SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF KIDNAPPING ON THE PEOPLE OF KOTON KARFE, AJAOKUTA AND OFU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS, 1920-2024

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Abstract

This study investigates the socio-economic implications of kidnapping in selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kogi State, focusing on Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas. Kidnaping have been endemic in Kogi land and these have underdeveloped the area. In order to check the menace of the crises, the paper tried to unravel the implications of the phenomena and as well solutions to their causes so that the Kogi State can grow and develop. Information for the study were gotten through primary sources, these include oral interviews, questionnaires, observation; and secondary data textbooks, government documents and articles. The study discovered that the economic, social, physical and political factors are the major implications of kidnapping in on Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas in Kogi State. Other implication of kidnapping in the areas are lack of investment, insfsurcture, distrust and slow development. The study also highlights the role of community mistrust in security agencies and the influence of organised crime networks in sustaining kidnapping syndicates. To stem the tide of the conflicts, the paper recommended that: First, it recommends the establishment of robust community policing initiatives to foster local intelligence gathering and enhance trust between security forces and residents. Second, it emphasises the urgent need for job creation programs, vocational training, and youth empowerment schemes to provide alternative livelihoods and deter participation in criminal activities. Third, it calls for improved security measures, including modern surveillance technology, rapid response units, and better-equipped law enforcement agencies. Lastly, the study advocates for stronger synergy among security agencies through joint task forces and intelligence-sharing platforms to dismantle kidnapping networks effectively.

Introduction

Kidnapping has become one of the most pressing security challenges in Nigeria, particularly in Kogi State, where several local government areas have been affected by this crime. Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu are among the worst-hit areas, experiencing frequent

cases of abduction that have disrupted economic activities, social interactions, and general security.[1] The rise in kidnapping incidents in these regions has been linked to factors such as unemployment, porous security networks, Personal vendetta, political reasons and the proliferation of arms. This chapter examines the implications of kidnapping in these three local government areas, focusing on its economic, political, social and psychological effects. It explored how the fear of abduction has altered daily life, discouraged investment, and strained community relationships.

A lot of factors have contributed to the rise in the rate of kidnapping in the world. Socio-economic disparities and inequalities has created a fertile ground for criminal enterprises.[2] Political instability and weak governance, also provide a conducive environment for kidnapping operations. Organised crime networks that engage in kidnapping for financial gain have taken kidnapping as a source of livelihood. There are also ideological motivations, such as terrorism or political extremism, which exploit kidnapping as a means to further their objectives.[3] Geographical factors, such as border regions and areas with limited government presence, which offer opportunities for kidnappers to operate with relative impunity have been identified as major sources of kidnapping in the world.[4]

Available literature such as that of Ajah, Nwokeoma and Okpan has shown that kidnapping has profound socio-economic consequences such as psychological trauma and physical harm inflicted on victims and their families.[5] Erosion of public trust in governmental institutions and the rule of law are also some of the consequences attached to kidnapping. Disruption of economic activities, as businesses and investors face increased risks and uncertainty and the deterioration of social fabric with communities living in fear and mistrust becomes the order of the day in affected areas. This gives rise to potential political instability and social unrest arising from the failure to address kidnapping effectively.[6]

In Nigeria, kidnapping has become a pervasive criminal activity affecting all segments of society and undermining the foundations of peace and security. The country has experienced a surge in kidnappings, ranging from high-profile cases targeting prominent individuals to incidents targeting ordinary citizens, schoolchildren, and even security personnel.[7] Kidnapping has become one of Nigeria's most persistent and evolving security threats, transforming from a localized issue in the Niger Delta to a nationwide crisis that affects citizens across all regions.[8] Between 1999 and 2023, the nature of kidnappings changed significantly, with an increase in both the frequency and severity of abductions.[9]

