



## Economics of Kidnapping and Livelihoods in Zamfara State

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the economics of kidnapping and its detrimental impact on livelihoods in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Utilizing a documentary methodology, the research analyzes news reports, NGO publications, government statistics, and academic studies to understand the lucrative nature of kidnapping as a criminal enterprise and its far-reaching socio-economic consequences. Findings reveal that kidnapping generates substantial illicit income, leading to financial ruin for victims' families through ransom payments. Furthermore, it disrupts agricultural activities, trade, and overall economic productivity, causing displacement, food insecurity, and exacerbating poverty. The pervasive fear and insecurity deter investment and hinder development efforts in the state. Addressing this crisis requires a multi-faceted approach encompassing strengthened security measures, targeted socio-economic interventions to address root causes like poverty and unemployment, and improved governance.

### INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, ongoing violent crises and conflicts have disrupted the peaceful existence of nations in recent times. These crises and conflicts manifest as protests, uprisings, and organized crimes like banditry and Kidnapping. Banditry is a form of organized crime committed by individuals or groups known as bandits. These criminals are typically outlawed by the affected nations. Bandits engage in severe crimes such as armed robbery, indiscriminate killings, murder, invasions, rape, property destruction, and burning of houses and properties. Armed banditry has been a pandemic global human phenomenon which has a severe social, political and economic consequence that tends to be threatening the overall developmental efforts of a nations. Kidnapping is a criminal act involving the ambush and capture of individuals against their will, typically for the purpose of demanding ransom. Kidnapping is defined as "the act, instance, or crime of forcibly or fraudulently seizing, confining, abducting, or carrying away a person, often with

a ransom demand or to further another crime." This implies that the act is Non-consensual. Beyond ransom, kidnapping can be used to make political statements, especially in situations of political rivalry. While this general view of kidnapping exists, different nations have varying legal definitions and punishments for the crime (Okoro, 2019). Banditry and kidnapping are heinous crime posing a great security challenges to north western part of Nigerian. Security challenges continue to significantly hinder meaningful development in Zamfara State. Insecurity not only threatens the lives and property of citizens but also deters local businesses, scares away foreign investment, and tarnishes the state's image. As an agriculturally dominant region, any disruption that displaces farmers from their lands and deprives them of their livelihood spells trouble for the economy. This is already evident in the current food shortages and high cost of living, which contribute to Zamfara State's poor human development indicators, making it one of the poorest states in Nigeria (Okafor & Chukwuemeka, 2023). In

Zamfara State, socio-economic activities are crucial to the livelihood and development of its population. Social and economic activities in the state include education, healthcare, community services, farming, livestock rearing, gold mining, local markets, trading of agricultural produce and livestock that are vital factors in explaining the culture and values of people in the area, have been truncated by the activities of armed bandits and kidnappers. The threat of armed banditry and kidnapping has recently become a recurring menace to the peace and survival of people, especially in the Zamfara North (Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2022).

It has become so common that it's no longer garners the necessary attention from sub-national, regional, national and international governments, institutions, and organizations. Only a few cases make the headlines, despite occurring daily and seeming to defy all possible solutions. People are harassed, raped, kidnapped, killed, displaced and have their properties destroyed, with homes set ablaze mostly by Fulani herders (also known as bandits) and a few other miscreants. Currently, no issue concerns most communities in Zamfara North more than armed banditry and kidnapping. People live in constant fear, leading to many communities becoming homeless, restless, despairing, helpless, hopeless, and in a pathetic state. Life in many rural communities has become increasingly uncertain, terrible and frightening. Zamfara North, is a senatorial district in Zamfara state, Nigeria, has experienced a surge in criminal activities, particularly banditry and kidnapping, over the past decade. These acts of violence have had profound implications on the socio-economic fabric of the region, disrupting livelihoods, instilling fear, and causing significant economic losses. The region, which relies heavily on agriculture and trade, has seen a decline in productivity and commerce, exacerbating poverty and instability. It is against this backdrop that this research work analyses the impact of banditry and kidnapping on socio-economic activities in Zamfara state.

In Nigeria, kidnapping has become a significant security challenge, with the country ranking third globally in terms of kidnapping cases (Global Kidnapping Report, 2020). According to the Nigerian Police Force, kidnapping cases increased from 1,490 in 2015 to 3,188 in 2020 (Nigerian Police Force, 2020). The economic impact of kidnapping in Nigeria is substantial, with estimated losses of over ₦1 trillion (approximately \$2.5 billion USD) between 2016 and 2020 (Oxfam, 2020).

