

FROM CONVENTIONAL TO UNCONVENTIONAL MECHANISM: THE PUBLIC DILEMMA OF KIDNAPPING BUSINESS IN THE SOUTH-EAST AND SOUTH-SOUTH REGIONS OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Kidnapping activities has become the most recurring organized crime in strategic cities, villages and communities in southeast and south-south Nigeria. It has generated a frenzy-like situation among members of the public. It needs to be known why civil police with its dexterity for conventional mechanisms in crime prevention and control are incapacitated to combat recent spate of kidnapping activities in Nigeria. Some pertinent questions about menace of kidnapping in Nigeria are: Why did conventional approach fail to control kidnapping activities in Nigeria? What control strategies were put in place by the respective state governments in southern states? What is the philosophy behind the adoption of unconventional means? What are the instances of its effectiveness? Is there any backlash with this strategy? With fieldworks in two purposively selected states in the southern regions of Nigeria, the study recommends among others, the creation of a specialized court with the mandate to convict suspects/sponsors of kidnapping business if found guilty within a stipulated timeframe.

Key words: *Kidnapping, Terrorism, Conventional strategy, Non-conventional strategy, Public*

1. Introduction:

Occasioned by the recent spate of kidnapping, violent killings, hostage-taking and mass abduction of innocent school-children across different communities, statistics has shown that Nigeria is ranked third amongst nations with high incidence of kidnapping activities in the world (Perlberg, 2013; Obarisiagbon and Aderinto, 2018). This unfortunate classification remains a source of major worry amidst scholars and non-citizens alike. Concerted efforts made by the various security agents to mitigate these heinous crimes against humanity have failed to yield desirable fruits. Rather than reducing with its sad nature, kidnapping business is becoming

expanding more and more on daily basis. Kidnapping business is more or less a source of living for some bad elements (unemployed) in the Nigerian society without any sign of abating. As a latest phase of organized criminal activity in the Nigerian today, kidnapping activities has recently become endemic with the many religious priests, school-children; oil expatriates' as well as unjustified killings of personnel of the Nigerian Police being the latest victims of the nefarious activities of kidnapers and other forms of banditry(Obarisiagbon, and Aderinto, *ibid*) Scholars and non-scholars alike have argued that kidnapping is now another dangerous dimension of terrorism in Nigeria

because of the resultant effects such heinous crime poses on the whole citizens at large. This horrible criminal act has not only shifted government attention on the latest approach to be adopted in combating the menace of kidnapping activities in the Nigerian society, but it has also dented the image of Nigeria as a 'self-adulated giant of Africa' in the global community.

Although kidnapping is now the most prevalent criminal activity in Nigeria as a whole but its upsurge rise has been noticeable in the southern part of Nigeria which is the focal point of this paper where between January 2008 and August 2012, 938 people were kidnapped and over \$200 million paid as ransom. A number of victims were also killed. However, just like the current style of ruthless and material-seeking, kidnapping is a transformation from the activities of Niger Delta militants who initially deployed it as a means of drawing government's attention to degradation of Niger Delta region; the Nigerian society also responded to the menace by adding some unorthodox strategies to its hitherto conventional approach. In few states (*Anambra and Imo states*) in the south-eastern Nigeria, governments have adopted demolition of buildings owned by kidnapers or their parents or serving as kidnapers' dens and invocation of deities to incur the wrath of gods to punish offenders and their sponsors in the south-south states (*Edo and Cross River state*).

Unfortunately, the recent kidnapping of two Chinese at Ohaozara Local Government in Ebonyi state has further depicted a new transformation from the previously known ransom kidnapping to the unconventional strategy being employed by kidnapers in Nigeria. Ngwama (2014) in his own treatise explained that about 110 kidnapped victims have been recorded alone in Abia state from 2008 up till date where some victims were conditionally released after payment of ransoms while others are killed with about 70 arrests of kidnapers have been made. Unfortunately, this ugly scenario does not seem to be abating but with a changing pattern from ransom kidnapping to the demand for hard drugs such as tramadol among others by the kidnapers in Nigeria. In this study, some pertinent questions that arise include: Why did conventional approach fail to control kidnapping menace in Nigeria? What control strategies were put in place by the respective state governments in southeast and south-south states? What is the philosophy behind adding unconventional means? What are the instances and how effective are they? Is there any backlash while adopting this strategy? With a specific focus on why various governance reforms have failed at all levels to mitigate high incidence of crime rates in our society, this study seeks to interrogate these questions by adopting case studies approach to decipher the major link between conventional and non-conventional strategies to combat kidnapping across



in the following southern states in Nigeria: *Anambra, Imo, Edo and Cross-River*.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 What is kidnapping?

Opinions vary amongst scholars and non-scholars alike as to the definitional perspectives of kidnapping across the globe due to the varieties, complexities and severity of recorded cases in different communities. Even though there is no universally accepted definition as to what kidnapping is all about in the literature of crime control and terrorism studies, but then, kidnapping is generally viewed as an organized crime against humanity to deny kidnapped victims of their freedom. In this paper, kidnapping is defined as the illegal movement or incarceration of any person or personality against their desire. Kidnapping can be conceived as a deliberate but forceful act to whisk away an individual or group of individual illegally either by hostage taking or abduction to a secluded place where no family or relations of the victims will have access to the person or group of persons except when ransom is paid to the kidnapers or for other reasons best known to the kidnapers. Forceful application and display of powerful weapons by kidnapers with a threat of severe punishment by the kidnapers against their victims is the main reason for compliance by kidnapped victims. The demand for financial ransom is the reason why some kidnapers do engage

in this dastard act where some kidnapped victims can be released alive and others might be killed even with paid ransom; whereas some kidnapping cases occur in Nigeria for ritual purpose especially in the southern part of Nigeria; while other reasons for kidnapping in the society is for superiority of political influence of powerful money-bag holders against their political opponent.

