



The Nexus between Small Arms Proliferation and Kidnapping on Nigeria's Security System

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Abstract

The paper interrogates how the free flow and illegal stockpiling of small arms and light weapons enhanced armed kidnapping in Nigeria. It assesses the frequency and severity of armed kidnapping on Nigeria's national security viz-a-viz identifies the susceptible factors that engrossed people in criminal activity. Though kidnapping is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria, it is an age-long predicament practiced for a purpose beyond financial gain. However, the new wave of armed kidnapping is a contagious profession where most unemployed youths get indoctrinated and are forced into a criminal cartel for economic reasons and financial gains. The paper dealt with the contending issues using the snowball sample technique with 50 respondents and buttressed the primary data with relevant journals and books through a desk review. The findings show that the effort of the government is not commensurate with the pain that armed kidnappers inflicted on victims and their families, and the designated punishment for perpetrators is peanuts. The criminally minded people are not only defying security measures but also making mockeries of the efforts of law enforcement agencies, as many security agents are also cooperators. The paper suggests that the government should end lip service to insecurity to uproot the stems of economic insecurity through the bottom-up approach. The government should shift away from the kinetics option to address the backbones of illicit acts in Nigeria, which are illegal armed deals and economic downtrodden. The paper is wrapped up with a rational choice theory that explains Nigeria's insecurity from an individualistic approach.

Keywords

Small Arms and Light Weapons, Kidnapping, Insecurity, National Security, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Kidnapping is one of the new waves of security challenges bedeviling Nigeria's national security. The cruel act of kidnapping has taken the third position as a lucrative business after illegal arms deals and human trafficking across geopolitical zones. The activities of criminally minded people have generated a series of uproar among the citizens, with several cases of kidnapping of innocent people that have been reported to Nigeria's military and paramilitary in the past few years (Oyewole, 2015). The study shows that more than 3,420 have been kidnapped in the last few years by different criminal cartel groups (Bunmi, 2022). Most of these victims, according to Oyewole (2015), were abducted for different reasons, such as ransom, ideological reasons, killing for rituals, selling of human parts to ritualists, or extracting information.

There is no doubt that the engagement of criminally minded people in the kidnapping has been attributed to the infiltration of small arms and light weapons coupled with socioeconomic challenges bedeviling the country across geopolitical zones. The study has it that the inability of the government to adequately disarm most of the ethnic and religious militias, particularly in the aftermath of the civil war in Nigeria in 1970, made all geopolitical zones saturated with illicit weapons. The easy accessibility to most of these weapons, along with poverty of belly rampage the country and made the geopolitical zones a convenient place for perpetuating crimes with untraceable effects.

However, several authors have written on typologies of kidnapping and proliferation of kidnappers, causes, and effects without adequate attention to how Nigeria's system/structure has encouraged the security break-out and how

the lackadaisical attitude of the government has effectively promoted insecurity in Nigeria. Beyond this, there was also inadequate attention paid to the failure of the government to reciprocate the yelling and neediness of people, resulting in finding alternatives that degenerated into security challenges. The paper, however, aims to address some of the knotty issues raised and suggest how to tackle the tails of non-state actors that continue wagging the government dogs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Orientations of Kidnapping

Kidnapping is one of the ambiguous and dicey concepts without a clear-cut definition. It is a situational concept that could be defined and tailored based on circumstances, scholars' perceptions, and the direction of perpetrators. Scholars like Inyang and Abraham (2013) conceptualized the concept of kidnapping from a human rights perspective. They view kidnapping as an abuse of human rights through unlawful means such as detention, bullying, and harassing innocent victims. Ottuh et al. (2014) see it as a conflictual stage of forceful hijacking, hostage, and false imprisonment of innocent victims with unlawful or indescribable excuses. Turner (1998), Robertson (1968) cited in Omonijo (2019), Abraham (2010) cited in Omonijo (2019), and Fage and Alabi (2017) define it as an abduction of innocent souls through forceful or use of threats against the consent of victims for reasons known to perpetrators. They contend that kidnapping is an act of capturing and forcefully whisking away innocent minds to unknown destinations and inflicting them with various injuries that leave them in excruciating pain. The purpose of excruciating pain inflicted on victims may be political, economic, and cultural through a coercive measure. Fage and Alabi explain further that the criminally-minded people engaged in this heinous act to seek the government's attention or retrieve vital information from government officials and other influential personalities relevant to their yelling or requests. From the definitions above, it is important to note that using force or threats is a means kidnappers use to achieve their desired objective.

