

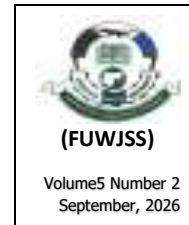
SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF KIDNAPPING IN THE BENUE VALLEY REGION, NIGERIA

Avanger, M.Y. & Gendaga, A.C.

Department of Sociology

University of Mkar, Mkar, Benue State, Nigeria

Email: revavanger@gmail.com; myavanger@umm.edu.ng



Abstract

This study assesses the implications of kidnapping on socio-economic development in Benue Valley Region, Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive cross sectional survey research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 400 respondents who completed structured questionnaire. The study's results revealed that kidnapping have negative implications on socio-economic development in Benue Valley Region, Nigeria. The negative impact of kidnapping in the region have affected businesses, reduced farming activities, increased payment of ransom, loss of employment, increased security expenses, migration/relocation, increased fear and restricted movement, reduced church/market attendance, affected social gatherings (school, hospital, festival). The study concludes that kidnapping have negative implications on socio-economic development in Benue Valley Region, Nigeria. The study therefore recommends collaborative efforts from government agencies, security forces, and local communities to address the root causes of kidnapping and promote socio-economic development in Benue Valley Region, Nigeria. The study also recommends immediate steps like strengthening border patrol, improving inter-agency intelligence sharing and addressing root causes like unemployment. Likewise, the study recommends imposition of stiffer penalties for those found in the act of kidnapping.

Keywords: Kidnapping, socio-economic development, Benue Valley Region, ransom payment

Introduction

Kidnapping has become a globalized security threat affecting socio-economic development of countries and regions. The term kidnapping is difficult to define with precision because it varies from one State to another and one country to another (Asuquo, 2009). However, Ene (2018) defines kidnapping as the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person against his or her will. Furthermore, Ibrahim and Ahmad (2020) defined kidnapping as forceful or fraudulent seizure of an individual or a group of individuals for economic, political and religious reasons. This is

often to subject the victims on an attempt to demand a ransom. Kidnapping therefore occurs when a person is abducted and taken from one place to another against their will or a situation in which a person is confined to a controlled space without the confinement being from a legal authority (Gberinyer, Okoro, & Adishi, 2021). Consequently, when the transportation or confinement of the person is done for an unlawful purpose, such as for ransom or for the purpose of committing another crime, the act becomes criminal. Kidnapping is therefore an act of seizing, taking away and keeping a person in custody either by force or fraud (Mungadi, 2020).

Kidnapping is a complex issue with various motivations including financial gain, political leverage, and socio-economic manipulations. Adebajo (2021) observes that countries with notable hotspots kidnapping incidents include, countries like Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia with high rates of kidnapping; Asian countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, and Pakistan have reported kidnapping cases, in Europe, kidnapping incidents have occurred in countries like France, Spain, and UK while African countries such as South Africa, Somalia and Nigeria have experienced significant kidnapping incidents. Kidnapping therefore, become a concern for Governments, International organizations, academics, and local communities worldwide, requiring coordinated efforts to prevent and respond to these incidents (Enobakhare & Oleabhiele, 2022).

In Nigeria, Olusegun and Adedibu (2021) attest that the socio-economic life that kicked up appreciatively during the return of Nigeria government to civilian administration in 1999 by General Abdusalami that brought hope and high expectations of socio-economic development and security stability to Nigerians became in shambles at the end of 1999 when General Obasanjo took over the government. During the period, the social and economic life of Nigerians began threatened by the rising of criminal activities of kidnapping in the southern Nigeria through oil bunkering and the introduction of insurgency and banditry in the Northern States.