Different reasons can be advanced for incessant spate of kidnapping business in the southern part of the country. At the earliest stage of its development, kidnapping activities started in the oil-rich south-south area with the frequent criminal activities of ethnic militias' by agitating for resource control. In this area, kidnapping of foreign expatriates amidst pipeline vandalism became a major source of living for the militant boys who often engaged the military in arms hostility. Violent kidnapping of these expatriates' is seen by the militant boys as a way of drawing government attentions to various environment hazards ravaging their communities due to the activities of multinational oil firms in the area. Today, the attendant disappearance of innocent individuals from the public; daylight banditry and other forms of human ritual sacrifice and killings have become so rampant in the south-south. In the southeast area, reasons for kidnapping activities include; joblessness or youth unemployment; desire for quick wealth; superiority of strong political influence of the big-wigs over the weaker

opponents as well as the increasing arms inflows in the hands of dreaded cultist groups across many communities in the southeast area.

2.2 Conceptual Analysis of Kidnapping: Its Motivations and Impacts

The recent spate of ritual killings and public disappearance of innocent citizens have made the adoption of unconventional methods of combating kidnapping a widely accepted coping strategies in the southern part of Nigeria (Ezemenaka, 2018). Occasioned by the failure of government through the various security agents to protect life and properties of citizens, unconventional mechanisms become a self-help coping strategy for helps communities and cities to protect themselves through various means that are acceptable to their social standard (Ezemenaka, 2018). Kidnapping activities in southeast and south-south Nigeria recently become an attractive business opportunity to some criminal elements among the jobless youths while some desperate politicians see kidnapping an avenue to express their political superiority over the weaker opponents (Omoweh and Okanya, 2005; Ogefere, 2015 cited in Chinwokwu and Michael, 2019). The recent upsurge in the recent kidnapping activities in Nigeria can be linked directly to the failure of the conventional mechanisms to combat the menace of kidnapping by the respective state governments and the civil police. As a latest discourse within terrorism studies and crime control

mechanism, kidnapping depicts an interface between governance failure and joblessness, being the twin socio-economic cum political malady in Nigeria. Arguably, the issue of youth's restiveness/joblessness occasioned by governance failure as well as political desperation of the elite has been discussed as one of the factors responsible for the unceasing wave of kidnapping activities in Nigeria without any sign of abating. Arguably, high rate of unemployment and underemployment among youths is one of the causes of kidnapping in Nigeria (Ugwulebo, 2011; Adibe, 2012.). In his own view, Ugwulebo specifically contended that the incessant cases of kidnapping activities in Nigeria would have been drastically reduced and combated if not for the youth joblessness amidst the lopsided security architecture in Nigeria. To him, these heinous crimes often take place at the cosmopolitan cities with high population density and several undercover grounds as hideout where kidnappers often keep their victims without genuine but concerted efforts from all government at the states or national level to stem the tide of kidnapping activities. Worst still, the financial inducement to supply illicit arms and ammunitions to kidnappers by some bad eggs among security personnel in Nigeria as well as kidnappers Hence, the ravaging syndrome of kidnapping activities in the southeast and south-south areas of Nigeria can be attributed to various reasons such as socio-economic and socio-political factors such as high rate of youth



unemployment; poverty, quest for human ritual sacrifice; financial gains; power struggle between political forces; weak nature of restraining institutions etc. In these two regions, 80% of the kidnapers are unemployed graduates and other school-leavers (Ibrahim and Mukhtar, 2017).

Suggesting that conventional counter-kidnapping is not wholly connected with unemployment, Ishaya (2010) seems to support Diara (2010) when he argued that while most of the kidnapers are involved in the shady business owing to poverty, some are in the kidnapping business because of their insatiable desire to acquire wealth, while youths that are recruited in kidnapping but armed with dangerous weapons are lured into the menace for selfish political gain of the stronger elements in Nigerian politics. According to him, Omotayo Mobolaji Johnson, a Geologist and member of staff at Chevron PLC was arrested by the Nigeria Police in Lagos State for complicity in the kidnapping of a bank Executive in the State despite that this Chevron employee earns N1.2million monthly. This arrest was made on 1st June, 2010. Diara went ahead to state that, Social disconnection and social dislocation breed crime and violence. As a result, kidnapping is also traceable to displeasure and disenchantment with loathsome social and political arrangements in the society. This reveals that not all kidnapping cases are committed essentially and primarily for material or monetary gains, but as a backlash or

means of voicing out social discontentment with and or disapproval of an existing political regime, framework, process, and culture. Ishaya (2010) supported this line of thought when he stated that when Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) made its first capture of four expatriate oil workers on 12 January, 2006, all efforts (including payment of ransom) to secure their release proved abortive as MEND refused to budge.

In his own submission, Akpan (2010) suggests that kidnapping was initially an activity with no monetary attachment as the key motivation factor, and in most cases, it was part of the outcome of a confrontation between MEND and oil interest groups or the Federal Government of Nigeria. Ngboawaji (2011) on his part posits that kidnapping is also a ritual business particularly during election periods. According to him, Nigerians in the South West have always talked about how human parts are used for money-making rituals or to acquire spiritual power, or the social menace of child theft; so, such phrases as “gbomogbomo, ajaale” – meaning “kidnappers” or the link between Clifford Orji and the sale of human parts have been part of the local discourse. Anywhere kidnapping business thrives, all sectors of that society is affected. Ikpang (2011) opines that, kidnapping drives away investors, as no investor would be ready to invest in a crises-ridden environment. Nigeria is therefore seen as a country in which insecurity to lives and properties looms

large and where criminality has assumed notoriety. Ikpang went ahead to state that the Niger Delta region in particular and Nigeria generally, appear not to be investment friendly. Moreover, the kidnapping of foreign nationals poses a lot of questions to the ideal sustainable democratic government in Nigeria that should engender economic development.

