

The Impact of Kidnapping for Ransom on Nigeria's Image

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Abstract

Kidnapping is a long-standing global phenomenon, which is not unique to any continent or country. However, it has taken on a new dimension in the 21st century with the development of kidnapping for ransom. Kidnapping for ransom is now a lucrative business in many nations of the world, and has grown particularly worrisome in Nigeria, due to the country's weak security system. It is in this regard that this article examines the impact of kidnapping for ransom on Nigeria's image. The study explores the evolution of kidnapping in Nigeria, causes of kidnapping, effects of kidnapping on victims and its impact on Nigeria's image. The study, which is qualitative in nature, discovers that Nigeria- a country that has long struggled with maintaining a positive image has allowed kidnapping to linger for too long. The paper posits that Nigeria has become insecure for both locals and foreigners and this has consequently affected foreign direct investment, tourism and migration. The paper thus argues that if kidnapping for ransom is not adequately tackled, it will hinder the growth of the economy arising from the consequence of hampered image of the country in the comity of nations. It therefore concludes that there is a need for the government to take proactive measures rather than reactive ones towards this menace.

Keywords: Kidnap; Ransom; Image; Insecurity; Nigeria.

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Introduction

Almost every day, the accounts of criminal activities keep flooding domestic and international news media. This ugly news of criminality sends shivers down to many people's spines, raising questions about the world's ability to maintain peace and make nations united (Odoma & Akor, 2019; Pires, Guerette & Shariati, 2016). One of these criminal activities is kidnapping. Kidnapping is a security challenge facing the world today, with Mexico leading (Brockett, Golden, Zapparoli & Lum, 2019; Tade, Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2020). Kidnapping takes various forms, depending on who is kidnapping and for what purpose. For instance, there is kidnapping for rituals, kidnapping for vengeance and kidnapping for ransom, kidnapping to influence decision-making process, kidnapping to recover a loss or gain advantage over a rival group, kidnapping for sexual exploitation, and kidnapping for political or ideological reason (Onuoha & Okolie-Osemene, 2019; UNODC, 2017).

Among the identified forms of kidnapping, the act of placing ransom on the kidnapped victims has become a lucrative business worldwide (Brockett, Golden, Zapparoli & Lum, 2019; Chinwokwu & Michael, 2019). For instance, Asia has the highest number of reported kidnappings for ransom, followed by Africa, Latin America, Middle East and Europe (NYA 24 report, 2017). Similarly, Constellis Report on global kidnapping for ransom in September and October, 2020, pointed out that the Americas experienced an increase of 85% in the number of foreign nationals kidnapped in the region with Haiti being a reference point, while kidnapping of foreign nationals in Africa more than doubled, recording its highest level so far in the period under study. Asia also saw an increase in the number of kidnapped foreign nationals while the Middle East experienced a decrease of 30% in the number of foreign kidnap victims (Constellis Report, 2020). Even though kidnapping for ransom is a global problem, it has become particularly alarming in some countries like Libya, Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Cambodia, Philippines, Mexico, United Arab Emirates, Ghana, Belarus, Iran and Benin (NYA24, 2017; Constellis, 2020).

Nigeria has become one of the world's most dangerous countries as a result of kidnapping (Oyewole, 2016). The proportion of global kidnappings in Sub-Saharan Africa was 37% in 2021, and Nigeria is among the five top

countries accounting for this high rate (Control Risks, 2022). Nigeria ranked 2nd in the top 10 countries for the kidnapping of foreign citizens between November 2019 and October 2020 (Constellis, 2020). Kidnappings for financial gain by various criminal groups, such as suspected armed bandits, herders, militants, pirates, and terrorist groups, among others, continue to be a severe security concern in the country. Successful career persons, including sport persons, journalists, top public servants are afraid of being kidnapped, or of their family members being kidnapped (Ani & Nweke, 2014). Kidnapping no longer affects only foreigners but also affects locals, both adult girls and males, the rich and the poor, the elderly, and children (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2020). A more recent trend is the issue of self-kidnap for ransom. It is a situation whereby a person arranges his/her kidnap or hides him/herself from families and friends to demand ransom.