On the contrary, Ottuh et al. (2014) see kidnappers as a liberation group that seeks to correct the insanity of the government through the abduction of powerful men in society. The rationale behind this is not far from forcing the government to provide basic needs for the people, such as capacity building and empowerment, reduction of hardship, and excruciating pains induced on society by the insensitive government. The trinary described the cartel activities as an act of commercialization and politicization of pressing their needs from the government. In a similar vein, Onduku (2001) refers to kidnappers as non-state actors aiming to correct injustice, exploitation, marginalization, and underdevelopment in the hard way, particularly in oil and conflict regions. It is a response stimulus to government oppressive policies and persistent marginalization of innocent souls as Onduku sees kidnapping as a tool of social action and a way of requesting the lion's share of the national cake through other means. Townsend (2008) calls them a cartel struggling or agitating for their sharing formula from the country's natural resources. In line with the submission above, Omeje (2010) conceptualized kidnapping from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) context, which kick-started the issue of kidnapping in Nigeria. He posits that kidnappers are organized criminal elements that redress the ruling class and their oppressive ideology in monopolizing the country's natural resources to their benefit while neglecting, marginalizing, and depriving the community people of the necessities for a good life, such as good hospitals, pipe borne water, among others. Although the authors reviewed have a good submission, however, the act of kidnapping in Nigeria goes beyond using the act to correct the anomalies of government. The act of kidnapping has become a means of survival, where ransom is forcefully collected from the relatives of the victims for economic gains.

Ottuh (2008) shared the view of Onduku (2001) when they regarded kidnapping as a 'necessary evil' and tool for 'social justice.' A necessary evil in this context means the ability to coerce the government to avert the most dangerous evil policy purported. To Yakubu (2001), kidnapping is a social phenomenon or palliative measure invented in human society to disrupt the garment of peace and increase tensions across geopolitical zones. This means that kidnappers are a class struggle for socio-economic, political, and cultural liberation in a prone environment, engineered and regulated by the principle of supply and demand. It is a structural phenomenon used by the criminal cartels to demand ransom from their family members or friends of the family through abduction. At the same time, the Augean for ransom aids the economic motivation to sustain the fight.

Kidnapping, in the context of this paper, is all-encompassing and has no boundaries. It is no longer a game of status and personality but an adventure with political, financial, and economic gains. It is a technique and method organized criminal groups use to seek redress from the government without being mindful of a significant implication on the country's human and national security development. The perpetrators used the tactic to pinch the government through the abduction of innocent citizens for the government to feel the excruciating pains being enjoyed by the marginalized and pauperized communities. The activities violate the fundamental human and natural rights endowed by being a human viz-a-viz restricting citizens' constitutional right to freedom of movement.

Rational Choice as a Theoretical Framework

The paper used Rational Choice theory to explain the rationale behind kidnapping, particularly in Nigeria. The theory is based on the assumption of utilitarian belief that actions are based on a conscious evaluation of the utility of acting in a certain way. Rational choice theory sees criminally minded people as rational actors who have evaluated the pros and cons of their actions and the risks involved before embarking on them. The theory believes that criminally minded people are risk bearers and takers as long as the benefit of their heinous action outweighs the negative consequences (Asiyanbi, 2017).

Rational choice theory is an individualistic approach claiming that criminal people tend to achieve a common goal of breaking the country's law for personal gains, such as socioeconomic, political, and cultural gains, without considering the implications on the state's human and national security development. Majeed and Malik (2017) and Leary (2015) noted that criminals are irrational beings who are curious about perpetuating what Ottuh (2014) called necessary evils. He further posits the need for marginalized people to take laws into their own hands due to what one scholar calls the political accumulation of wealth. The political accumulation of wealth has made the government lose its sense of reasoning and attention to listen to the yelling and needs of the citizens. This, in turn, makes citizens make a decisive decision through irrational means in seeking the government's attention on their press needs; the end justifies the means. The decisive decision remains a viable option to meet their daily needs. In the view of violators, kidnapping is like guerrilla warfare, an 'act and refrains' that is worth risk-taking, and its clandestine nature with humongous financial step-ups, often without any suspicion, make it easy for the perpetrators to get away with their evil acts.

