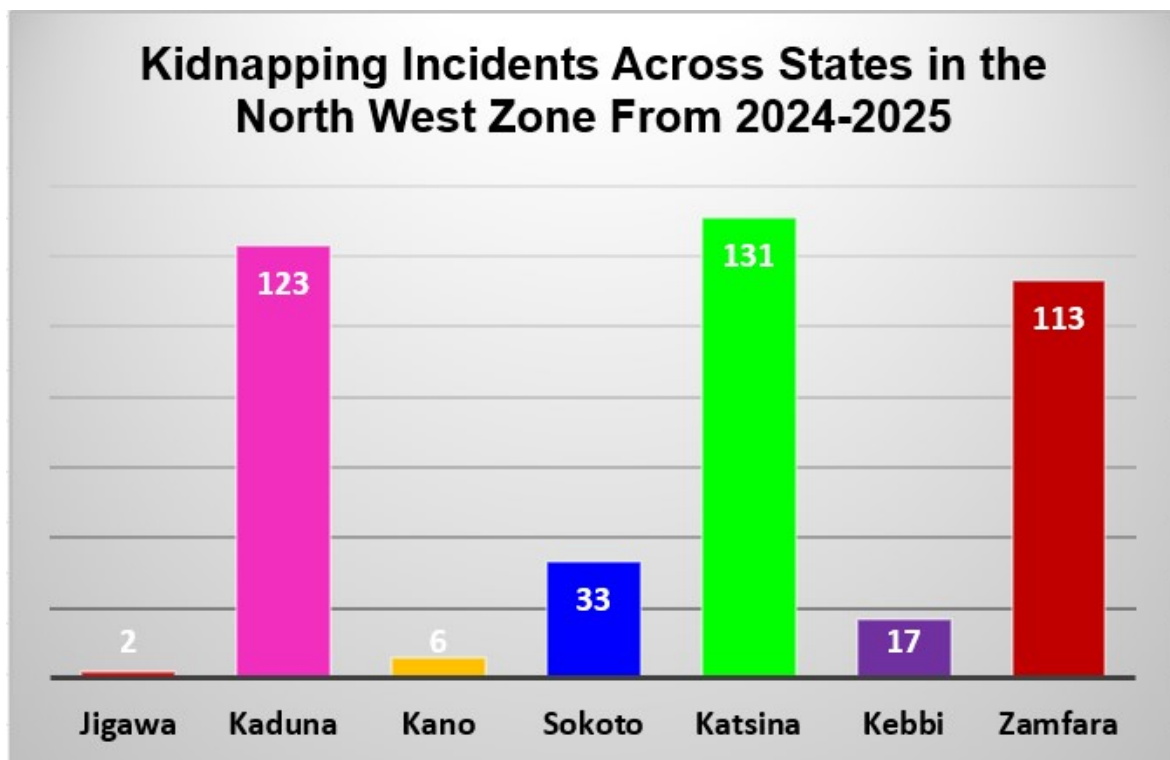


Figure 6: Kidnapping Incidents in the North-West Zone

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

A zonal representation of kidnapping incidents in the seven North-West states is shown in Figure 6. With 131 kidnapping cases between 2024 and 2025, Katsina State has the greatest number of kidnapping incidents in the zone. This represents 30.8% of all incidences. With 28.9% of every occurrence in the zone, Kaduna state had the second-highest number of incidents. Zamfara State, which accounts for 26.6% of all incidences in the zone, comes in third. While states like Jigawa and Kano managed to keep kidnapping percentages remarkably low—at 0.5% and 1.4% respectively—the broader North-West zone remains highly volatile and unpredictable. In areas like Kebbi (4%) and Sokoto (7.8%), forest-fringe banditry has become a relentless threat. This rural insecurity has a devastating domino effect: terrified farmers abandon their farmlands which is directly driving up food prices across the region.