What began as a tactic used by militant groups in the oil-rich Niger Delta to demand ransom and political concessions has since expanded into a widespread criminal enterprise, affecting politicians, schoolchildren, religious leaders, business people, and ordinary citizens. By the late 2010s, the epicenter of kidnapping shifted towards the North, particularly in the North-West and North-Central regions, where banditry and terrorism contributed to the worsening security crisis.[10] Armed groups operating in states like Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, and Niger increasingly resorted to mass abductions for ransom, targeting villagers, travelers, and schoolchildren. The kidnapping of over 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, by Boko Haram in 2014 was a turning point, drawing international attention to Nigeria's security vulnerabilities.[11]This pattern continued with the abduction of over 300 schoolboys in Kankara, Katsina State, in 2020, and subsequent

attacks on schools in Niger, Kebbi, and Zamfara states.[12]

Between 2019 and 2023, Nigeria recorded some of its worst kidnapping statistics, accounting for over half of all abductions in West Africa.[13] The situation was particularly dire in the North-West, which saw the highest number of incidents, followed closely by the North-Central and North-East.[14] The Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, also became a hotspot, witnessing a 20% increase in kidnapping cases.[15] By 2023, Nigeria recorded 2,149 reported kidnapping incidents, with kidnappers demanding over 5 billion naira in ransom between July 2022 and June 2023.[16] The actual amount paid by victims' families was lower, estimated at around $387,179, but the financial and psychological toll on affected communities was devastating.[17]

Economic Activitiesof the People of Ajaokuta, Koton Karfe and Ofu Local Government Areas

Ajaokuta's geographical location along key road networks facilitates transportation and logistics services also. The movement of goods and services between Ajaokuta and other regions of Nigeria plays a crucial role in the local economy, enabling trade and commerce. This has gainfully employed diverse youths and able bodied men. The presence of mineral resources in the area, particularly iron ore, has potential for mining activities. While the Ajaokuta Steel Complex aims to utilize these resources, artisanal mining and quarrying for building materials are also present.

The economic activities of these local governments are diverse and are influenced by the climate and geographical location. The people of Ajaokuta Local Government Area specifically are diverse and significantly influenced by the region's geographical location, natural resources, and industrial development. Ajaokuta is particularly notable for its potential in industry due to the presence of the Ajaokuta Steel Complex, but its economy also relies on agriculture, commerce, and trade. One prominent economic activity in Ajaokuta is centered on the Ajaokuta Steel Complex, which is one of Nigeria's largest industrial projects.

Another important economic activity in Ajaokuta is agriculture. A component of agriculture is crop farming. Agriculture is a vital component of the local economy. The fertile land in Ajaokuta supports the cultivation of various crops, including cassava, yams, maize, rice, and vegetables.[18] Farmers engage in subsistence farming and commercial agriculture, producing food for local consumption and for sale in nearby markets. Livestock rearing is a common practice among the people of Ajaokuta. Cattle, goats, sheep, and poultry are raised for meat, milk, and eggs, contributing to the local food supply and providing additional income for households.[19]

The growth of small-scale businesses, including retail shops, food stalls, and service providers, has emerged in response to the needs of the local population. These businesses contribute to the local economy by providing goods and services and generating employment.The people of Ajaokuta also engage in various artisanal activities, including woodworking, weaving, and pottery.[29] These crafts are not only a source of income but also play a significant role in preserving cultural heritage and traditions. Although Ajaokuta is primarily landlocked, the proximity to the Niger River provides opportunities for fishing. Local fishermen engage in small-scale fishing activities, which contribute to food security and income for families.[20]

Just like Ajaokuta local government area, the economic activities of the people of Koton Karfe Local Government Area are diverse and deeply intertwined with the region's geographical features, natural resources, and cultural practices. The local economy primarily revolves around agriculture, trade, and small-scale industries, reflecting the needs and resources of the community. Agriculture is the backbone of the economy in Koton Karfe, with most households engaged in various farming activities.[21]The fertile land in Koton Karfe supports the cultivation of staple crops such as cassava, maize, yams, rice, and millet.[22] Farmers often practice subsistence agriculture, producing food primarily for their families, while surplus is sold in local markets. Many farmers also grow vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, and okra, which are in high demand in local and regional markets. These crops provide essential nutrients for families and contribute to the local economy.[23] The people of Koton Karfe engage in the rearing of livestock, including goats, sheep, cattle, and poultry. Livestock serves as an important source of protein, income, and cultural significance within the community. Koton Karfe's proximity to the Niger River provides opportunities for fishing.[24]