Ojukwu (2011) contended that the goal of generating at least 6000 megawatts of electricity in Nigeria can only be achieved if the life of investors who are working with the power sector will not be threatened by the kidnapers. On their own part, Alexander and Klein (2009) rightly argued that the psychological and physical effect of being a victim of kidnapping is traumatic and mind-boggling. Psychologically, the victim may have confusion, disorientation, shock, anxiety and withdrawal. Physically, the victim may have an exacerbation of pre-existing physical condition such as asthma and diabetes. Nwadiora and Nkwocha, (2011) corroborated that many Nigerians have lost their lives as a result of beating, torture and inhumane conditions they are subjected to by the kidnapers. It is therefore, a fact that, kidnap victims, their families and relations always have serious psychological trauma, because of fear that the victims could be hurt or even killed. Many scholars and institutions have enunciated solutions to the menace of kidnapping in Nigeria.

Osaghae (2011) noted that on 19th February 2009 Enugu State House of Assembly enacted an amendment act 2009. This was an act to amend the criminal code Cap30 laws of Enugu state 2004 inserted in section 315 of the criminal code, which prescribes death penalty for kidnapers. Ikpang (2011) asserted that judgment is often influenced by the politicians in the law court. Anosike (2009) added corruption on the side of police, court and judiciary as another factor that influences conviction of kidnapers. Recently in Nigeria, registration of Subscribers' Identity Module (SIM) cards became compulsory in an effort to curb the incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria. This is exactly why Ugwulebo (2011) noted that the global system of mobile (GSM) telephone service providers should fast-track their data capturing exercise. This according to him will help the security agents to know who is making a particular call and the location of the caller. Once ownership of numbers can be identified, handsets can be tracked, and their geographical locations become identifiable – then any call made to solicit for ransom would help to locate the kidnapers. Ikpang (2011) argued that in some countries, when telephone calls are made, the police have access to the calls but it is not the same in Nigeria. He later explained that kidnapers could switch off their phones; change location, or simply throw their phone away to acquire another because unlike other jurisdiction where every phone is registered and identity of the owner properly documented, habitual phone



purchase is the trend in Nigeria. Osaghae (2011) opined that the relatives of the kidnapped persons should cooperate with the security agents, because they can be of great help. However, the Police Force has been accused of aiding and abetting kidnapers, as a result people detest using police against kidnapers (Ugwulebo, 2011). Meanwhile, the police will not have information to react if cases of kidnapping are not reported to them.

In order to combat the menace of kidnapping activities, Onyeishi and Eme (2011) suggested that government should re-organize the security agencies to take them through a new re-orientation via training. Meanwhile, one of the major problems of security agents is training in order to match the well-armed criminals. As Osaghae (op.cit) rightly opined that police training must include infantry, weapon handling, and antiterrorist training in order to match the well-armed criminals. He also opined that prison warders must be co-opted in the fight against kidnapping because criminals that act outside are known by the inmates. But, Nigerian prisons are faced with many problems and challenges due to the institutional decay and structural weaknesses.

Furthermore, Ugwuoke (2011) argued that the application of community policing initiatives in Nigeria villages would obviously allow the various communities and police departments to work together to reduce crime of violence such as kidnapping and to improve the quality of life of Nigerian

citizens. On his own part, Erhabor (2012) acknowledged that the university campuses which are expected to play a major role in the countries human development and to serve as vibrant centres of productive research and academic excellence are not spared from the vestige of violent crime rocking the national scene by ethnic militant groups.

In his own view, Oni (2001) noted that, the university should develop a policy of providing a well-articulated and comprehensive programme of guidance and counseling to identify violent suspected cult members. It is believed that violent associations appear to be training ground for kidnapers.

2.3 Conventional Mechanism to Counter-Kidnapping:

Recognized by the relevant laws, statutes and other legislative enactments (Penal Code Section 271, 273; Criminal Code 364; Terrorism Act 2011 etc) in the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a serious crime against humanity with different punitive measures such as: payment of fine; life-imprisonment and death penalty etc, conventional methods to counter-control kidnapping activities in Nigeria have yet to yield appreciable degree of results in Nigeria (Egbe, 2017; Akingbehin, 2017; Umego, 2018). Rather, kidnapping activities continues to be worsening day by day across different cities and communities amidst the on-going arms-banditry by the rustlers. Conventional methods to counter-control kidnapping is the sum

total of all legal means/solutions (kidnappers' arrest, trial and prosecution in law courts; Security raid and vigilance at the nation's forests; Creation of a combined teams of anti-kidnapping squad units of the Nigerian Police and other security agents; government ransom payment to freed kidnapped victims either conditionally or unconditionally from kidnappers' den)

2.4 Unconventional Mechanism to Counter-Kidnapping:

Unconventional methods are strategic part of community policing mechanisms adopted by different cities and villages in collaboration with government in some states, and without governments' involvement in some others. Unconventional methods are deeply rooted in socio-cultural background of the various communities because of people's beliefs and perceptions in its efficacy. These methods are introduced to combat the heinous activities of kidnappers in different localities. Governments' failure to secure and protect citizens' life and properties necessitates the introduction, practice and acceptance of the various dimensions of unconventional mechanisms to counter-control kidnapping. Buoyed by the recent successes recorded across different states in the southern part of Nigeria against kidnappers' den, abode and hideouts, the prevalence of unconventional methods of counter-kidnapping remains relevant amidst the on-going agitations and public outcry to

rejjig security architecture of the Nigerian state.