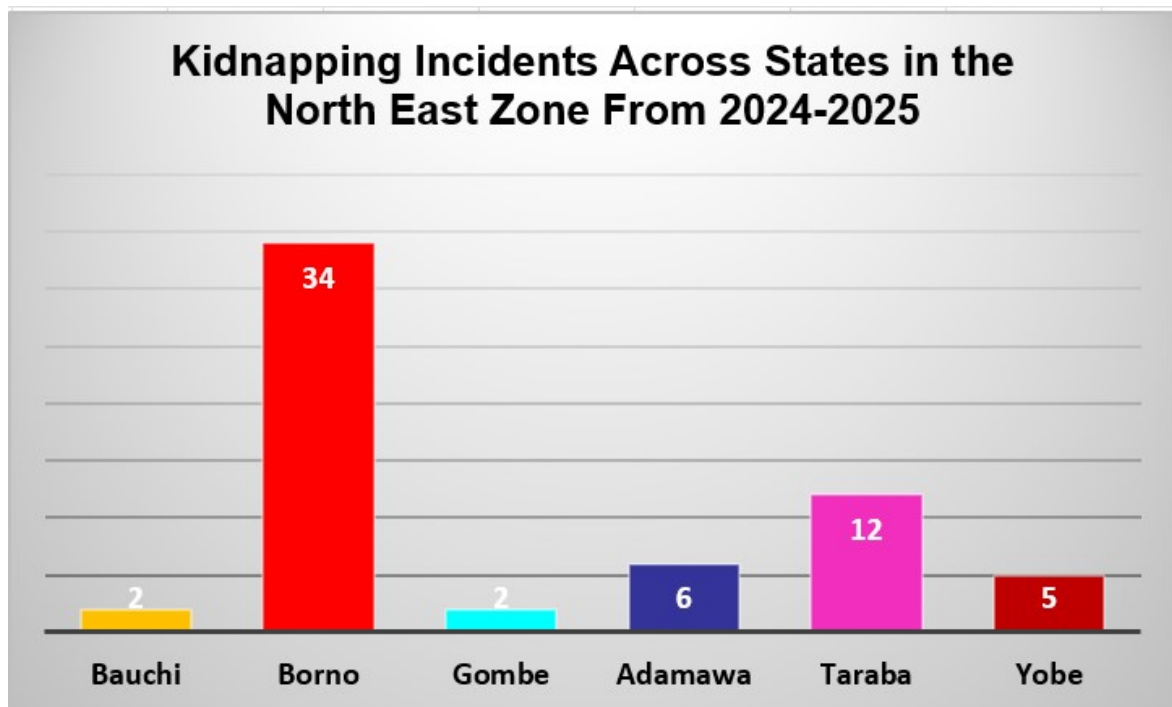


Figure 7: Kidnapping Incidents in the North-East Zone

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

Figure 7 shows North-East kidnapped incidents across the 6 states. Analysis of the incidents depicts Borno state as the epicenter of kidnapped incidents from 2024-2025 with a total incident of 61, accounting for 55.7%. This per cent is a reflection of the activities of insurgents in the region as most of the recorded incidents are insurgency-related. Taraba state records the second highest incidents (12) accounting for 19.7% of the total incidents. Adamawa and Yobe states respectively recorded (9.9%) and (8.2%), while Bauchi and Gombe each have 3.3%. The nature of kidnapping in this zone is best classified as insurgency-linked kidnapping. The availability of large expanse of forest and ungoverned spaces in this region massively contributed to the continuous cases of kidnapping, as security forces find it difficult to penetrate this forested fringes.