Finally, the economic activities of the people of Ofu Local Government Area are diverse, reflecting the region's agricultural potential, natural resources, and local craftsmanship. Ofu is primarily an agrarian community, with a significant portion of the population engaged in farming and related activities. Agriculture is the backbone of Ofu's economy, with most households involved in various farming practices. The fertile soil in Ofu supports the cultivation of a variety of crops, including cassava (abacha), yams (uchu), maize (akpa) and vegetables (emi).[25] Farmers often practice both subsistence and commercial agriculture, producing food for household consumption as well as surplus for sale in local markets. In addition to staple crops, many farmers grow vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, and okra. These vegetables are not only important for local diets but also provide income when sold in regional markets.Livestock (ewun-ore) farming is also common in Ofu, with residents raising goats, sheep, and poultry. Livestock provides a source of protein, serves as a form of wealth, and plays a significant role in cultural practices. Some households are considered rich due to the number of livestock they have. They are considered rich because, they never get stranded. They save their money or wealth in form of these animals so that when a need arises, they sell off some and raise funds hence rearing livestock was and is still considered as a form of investment in OFU Local government areas.[26]

Religious Activities of the People Ajaokuta, Koton Karfe and Ofu Local Government Areas

The religious landscape of Ajaokuta Local Government Area is characterised by a rich tapestry of beliefs and practices, reflecting the diverse cultural heritage of its inhabitants. The area is home to various religious groups, with the predominant religions being Christianity and Islam. Christianity is one of the most widely practiced religion in Ajaokuta, with numerous denominations represented in the community.[47] Regular church services are held in various denominations, including Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal, and Evangelical churches. These services typically include worship, prayers, singing, and sermons, fostering a sense of community among congregants. Major Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter are widely celebrated. These occasions involve special church services, community gatherings, and festive activities, reinforcing the religious and social bonds among the congregation.[27]

Islam also has a significant presence in Ajaokuta, with a number of mosques and Islamic organizations catering to the Muslim population.[28] Alongside Christianity and Islam, traditional African religions still play a role in the spiritual life of some community members. Some individuals and families may practice ancestral worship, honoring their ancestors and seeking guidance through rituals and offerings which they offer to the Almighty God (Ohomorihi) through smaller gods called "ori". The people of Ajaokuta are Ebiraland people and they generally begins their prayers (izu) by offering praises to the Almighty God, after which they acknowledge the earth called "ehe" and finally the gods and goddesses (ori) before calling on the name of their ancestors.[29]

The people of Koton Karfe also have three major religions. The major religions in Koto Karfe is Islamic Religion while only a few members of the local government practices Christianity.[30] African traditional religious practices are also found among the people of Koton Karfe. While the Muslims worship Allah who is considered the supreme being, the Christians believe in Jehovah who is served through Jesus Christ.[31]

The Ofu people just like the in Ajaokuta and Koton Karfe practices three religions also. The local government has a considerable number of Christians, Muslims and the African Traditional Religion worshipers. Churches such as the United Evangelical Church (formally Quaibo), the Christian Mission in many Lands (CMML), Roman Catholic Church and other petecoastal churches are commonly found in the towns and villages of OFU Local government area.[32] Likewise, numerous mosques are also in the local government indicating that these religions are widely practiced. Those who believe in African Traditional Religion also exists in their numbers within the local government area. These sect believe in the Almighty God (ojochamachala) but they worship him through smaller gods such as" aligenu" (water goddess)," ojo erane"(God of the land), among others.[33]

Socio-Cultural Activities of the People of Ajaokuta, Koton Karfe and Ofu Local Government Areas