Rational choice theory and its assumptions have explained why and how people embark on deviant behaviour to commit crimes and why the cobweb network of kidnapers are risk bearers and takers after weighing the options. It emphasizes why risk-takers take laws into their own hands after feeling rejected and marginalized, consuming their self-esteem. The factors mentioned above made the concerned stakeholders put themselves as a cobweb network to embark on disdain and deviant acts to get people, the government, and society's attention through the spotlight of media and newspapers.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Historical Excursion of Kidnapping in Nigeria

The concept and practice of kidnapping is not a new phenomenon; the records can be traced to the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade when the kings and chiefs kidnapped their subjects and sold them to slave merchants as enslaved people. However, the narrative of kidnapping in Nigeria took a drastic change in 2005 when the Niger Delta militant abducted the oil expatriates and requested ransom from the government. The Niger Delta militant substantiated the reason for the abduction as a way of calling the attention of the Nigerian government to the deplorable and horrible of Niger Delta land due to the activities of oil expatriates in the area. The failure of the government to pay ultimate attention to the dire needs of the region, coupled with the exclusivity of the region in government policies, continues to wax the illegal activities of Niger Delta militants. Kidnapping during this period is a technique and strategy with class; the abduction is restricted to oil expatriates and some people of higher caliber and profile. To present their grievances on marginalizing the region in terms of socioeconomic development and environmental degradation that made it difficult for them to breathe. The impression of kidnapping was to address environmental scarcity, degradation, marginalization, and poverty in the Niger Delta Region then (Akinyemi et al., 2023). The government's nonchalant attitude made the Niger Delta militant metamorphosis and seen kidnapping as an alternative way of requesting their share in the national cake and addressing the act of injustice in the Niger Delta Region.

Since 2005, kidnapping has remained a new contagious profession and a forced garment to wear for some of the unemployed youths who have been riddled with poverty (Campbell, 2020). The aftermath of 2005, particularly in 2011, changed the narrative slogan of armed kidnapers from kidnapping of oil expatriates to kidnapping without boundaries. The cancerous nature of kidnapping diseases has made everyone seek therapy of any choice to diagnose the disease so as not to become the victim, while the victims who manage to escape also seek alternative means to prevent themselves from the reoccurrence decima of such.

Sooner than later, kidnapping became a social action, a tool used by marginalized people to repress the government's oppressive policies and checkmate the government's insensitivity toward marginalized areas since a live dog is far better than a dead lion. This adage corroborated the perception of Ottuh (2008), who described kidnapping as a "necessary evil" and a tool for "social justice" through the disruption of human and national security.

Who born Kidnappers?

Kidnappers is not a name that christens a child after birth but a rebirth name that the society gives to a set of criminal cartels or organized criminal sets of people that vowed to use violence to reciprocate and avert the effect of government bad policy on society. However, this set of people are not born kidnapers. The society brought out demons in them due to socio-economic gaps between their needs and the availability of conventional means to get the desired needs. Individuals engaged in criminal activities due to social and cultural factors such as poverty, unemployment, lack of education, and dysfunctional family environments are seen entangling with kidnapping activities as an alternative means to an end. One of the major factors that encouraged, particularly unemployed youth, to the illicit business of kidnapping is not far from easy access to small arms and light weapons across all geopolitical zones. These sets of criminal groups see kidnapping as a coping measure to cushion the effect of societal pressure on them.