Kidnapping for ransom has become a flourishing business venture, based on the perceived low risk and high profit (Tade, Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2020) such that the hallowed image of Nigeria and Nigerians have been dented (Odoma, 2019) and the implication of this is that it has reduced Nigeria's potentials to attract foreign direct investments (Ayuba, 2020). Hence, this study examines the impact of kidnapping for ransom on Nigeria's image with emphasis on tourism, foreign direct investment and migration. This study is done in seven sections. Following this introduction, the second section focuses on conceptualisation of key concepts and theoretical framework, while the third section looks into the evolution of kidnapping in Nigeria. The fourth and fifth sections highlight the causes of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria and effects of kidnapping on victims respectively. The sixth section examines the impact of kidnapping for ransom on Nigeria's image, while the last section concludes the work.

Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Framework

Kidnapping

The term 'kidnap' is a product of two separate English words: 'Kid' (meaning young or child) and 'nap' (meaning short sleep or snatch). During the 17th century, the term "Kidnapping" gained notoriety in England, referring to colonial farmers abducting children and subjecting them to slavery for agricultural labour (Kalaivani & Kannappan, 2018). This practice evolved

to include the abduction of kids of wealthy families for ransom (Tzanelli, 2006). Greenawalt (1989:92) defines kidnapping as the unlawful removal of someone and confining him or her in isolation, a situation of false imprisonment, to restrain the victim unlawfully, usually accomplished by threat of force that coerces him/her to stay or act as (s)he is directed. Similarly, kidnapping is defined as the act of seizing, removing, and keeping a person in custody by force or deception (Abraham, 2010). Kidnapping is a criminal conduct that includes seizure, detention, abduction, subjugation, forcefulness, threats, acts of terror, and servitude (Goldberg, 2000). Inyang and Ubong (2013) define it as the use of force to capture, take away and detain a person unlawfully against his/her will. These definitions see kidnapping as unlawful, a criminal act, forceful and violation of civil rights.

Kidnapping is a type of violent crime or organised crime that involves the illegal detention of someone against their will for a variety of criminal objectives (Odoma & Akor, 2019). Uzorma & Nwanegbo-Ben (2014) defined kidnapping as the act of grabbing, detaining, or conveying away a person by force or trickery, usually with a ransom demand. In a similar opinion, Zannoni (2003), noted that ‘in many instances kidnapping is a business involving a demand for ransom which may vary considerably, depending on the type of criminals involved and the victim’s personal status’ (Zannoni 2003:1; cited in Tzanelli, 2006). Okoli and Agada (2014:138) identified three components that are needed to establish the act of kidnapping; (i) Taking a person away forcefully (ii) Detaining a person illegally (iii) Extortion of the victim through demand for ransom. Pharaoh (2005 as cited in Akpan, 2010) categorised kidnapping into three: political kidnapping (to settle political scores or accomplish some political objectives), criminal kidnapping (to take someone hostage for a ransom) and pathological kidnapping (kidnapping by parents and kidnapping for sexual purposes).

Kidnapping for ransom is any unlawful act of luring, seizing, and/or transporting a victim— a person or group of persons— to an undisclosed location for detention against the victim’s wish and threatening such individual with harm in order that money can be extorted directly from the victim or from those associated with the victim like relatives, friends, employers, government, or any other third party as a condition for the release of the victim (Onuoha & Okolie-Osemene, 2019:235-236). The overriding purpose

of kidnapping for ransom is a payment for the release of victims and the enrichment of perpetrators (Vannini, Dettoto & McCannon, 2015:1). Kidnappers often ensure that victims possess kidnap value. This entails that it is the worth of the victim that makes him or her a worthwhile target (Okoli and Agada, 2014; Mutum, 2016). This kidnap value could be direct or indirect; direct in the sense that the victim himself/herself is wealthy and indirect in that the victim has wealthy families and friends. The core rationale of the abduction business is that the victim is worth a ransom price and that he or she can pay it, whether directly or through a third party (Odoma & Akor, 2019).

National Image

A nation's image is like a cloth worn by the nation and the picture attributed to it by both local and foreign nationals (Okoroafor & Dike, 2010). A country's image is the comprehensive image that is made up of such factors like exceptional products, historical events and relationships, traditions, economic, political and technological development (Brijs, Bloemer & Kasper, 2011:1260). According to Aleyomi (2020), image is a crucial factor that assesses a country's credibility, which is gleaned from the policies that emanate from the state for the purpose of defending and promoting its national interest. A good image constitutes a source of goodwill and patronage for a country (Ajayi, 2006). Internal and external image is considered by investors in determining where to direct investment funds and where to bring the level of unfriendliness down (Akinterinwa, 2013).