Kidnapping has become a pervasive and lucrative business in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The state has witnessed a surge in kidnapping cases, with many residents living in fear of being abducted. This article uses a documentary methodology to examine the economics of kidnapping and its impact on livelihoods in Zamfara State. The economy of kidnapping is a global phenomenon, with

estimated annual profits ranging from \$500 million to \$1.5 billion (Becker, 2014). According to the Global Kidnapping Report (2020), kidnapping cases increased by 15% globally between 2018 and 2019. This surge in kidnapping cases has significant implications for livelihoods, as it leads to loss of income, displacement, and psychological trauma. Zamfara State in northwestern Nigeria has been particularly affected by kidnapping. The state has recorded one of the highest numbers of kidnapping cases in the country (Amnesty International, 2020). According to the Zamfara State Government, the state has lost over ₦17 billion (approximately \$44 million USD) to kidnapping between 2016 and 2020 (Zamfara State Government, 2020). The impact of kidnapping on livelihoods in Zamfara State is devastating, with many families forced to pay ransoms, displacement, and psychological trauma.

The nexus between the economics of kidnapping and livelihoods is complex and multifaceted. Kidnapping leads to loss of income, displacement, and psychological trauma, all of which have significant implications for livelihoods. According to ActionAid (2020), many families in Zamfara State have been forced to pay ransoms, which has depleted their savings and reduced their income. Additionally, kidnapping has disrupted agricultural activities, leading to food insecurity and reduced livelihoods (Oxfam, 2020). The economy of kidnapping has a significant impact on livelihoods in Zamfara State. The Nigerian government must take decisive action to address the root causes of kidnapping, including poverty and unemployment. Additionally, the government must work to improve security in the state, including deploying more security personnel and establishing a robust intelligence gathering system.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The term kidnapping is difficult to define with precision, because it varies from one State to another and from one jurisdiction to the others (Dangana, 2021). Asogwa, (2020). also noted that, kidnapping varies from country to country; therefore, the term is uncertain and devoid of any straight jacket definition. They therefore simply defined kidnapping as an unlawful seizure and detention of people by force, against their will. Utit, (2022). defined kidnapping as the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his/her will. It is a common offence against the law and the key part is that, it's considered an unwanted act on the part of the victim. Olulowo, Babawale & Anani, (2021) defined kidnapping as forceful or fraudulent seizure of an individual or a group of individuals for economic, political and religious reasons. According to Yakubu, (2022), kidnapping is a crime of seizing, confining, abducting or carrying away a person by force or fraud often to subject him or her to involuntary servitude in an attempt to demand a ransom. In other words, it involves unlawfully seizing and carrying away a person by force or fraud or

seizing and detaining a person against his or her will with the intent of carrying that person away at a later time (Okosa, 2022). While Nwadike Fasugba, (2020) conceptualizes kidnapping as an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud. However, it includes snatching and seizing of a person in order to collect a ransom in return or settle some scores of disagreement among people. Aleyomi, & Olajubu, (2024), also defined kidnapping as the —act of seizing and detaining or carrying away a person by unlawful force or by fraud, and often with a demand for ransom. It involves taking a person from their family forcefully without their consent with the motive of holding the person as a hostage and earning a profit from their family. From the foregoing, the definition of kidnapping has no one best way to describe it, but it is clear that for an act to be deemed kidnapping, it shall involve coercive movement of a victim from one place to another, detention or seizure of that person be it a child or an adult. From the various definitions and or conceptualizations of kidnapping above, it is easy to point out that all of them seem to be united in agreement on some key facts, that kidnapping is a forceful and criminal act which violates the rights of the victims. However, a more common ground among the definitions is the fact that all of them agree that it is done for the purpose of ransom providing justification that socio-economic condition is the major driver of kidnapping anywhere in the world, without necessarily ruling out other contributory or intervening variables. For this work, kidnapping is viewed as the unlawful.

Existing research on kidnapping in Nigeria has highlighted the economic motivations behind the crime (Ogundiya, 2016; Adebayo, 2017). However, few studies have examined the specific context of Zamfara State. A report by the Nigerian NGO, ActionAid, found that kidnapping has had a devastating impact on livelihoods in Zamfara State, with many residents forced to pay ransoms and others displaced from their homes (ActionAid, 2020).