METHODOLOGY

The paper used qualitative analysis with a snowball sampling technique of 50 respondents. Through a desk review, it buttressed the primary data with relevant journals and books to analyze the nexus of small arms and light weapons infiltration and kidnapping on national security. The data gathered was analyzed descriptively.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Persistence Kidnappings in Nigeria: Susceptible Factors

Kidnapping is a new normal phenomenon that knows no boundaries. It is a contagious disease that has no respect for class and status. Various scholars adopted and adapted different theories to explain the prevalence of kidnapping and its effect on the country's socioeconomic development. For example, scholars like Nfeabusi (2009) present their perception of kidnapping through economic theory. He used the economic principle of laws of supply and demand to explain the rationale behind the choice of crime by criminally minded people. In his analysis, criminally minded people choose their victims based on swollen pockets or bank accounts. However, this paper used the rational choice theory to determine the susceptible factors propelling the wheel of kidnapping across the geopolitical zones. The rational choice theory seeks information from different perspectives. It situates the causes of insecurity in Nigeria, particularly kidnapping, through the lens of individual perception, societal role, and societal structure across the geopolitical zones.

In the course of the findings, chasing economic power, whether genuine, lawful, or unlawful, is one of the parameters that make some innocent people victims of circumstance. The pursuit of purchasing power by the commonalities who are extremely poor adopting alternative ways. This position aligns with the individualistic approach that pinpoints economic downtrodden such as unemployment, marginalization, and lack of legal opportunity (Gomez, 2017), which paved the way for a rise in poverty. These are some of the compounding factors that contributed to the irrational choice of bringing a sword from the sheath to unleash terror on innocent people. The lack of economic and employment opportunities coupled with desperation and a sense of hopelessness is significant. It could soak innocent hands in criminal oil (Smith, 2018) since an idle hand is a devil's workshop. The economic hardship has made it difficult for potential victims to think rightly before engaging in criminal activities since the ends justify the means. However, several arguments have been raised on why people liken poverty to human beings; poverty is a concept without any sense of humanity (Asiyanbi, 2023). However, people's perceptions, personal motivations, and overbearing burdens have made people become the victims of circumstances, not poverty.

In a further argument, poverty in Nigeria's context could be measured with two basic parameters: economic downtrodden and inflation. The two yardsticks reconceptualized Nigeria's poverty with a new mindset of injecting a sense of organ or humanity into poverty. For example, the economic crisis in Nigeria led to an inflation rise of 3.16 percent in 2011 to 11.61 percent in 2018 and 22.79 percent in 2023 (NBS, 2023). According to the analysis by the World Bank, the inflation forcefully injected five million Nigerians into poverty between January and October 2022 (World Bank). Another four million Nigerians also slipped into poverty in the first four months of 2023 (World Bank). That is, nine million Nigerian citizens have been impoverished due to epileptic inflation. The Nigerian minimum wage has been statistically calculated based on a recent economic reality that the minimum wage of 30,000 naira is 19,355 in today's economic reality. In the NBS 2022 analysis, more than 63% of Nigerians have been diagonally and multidimensionally impoverished (NBS, 2022). The unemployment rate in Nigeria has been statistically analyzed as follows: 23.13% in 2018, 33.28% in 2020, and 43% in 2023, with an inflation of 20.3%. Using the current economic reality, KPMG is presumed to have a 20.0% inflation in 2024 (ICIR, 2023).

Indeed, the criminal-minded people leverage the socioeconomic challenge bedeviling the country, reorientate some of the innocent youth, and indoctrinate them into illegal business to make an end meet. Daily Trust reported in July 2022 that the ransom received by terrorists or armed kidnapers between 2011 and 2020 was \$18.34 million (18.98 billion naira). Between July 2021 and June 2022, 653.7 million naira was ransom to perpetrators (ICIR, 2023). Indeed, Nigeria has been ranked third highest in kidnapping cases (Akinyemi, 2023). This is why rational choice theory sees the perpetrators and cooperators as rational actors who believe more in the benefits and positive gains of their actions and inactions through irrational means. Some unemployed youth, marginalized society, and under-employed youth preferred to engage in a business where their bread is best buttered, a clandestine business with little or no punishment like kidnapping. The analysis does justify the heinous act of the criminally minded people.

Furthermore, for the government to understand the kind of society that is grooming, where the salary earners cannot shake their legs, the high inflation rate and the epileptic nature of the exchange rate have jeopardized many businesses. These activities have jeopardized Nigeria's economy and paved the way for the unemployment rate, which continues to give rise to poverty.