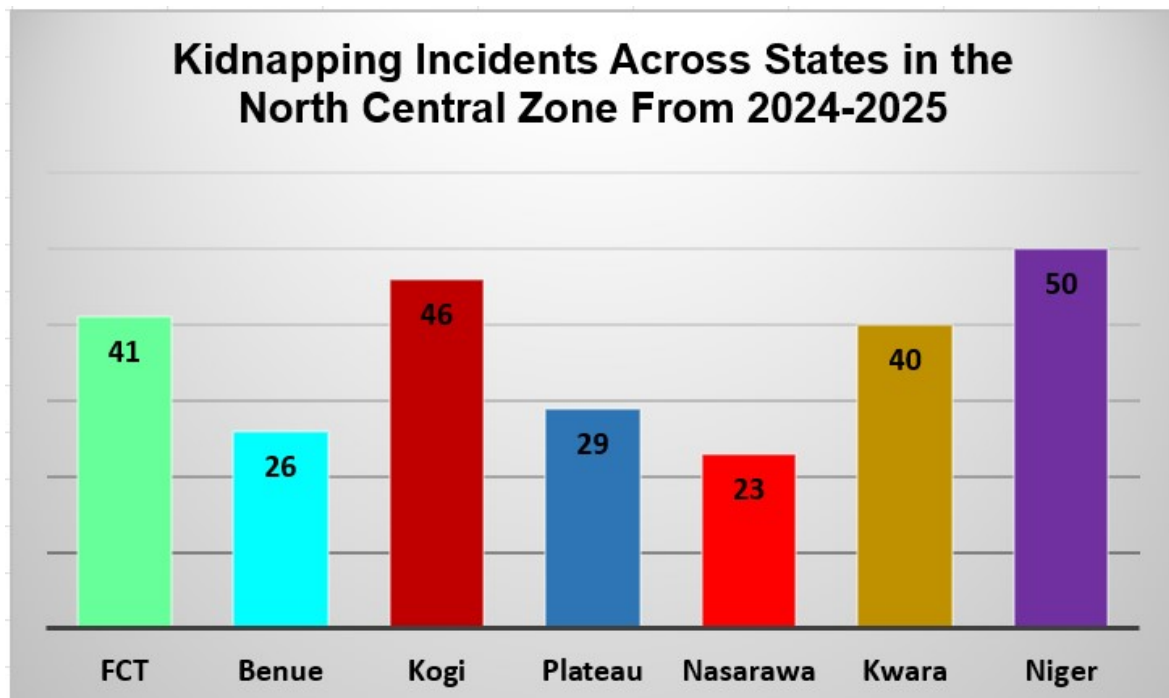


Figure 8: Kidnapping Incidents in the North-Central Zone

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

Figure 8 shows North-Central states with 255 cases of kidnapping incidents from 2024-2025. Analysis of the incidents revealed Niger, Kogi, FCT and Kwara states as epicenters of kidnapped incidents recording 50 (19.6%), 46 (18%), 41 (16.1%) and 40 (15%) cases respectively. Nasarawa state with 23 recorded cases (9%) has the lowest kidnapped incidents in the zone for the period under review. Notably, this zone has continued to experience kidnapped attacks due to spillover activities of kidnappers and insurgents in the North-West and North-East zones where significant and aggressive military operations are usually conducted against criminal elements on daily basis.

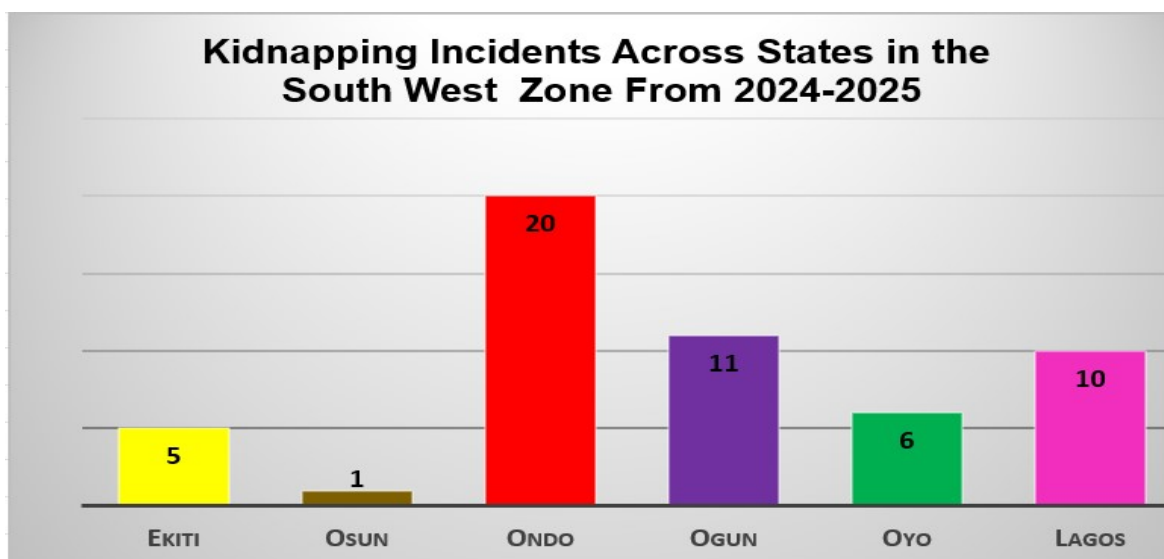


Figure 9: Kidnapping Incidents in the South-West Zone

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

Figure 9 highlights a troubled landscape in the South-West, as the region recorded 53 kidnapped cases between 2024 and 2025. Ondo State alone drove more than a third of the regional volume, recording 20 cases to claim 37.7% of the total share. Ogun state closely followed Ondo state with a total of 11 cases accounting for 20.8%, with Lagos having 18.9% of 10 cases. Oyo, Ekiti and Osun states respectively recorded 6 cases (11.3%), 5 cases (9.4%) and one case (1.9%). Notably, this zone that was once seen as relatively safe and peaceful in Nigeria have become nightmare to citizens. Of recent, is the kidnap of scores of pupils, students and teachers from three schools in Oyo state where one of the kidnapped mathematics teachers was killed in captivity.