The people of Ajaokuta, a region in Kogi State, Nigeria, belong primarily to the Ebira ethnic group and have a rich socio-cultural heritage. Although Ajaokuta is often known for its steel industry project, the local culture is deeply rooted in traditional practices, festivals, crafts, music, and communal values. Prominent among these festival is the eku festival (masquerade festival). This is a significant traditional festival for the Ebira people in Ajaokuta. The Echane festival, often celebrated and marked by traditional dances, masquerades, and rituals to honor ancestors and celebrate agricultural harvests.[34]It is also a time for families and communities to gather, pay respects to the spirits, and strengthen social bonds.

Masquerades play a significant role in Ajaokuta's cultural life, representing ancestral spirits and serving as protectors of the community. Known locally as "eku", masquerades are a unique feature of the Ebira culture, and each masquerade has a distinctive role, story, and symbolism. The masquerades appear during festivals, weddings, and other important occasions to entertain, pass messages, and sometimes settle disputes.[35] They also reinforce cultural values and maintain social order, as they often carry a moral or spiritual message.

While many in Ajaokuta practice Islam or Christianity today, traditional beliefs remain significant. The traditional Ebira religion involves the worship of ancestral spirits, deities, and nature (such as the worship of rivers, the

African python among others).[36] Religious rites are often performed to seek protection, prosperity, and good health. Many communities maintain shrines where traditional priests perform rituals. These shrines serve as spiritual centers for traditional religious practices and play a role in communal decision-making, conflict resolution, and cultural preservation.[37]

The people of Koton Karfe, located in Kogi State, Nigeria, belong to the Egbira koto ethnic groups.Koton Karfe has a vibrant socio-cultural life shaped by their ethnic background. The cultural practices, traditional festivals, music, dance, and community values form an essential part of life in Koton Karfe. Festivals such as the fishing festivals and the "woriwo" (yam festival) are the most commonly celebrated festivals in Koton Karfe.[38]During these festivals, they prepare traditional meals such as pounded yam and fresh fish soup. In addition, they make local drinks from millet or guinea corn called "Achicha".[39] Like many other communities in Kogi State, Koton Karfe people celebrate the New Yam Festival, marking the end of the farming season and the beginning of the harvest period. The Yam Festival is important agriculturally and socially, as it strengthens community ties. During this time, people offer yams to the gods as a gesture of thanksgiving before eating the new harvest, followed by traditional feasts, dancing, and communal gatherings.

Masquerades are an essential feature in Koton Karfe, especially during traditional festivals and significant occasions. Each masquerade represents ancestral spirits and carries unique cultural meanings. The masquerades are believed to embody spiritual forces and are often called upon to bless the community or drive away evil spirits. Masquerades perform dances, engage in processions, and sometimes interact with the audience, creating a thrilling display of color, movement, and music. They serve to enforce societal norms, teach moral lessons, and provide entertainment for the community. Some of the masquerades in Koton Karfe are "akuki", "ahuruma", "owuna", "adaka", eku-anukpo" among others.[40]

Marriage in Koton Karfe is also an important event involving various stages, including introduction, dowry payment, and a grand celebration. The bride's family is presented with gifts and a dowry as a symbol of respect and alliance between families. Traditional marriages often include music, dancing, and colorful attire representing the cultural heritage of the Egbira Koto ethnic groups. Many people in Koton Karfe still hold on to elements of traditional religion, worshipping deities, nature spirits, and ancestors. Rituals are conducted to honor these spiritual entities, seek blessings, or ask for protection from harm.