The nature and extent of kidnapping activities in Nigeria at large and Benue Valley Region in particular become worrisome. The nature of kidnapping in the Benue Valley Region in particular and Nigeria at large is largely economically driven, carried out by organized bandit gangs, and it cripples agriculture, education, investment and social cohesion. The zone's poverty, unemployment, and weak governance create a cycle where insecurity reduces development, which in turn fuels more crime (Enobakhare, & Oleabhiale, 2022). Nigeria has been ranked among the kidnapping hotspots of the world. Recent Nigeria Security Tracker(NST)(2025) and related security-monitoring reports covering the period from July 2024 to June, 2025 reveal a persistent rise in kidnapping incidents across Nigeria, particularly in the North-West and North- Central

regions, with thousands of victims abducted and billions of naira paid as ransom. While the Strategic Business Management (SBM) Intelligence Report (2025) recorded 4,722 kidnappings, 997 incidents and #2.57 billion ransom payments. The Cable Report (2025) reveals 4,722 kidnappings, #2.57 billion ransom in one year. The Nextier Advisory Report (2025) reveals that 4,654 were killed; 3,141 were kidnapped in Nigeria. Beacon Security & Intelligence Ltd Report (2025) reveals that over 4,680 people were victims of abduction and kidnapping in Nigeria. Some of the most notorious incidents from 2022 to 2025 include the terror attacks on the Abuja-Kaduna train that led to abduction of over 60 passengers. The abduction of congregants at the St. Francis Catholic church in Ondo State in June, 2022 and the raid of the Medium Security Custodial facility in Kuje, Abuja in July, 2022 that led to several prisoners to escape (Babajide, 2023). Babajide (2023) on TVC Hangout programme reports that over 571 people were abducted in Nigeria.

Benue Valley Region is not just a hotspot it is a high-potential target for kidnappers due to a perfect mix of geographic, security, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Ker (2023) maintains that with the lingering security challenges especially kidnapping and the ability of the security apparatus of the government to guarantee Safety and security on highways and remote areas, Benue Valley as a region has drifted to severe security threat. The Renters Daily Briefing Newsletter, Nov. 21, 2025 reports that Gunmen kidnapped students from St. Mary's Catholic school in Niger State with over 200 students and teachers were abducted. Gunmen also attacked a church in Kwara State killed two people and kidnapped the pastor and some worshippers. The Renters (2025) further reports that, 25 school girls were kidnapped from a boarding Government Secondary school Kankara in Katsina State where two girls managed to escape.

There are several structural factors that heighten the risk of kidnapping with its implication on socio-economic development in Nigeria. Okoli and Agada (2020) observed that the major factors are being porous borders and weak surveillance in Nigeria open frontiers that allow armed groups to move freely into the country especially from the neighboring countries where similar attacks are frequent. This has led to a challenge of under-resourced security forces like the police and military units who are often overstretched, under equipped and slow to respond leaving communities exposed for hours or days during attacks. Therefore Ewetan and Urhie (2020) maintain that communities become vulnerable to these attacks that lead to community displacement and trauma. Due to these repeated attacks thousands of people are forced to flee disrupting agriculture, education, and local economies of the country. Essien and Ben (2013) observed that kidnapping can have destabilizing implications on the socio-economic development of the people.

It may cause disruption of social peace and economic sabotage. When an entrepreneur is kidnapped, it can lead to the closure of his business, disengaging his labor force and creating more unemployment among the youths. In the same vein, when the bread winner of a family is kidnapped his dependents usually go through unexpected social and economic devastation. Commenting, Chukuigwe and Albert (2019) assert that kidnapping has opened up avenues for dangerous socio-political degradation. This no doubt has implications for the socio-economic and political development. Therefore, there is no doubt that kidnapping has devastating implications on human capital development of any country. Incidents of kidnapping in the country has led to many experienced brain drain as skilled individuals may relocate to safer areas leading to a loss of human capital (Onwuatiegwu, 2020). Usu (2024) in the same vein observes that kidnapping disrupts commercial activities, causes rural-urban migration, trigger extortion in markets, and lead to abandonment of farming. Yusufu, Idrees and Mamman (2023) further maintained that, kidnapping leads to loss of lives of some victims, financial indebtedness and loss through payment of ransom, forceful closure of schools, businesses, and restrictions in farming activities among others are the major socio-economic implications of kidnapping in Nigeria. Kwanga, Iormanger, Udoo and Shabu (2022) further observed that kidnapping leads to a sharp drop in household income, force small businesses and social gatherings to shutdown, reduces agricultural out- put, and disrupts marketing and trading activities. It also increased out-migration, loss of property through ransom payments, and a general decline in health-service utilization. Frank (2021) further emphasized that in a society where the incidence of kidnapping is high, fear usually limits people's lives and actions. Such victims always move with caution as they do not know who might be the next target; while the rich people surround themselves with security guards because of their fear of getting kidnapped. As such Onov (2024) observes that insecurity especially kidnapping significantly lowers household living standards with political grievances, unemployment, and weak governance as underlying drivers.