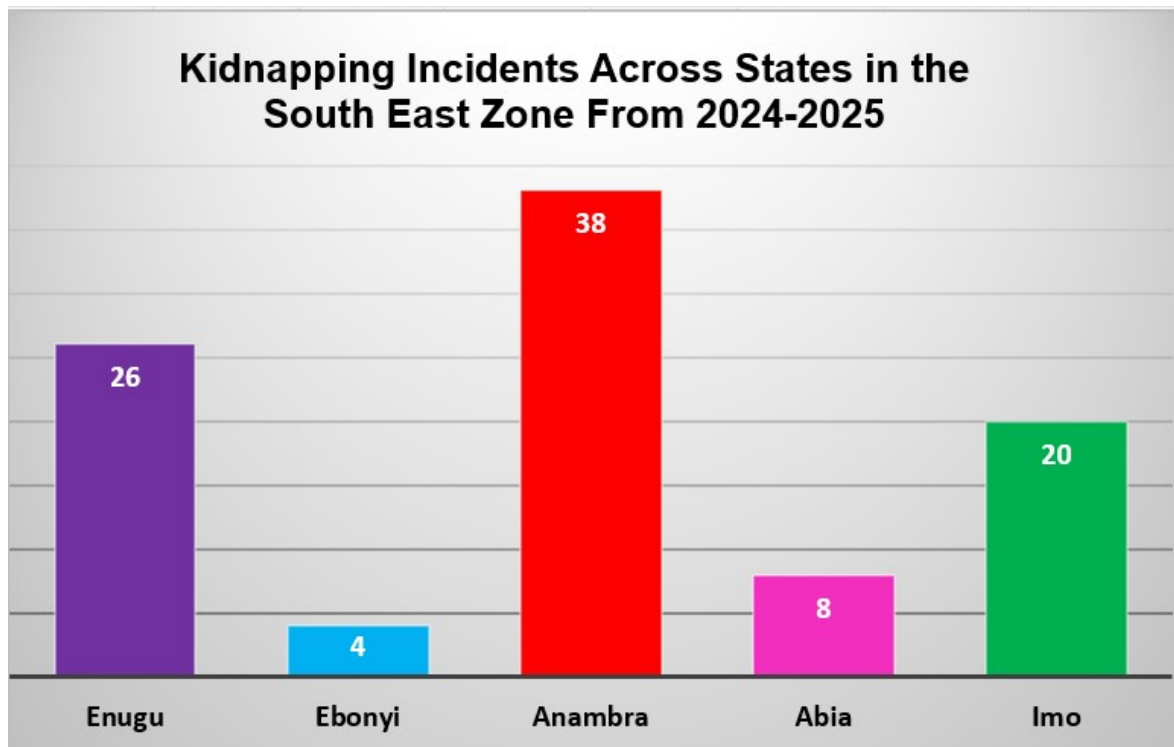


Figure 10: Kidnapping Incidents in the South-East Zone

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

Figure 10 shows the geography of kidnapping crisis across the South-East's five states from 2024 to 2025, with the distribution heavily skewed. Anambra State anchors the top of the list with 38 cases, recording 39.6% of the regional total. Enugu state recorded 26 cases accounting for 27.1% appeared second. While Imo state had 20 cases which represents 20.8%, Abiastate on the other hand had 8 cases, accounting for 8.3% and Ebonyi had 4 cases with 4.1%. Beyond these figures, the operational reality of these incidents is quite revealing. Because the vast majority of the incidents occurred along highways and urban transit routes, these criminally motivated syndicates have effectively weaponized the regional road network. The fallout of this, is that transport operators face massive disruptions, trading hubs are cut off, and interstate commerce has slowed down significantly making life unbearable to daily commuters on daily basis.