The unconventional mechanisms to control kidnapping activities vary from one state to another. This includes: demolition of buildings owned by kidnappers or demolitions of buildings owned by kidnappers' parents; public invocations of local deities with a view incur the wrath of gods; public placing of curses on perpetrators of kidnapping activities as well as the use of community vigilante groups. These unconventional methods were adopted because of the failure of civil police to combat the ugly trend of kidnapping trend that is alarming. The strong belief in the fetishism and occultism fight to punish any culprits of kidnapping might have been responsible for the reasons why these unconventional methods were adopted by different communities. For instance, In Edo state, tradition was invoked by consulting local deities and publicly placing curses on perpetrators. According to Chief Edebiri, the Esogban of Benin Kindgom in Edo state, whoever fails to heed the warning of Oba through the invoking of local deities will incur the wrath of the gods especially if the perpetrator ever drinks the water from the kingdom or set his/her foot in Benin Kingdom (Tony Osauzo, 2019:).The essence of this tradition invocation is to set free the victims from the den of the kidnappers from whatever had been administered on them. Essentially, the ultimate goal of this unconventional method of fighting kidnapping business is to sanitize the society of all criminal



activities. It is also believed that the placement of curse on perpetrators of kidnapping activities and their collaborators would be seriously dealt with by the gods, and also affects those who aid and abate kidnapping business in their lands

2.24 Conventional versus Unconventional Mechanisms: Is there any difference?

Primarily, security of life and properties of citizens remains the sole responsibility of the government (formal civil police and other security agencies), but the recent spate of violent killings amidst public disappearance of school children and other innocent citizens made members of public, communities, villagers to resort to self-help to protect themselves locally since the formal institutions (the military, civil police and other security officials) have failed to gain legitimacy and respect of the inhabitants and proven to be incapable of providing citizens with basic security. As such, mistrust in these formal institutions and authorities governing them have made people to resort to the alternative solutions to cope with their everyday lives and safeguard their basic human security. Therefore, major difference between conventional and unconventional mechanisms depends on its legitimacy perspective. The strong belief in the efficacy of the various dimensions of unconventional mechanisms such as the adoption and use of building demolition and local deities to invoke gods to punish offenders through fetishism and

occultism fight to punish any culprits of kidnapping are part of the reasons why these unconventional methods were adopted by different communities.

Also, Nigerian citizens especially from these troubled areas have trust in the immediate application of punishment and resolution of cases through unconventional methods over conventional mechanism because most of the high profile cases of kidnapping in Nigeria that have involved the formal security institutions have been swept under the carpet without immediate trial and judgments; some high profile cases pending before the law courts to punish kidnappers are numerous. This ugly scenario makes it difficult to wipe out kidnapping activities in Nigeria. Justice delayed they say is justice denied.

Unconventional method of counter-kidnapping is adopted to sanitize the society of all criminal activities due to citizens' strong beliefs in the supremacy and public trust in its effectiveness over conventional means. Many kidnappers' buildings have been demolished either by vigilante groups or governments were never built again. Wiping out the operational base of kidnappers' den by the demolition of their buildings or buildings that belong to their parents have a great potency to reduce kidnapping activities in most areas such approach has been adopted. Exposing kidnappers' dens through buildings demolition brings public shame and ridicule to anyone associated with

kidnappers in form of syndicate in these communities.

3. Theoretical Framework **Interrogating conventional to unconventional mechanism: the self-efficacy theory**

This study adopts the self-efficacy theory to interrogate the rationale behind the adoption of unconventional method after the failure of the conventional mechanism to counter-kidnapping. Self-Efficacy is a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute a plan of action in prospective situations (Bandura, 1977). The major thrust of the theory is that People belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Kathy Kolbe (2009) also provided her own perspective to self-efficacy theory. She opines that self-efficacy connotes determination and perseverance – seeing as how it helps one overcome obstacles that would interfere with utilizing those innate abilities to achieve goals. People's beliefs about their abilities have a profound effect on those abilities. Ability is not a fixed property; there is a huge variability in how you perform. People who have a sense of self-efficacy bounce back from failure; they approach things in terms of how to handle them rather than worrying about what can go wrong (Bandura, 1977b). This theory is sufficient as people of southeast and south-south Nigeria refused to worry about what can go wrong as Bandura put it, rather they bounce back from the failure of conventional mechanism to

unconventional mechanisms to counter-kidnapping.

4. Data and Methods:

4.11 Research Design:

The nature of this study requires the adoption of eclectic method of inquiry and analysis. A combination of methods proved enriching, as all the adopted methods complemented one another in gathering and analyzing the data about the menace of kidnapping activities' in Nigeria: The study utilized survey design (Key Informant Interview [KII] and In-depth interview methods [IDIs], historical, descriptive and interpretative design and analysis. The historical method performs the linkage function by connecting the on-going records on kidnapping activities with the past; the descriptive method helps to describe the demographic characteristics of not only the respondents in the interview but also the kidnappers. The interpretative method allows for detailed questioning beyond mere description. As such, some pertinent research questions raised are: Why did conventional approach fail to control kidnapping activities in Nigeria? What control strategies were put in place by the respective state governments in southern states? What is the philosophy behind the adoption of unconventional means? What are the instances of its effectiveness? Is there any backlash with this strategy? This paper seeks to interrogate these questions.



4.12 Sources of Data:

Both primary and secondary data were employed in this study. Primary data were generated from interviews and field work was carried out in various towns/villages of the two states that were purposively and randomly selected in South-East (*Anambra and Imo states*) and South-South (*Edo state and Cross River state*). These selected states are the major deadly zones where kidnapping activities have been rampant and unceasing without any sign of abating. Secondary data were sourced from internet materials, library materials, journals, texts, published commentaries, newspapers; and other archival materials etc. These texts were subjected to content analysis and these efforts were complemented with a detailed archival search carried out across different libraries in southern part of Nigeria.