Origins and Impact of Kidnapping in North Central Nigeria

In the North central which is known to be Benue Valley region in particular, violence and criminality which began in the form of armed robbery has graduated fully into kidnapping, arms trafficking, human trafficking, terrorism and militancy, thereby undermining the region's security. Ker (2023) maintains that, with the lingering security challenges especially kidnapping and the ability of the security apparatus of the government to guarantee safety and security on highways and remote areas, Benue Valley as a region has been drifted to severe security threat. The

Renters Daily Briefing Newsletter Nov. 21, 2025 reports that gunmen kidnapped students from St. Mary's catholic school in Niger State with over 200 students and teachers were abducted. Gunmen also attacked a church in Kwara State killing two people and kidnapping the pastor and some worshippers. In Katsina State, 25 school girls were kidnapped from boarding Government secondary school, Kankara where two girls were managed to escape. Gunmen also kidnapped 11 passengers and a driver from a Benue Link Transport Company bus but were later rescued. A tax collector and 17 others were arrested for kidnapping two traders in Buruku LGA of Benue State. Three women were arrested for kidnapping and trafficking six children from Plateau State to Anambra State but the children were rescued and placed under protective care. These incidents highlight the ongoing security challenges particularly kidnapping, in the Benue Valley region. The Crime Report (2025) reveal that a surge in abductions of at least 47 people were kidnapped between Nov. and Dec. 2025 with ransom payments exceeding one hundred million naira. The region porous borders' weak security presence and limited coordination among agencies make it easy for criminal groups to operate with little risk of interception. Farmers, traders, and even Clergy have been targeted and many victims are killed even after ransom is paid.

Kidnapping has become one of the most serious security challenges affecting the socio-economic development of the Benue Valley Region in Nigeria. The increasing rate of abductions, armed violence, and criminal attacks has generated fear, displacement, and instability within communities, thereby disrupting economic and social activities. According to Akagu, Osisiogu, & Usuman (2024) maintain that kidnapping negatively affects agricultural production, commercial activities, education, transportation, and investment opportunities in many parts of Nigeria, especially in agrarian communities such as States from Benue Valley Region. In the same vein, Daniel, & Kelvin (2026) observe that the Benue Valley Region, known as one of Nigeria's major agricultural zones, has experienced repeated incidents of insecurity, including kidnapping, banditry, and farmer-related conflicts. Commenting on the implications of kidnapping, Audu, Gana, & Aliyu (2023) maintain that the security threats have reduced access to farmlands, discouraged rural development, weakened local businesses, and increased poverty and, unemployment among residents. Research on insecurity in Benue Valley Region indicates that criminal activities, such as, kidnapping have serious implications for public safety, economic productivity, and community stability (Isaac, Uzodinma & Mbah, 2022). Kidnapping as a national economic crime drains families' savings, hampers business confidence, and erodes social trust. Kidnapping undermines livelihoods, agriculture, trade, and overall development of a nation (Okoli

and Agada, 2020). It is against this backdrop of hotspots activities of kidnapping in the Benue Valley region that the study seeks to assess the extent to which kidnapping affects economic activities, social wellbeing, and sustainable development in Benue Valley region, Nigeria with a view to improving practical recommendations for improving security and development outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts an integrated framework of Relative Deprivation Theory and Human Security Theory to explain and assess the implications of kidnapping in the Benue Valley Region. Relative Deprivation Theory advanced by Ted Gurr in 1970, argues that individuals and groups resort to violent behaviours when they perceive a disparity between their expectations and actual socio-economic conditions. In the context of Benue Valley Region, widespread poverty, unemployment, and marginalization, create such deprivation, providing a rational basis for the emergence of kidnapping and banditry as social and economic survival strategies (Enobakhare & Oleabhiele, 2022). While Human Security Theory introduced by the UNDP in 1994, extends this analysis by focusing on the consequences of insecurity on people's lives. It reframes development to include freedom from fear and freedom from want across economic, food, health, educational, personal, and environmental security dimensions. Thus, while Relative Deprivation Theory explains the causal drivers of kidnapping, Human Security Theory provides the analytical lens to assess its disruptive effects on agriculture, education, trade, and household welfare in the Benue Valley Region (Audu, Gana, & Aliyu, 2023; Daniel, & Kelvin, 2026). Together, the two theories capture the vicious cycle in which deprivation fuels insecurity and insecurity deepens underdevelopment in the Benue Valley Region, Nigeria.