A lot of factors can make or mar a country's image, ranging from culture to citizens' behaviour, sports, government type, global participation, security, etc (Okoroafor & Dike, 2010). Aleyomi (2020) identified weak state capacity, corruption and impunity as the internal drivers of Nigeria's image crisis. The resultant effect of this is the enrichment of few and impoverishment of many, and one of the ways some of these impoverished masses have employed to get out of this quagmire is by resorting to kidnapping for ransom.

Theoretical Framework

Kidnapping for ransom is an organised crime that involves calculative planning and utilisation of both human and material resources. No single theory serves to explain all types of crimes, hence, this study adopts a theoretical bridging approach that combines the rational choice theory and the theory of ungoverned spaces.

Rational Choice Theory first emerged in the 18th century and was developed by the classical school of criminology through the writings of Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham (Lyman & Potter, 2007). The central theme of this theory focuses on individualism, optimality, structure, self-regarding interest and rationality (Abell, 2000; cited in Ogu, 2013). Rational Choice Theory posits that individuals ultimately take actions that concern entirely with their welfare, having weighed the risk as well as reward optimally. This school sees organised crime members as possessing free will and able to take rational decisions regarding their involvement in crime (Lyman & Potter, 2007). For instance, an individual who has been economically deprived overtime can resort to maximising his/her own wellbeing through crime such as kidnapping for ransom, having considered the risk of getting caught and the monetary value which can possibly take him/her out of poverty.

Theresa Whelan defines ungoverned space as a physical (land and maritime) or non-physical (financial space) area where there is an absence of state capacity or political will to exercise control (Whelan; in Olaniyan, 2017). Similarly, The RAND Project Air Force Annual Report in 2007 defined ungoverned spaces as “failed or failing states; poorly controlled land or maritime borders or airspace; or areas within otherwise viable states where the central government’s authority does not extend” (Taylor, 2016:1). Both definitions see ungoverned spaces as the absence of state capacity to exercise control over certain areas or a product of a failed state. In other words, anywhere with no government presence is an ungoverned territory. However, Taylor (2016) sees the term “ungoverned” as a misnomer because the absence of government does not necessarily imply the absence of governance. If the state has failed in its exercise of control over these spaces, definitely such spaces will be governed by non-state actors. However, the criticisms of the theory of ungoverned spaces actually validates the

theory rather than undermine it (Olaniyan, 2017), because the absence of state control will invariably lead to non-state control of these spaces which admittedly may not be very attractive and can pose a security threat to the nation.

This paper argues that, to a large extent, the problem of ungoverned spaces in the Nigerian state today actually influences or fuels the rational choice of kidnapping people for ransom. The logic is this, kidnappers are aware of the array of ungoverned forests within the country, and as such, the probability of getting caught and victims getting saved without payment of ransom is very low. Hence, the reason why kidnapping for ransom has become a rational choice is because the ungoverned forests serve as a “safe-haven” for kidnappers.

Evolution of Kidnapping in Nigeria

Kidnapping, according to Onuoha and Okolie-Osemene (2019) is not a new occurrence in Nigeria, as it has been happening as far back as the 1980s when the act was mainly carried out for rituals, but became an issue of concern in the 1990s as a result of the crisis in Nigeria’s oil-rich Niger Delta region. The region originally comprises six states, namely, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers, but was politically mapped-out and expanded to include Abia, Imo and Ondo states.

The origin and growth of kidnapping in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is traceable to what Townsend (2008) called “natural resource nationalism” which means the tendency of the people in this region to look for greater payback from the natural resources derived from their soil (Akpan, 2010). Kidnapping became a recurrent crime in Niger Delta from the year 2000 when the people of the area began to form militant groups to agitate against perceived inequality and ill treatments by the Nigerian government and oil companies, with Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) being the front runner, (Odoma & Akor, 2019; Onuoha & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). An act that started off as abduction became financially motivated and militants began to demand millions of dollars as ransom for the release of hostages. By January 2007, “nearly 100 foreign hostages, mostly oil workers, have been kidnapped in the restive region” (Oduwole 2007:6), and between 2006

and 2008, “kidnappers in Nigeria pocketed ransoms of over \$100 million” (Okocha and Ikokwu 2009:1).