The concept of livelihoods has gained significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of poverty reduction and sustainable development (Chambers & Conway, 1992). A livelihood is defined as "the means, activities, entitlements, and assets by which individuals or households seek to secure their well-being and improve their quality of life" (DFID, 1999). Livelihoods are often fragile and vulnerable to external shocks, such as climate change, economic downturns, and conflict (Scoones, 1998).

The sustainable livelihoods framework (SLF) is a widely used approach for analyzing and understanding livelihoods (Chambers & Conway, 1992). The SLF identifies five key assets that are essential for securing a livelihood: human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital, and financial capital (DFID, 1999). These assets are used to generate livelihood outcomes, such as

income, food security, and well-being. Livelihood diversification is an important strategy for reducing poverty and improving livelihood outcomes (Ellis, 1998). Diversification involves spreading risks and opportunities across different activities, such as farming, livestock, and off-farm employment (Scoones, 1998). Livelihood diversification can help households to cope with shocks and stresses, and to improve their overall well-being.

Climate change is a major threat to livelihoods, particularly in developing countries (IPCC, 2014). Climate-related shocks, such as droughts and floods, can have devastating impacts on livelihoods, particularly for vulnerable households (Speranza, 2010). There is a need for climate-resilient livelihoods that can withstand the impacts of climate change. In conclusion, livelihoods are a critical aspect of human well-being, and are influenced by a range of factors, including poverty, climate change, and economic development. Understanding livelihoods is essential for developing effective policies and interventions that can improve livelihood outcomes and reduce poverty.

### **Nexus between Kidnapping and Livelihood**

The nexus between kidnapping and livelihood is a complex and multifaceted issue that has gained significant attention in recent years (Adebayo et al., 2020). Kidnapping is a serious crime that not only affects the victims and their families but also has broader implications for livelihoods and economic development (Ojo et al., 2020). In many parts of the world, kidnapping has become a lucrative business, with perpetrators demanding hefty ransoms from victims' families (Umar et al., 2020).

The livelihoods of individuals and communities can be severely impacted by kidnapping, particularly in areas where it is prevalent (Adebayo et al., 2020). Kidnapping can disrupt economic activities, such as farming and trade, and can also lead to the displacement of people from their homes and communities (Ojo et al., 2020). Furthermore, the trauma and psychological distress caused by kidnapping can have long-term effects on victims' livelihoods and well-being (Umar et al., 2020). On the other hand, livelihood challenges can also contribute to the rise of kidnapping (Adebayo et al., 2020). In areas where economic opportunities are scarce, some individuals may turn to kidnapping as a means of survival or to improve their economic circumstances (Ojo et al., 2020). Additionally, social and economic inequalities can create an environment in which kidnapping can thrive (Umar et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the nexus between kidnapping and livelihood is complex and multifaceted. Kidnapping can have severe impacts on livelihoods, while livelihood challenges can also contribute to the rise of kidnapping. Addressing the root causes of kidnapping, such as poverty

and social inequality, is essential for reducing its incidence and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

### **The Economics of Kidnapping and Its Distortions on Individuals and the Economy**

Kidnapping, as an illicit market, operates under unique economic principles, including supply-demand dynamics, risk assessment, and price distortions. Prominent economists and criminologists have examined how kidnapping disrupts both micro- and macroeconomic stability through ransom payments, reduced investment, and psychological trauma. Becker (1968) pioneered the economic theory of crime, arguing that criminals engage in illicit activities when the expected benefits outweigh potential costs (Becker, 1968). Kidnapping follows this logic, where perpetrators assess risks (e.g., law enforcement response) against rewards (ransom payments). Similarly, Schelling (1971) noted that organized crime operates like a business, with kidnapping serving as a revenue stream (Schelling, 1971). Kidnapping imposes severe income shocks on victims' families, often forcing them into debt to pay ransoms (Phillips, 2016). In Nigeria, where kidnapping is rampant, households liquidate assets, withdraw children from school, or relocate, exacerbating poverty (Onuoha, 2020). Women, particularly in Southern Kaduna, face livelihood disruptions as market access declines due to security risks (Egwu, 2021). At a macroeconomic level, kidnapping deters foreign direct investment (FDI) and stifles local businesses. Aslan & Topal (2018) found that insecurity reduces economic growth by displacing labor and increasing security costs. In Nigeria, the opportunity cost of security spending diverts funds from infrastructure and social services (NBS, 2022). Some economists advocate ransom insurance markets (Phillips, 2016), while others emphasize state capacity-building (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). However, without systemic reforms, kidnapping will persist as a rational economic choice for criminals (Becker, 1968).