Research Methodology

The study area is Benue Valley Region. The Benue valley region in Nigeria is a significant geographical and cultural area that spans across several states, including Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Kebbi, Niger, Kwara, and Kogi States. The region is named after the Benue River, which flows through it and is a major tributary of the Niger River. Geographically, the Benue valley is located in the central part of Nigeria, covering an area of approximately 100,000 square kilometers. The region has a tropical climate with two distinct seasons namely, wet and dry seasons. The vegetation is mostly Savannah grassland with some forest areas along the river valleys. The population and culture of Benue valley is home to diverse ethnic groups, including Tiv, Bassa, Idoma, Igala, Birom, Gwari. The region has a population of over 20 million people, with a mix of Christians, muslims, and

traditional worshippers. The Tiv people are the largest ethnic group in the region, known for their farming and trading traditions. The Benue valley region is a significant cultural and economic hub in Nigeria with a rich history and diverse population. The Benue valley is often referred to as the “food Basket” of Nigeria due to its rich agricultural production. The region produces crops such as yams, maize, rice, and soya-beans. The region is also rich in natural resources, including coal, limestone, and granite. In terms of infrastructure, the Benue valley has a network of roads, including the major highway that connects the region to other parts of Nigeria. The region has several airports, including the Makurdi International Airport in Benue State. The Benue River is an important transportation route, with several ports and jetties along its course. In terms of tourism, the Benue valley has several tourist attractions, including the Washa falls, the Mambilla plateau, and the Benue River. The region is also home to several cultural festivals, including the Tiv Traditional festival, the Birom cultural festival, the Igbela cultural festival, and the Idoma cultural festival. The security challenges in the valley are enormous. The Benue valley has faced security challenges including kidnapping, armed robbery, and conflicts between farmers and herders. The region has also been affected by Boko Haram, insurgency which has spread from neighboring States. The region faces several challenges including security concerns, and infrastructure deficits, which need to be addressed to unlock its full potential. With these challenges therefore, the study is set to assess the implications of kidnapping on the socio-economic development of Benue Valley region, Nigeria.

The population of this study consists of both adult male and female who were victims of kidnapping, family members, business owners, farmers, security personnel, community leaders, and government officials aimed at studying the implications of kidnapping on the socio-economic development in Benue Valley, Nigeria. A total of 400 respondents were interviewed. The structured interviews were the main instrument for quantitative data collection for the study. The structural interviews were administered to enable the full participation of respondents with both formal and informal educational background. The benefit of this method was that it helped to generate quantitative data that was subjected to statistical analysis and opened to generalization of findings.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

A	Sex	Frequency (400)	Percentage (100)
	Male	294	73.5
	Female	106	26.5
B	Age	Frequency (400)	Percentage (100)
	18yrs – 35 yrs	257	64.25
	36yrs – 55 yrs	97	24.25
	56 yrs and above	46	11.5
C	Occupation	Frequency (400)	Percentage (100)
	Trader/business Owner	152	38.0
	Student	145	36.25
	Farmer	79	19.75
	Civil Servant	24	6.0
	Educational Level	Frequency (400)	Percentage (100)
	Tertiary Education	154	38.5
	Secondary education	127	31.75
	Primary education	101	25.25
	Non-formal education	18	4.5
	TOTAL	400	100%

Source: Research survey, 2025

The above Table result showed that 294 respondents representing 73.5% of the sample population were female whereas 106 respondents representing 26.5% were male. In terms of age, the result revealed that 257 respondents representing 64.25% were from the ages of 18 years-35 years, 97 respondents representing 24.25% were from the ages of 36 years-55 years, whereas 46 respondents representing 11.5% were from the ages of 56 years and above. The data revealed that 152 respondents representing 38.00% were Traders/business owners, 145 respondents representing 36.25% were students, 79 respondents representing 19.75% were farmers whereas 24 respondents representing 6.00% were civil servants. In terms of educational attainment, 154 respondents representing 38.5% were holders of tertiary education certificate, 127 respondents representing 31.75% were holders of

secondary education certificate, 101 respondents representing 25.25% were holders of primary education certificate whereas 18 respondents representing 4.5% were non-literate.