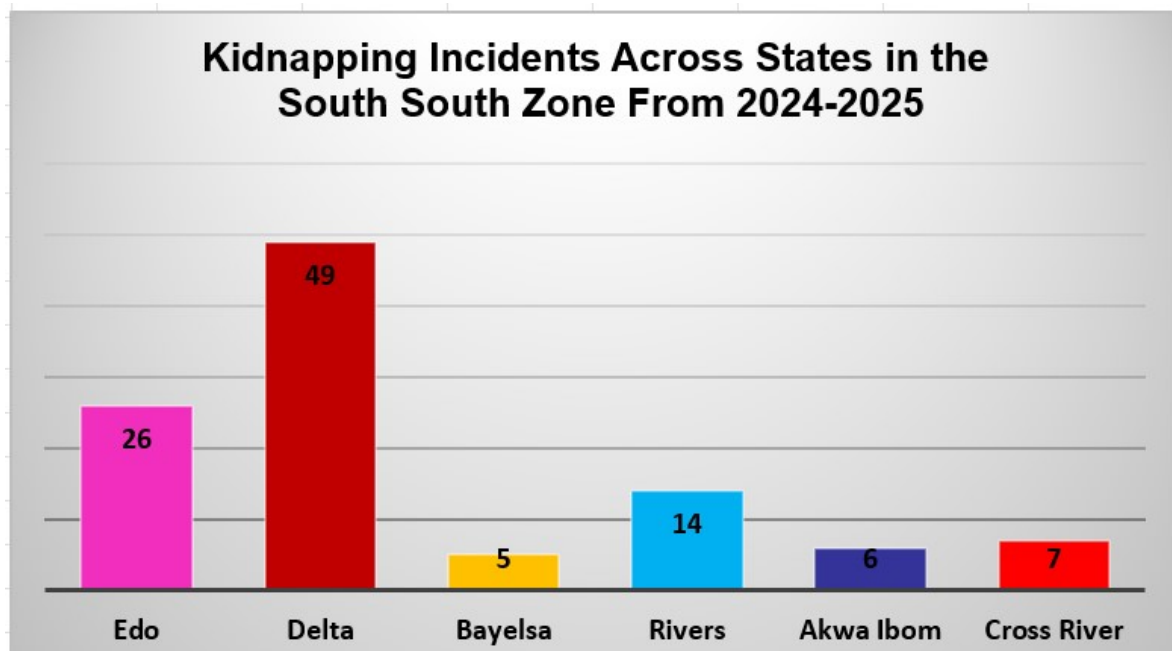


Figure 11: Kidnapping Incidents in the South-South Zone

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

Figure 11 shows the Niger Delta states of the South-South kidnapping incidents from 2024-2025. The zone recorded a total of 107 cases with Delta state having the highest record of 49 incidents, representing 45.8%. Edo state recorded 26 cases which accounted for 24.3%, while River state has 14 cases, representing 13.1% of the total cases. Similarly, Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa states recorded 7 (6.5%), 6 (5.6%) and 5 (4.7%) cases respectively. Importantly, most of the kidnapping incidents in this zone were criminally induced.