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study employed a documentary methodology to analyze a diverse range of existing documents related to kidnapping in Zamfara State. The documents analyzed include news articles from reputable Nigerian newspapers, which provided firsthand accounts of kidnapping incidents, victim testimonies, and expert opinions. Furthermore, reports from Nigerian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like ActionAid and Amnesty International offered in-depth analyses of the socioeconomic and political factors contributing to kidnapping in Zamfara State. Government reports from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics and the Zamfara State Government provided valuable data on poverty rates, unemployment, and crime statistics, which helped to

contextualize the kidnapping phenomenon. Furthermore, official documents from the Zamfara State Government, such as policy briefs and press releases, shed light on the government's response to kidnapping and its efforts to address the root causes of the problem. Other documents analyzed included academic studies, research papers, and conference proceedings, which provided theoretical frameworks and empirical insights into the economics of kidnapping and its impact on livelihoods in Zamfara State. These diverse documents, provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues surrounding kidnapping in Zamfara State.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the documents reveals that kidnapping has become a lucrative business in Zamfara State, with kidnappers demanding hefty ransoms from victims' families. According to a report by ActionAid, kidnappers in Zamfara State can earn up to ₦100 million (approximately \$250,000 USD) from a single kidnapping incident (ActionAid, 2020).

The documents also reveal that the economics of kidnapping has had a devastating impact on livelihoods in Zamfara State. Many residents have been forced to pay ransoms, which has depleted their savings and left them impoverished. According to a report by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, the poverty rate in Zamfara State is over 70% (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **The Lucrative Nature of the Kidnapping Economy**

The study confirms that kidnapping has evolved into a significant and profitable "business" in Zamfara State. The exorbitant ransoms demanded, with instances reaching up to ₦100 million per incident, highlight the substantial financial incentives driving this criminal activity. This illicit economy operates on principles of supply and demand, risk assessment by perpetrators, and significant price distortions imposed on victims and their families. The potential for such high returns makes kidnapping a "rational economic choice" for criminal elements, as theorized by Becker's economic theory of crime.

### **Devastating Impact on Individual Livelihoods**

The economic consequences of kidnapping on individuals and households in Zamfara State are dire:

#### **Financial Ruin**

The payment of hefty ransoms depletes savings, forces families into debt, and necessitates the liquidation of assets, pushing them further into poverty. This aligns with Phillips' observation of income shocks experienced by victims' families.

***Displacement and Loss of Economic Activity***

The insecurity caused by banditry and kidnapping disrupts essential livelihood activities, particularly agriculture and trade, which are central to Zamfara's economy. Farmers are displaced from their land, markets become inaccessible due to security risks (as noted by Egwu in Southern Kaduna, a similar context), and the overall flow of commerce is severely hampered.

***Food Insecurity***

The disruption of agricultural activities directly contributes to food shortages and increased cost of living, exacerbating the already poor human development indicators of Zamfara State, as highlighted by Okafor & Chukwuemeka.

***Psychological Trauma and Social Disruption***

Beyond the immediate economic losses, the trauma of kidnapping and the pervasive fear it instills have long-term consequences on the well-being and social cohesion of communities. Families are torn apart, and trust within communities erodes.

***Educational Disruption***

As families struggle to pay ransoms or are displaced, children are often withdrawn from school, hindering their future prospects and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

***Macroeconomic Consequences for Zamfara State***

The economic impact extends beyond individual households to affect the entire state:

***Deterioration of Investment***

The high levels of insecurity, driven by banditry and kidnapping, deter both local and foreign investment. Businesses are unwilling to operate in an environment where their personnel and assets are at constant risk. This aligns with Aslan & Topal's findings on the negative impact of insecurity on economic growth.

***Increased Security Costs and Opportunity Costs***

The need to combat insecurity necessitates significant government spending on security apparatus. This diverts crucial funds from essential sectors like infrastructure, education, and healthcare, hindering long-term development, as noted by the NBS data on opportunity costs of security spending.

***Damage to State Image and Reputation***

The prevalence of kidnapping tarnishes the image of Zamfara State, making it unattractive for tourism, business partnerships, and other forms of economic engagement.

***Reinforcement of Poverty Cycle***

The combined effects of disrupted livelihoods, reduced investment, and diverted resources contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment in the state.