4.13 Method of Data Collection:

This paper adopted interview method of data gathering. The interview was conducted with the five categories of respondents in mind: One, the Civil Police, who are the law-enforcers of the land especially in the affected communities; Two, The Opinion/Community Leaders in these towns; Three, the local hunters/security agents in the affected communities; Four, the traditional priests/herbalists in charge of the invocation of local deities to incur wrath of gods in such communities; Five, members of the general public. The Civil Police, Opinion Leaders, and traditional priests were

purposively selected while both the local hunters and some members of the public were randomly selected. Respondents in this study were individually interviews across different towns where the study was carried. Most importantly, this study relied on information elicited from the various respondents about the incessant spate of kidnapping and political activities in their respective communities. The respondents' life experiences formed the bedrock of the primary data to this study. The various towns in Nigeria where the field works were conducted includes: Benin metropolis in the Edo state capital; Calabar Municipal Area in Cross River state where houses were demolished with bulldozers; buildings' demolition took place at Aguleri and Umuleri towns but specifically in two communities (Umuatulu and Umueri) which are located in Anambra East Local Government of Anambra State; Mgbidi town in Oru East Local Government of Imo state; and Ohoba community in Ohaji Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state. Facts and figures from derived from interview were complemented by secondary data in this study.

5. Case Studies:

Two states from Southeast region and two states from South-south region were purposively and randomly selected. These are (*Anambra and Imo states*) from Southeast and (*Edo state and Cross River state*) from South-south. These selected states are the major deadly areas in the regions where kidnapping

activities have been rampant with its attendant ritual killings without any sign of abating. The selected states from these regions are chosen to explain why conventional approach failed to counter-kidnapping activities in Nigeria and the philosophy behind the adoption of unconventional means. These case studies which constitute the fulcrum of unconventional means to counter-kidnapping would be analyzed on state by state basis;

Anambra State:

Created in August 27, 1991, this is one of the five states in the Southeastern part of Nigeria that belongs to Igbo people. The state represents a major gateway to heart of Igbo land through Onitsha, being the commercial hub/centre of all eastern states even though its capital is located at Awka. In this study, findings show that between 2012 to 2015 no fewer than ten buildings or kidnappers' den have been demolished by the Anambra State Government especially during the yuletide season when sons and daughters of the state would be trooping home to felicitate with their loved ones (*Joe Chukwudi, 2014*). At Aguleri and Umurueri, both towns in Anambra East Local Government Area, three building that belonged to kidnappers were demolished. These buildings as hideouts for kidnappers were owned by businessmen from the state that specialized in kidnapping business. Another demolition of buildings occurred at Umuatulu and Umueri communities where a one-story building and an adjoining boys' quarter

which belonged to late Ozoemena Egwuatu but were used by his twins' nephew for kidnapping business were also demolished by the state government. The state government adopted this approach to combat kidnapping so as to wipe out the operational base of the kidnappers in their area and to annihilate the hideout of kidnappers in the area (*Joe Chukwudi, 2014; p2*). In other round of building demolition, the state government with the aid of members of police force demolished a building at Umunbo Ayamelum Local Government area of the state where the building owner (Celestine Ughamadu) was alleged to have used the building as a hideout for kidnapped victims (*Chidinma Eze, 2014: p1*). Based on our findings, the total numbers of 16 buildings have been demolished in recent times in the state (*Chidinma, Eze, 2014*). Official information that was reported in *The Daily Post Newspaper* of August 26, 2014 gives a reliable credence to the above figure from Mr James Eze, the Senior Special Adviser (SSA) to the state Governor on media. Demolitions of the kidnappers' buildings have been a routine exercise with the belief that kidnapping activities would be stopped. However, these ugly scenarios continue to manifest itself across villages with no sign of abating due to the conspiracy on the part of some unscrupulous elements in the area. These kidnappers are drug addicts in unknown communities but are usually being co-opted into the business by the power-brokers in the society.

**Imo State:**

With the capital of this state located at Owerri, Imo state is one of the oldest states in Nigeria which was created in February 3, 1976. The state is also one of the five states in southeastern Nigeria. Findings in this study revealed, a hotel and five buildings which belonged to three suspected kidnappers in Mgbidi, Oru East Local Government were demolished by the state government on Saturday July 22, 2018 in Imo state (Chidiebube, Okeoma, 2018: p10). Even though the various demolitions of hotels and building which belonged to the kidnappers in the state did not curb the activities of kidnapping. Rather, the ugly situation continues to rear itself without any sign of abating. In May 26, 2016, buildings that belonged to two suspected kidnappers in Ohoba community in Ohaji Egbema Local Government Area of Imo state were also demolished. (Gibson, Achonu, 2016: p5). These kidnappers are youths of a working class between 28 to 30yrs of age. This study discovers that the recent case of building demolition in Imo state occurred in February 20, 2020 as reported by The Punch Newspaper where a building that belonged to a suspected kidnap kingpin in Owaelu, Uratta in Owerri North Local Government Area of the state (Chidiebube, Okeoma, 2020: p1).

Ebonyi State:

Created in October 1, 1996 as one of the five states in the southeast Nigeria, kidnapping activities occurred in July 13, 2013, where kidnappers' hideouts

were demolished at Emezabi community in Mgbo at Ohaukwu Local Government area of the state. The building was demolished completely as aftermath of the kidnap of one Mrs Winifred Ogbu, a wife of one of the principal officers of Ebonyi State House of Assembly in 2013 by a group of six kidnappers who kidnapped the woman in Abakaliki (Peter-Okutu, 2013).