The rational choice theory further describes how these social dynamics operate and influence criminal networks, which makes all geopolitical zones convenient and conducive for heinous crimes, particularly kidnapping (Johnson, 2019; Brown & William, 2020). The sudden unemployment rate due to economic downtrodden has broken community ties, friendship ties, and parent-child relationships. Better your life without government became the song of the evil doers to recruit innocent people to the criminal cartel.

Beyond the socioeconomic challenges, the peanut salaries of security personnel have also made the law enforcers, compromisers, complacent, and cooperators of illicit acts. The maximum cooperation from the security personnel creates an enabling environment for the growth and sustainability of their heinous crime. For example, the security operatives give instructions and descriptions of where to drop the ransom for kidnapers with their percentages added. The irrational synergy maintained between the security personnel and criminally minded people has given them the edge to evade arrest and prosecution (anonymous victims).

Furthermore, corruption in governance and weak judicial processes also play a vital role in the persistent rise of kidnapping across all geopolitical zones (Okeke, 2021). The widespread corruption in the societal structure also makes

law enforcers cooperate in evil perpetrating, compromises investigations, frustrates criminal prosecutions, and contributes to the culture of impunity. The inadequate judicial process, such as delay in legal proceedings, fails to give the judicial system the credibility it deserves. This has made some people believe that kidnapping carries low risks of prosecution and conviction.

Another avenue annexed by the criminal people is inadequate cooperation and understanding between and among people across the geopolitical zones. This has been explained from the perspective of political instability and ethno-religious crises. That is, the North does not see themselves as Nigerians but as northerners; this practice cuts across all the geopolitical zones in Nigeria, which further gives credence to illicit kidnapping.

Typologies of Kidnapping in Nigeria's Setting

It is no news that the crime rate of kidnapping in Nigeria has presumably taken the third position after arms deals and human and drug trafficking. The activities of these nonstate actors have turned kidnapping into a new normal phenomenon and banditry without boundaries and classes. The study shows that between 2006 and 2020, the country witnessed and recorded 3,500 cases with an estimated ransom of more than \$18.34 million ransom payment (SBM, 2021, cited in Al-Jazeera News). The years 2021, 2022, 2023, and even 2024 are groundbreaking years as the country witnesses a high rate of crime that makes it difficult for innocent citizens to sleep with their two eyes closed. The high rate of kidnapping in society, coupled with the excruciating pains inflicted on innocent victims, has made several scholars work assiduously and categorize kidnapping in content and context forms. For instance, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2003) included kidnapping for extortion to influence business decisions or obtain commercial advantage as a general form of kidnapping. Added to this is kidnapping for sexual exploitation due to family feud, spouse or child abduction, kidnapping for revenge or ideological reasons, and political purposes, have all regarded as types of kidnapping.

Further, Pharaoh (2005) polarizes forms of kidnapping as criminal kidnapping, that is, hostage for ransom; political kidnapping for settling of political scores; and pathological kidnapping, that is, parental kidnapping and launching for sexual purposes. Young et al. 2007, also use cultural kidnapping as a culture used to kidnap a bride against her consent or her parent's consent and amateur kidnapping as an arrangement of hostage for a dime ransom.

The scholars above have partitioned kidnapping into various forms and comprehensively explained how criminals and perpetrators operate. However, the scholars' explanation and chosen types of kidnapping are myopic due to the following factors: globalization, infiltration of small arms, and the advent of technology. In the course of the findings, it was discovered that researchers and scholars need to look beyond their armpits in the phase of globalization and technological revolution. They did not acknowledge the role of globalization and revolution technology, where ransom and potential customers would be negotiated and paid over the phone. This technique is called "kidnapping on the telephone, or telephone kidnapping." This is an act of getting the potential victims engaged on the telephone, and all the necessary arrangements would be made, including payment for ransom to prevent the potential abductee from whisking out of his/her compound. In addition to this is pseudonymous kidnapping, or digital kidnapping, where the negotiation and bargaining would take place on the web with the use of cryptocurrency such as bitcoin as a ransom. This form of kidnapping has gone beyond the use of an intermediary for negotiation and delivery of ransom. The potential victims would be coaxed and intimidated either through his/her businesses online or by trapping some of their families to threaten such potential victims.