The Ofu people, who reside in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria, primarily belong to the Igala ethnic group.[41]Their socio-cultural life is rich with traditions, deeply rooted in their Igala heritage, and reflected in their festivals, dances, folklore, religious practices, communal governance, and agricultural lifestyle. Lots of festivals are celebrated such as the "ocho" (hunting festival).[42] Offerings are made at family shrines (Anukwu) to honor deceased family members, and ancestral spirits (ibegwu) are called upon during festivals and important events for blessings and guidance.[43]

Political Arrangements in the Local Governments

In Nigeria, local governments, including those in Kogi State such as Ajaokuta, Koton Karfe, and Ofu, operate under a political

arrangement defined by the Nigerian Constitution. Each local government area (LGA) is governed by a structured political system that includes both elected and appointed officials responsible for managing local affairs, providing services, and promoting development.[44] The head of each local government area is the Chairman, who is elected by the people. The Chairman is the chief executive officer of the LGA and is responsible for overseeing administration, implementing policies, and coordinating activities within the local government. The Chairman also represents the local government at the state level and liaises with other governmental bodies.[45]

The Vice Chairman assists the Chairman and steps in during the Chairman's absence. In some cases, the Vice Chairman may have specific responsibilities, such as overseeing certain departments or projects within the LGA.[46]Each local government is divided into wards, and each ward elects a Councilor to represent its interests. Councilors serve as members of the legislative arm of the local government, which is responsible for making by-laws, approving budgets, and representing the views of their constituents.[47]

In many LGAs, including Ajaokuta, Koton Karfe, and Ofu, traditional rulers play an important role in governance, though they are not part of the official local government structure. Traditional rulers, such as chiefs or clan heads, are custodians of culture and are respected figures who influence community decisions.[48] The local government often consults with traditional leaders on matters related to land, cultural events, and disputes. These leaders help maintain social order, mediate conflicts, and preserve customs. The collaboration between traditional and local government leaders ensures that decisions reflect the community's cultural and social values.

The political arrangement in the local governments of Kogi State, such as Ajaokuta, Koton Karfe, and Ofu, is structured to ensure governance at the grassroots level. Through elected leaders, legislative and executive arms, and various departments, LGAs manage local affairs, deliver essential services, and promote development. Despite challenges, the system strives to improve community welfare and respond to the unique needs of each LGA's population. Traditional leaders, community engagement, and oversight mechanisms further strengthen governance, contributing to a balanced approach that respects cultural heritage while fostering progress.

Economic Implications

Kidnapping has had severe economic repercussions in Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas of Kogi State. The persistent threat of abduction has negatively impacted business activities, discouraged investment, strained household incomes, and contributed to the overall decline of economic growth in these regions.[49] The economic implications of kidnapping in these LGAs can be analysed through diverse dimensions. Firstly, Insecurity caused by kidnapping has led to the closure of many businesses, particularly those that operate in high-risk areas such as highways, rural markets, and isolated settlements.[50] Traders and business owners, fearing for their safety, often reduce their operating hours or relocate to safer regions, leading to a decline in commercial activities. In Ajaokuta, for example, the fear of kidnapping has discouraged workers from commuting freely, affecting both the formal and informal sectors.[51] Similarly, in Ofu local markets that once thrived with agricultural and commercial exchanges have experienced a drop in patronage, as people avoid going to the farm except they go in groups due to security concerns.[52]

The economic implications of kidnapping in Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Dekina are far-reaching, affecting multiple sectors and worsening the overall economic condition of the region. The disruption of business activities, decline in agricultural production, loss of investment, and financial burdens on families have all contributed to economic stagnation. Without effective security measures and government interventions, these Local Government Areas will continue to face economic hardships, making development efforts more challenging. Addressing these economic issues requires a holistic approach that includes enhanced security, community engagement, and economic empowerment programs to mitigate the effects of kidnapping on the local economy.

Social Implications

Kidnapping has far-reaching social consequences in Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas of Kogi State. Beyond the economic effects, the crime has disrupted communal life, instilled fear among residents, and weakened social structures. The persistent insecurity has affected education, healthcare, cultural practices, and overall societal cohesion. One of the most profound social impacts of kidnapping is the erosion of trust within communities.[53]In many cases, kidnappers operate with the assistance of local informants, leading to suspicion and fear among residents. People become wary of their neighbors, making it difficult to build strong community relationships.