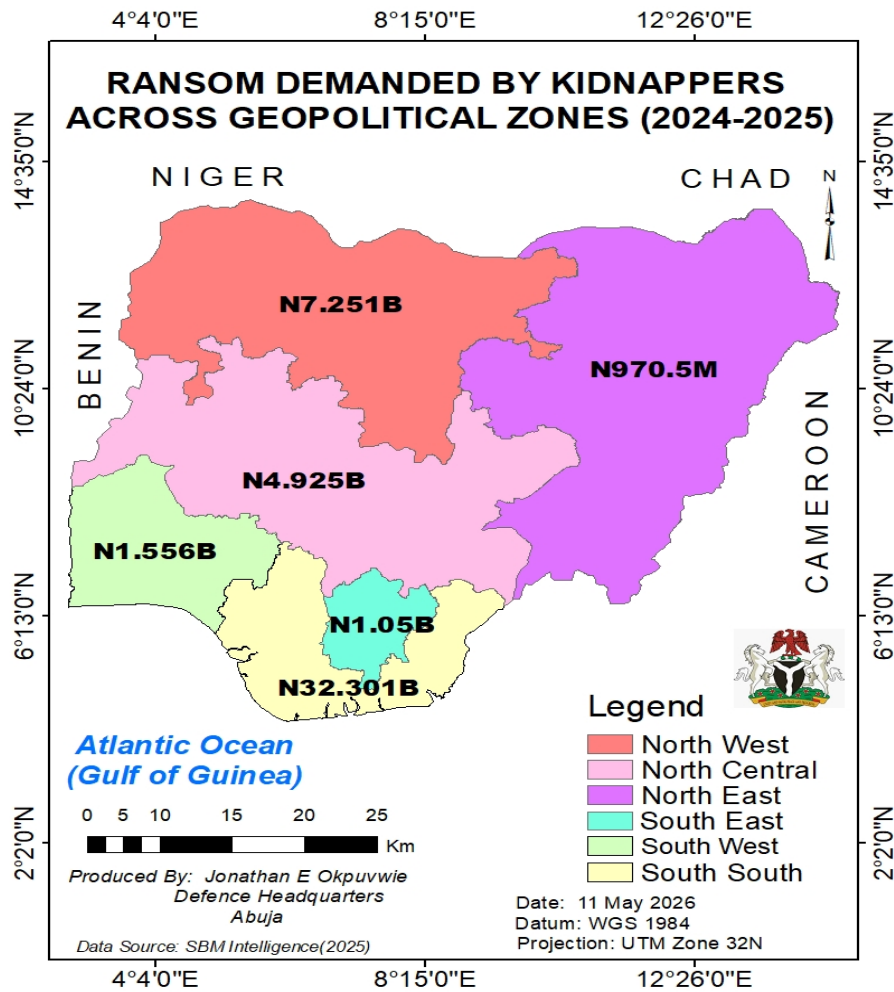


Figure 12: Ransom Demanded by Kidnappers

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

From the study at Figure 12, a total sum of forty-eight billion, fifty-three million (N48,053,000,000) naira was demanded as ransom by kidnappers between 2024 and 2025. The study indicates that South-South zone recorded the total sum of thirty-two billion, three hundred and one million naira (N32,301,000,000), accounting for 67.28% of the total amount requested by kidnappers nationwide from 2024 - 2025. Further analysis reveals that kidnappers in the North-West zone demanded for the sum of seven billion, two hundred and fifty-one million, eight hundred and forty thousand naira (N7,251,840,000) which accounted for 15.10% before victims can regain their freedom. Also, kidnappers demanded for the sum of four billion, nine hundred and twenty-five million, fifty thousand naira (N4,925,050,000) in the North-Central zone for the period under review, accounting for 10.25%. In the South-West, the sum of one billion, five hundred- and fifty-six-million-naira (N1,556,000,000)-

representing 3.24% was requested by kidnappers as ransom, while South-East and North-East zones recorded the sum of one billion, five million, two hundred-thousand-naira (N1,005,200,000) accounting for 2.09% and nine hundred and seventy million, five hundred thousand naira (N970,500,000), representing 2.02% respectively. Further analysis of this ransom disparity across the zones reflects the nature of the incidents and the caliber of the kidnapped victims, as recorded in the South-South zone which was criminally induced.

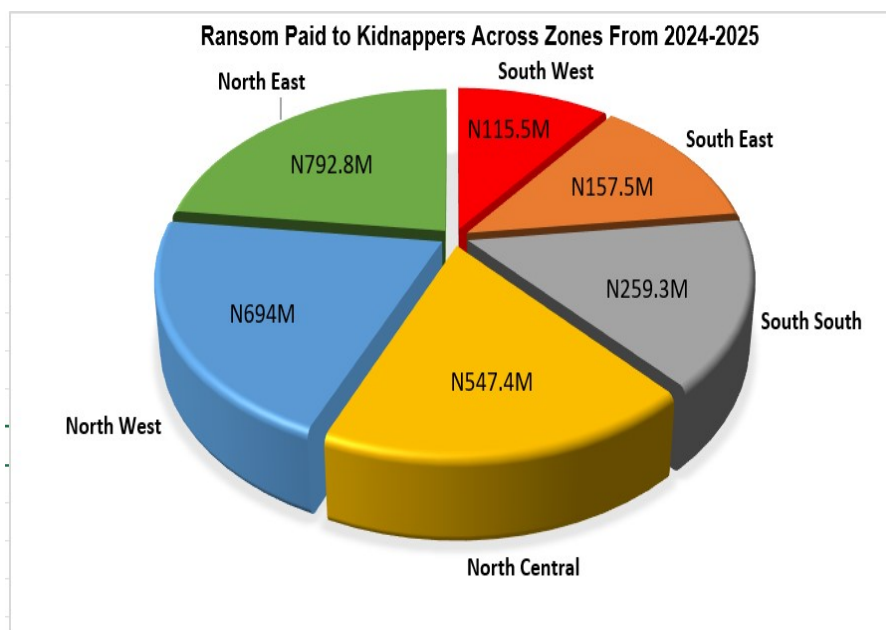


Figure 13: Ransom Paid to Kidnappers

Source: Designed by the Author with Data from SBM Intelligence (2025)

The study shows that the sum of two billion, five hundred and sixty-six million (N2, 566, 000,000) naira was paid to kidnappers for the release of victims across the six geopolitical zones of the federation between 2024 and 2025. The total ransom paid to kidnappers in the South-South zone between 2024 and 2025 amounted to N259,300,000. This amount accounted for 10.10% of the national total. Also, the South-East zone has 6.13% of the overall figure, with victims compelled to cough out a total sum of N157,550,000 as ransom. While the South-West zone recorded the sum of one hundred and fifteen million, five hundred and fifty thousand naira (N115,550,000) as ransom, representing 4.50%. In the North-Central, the study equally noted that the sum of five hundred and forty-seven million, four hundred and fifty thousand naira (N547,450,000), accounting for 21.33% was paid by victims before they regained their freedom. For the period under consideration, the North-

West and North-East zones recorded six hundred and ninety-four million naira (N694,000,000), and seven hundred and ninety-two million, eight hundred thousand naira (N792, 800,000) as ransom payments for kidnappers, representing 27.03% and 30.88% respectively.