Onuoha and Okolie-Osemene pointed out that, although Late President Umaru Musa Yar’adua initiated an amnesty programme in 2009 in order to reduce the civil unrest in the region, kidnapping for ransom had already spread to other parts of the country, particularly the Sout East and South West (Onuoha & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). This is in line with Akpan (2010) position that kidnapping in Nigeria has had four versions over the years, viz: Kidnapping as a liberation struggle; kidnapping for economic benefits; kidnapping as a political tool and kidnapping as a new habit of crime. In essence, kidnapping started with a liberation struggle in the Niger Delta which was later monetised; at some point it became an instrument for political disputes and now, kidnapping has become a lucrative venture for unemployed youths and angry groups in the country.

The first large-scale abduction was carried out by Boko Haram terrorists on April 14, 2014 with two hundred and seventy-six (276) secondary school girls in Chibok community of Borno State, Nigeria abducted. Since then, kidnapping has become a thriving criminal enterprise for hoodlums across states in Nigeria (Odoma & Akor, 2019). While selective kidnapping is often carried out in the southern part of the country, large scale kidnapping is the modus operandi in the north, with ransoms being demanded in bulk (SBM Intelligence, 2020). This is evident in the attacks on boarding schools whereby bandits kidnapped hundreds of students at a time to hold them for a bulk ransom— which communities are more likely to pay (Meyer, 2021). Between December 2020 and February 2021, kidnappers have kidnapped a total of 769 students from their schools across northern Nigeria in at least five separate incidents (Aljazeera, 2021). This started with the abduction of more than 300 boys from their boarding school in the town of Kankara, in northwestern Katsina State in December, 2020 (Meyer, 2021). On 17th February, 2021, 27 boys and their teachers were taken from a school in Kagara, Niger State, and ten days later, on February 26, 2021, more than 300 schoolgirls were taken from their school in Jangebe, Zamfara State, and they were released the following week (Meyer, 2021). Currently, negotiations of ransom have moved beyond individuals to include communities and government. Katsina and Zamfara States governments

for instance, have been criticised for negotiating with bandits and introducing amnesty schemes. Between June, 2011 and the end of March, 2020, at least \$18.34 million has been paid to kidnappers as ransom (SBM Intelligence, 2020). On the number of people kidnapped in the country between January and June, 2021, the SBM report indicated that a total of 2,371 persons were abducted across the states of the federation with a total of ₦10 billion demanded as ransom for the kidnap victims.

So many kidnap cases go unreported out of the fear of not losing the kidnapped victim to the cold hands of death, hence, victims and their loved ones do the biddings of their abductor (Chidi, 2014; Odoma & Akor, 2019). Kidnapping has become so pervasive in Nigeria such that there is now panic among the people who are unsure of whom the next victim will be. The crime has become a veritable commodity in the hands of its perpetrators who have now made a multi-million naira business out of it (Osumah and Aghedo, 2011).

Causes of Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria

Kidnapping is a complicated phenomena that occurs in a variety of settings and has a variety of causes. In Nigeria, several factors have been identified as the causes of kidnapping for ransom. For instance, Ibrahim and Muhktar (2017) pointed out that political factors like poverty and lack of legal and available employment opportunities among the youths play a fundamental role in the rise of kidnapping in the country. Nigeria produces graduates in large numbers yearly without corresponding job opportunities to absorb them (Ayuba, 2020). The SB Morgen Intelligence (2020) report on unemployment and Nnorom (2021) reveal that 23.19 million youths, as at the fourth quarter of 2020, were unemployed with Imo State having the highest rate of unemployment at 54%. This deepened economic deprivation has led to a state of desperation such that kidnapping is seen as a way of getting money from the rich in the society. A causal relationship between unemployment and kidnapping was drawn by Chidi (2014:139) who noted that “if people are empowered and provided jobs, most of these crimes will be reduced. He further identified the loss of societal value as another cause of kidnapping in the country. Corroborating this point, Chinwokwu and Michael (2019) stated that things that used to be sacrosanct in the