Abia State:

The state government demolished a building popularly known as Akoto Bar and Resort Limited and a two-bungalow that was owned by Olisagbo Ifedike (a.k.a Ofeakwu) who happened to be involved in dual business of kidnapping and armed robbery (Anayo, Okoli: 2013). As reported in the This Day Newspaper of April 17, 2016, another round of building demolition (four bungalows) by Abia State government occurred at Etitiamia Nkporo Community in Ohafia local government area of the state. These building were reduced to rubbles after the demolition had taken place (Emmanuel, Ugwu, 2016). Another case of building demolition that belonged to kidnappers, The Government of Abia state in June 26, 2017 demolished two buildings that were owned by twin brothers at Umuerim Nsirimo in Umuahia South local government area of the state (Ogbonnaya, Ikokwu: 2017)

Cross River State:

As one of the six states in south-south Nigeria, Cross River state was created in May 27, 1967 with its capital located in

Calabar and it borders Cameroon to the east. As findings in this study has shown, kidnapping activities has been a recurring decimal across the state even though state government often demolishes their hideouts once kidnap cases are reported. Precisely, in August 13, 2020 cases of building demolition that belong to kidnapers were recorded in the state. Unfortunately, these kidnapers are mostly youths of a working age bracket but their sponsors are big wigs in society especially from the already tensed political atmosphere in the town. Many houses belonging to the kidnapers as hideouts have been demolished. Recently, A Special Adviser on State Security in Cross River Dr Alfred Mbotto led a combined team of anti-kidnapping forces to demolished some buildings at Calabar Municipal Area of the state capital where kidnapers ranging from 28yrs of age to 31yrs of age were arrested (Ada Wodu,2020: p5);

Edo State:

As one of the six south-south states in Nigeria that was created in August 27, 1991, cases of kidnapping business and other violent crimes have been occurring and unceasing mainly among the unemployed youths either as indigenes or strangers'. Worrying by the recent spate of kidnapping activities in their entire lands, findings shown that congregation of herbalists/traditional priests in Benin Kingdom gathered together and invoked the different deities as an aged-long traditional practice to stem the tide of the

kidnappers' activities out of their lands. They resulted to this self-help community policing method of combating crime because they were disturbed by the upsurge in cases of kidnapping activities and other violent crimes in their domain. The essence of this land-cleansing is to appease the gods for any infractions that may be responsible for such heinous acts in their lands given the seeming incapacitation of the civil police to stem the tide. Curses were heaped on those responsible for the dastard acts in their communities as it was described as sacrilege to partake or sponsor kidnapping business in their domain (Tony Osauzo, 2019: p1) Most importantly, in all the states in south-east, there are evidences where the various unconventional strategies have worked and with little cases of backlash recorded in some areas.

6. Discussion of Findings:

An in-depth assessment of the major findings from the fieldwork in this study depicts plethora of issues as to why conventional approach to kidnapping failed and the rationale behind the adoption of unconventional mechanisms to combat high rate of kidnapping business in the south-south and southeast Nigeria. Hence, our findings in this study raise some contending debates about failure of conventional approach and why unconventional mechanism was adopted: financial inducement versus youth unemployment; religious fundamentalism versus politics. This study situates our discourses on these



contending issues within the context of our interactions with the respondents at the fieldworks in the affected communities;

Conventional Mechanisms: Why did it fail?

As recognized methods known to Nigerian laws in crime control and prevention by formal institutions of government (civil police and other security agencies), conventional mechanism to counter-kidnapping has been adjudged to be failure due to the following reasons:

Financial inducement or politically induced kidnapping:

Is attraction to kidnapping business a matter of financial inducement or a display of political influence/desperation of the sponsors of kidnapping? Nnam McPherson (2014:71) linked the incessant spate of kidnapping as an organized crime to godfathers and high class political gladiators as sponsors of kidnapping business in the southeast Nigeria. Kidnappers have their sponsors amongst the big-wigs in the affected states in Nigeria. References to kidnapping sponsorship by the powerful elements/rich men in the society is an attestation to the fact that kidnappers have strong root in the affected states and that kidnappers are being used to test and suppress the political influence of their political opponents as kidnapped victims. Sponsors of the kidnapping operations in the affected states also see kidnapping as a modern-day business by

targeting their victims from the rich homes and often demand for hefty financial ransom.

Our findings show that kidnapping activities continue to be unabated in Nigeria due to the collaboration between high class politicians and the unemployed youths as kidnappers in the affected communities. Sponsors of kidnapping activities are financially privileged to lure the unemployed youths into kidnapping business because they are socially disadvantaged (Nnam, McPherson, 2014:72). Consequently, unemployed youths often see financial attraction in kidnapping business as an opportunity to pay the state back in its own coins by engaging in kidnapping activities. The argument here is that rampant cases of kidnapping activities go beyond economic inducement; it is also for political surrogacy on the part of the powerful elements in Nigerian politics against the weaker political opponents. A respondent who craved anonymity during our fieldworks however expressed pessimism that the predatory role of the sponsors of kidnapping business makes it difficult to arrest their sponsors and thereby making it difficult for the government to stem the tide of kidnapping through conventional mechanisms. Sponsors of kidnapping see themselves to be above the law due to their financial clout and influence in the society. This is one of the reasons why conventional mechanisms to combat kidnapping has failed in Nigeria.

Increasing Inflow of Arms and Ammunitions/Security Personnel's Conspiracy

The focal point of this discourse on kidnapping business bothers on the linkage between rising arms' inflow and conspiracy of some bad elements among security personnel with kidnapers in Nigeria. These bad eggs among the security operatives have been aiding and abetting kidnapers' activities in the affected communities, a scenario which frustrates all the known conventional mechanisms to combat kidnapping. Findings have shown that the rising inflow of dangerous arms and ammunitions are the handiwork of some unscrupulous elements among the security personnel. Suspected kidnapers rely on their dastard relationship with the bad eggs among security operatives for the supply of arms. Unfortunately, the incapacitation and weakness of the civil police to mitigate these heinous crimes in the affected communities often encourage people to resort to self-help through local vigilantism with fetishism by invoking the wrath of gods/deities on the sponsors of kidnapping business and other violent crimes. Responses from the local hunters/priests in-charge of deities, community leaders and other members of the public in the affected communities alluded to the urgent need for 'self-help' to combat kidnapping since civil police is structurally and operationally weak and incapable to curb kidnapped activities in their communities. This is another reason why conventional approach to

kidnapping has failed (Emma-Amaize, 2013).