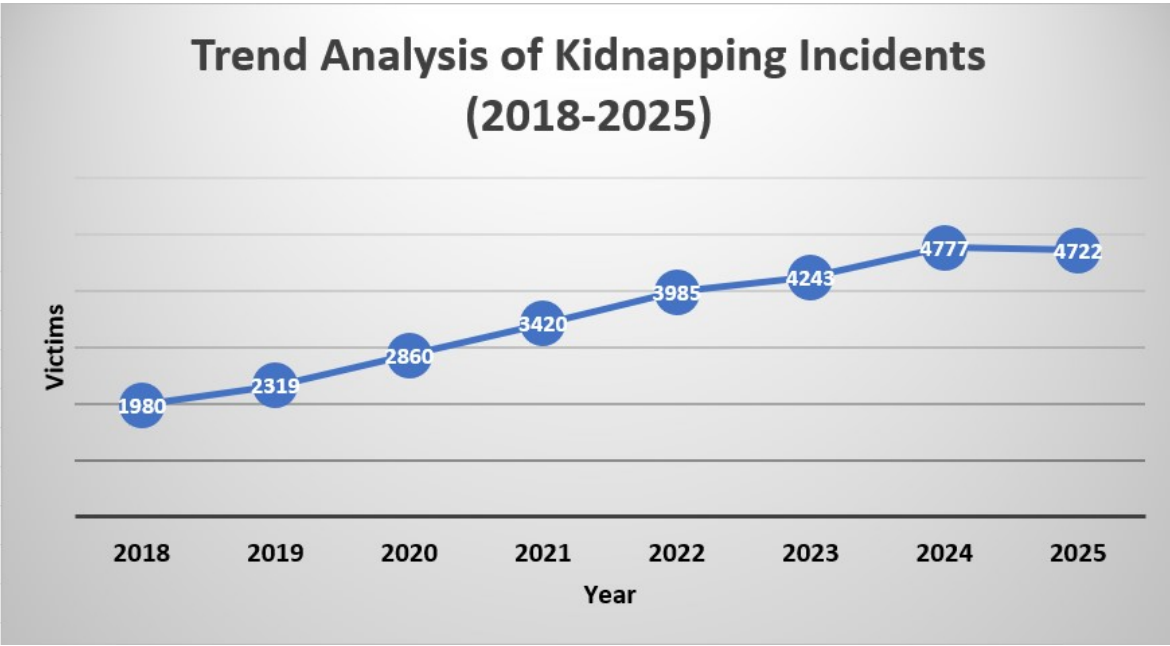


Figure 14: Trend Analysis of Kidnapping Incidents

Source: Author’s compilation from ACLED (2025), Nigeria Security Tracker (2025), SBM Intelligence (2025), and Nigeria Watch Database (2025)

The trend analysis of kidnapping incidents from 2018 - 2025 is shown at Figure 14. Notably, there were relatively few kidnapping incidents nationwide in 2018. Nonetheless, the trend shows a consistent and steady increase in kidnapping activity nationwide between 2018 and 2024. A rise in kidnapping incidents was recorded across the country between 2023 and 2025. Significantly, kidnapping activity slightly decreased between 2024 and 2025. The reported decrease could be attributed to security forces conducting more aggressive operations around the nation.