society, such as good name, integrity, hard work, honesty and truth, no longer hold any value. The rich are being celebrated in the society irrespective of whether their wealth is derived through corrupt means. Furthermore, Eke and Christopher (2019) opined that the porosity of national borders contributes to the problem of kidnapping in the country. According to them, Nigeria's borders are infiltrated by criminals, who plot their criminal activities with impunity thereby placing the country in a severe state of insecurity. In another dimension, Olaniyan (2017) and SB Morgen Intelligence (2020) see the problem of large swathes of ungoverned spaces as another major cause of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria. Hence, forest spaces have become 'business' dens for kidnapers in order to keep their victims hostage while negotiating with their family members on what to pay to secure the release of the victims. Other causes include: inequality, proliferation of dangerous weapons, quick money syndrome, weak state capacity, corruption and impunity (Onuohia & Okolie-Osemene, 2019; Aleyomi, 2020).

Effects of Kidnapping on Victims

Kidnapping or hostage taking can be very devastating for the victims irrespective of the motive. It can affect victims psychologically, physically, financially and even physiologically.

Psychological Effects

The period of captivity comes with psychological trauma for victims who in most cases experience physical and emotional torture and have to deal with the fear of whether they will be killed or released (Tade, Ojedokun & Aderinto, 2020). Victims of kidnapping may have to battle with psychological disturbances such as trouble sleeping, impaired memory and concentration, flashbacks, hypervigilance and hyperarousal, shock and numbness, hopelessness, dissociation, anger, depression, withdrawal, irritability, among others (Alexander & Klein, 2009; Shekwolo, Temitope, Aondoaver, Nanlir, 2020). Kidnapping exposes victims to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder because victims find it difficult to overcome the traumatic experience even after being released from kidnapers' den. (Onuohia & Okolie-Osemene, 2019).

Physical Effects

Tade, Ojedokun & Aderinto (2020) identified a number of factors that determine whether a victim of kidnapping will go through hellish or soft treatment. However, victims mostly go through torture or eventually get killed. Victims are usually injured in the process of moving them from one location to another to avoid being rescued by security operatives (Onuohia & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). As a result, there could be exacerbation of an existing physical condition (such as, diabetes, ulcer, and asthma) of the victim. Not only that, captives may develop fresh health conditions as a result of the inability to get good sleep, nutritious diet, fresh air and warmth (Alexander & Klein, 2009). Exposure of victims to torture can also cause certain physical defects like blindness, broken bones and bruises.

Financial Consequence

As a result of the huge sum of money demanded as ransom by kidnappers, victims are often drained financially. As a matter of fact, the families of victims dispose of assets such as land, empty their life savings or even borrow huge sums of money in order to meet up with the demand. The victims on release are sometimes unable to saddle through the resultant financial quagmire. According to SBM Intelligence report (August, 2022), the sum of ₦653.7 million was paid as ransom to kidnappers between July 2021 and June 2022.

Physiological Ramifications

The female gender, both children and adults, are mostly exposed to sexual abuse such as rape for as long as they are in the kidnapper's den. This heinous act exposes victims to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. They may even have sexual defects, that is, finding it difficult to form a healthy relationship, which they may need to undergo many years of therapy to overcome (Shekwolo, Temitope, Aondoaver, Nanlir, 2020).

Impact of Kidnapping for Ransom on Nigeria's Image

Kidnapping in Nigeria has become a national malaise and source of shame (Olaniyan, 2017). The rampancy of kidnapping for ransom of both foreigners and citizens has flung the Nigerian foreign relations into jeopardy and tarnished her image in the international community (Ibrahim, Ahmad &

Shehu, 2021). This negative publicity that kidnapping for ransom attracts to Nigeria has affected trade, tourism and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the country (Okoli & Agada, 2014; Onuohia & Okolie-Osemene, 2019).

Kidnapping has massively affected the Nigerian tourism sector. The tourism sector contributes significantly to a country's GDP earnings as Nigeria has the potential to be one of the world's best tourist destinations. However, the factors determining each country's tourism attraction are a nation's safety and security conditions (Danladi, 2012). Sadly, the level of insecurity in the country is one of the factors that have dented growth in the Nigerian tourism sector. Kidnappers have continued to target international tourists based on the belief that a huge sum of money will be paid by their family or their home government (Odeku, 2020). Unfortunately, no foreigner will want to travel to a country where they stand the risk of being kidnapped or even killed. Also, the rate of domestic travels has reduced, courtesy of the problem of kidnapping in the country. This has, in turn, affected the revenue generated from tourism in the country.