In addition, gendered kidnapping, either to regenerate more terror in the world or for sexual exploitation and pornography is also a tactic used by the kidnapers to induce fear and force the government to make their wish. The instances of such could not far from the kidnapping of 276 Chibok school girls in 2014 (Wild, 2021; Teresa & Catala, 2021; Iyekekpolo, 2016), abduction of Dapchi Girls in 2018 (Pearson & Zenn, 2021) and the abduction of 39 students (all girls) at the Federal College of Forestry in Kaduna (Lere, 2021) cited in Idris et al. (2022). Most of these girls, especially Chibok girls, were kidnapped as sex slaves for reproduction.

Another form of kidnapping is random kidnapping through visitation, where the criminally minded engage in unhindered visitation to potential victims and are forcefully evicted and whisked to an unknown destination. High-way kidnapping is a technique and drama put on by the kidnapers by truncating the movement of cars, buses, and innocent passers-by to create artificial traffic for their desire.

Roles of Small Arms and Light Weapons in Kidnapping Activities

Small arms and light weapons (SALW) are one of the instruments that facilitate the proliferation of different forms of violence and a propeller paddling the insecurity across the geopolitical zones. It has played an innumerable role and inflicts unhealed bruises on the concerned and potential families, disrupting the country's socio-economic activities and human and national security. The easy accessibility of small arms in copulation with its illegal stockpiling has exacerbated and fueled the incidents of kidnapping by lowering the barriers of entry for perpetrators with a myriad of consequences. The availability and illegal stockpiling of small arms and light weapons allow the perpetrators to exert control and coercion over the victims, intimidate and subdue them for easy abductions (Small Arms Survey, 2015). Jenks (2017) notes that most kidnapers leverage SALWs to overpower resistance and ensure the compliance of their victims. SALW is, therefore, a force multiplier, bolstering criminally minded groups, intensifying the risks accompanying kidnapping, and deterring law enforcement interventions. In conflict-affected regions, insurgent factions finance their

activities through ransom payments and extortion, with SALW playing a central role in enforcing their demands (Boer, 2018). The widespread availability of SALW enables criminal elements to expand their illicit enterprises and perpetuate kidnapping as a lucrative source of revenue, exacerbating the challenges faced by affected communities.

The proliferation of SALW exacerbates the violence associated with kidnapping incidents, posing grave risks to victims and bystanders alike. According to the Small Arms Survey (2018), armed kidnappings more than often result in severe fatalities and injuries due to the use of small arms during the abduction process. The lethal capabilities of SALW increase the potential for violence escalation, as perpetrators use force to achieve their objectives or evade capture (Lawrence, 2016). Moreover, the presence of small arms heightens the risks of accidental shootings and collateral damage, further amplifying the humanitarian toll of kidnapping-related violence (Jenks, 2017). Thus, SALW proliferation aggravates the severity and increases the cycle of kidnappings with a grave impact on socioeconomic, human, and national security.

The tactical role of small arms has orchestrated the incessant killings and kidnappings as criminal-minded people continue to amass arsenals for the expansion of their criminal operations through ransom payments. The concentration of illicit arms in the hands of untrained combatants, given opportunities to assert control over their potential victims, contributes to a vicious cycle of retribution and retaliation with severe implications on national security (Asiyanbi, 2017). The occurring and reoccurring violence of armed kidnappers associated with small arms has been responsible for the untimely death of some of the victims. For example, in April 2021, more than 590 victims and potential ones lost their lives due to violent attacks in their various communities (NST, 2021). The concentration of Illicit weapons in armed bandit kidnappers is a veritable tool of domination, oppression, and aggression due to its easy handling with little or no training to operate. The easy accessibility of small arms has militarized the attitude and youths' behaviour to the extent of aggravating a minor issue and settling it with a gun. Guns remain a new communication channel to express grievances and misunderstandings and settle differences among youths. The new channel of communication has been used to brutalize, kill, and displace innocent citizens from their comfort abode.