Table 2: Respondents to where kidnapping mostly occurs

Variable	Frequency (400)	Percentage (%)
Highways	85	21.25
School/church	73	18.25
Road	72	18.0
Market	70	17.5
Farm	62	15.5
Home	38	9.5
Total	400	100

Source: Research Survey, 2025

The Table 2 on respondents to where kidnapping is mostly occurs showed that 85 respondents representing 21.25% indicated high ways, 73 respondents representing 18.25% indicated school/church, 72 respondents representing 18.0% indicated farm, 70 respondents representing 17.5% indicated road, 62 respondents representing 15.5% indicated market whereas 38 respondents representing 9.5% indicated home.

The above findings indicate that kidnapping mostly occur on high ways, school/church, farm, road, market as well as home. This is in agreement with the findings of Ker (2023) who attests that kidnapping occurs in remote or upcoming areas where there exist ineffective security services or none.

Table 3: Respondents on economic implications

Variable	Frequency (400)	Percentage (%)
Business losses	85	21.25
Reduced farming activities	74	18.5
Payment of ransom	71	17.75
Loss of employment	70	17.5
Increased security expenses	61	15.25
Migration/relocation	39	9.75
Total	400	100

Source: Research Survey, 2025

The Table 3 above on economic implications of kidnapping showed that, 85 respondents representing 21.25% indicated business losses, 74 respondents representing 18.5% indicated reduced farming activities, 71 respondents representing 17.75% indicated payment of ransom, 70 respondents representing 17.5% indicated loss of employment, 61 respondents representing 15.25% indicated insecurity expenses while 39 respondents representing 9.75% indicated migration/relocation.

The above findings indicate that kidnapping in the Benue valley region, Nigeria has severe negative implications on the economic development of the region. This is in agreement with the findings of Kwanga, Iormanger, Udoo & Shabu (2022) who maintained that, kidnapping leads to a sharp drop in household income, force small businesses and social gatherings to shutdown, reduces agricultural out-put, and disrupts marketing and trading activities. The findings further note increased out-migration, loss of property through ransom payments, and a general decline in health service utilization. The findings are also in agreement with the findings of Usu, et al (2024) who maintained that banditry and kidnapping disrupt commercial activities, cause rural-urban migration, trigger extortion in markets, and lead to abandonment of farming.

Table 4: Respondents on social implications

Variable	Frequency (400)	Percentage (%)
Increased fear and restricted movement	154	38.5
Reduced church/market attendance	127	31.75
Affected social gatherings (e.g. School, hospital, festival)	101	25.25
People migrated/relocated	18	4.5
Total	400	100

Source: Research Survey, 2025

The Table 4 above on social implications of kidnapping showed that 154 respondents representing 38.5% indicated increased fear and restricted movement, 127 respondents representing 31.75% indicated reduced church/market attendance, 101 respondents representing 25.25% indicated affected social gathering(school/hospital/festival), whereas 18 respondents representing 4.5% indicated people migration/relocation. The above findings indicate that kidnapping in the Benue valley region in Nigeria has negative implications on the social development of the region. This is in agreement with the findings of Kwanga, Iormanger, Udoo and Shabu (2022) that kidnapping leads to sharp drop in household income, force small businesses and social gatherings to shutdown, reduces agricultural output, and disrupts marketing and trading activities. The study also notes increased out-migration, loss of property through ransom payments, and a general decline in health-service utilization.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concluded that kidnapping has had significant negative implications on the socio-economic development of Benue valley region in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends stronger collaborative efforts from government agencies, security forces deployment, and community-based

intelligence to take immediate steps like strengthening border patrol, improving interagency intelligence sharing are critical to reducing this risk of kidnapping and enhanced socio-economic development of the region. Finally, the study recommends imposition of stiffer penalties for those found in the act of kidnapping.

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