Governance reforms' failure/ lopsided security architecture in Nigeria

The current security architecture/ arrangement is skewed to favour the north against southern region in Nigeria. Majority of the members of security agencies deployed to protect cities and communities in the southeast and south-south states are from the north. This ugly scenario does not allow for effective policing and crime control since many personnel of these security agencies do not understand the body language/ culture of the communities they are deployed to protect. This is one of the reasons why public agitation for community policing and vigilantism vis-à-vis restructuring of the ailing security architecture of the country has been rampant especially in the southeast Nigeria. Is there any nexus between kidnapping and governance failure? This study argued that governance failure/lopsided security arrangement in Nigeria has a direct consequence on whole gamut of human life and security.

Worst still, previous governance reforms engineered by successive Nigerian governments in the security sector have not yielded any appreciable level of development due to the prebendal but predatory orientations of its succeeding leaders to effectively carry out genuine security reforms that has human faces. Hence, issues of human security in the development agenda of any nation is



very tasking and daunting. Experts and non-experts alike have continuously analyzed the nexus between human security and development (Akinola, 2011; Shanum, 2013 cited in Yagboyaju, 2019). It has been argued that sustainable development through the various socio-economic variables cannot be achieved outside a genuine cause for human security (Shanum, 2013 cited in Yagboyaju, 2019). Human security here is seen as nerve-centre of any sustainable development. Peace and security of all human life and properties without ethnic consideration and party affiliations is major indices for measuring national development vis-à-vis performance indicator of governance.

Sadly, enough, several indicators' of a failed and bad governance have been raison d'être for insecurity vis-à-vis kidnapping activities in the affected states, with the phraseology that Nigeria as a 'self-adulated giant of Africa' to be classified as one of "the 19 poorest, unhappiest, unhealthiest and most dangerous nations in the world" ("National Assembly's Amendment of CCB Act Cannot Stand," 2016 p.24 cited in Yagboyaju, 2019). While corroborating the above viewpoint, two respondents during our fieldworks alluded to some indicators that have been responsible for the rampant nature of kidnapping activities in the southern part of Nigeria. In another words, this unfortunate scenario may have formed the basis of the submission of a London-based Newspaper, *The Independent*,

which described Nigeria as a nation with the "5th most dangerous country in the world with the lowest rank in safety and security" depicting the presence of Boko Haram, armed kidnapers and other violent crimes (Sarah Schmalbruch, 2017). Consequently, it is on the threshold of above security failure in Nigeria that kidnapers operate their unlawful business without any sign of abating. Failure on the part of the succeeding governments over the years to genuinely carry out security sector reforms has weakened the quest to combat kidnapping activities and thereby makes the fight against insecurity occasioned by rampant kidnapping an insurmountable task since Nigeria returned to civil rule in 1999.

Rising Youth Unemployment or Influence of Drug Addiction:

Is there any nexus between youth unemployment/drug addiction and kidnapping activities? Can gainfully employed people be lured into kidnapping business? Are there drug addicts among kidnapers? As evident from our engagement with the various respondents from the fieldworks, this study found out that kidnapers in the affected communities and villages are unemployed youths who are lured into the business by the powerful elements in the society. Not only this, kidnapers are also drug addicts who have been deported from the developed climes at one time or the other. Consequently, the rampant cases of kidnapping in the affected communities are a reflection of danger posed by the rising wave of youth

unemployment in Nigeria (Inyang and Ubong (2013). The dilemma that is inherent in idleness or joblessness has been luring many youths to kidnapping. Presently in Nigeria, statistics has shown that kidnapping provides opportunities for unemployment youth to be lured into kidnapping activities as survival or coping strategy. Our findings show that youth unemployment occasioned by their uncontrollable access to hard drugs and being used as political thugs by the desperate politicians create a veritable platform for kidnapping activities in the affected states.

Corroborating the foregoing, Iwarimie-Jaja (2003) cited in Nnam (2014) argued that those who are unemployed are poor, frustrated physically and psychologically to embrace any available survival means or demand of orderly behaviour in line with their economic circumstances and these unemployed youths are posed to engage in kidnapping as an opportunity to pay society back in its coin. So many atrocities like kidnapping or political assassination are being committed by these jobless youth under the influence of drug such as tramadol among others. Most of these kidnapers are ex-convicts, drug addicts and political thugs etc.

Poor Remuneration/Poor Condition of Service of Security Personnel

Can poor remuneration/condition of service affect the morale of security personnel? This study found out that the citizens' major concern over lack of

dedication to work and lack of genuine commitment to the task of internal security assignment within the civil police in Nigeria is poor welfares. During the interview of some security officials in the affected states, some officers gave reliable credence to their poor remuneration/condition of service which affects their job performance. Worst still, the major concern is the painful experience and feelings of some families of combat security officers who incidentally die in the course of duty while engaging kidnapers in gun-duels. They are often being neglected to suffer by the Nigerian Police Force and this ugly scenario cannot engender serious patriotism or dedication to work from the security officers who feel their conditions of service is poor in relative comparison to what average politicians earn. Hence, poor remuneration/condition of service is a threat to conventional strategy to combat kidnapping and other crimes in Nigeria.

Unconventional Mechanism: Reasons for its adoption & Effectiveness.