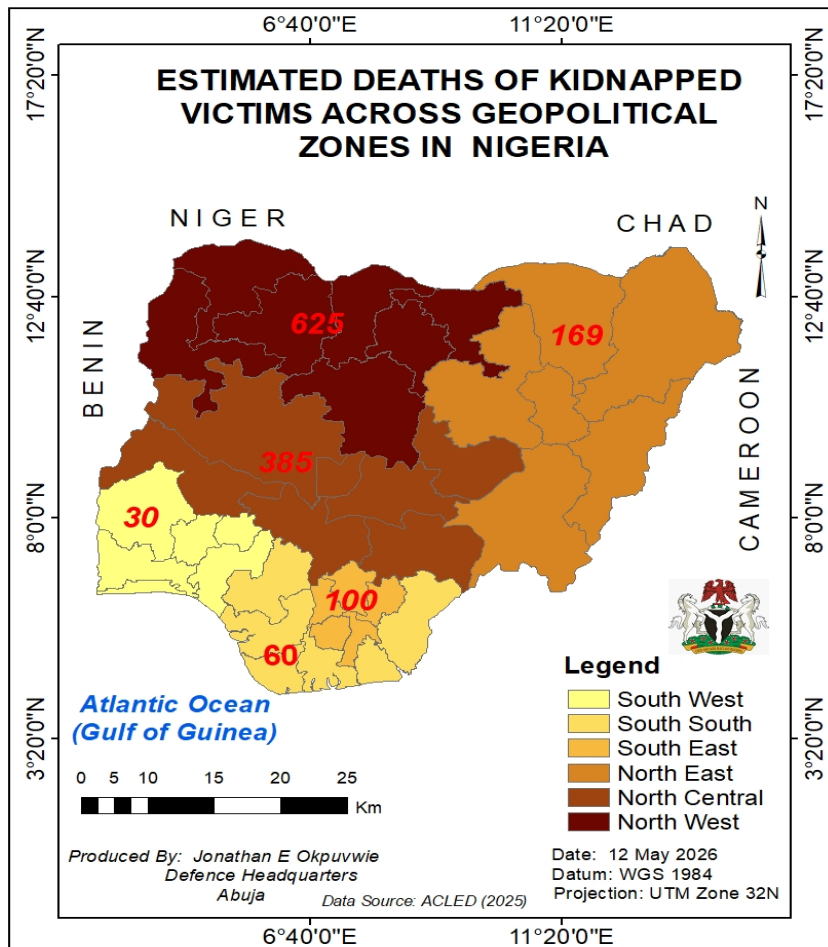


Figure 15: Death Arising from Kidnapping Incidents

Source: Author's Compilation from ACLED Data (2025)

It is important to note that based on ACLED (2025) report which recorded 1,369 deaths from kidnapping-related violence across the country (Figure 15), spatial analysis of the above figure indicates a disproportionate concentration of deaths in the North-West and North-Central geopolitical zones with 625 and 385 deaths, representing 45.65% and 28.12% respectively from 2024 - 2025. The North-East recorded 169 deaths accounting for 12.38% of the total deaths for the period under review with 100 deaths recorded in the South-East geopolitical zone, accounting for 7.31%. In the same vein, the South-South and South-West zones recorded 60 and 30 deaths respectively, representing 4.38% and 2.19% of the total deaths. Worthy to state is the fact that most of these recorded deaths are insurgent and banditry-related, mostly in the northern geopolitical zones. In the southern zones, the

recorded deaths could be attributed to criminally induced kidnapping. In view of the foregoing, kidnapping as observed from the study, affects victims psychologically, physically, financially and even death. The psychological effects of kidnapping during the period of captivity comes with trauma, death, emotional torture for fear of be killed or released (Tade, Ojedokun&Aderinto, 2020 cited in Adebola &Temidayo, 2023). The findings of the study equally align with the SBM Intelligence report of August, 2025, wherein it was reported that the sum of N48 billion naira was demanded by kidnappers as ransom for the period of 2024-2025. The work of Ngwama, (2014) cited in Udechukwu&Ofoke, (2024) equally supported the findings of the study. Pertinently, the socioeconomic effects of kidnapping are extensive and deeply damaging to affected communities and national development including reputational damage to the image of the country around the world.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The North-West zone sits at the absolute center of kidnapping incidents across the country, recording 42.6% of all recorded incidents between 2024 and 2025. The North-Central zone was in second place nationwide with 255 cases which accounted for 25.6%. The South-South and South-East respectively recorded 107 cases (10.7%) and 96 cases (9.6%) for the period under review. While the North-East zone had 61 cases (6.1%) and South-West zone recorded 53 cases representing (5.3%). Additionally, the study indicates that the sum of forty-eight billion, fifty-three-million-naira (N48, 053, 000,000) was demanded as ransom by kidnappers, while the sum of two billion, five hundred and sixty-six million (N2, 566, 000,000) naira was paid to kidnappers for the release of victims across the six geopolitical zones of the country for the period under review. Accordingly, a total number of 1,369 deaths was recorded from kidnapping-related violence across the country for the period under consideration.

The study identifies the causes and triggers of kidnapping across Nigeria. These include poverty, unemployment, greed, poor policing, compromise on the part of security agencies, poor governance, forested hideouts, porous borders, and get rich quick syndrome among others. The socio-economic consequences of kidnapping, according to the study, include, death, financial burden, health related issues, emotional trauma and increased cost of conducting business. Kidnapping also dampens and weakens the morale of local and international investors; and disrupts transportation and educational systems across the country. It was noticed from the study that the observed problems weaken social stability, cohesiveness and hamper sustainable national development. While this study provides a

robust examination of spatial distribution of kidnapping and its socio-economic consequences across Nigeria, one observed limitation is the reliance on open-source and official crime registries. This inherently underrepresents cases resolved through private ransom negotiations—a systematic challenge in contemporary conflict research. Accordingly, future studies should employ victimization surveys or proxy indicators to standardize and validate official spatial datasets.

Recommendations:

The study recommends that Nigerian governments at all levels should:

- a. Dismantle and shatter criminal recruitment networks by initiating and financing grassroots economic initiatives and programmes that will directly prevent vulnerable persons from the financial incentives provided by criminal gangs.
- b. Strengthen prosecution, judicial efficiency, and enforcement of anti-kidnapping laws, and discourage the payment of ransom to kidnappers.
- c. Train security personnel in the application of geospatial intelligence in crime control and management.

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