Small arms and light weapons are beacons of hope for armed kidnappers, Boko Haram terrorists, and its offshoot, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), in spreading the gospel of violence across all geopolitical zones. Aside from this, the Fulani herders have also replaced their control sticks with small arms like AK47s in moving their cattle around (Asiyanbi, 2017; Babarinde, S. 2016). The persistent rise in armed bandits and kidnappers coupled with the illegal whisking and hostages to an unknown destination has dealt with socio-economic development such as infrastructure, education, food supply, health, and social development.

The table below shows the atrocity committed by armed bandit kidnappers as a result of easy accessibility and availability of small arms and light weapons across the geopolitical zones of Nigeria between 2021, 2022, and 2023, according to the National Security Tracker survey (NST).

S/N	Geopolitical zones	Number of people kidnapped in 2021	Number of people kidnapped in 2022 (January-March)	Number of people kidnapped in 2023 (January-April)
1.	North-West	1,405	746	292
2.	North-Central	942	547	359
3.	North-East	210	61	58
4.	South-South	140	44	84
5.	South-West	169	36	29
6.	South-East	77	53	74
Total		2,943	1,487	896

Source: National Security Survey (NST) 2021-2023 and Premium Times, 2022

The table above shows the leverage on SALWs that orchestrate the sophisticated kidnapping operations, capitalising on the tactical advantages afforded by small arms. The use of small arms in kidnapping incidents contributes to a vicious cycle of retribution and retaliation, perpetuation cycles of violence and insecurity, as shown in the table above (Akinyemi & Asiyanbi, 2023). The kidnappings and violent killings perpetrated by bandits have become recurring decimal with no fewer than 590 people killed and 2,943 kidnapped in 2021; between January-March 2022, 1,487 were kidnapped and 2,968 killed, and between January- April 2023, 896 were abducted, and 1,228 were killed. This shows the drastic effect of the illegal proliferation of small arms on the security development of the state.

National Security and Kidnapping in Nigeria: The Nexus

National security is one of the core functions of any sensible and reasonable government. It is a precondition for sustainable development that encompasses the protection of territorial integrity against any external and internal forces, preserving political independence, promoting human and economic security, and providing maximum job security, among others. All these are preeminent priorities, which serve as core values that the government must provide and protect against internal or external interference. The ability of a state to protect and promote these core values without sacrificing any of its vital interests in the avoidance of war is called integrity. However, Baldwin (1997) argues that pursuing security sometimes requires sacrificing other values, which Ullman (1993) referred to as a “decrease in vulnerability.” In the view of Ullman, a decrease in vulnerability is also called security since it is the protection from a sudden and hurtful disorder caused by nature or man or protection from internal and external forces.

It is no longer news that the central core values of Nigeria's national security have been threatened, which redefined the concept of national security into a dynamic process and what Thomas Hobbes defines as a state of nature. A state of nature characterized by the war of everyman against other men, a constant and violent condition of competition in which each individual has a natural right to everything regardless of the interests of others. A law of nature guides the state of nature, entrusts the right to protect political independence, and protects the citizens against any anxiety to the government. The government, in return, entrusts the protection of territorial integrity and citizens under the guidance of armed forces (military and paramilitaries).

The inadequacy in managing the security crisis in Nigeria due to epileptic policy, the nonchalant attitude of the government, and the concentration of national wealth with just 10% while 99% of citizens continue wallowing in poverty. The existence of a wider gap between the upper class and lower class makes some innocent citizens venture into the illicit business of kidnapping for ransom to make a living.

Contemporary national security development has gone beyond protecting the state against external aggression. It should incorporate the protection against fear of wants, such as the ability to secure the system regarding food, a conducive environment for socio-economic development, triumphant health sectors, and provision for basic needs for people (Tickner, 1994), cited in Stephen (2003). The ability to shelter society promotes a viable ecosystem, viz-a-viz eliminating physical and structural violence to promote human survival in the absence of wars, killings, massacres, and imminent dangers across geopolitical zones.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons has left indelible marks on Nigeria's security architecture. Their availability and ease of accessibility play a significant role in destabilizing the country's relative peace and contributing to the rise of kidnapping and other criminal activities. Addressing the security challenges in Nigeria has gone beyond the state-centric or militaristic approach; all hands must be put on deck to uproot the motivating factors, not the syndrome addressed by the government.

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