This study explores three major forms of unconventional mechanisms that were employed to tackle kidnapping activities in the affected communities. These are: demolition of buildings owned by or serving as kidnapers' den; traditional invocation of gods by consulting local deities and public heaping of curses on kidnapping sponsors; and the use of local hunters as community vigilante groups to search for kidnapped victims or kidnapers' kingpins. Hence, this study found the following about the



three unconventional mechanisms that have been used to tackle kidnapping activities in the affected communities;

a. Supremacy and Traditional Beliefs in gods/deities:

The philosophy behind unconventional strategy is the perceived supremacy and liberation that traditional invocation of local deities to incur the wrath of gods can be used to set free kidnapped victims from kidnappers' den and to punish sponsors of kidnapping business in their communities. This strategy has been adopted for two reasons. One, there is a firm belief in the efficacy of African traditional religious practices by appeasing the gods to dispense natural justice without fear or favour. They believed that justice will prevail. Two, it is believed that kidnapped victims in the den of the kidnappers would be set free unconditionally. Consequently, citizens' beliefs in the traditional laws of the land to punish offenders accordingly and to set free the victims from the captive of the mighty (kidnappers) are the reasons why local community policing is preferable to formal civil policing. Essentially, this unconventional method of combating kidnapping activities is to sanitize the society of all criminal activities. It is also believed that the heaping of curses on sponsors of kidnapping activities and their collaborators would be seriously utilized by the deities, and also punishes those who aid and abet kidnapping business in their respective communities.

Invocation of gods/deities through the efforts of the congregation of herbalists/traditional priests is an aged-long traditional practice to stem the tide of the kidnappers' activities out of their lands. The practice is now known to be a 'self-help methods' owing to the failure/weakness of civil police in crime control and prevention. It is a land-cleansing method of appeasing gods for any infractions that may be responsible for kidnapping activities in the lands. Kidnapping is described as sacrilege for anyone to partake or sponsor. To a large extent, this unconventional mechanism has yielded some appreciable result in the reduction of kidnapping cases in the affected areas.

b. Demolition of Kidnappers' Buildings:

Of what relevance is demolition of building to combat kidnapping? This study argued that the essence of this unconventional method is to wipe out the kidnappers' base in the affected communities (Local governments in Anambra state, Cross River state and Imo state) where it was adopted. As a routine exercise, demolition of buildings by the state governments which are directly owned by kidnappers or the one serving as kidnappers' den is to wipe out the operational base of the kidnappers in their area and to annihilate the hideout of kidnappers especially where they often keep their victims. This is the rationale behind the adoption of this unconventional means by the respective state governments. Even though demolition of buildings as an

unconventional means works to a large extent, our findings discovered some noticeable instances of backlash at Awara community, Ohaji/Egbema Local Government area in Imo state where conspiracy with the arrested kidnappers on the part of a traditional ruler (who was paid for the services rendered) provided operational vehicle for the kidnappers; a native doctor provided protective charms against the operational hazard and arrest of kidnappers and worst still a pastor provided spiritual guide for their kidnappers operations(Chidiebube-Okeoma, 2020). These act of conspiracy of major stakeholders in the affected communities put strong limitations on the efficacy of unconventional mechanism to combat kidnapping in these communities.

c. *The Relevance of Local Hunters/Vigilante Groups:*

Are local hunters'/vigilante groups legitimate to be law-enforcers? Can vigilante groups legitimately be substituted for Civil Police? Is this a way forward to the gradual emergency of state-community policing in Nigeria? The phenomenon of local vigilantism in these affected communities as a veritable means of neighborhood security has gained greater currency and utility across most states in the south-south and southeast Nigeria. These local hunters or vigilante groups' work in harmonious relationship with the civil police to combat kidnapping activities and other violent crimes in the affected communities.

Their main responsibility is to make arrest of the kidnappers and other criminals in their domains and hand them over to the civil police for prosecution. To a large extent, this unconventional means yielded positive results except few cases where vigilante groups have become demigods by using their positions to witch-hunt innocence people. Formal institutions have failed to gain legitimacy and respect of Nigerians and proven to be incapable of providing citizens with basic security. As such, mistrust in these formal institutions and authorities governing them have made people to resort to the alternative solutions to cope with their everyday lives and security.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In other to stem the tide of the incessant spate of kidnapping activities in Nigeria, this paper explores the synergy between kidnapping and insecurity in Nigeria with a specific focus on the conventional and unconventional mechanism for combating kidnapping business in the southeast and south-south Nigeria. This study argues that incessant spate of kidnapping and other violent crimes in the southern part of the country is a result of civil police incapacitation in crime prevention and control in Nigeria; conspiracy of some political big-wigs who see investment opportunities in kidnapping by luring unemployed youths into this crime.

Essentially, this study interrogates the nexus between the weakness of civil



police in crime prevention and control as a driver of unconventional methods to combat kidnapping in Nigeria, using purposively selected states in the southeast and south-south Nigeria as case studies. Adopting unconventional mechanisms to combat kidnapping by governments/herbalists/traditional priests in the affected communities to shame perpetrators and sponsors of kidnapping business by annihilating their base in the entire southeast and south-south Nigeria. Most importantly, unconventional method through invocation of local deities helps to set free victims of kidnapped activities.

From all the available information gathered from the respondents in this study, various communities resort to self-help in combating kidnapping through the various unconventional means that are in line with their traditions and values since the civil police are incapacitated and weak in crime prevention. Admittedly, government personnel amidst the security sector in the affected areas believed that unconventional strategy through demolition of the kidnappers' or their fathers' buildings helps to wipe out the operational based of the kidnappers in the affected areas. Essentially, this paper recommends that governments at all levels need to restructure the security architecture in the country in line with the dictate of the modern-day for community policing across different states in Nigeria. There need to be inter-agencies collaboration between security agencies and local hunters/vigilantes not

only in the affected communities. This can be done effectively by creating Special Forces to combat kidnapping. Government should enact national legislation/law that serves as deterrence for kidnappers and their sponsors in Nigeria and creation of a specialized court with the mandate to convict suspects/sponsors of kidnapping business if found guilty within a stipulated timeframe.

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