In villages and towns across Ajaokuta and Ofu, social gatherings and communal activities have declined as people fear large gatherings may attract criminals. This breakdown of social cohesion affects the collective ability of communities to mobilize for security and development initiatives. The education sector has also been severely affected by kidnapping, particularly in rural areas where schools are vulnerable to attacks. Fear of abduction has led to reduced school attendance, especially among female students.[54]The social implications of kidnapping in Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas are profound and far-reaching. The erosion of community trust, psychological trauma, disruption of education, and decline in religious and cultural practices have all contributed to a weakened social structure. Additionally, migration, family disintegration, and the rise in crime have further destabilised these Local Government Areas.

Political Implications

Kidnapping has also had significant political ramifications in Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas, affecting governance, political participation, and public trust in leadership. The increasing rate of abductions has exposed weaknesses in security policies, strained government resources, and influenced political dynamics in Kogi State.[55]The political implications of kidnapping in these Local Government Areas can be examined through several dimensions. One of the most immediate political effects of kidnapping is the erosion of public confidence in government institutions.[56] Many residents believe that the government has failed in its primary responsibility of providing security, leading to disillusionment and distrust in political leaders. In Koton Karfe, where kidnappings frequently occur along major roads, citizens have criticized local and state authorities for not implementing effective security measures.[56]Similarly, in Ajaokuta and Ofu, persistent cases of abduction have fueled the perception that political leaders prioritize their own safety and interests over those of the people.[57]

The political implications of kidnapping in Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas are profound and far-reaching. From weakening government authority and public trust to affecting elections, diverting resources, and increasing political instability, the crime has deeply influenced governance and security policies. The rise of non-state security actors, the strengthening of criminal networks, and the erosion of political credibility further complicate the challenge.

Physical Implications

Kidnapping has profound physical implications that affect the overall development, infrastructure, and spatial organisation of Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas. The fear of abduction has altered settlement patterns, led to the destruction of properties, and impacted the physical environment in several ways. These physical consequences contribute to the broader socio-economic and political instability in the region. Insecurity caused by frequent kidnappings has forced many rural dwellers to abandon their homes, leading to the depopulation of villages and small settlements.

In Ofu Local Government Area, for instance, some farming communities have relocated to urban centers for safety, leaving farmlands and houses abandoned.Kidnapping activities often involve violent encounters that result in damage to public infrastructure. Roads, bridges, schools, and health centers in remote areas have been abandoned or destroyed due to persistent attacks.[58]

The activities of kidnappers, particularly those operating from forests, have led to environmental degradation. In many cases, forests and ungoverned spaces serve as hideouts for criminals, making them unsafe for legitimate economic activities such as farming and logging. In Koton Karfe and Ofu, security operations targeting kidnappers have resulted in deforestation and displacement of wildlife. The indiscriminate use of bush burning by both criminals and security forces has also contributed to environmental damage, affecting soil fertility and biodiversity.[59]

The physical implications of kidnapping in Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas have disrupted settlement patterns, destroyed infrastructure, and hampered economic activities. The depopulation of rural areas, environmental degradation, and increased security measures have altered the physical landscape, making development efforts more challenging.

Conclusion

The implications of kidnapping in Koton Karfe, Ajaokuta, and Ofu Local Government Areas are extensive, affecting the economic, social, political, and physical landscapes of these regions. The crime has disrupted local economies by discouraging investment, reducing agricultural productivity, and increasing the cost of doing business. Socially, it has instilled fear among residents, weakened communal ties, and led to the displacement of families and communities. Politically, kidnapping has eroded public trust in governance, influenced election outcomes through voter intimidation, and forced the government to divert resources from development projects to security efforts. The rise of vigilante groups and non-state security actors further complicates the situation, increasing concerns about lawlessness and human rights violations. Physically, the crime has contributed to the abandonment of rural settlements, destruction of infrastructure, environmental degradation, and unplanned urban expansion. These challenges have weakened the structural

foundation of these Local Government Areas, making sustainable development more difficult.

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