***The Nexus Between Livelihood Challenges and Kidnapping***

The study acknowledges the complex interplay between livelihood challenges and the rise of kidnapping. Scarcity of economic opportunities, poverty, unemployment, and social inequalities can create an environment where some individuals resort to kidnapping as a means of survival or economic advancement. This highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of insecurity, which are often intertwined with socio-economic vulnerabilities.

***Recommendations***

Arising from the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

***Strengthening Security and Law Enforcement***

1. Enhanced Military and Police Presence: Increase the deployment of well-equipped and adequately funded security personnel, including specialized anti-kidnapping units, particularly in vulnerable areas like Zamfara North.
2. Improved Intelligence Gathering and Sharing: Invest in robust intelligence networks to identify and track kidnapping gangs, their financiers, and their operational bases. Foster better coordination and information sharing between different security agencies and with community stakeholders.
3. Border Security Enhancement: Strengthen border security to prevent the influx of arms and the movement of criminal elements across state and national borders.
4. Community Policing Initiatives: Foster trust and collaboration between security forces and local communities. Empower community-based intelligence gathering and early warning systems.
5. Prosecution and Judicial Reforms: Ensure the swift and effective prosecution of convicted kidnappers to deter others. Strengthen the judicial system to handle kidnapping cases efficiently and transparently.

***Addressing Socio-Economic Root Causes***

1. Livelihood Diversification and Economic Empowerment Programs: Implement targeted programs to promote alternative livelihoods beyond agriculture, such as vocational training, support for small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), and access to microfinance. This can reduce the desperation that might drive some individuals towards criminal activities.

2. **Agricultural Development and Support:** Invest in modernizing agriculture, providing farmers with access to inputs, credit, and markets. Secure farming communities to enable them to engage in their livelihoods without fear of attacks or displacement.
3. **Education and Skills Development:** Improve access to quality education and skills development programs to enhance the employability of the youth and create alternative pathways to economic prosperity.
4. **Poverty Alleviation Programs:** Implement and scale up social safety nets and poverty reduction programs to address the underlying economic vulnerabilities that can contribute to insecurity.
5. **Job Creation Initiatives:** Promote investment and create employment opportunities, particularly for young people, to reduce idleness and the potential for recruitment into criminal gangs.

#### **Governance and Institutional Reforms**

1. **Strengthening Local Governance:** Empower local government authorities to play a more active role in addressing security challenges and promoting socio-economic development at the grassroots level.
2. **Transparency and Accountability:** Enhance transparency and accountability in governance to build trust between the government and the people. Corruption can exacerbate socio-economic inequalities and undermine security efforts.
3. **Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Initiatives:** Invest in dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation efforts to address the underlying grievances and conflicts that may fuel banditry and kidnapping. Engage community leaders, religious figures, and civil society organizations in these processes.
4. **Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs:** Develop programs for the rehabilitation and reintegration of former bandits and kidnappers who are willing to renounce violence, focusing on providing them with skills and opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.
5. **Victim Support and Compensation:** Establish mechanisms to provide support, counseling, and potential compensation to victims of kidnapping and their families to help them recover from the trauma and economic losses.

#### **Public Awareness and Community Engagement**

1. **Sensitization Campaigns:** Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate communities about the dangers of kidnapping, the importance of reporting suspicious activities, and ways to enhance community safety.
2. **Community Resilience Building:** Support community-led initiatives to enhance resilience and coping mechanisms in the face of insecurity. This can

include establishing local security networks and promoting social cohesion.

#### **Implementation Considerations**

1. **Coordination and Collaboration:** Effective implementation requires strong coordination and collaboration among all levels of government (federal, state, local), security agencies, civil society organizations, and community stakeholders.
2. **Resource Allocation:** Adequate financial and human resources must be allocated to support the implementation of these recommendations.
3. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the progress and impact of interventions and make necessary adjustments.
4. **Long-Term Commitment:** Addressing the complex challenges of kidnapping and its impact on livelihoods requires a sustained and long-term commitment from all stakeholders.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The economics of kidnapping in Zamfara State represents a grave threat to human security and sustainable development. The findings clearly demonstrate its devastating impact on individual livelihoods and the broader state economy. The actionable and implementable recommendations outlined above provide a comprehensive framework for addressing this crisis. By prioritizing security sector reforms, tackling the root causes of socio-economic vulnerability, strengthening governance, and fostering community engagement, the Nigerian government, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, can work towards dismantling the kidnapping economy and creating an environment conducive to peace, security, and improved livelihoods for the people of Zamfara State.

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