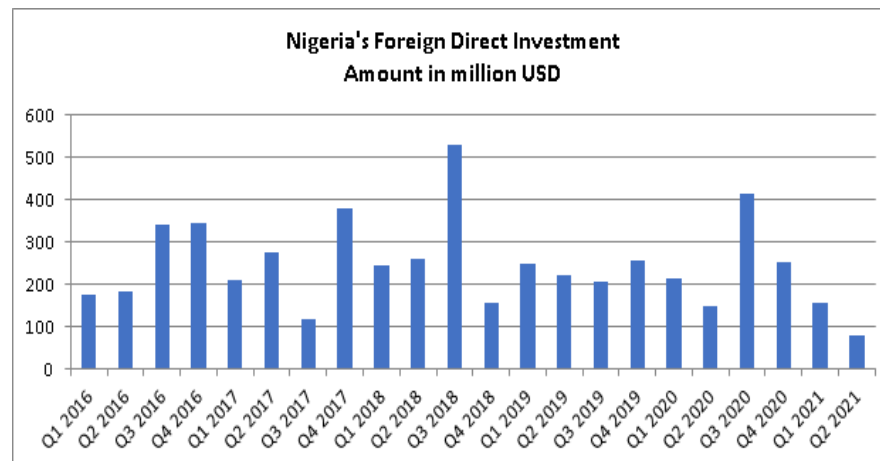
Figure 1



Source: Designed by the authors with data from World Bank and CEIC

Figure 1 shows Nigeria’s tourism revenue between 2015 and 2019. Tourism revenue was \$1,088,000 in 2016, showing a 136.01% increase from 2015. It rose to an all-time high of \$2,615,000 in 2017, representing 140.35% increase from 2016, then dropped to 1,977,000 and 1,471,000 in 2018 and 2019 respectively. The rate of kidnapping in Nigeria is scary and a source of discouragement to both local and foreign tourists.

Since the country returned to civil rule on May 29, 1999, Nigeria has strived towards wooing investors across the globe for the purpose of boosting the country’s economy (Thomas, 2015). However, the unsavoury rating of Nigeria as a crime haven and an unsafe nation for business and investment no doubt scares and discourages both domestic and foreign investors from investing in the country (Odoma, 2019). Investors are sceptical of putting their money in an unsecured and unstable economy (Onuoha & Okolie-Osemene, 2019).



Source: Designed by the authors with data extracted from Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2016-2021.

The graph above shows that Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) between 2016 and 2021 has been fluctuating, as there has not been any noticeable increase over this period. However, from the last quarter of 2020, Nigeria’s FDI has continued to decrease. As a matter of fact, the FDI flow into

Nigeria slumps to its lowest in 11 years in the second quarter of 2021. According to the FDI intelligence report, some of the reasons for this downturn are as a result of political instability and security issues in the country (Oyekanmi, 2021), especially the fact that kidnapping for ransom has been the most disturbing in recent times. This ugly development affects the sentiments of foreign investors towards the economy. Not only does the country fail to attract investors, so many investments in Nigeria have been relocated to other peaceful, secure and investment friendly African countries (Odoma & Akor, 2019).

Furthermore, this negative impact can also be expressed from the part of the citizens of the country. Nigerians have lost complete faith in the government, particularly in guaranteeing their wellbeing and safety. This is evident from the rate at which Nigerians leave their home country to find solace someplace around the world. The net migration in Nigeria shows that more people are leaving the country than those coming in.

Conclusion

The study explores the evolution of kidnapping in the country, the various causes of kidnapping for ransom, effect of kidnapping on victims and the impact of kidnapping on Nigeria's image. The paper observes that although the primary cause of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria is economic deprivation, certain situations within the country have continued to aid this enterprise. One of these is the problem of ungoverned forests, which has become a safe haven for kidnappers. The implication of kidnapping on the country's image is that both citizens and foreigners have seen the country as insecure. This negative view of Nigeria has had a ripple effect on foreign direct investment, tourism revenue and even migration. However, just like Aleyomi (2020) rightly observed, the grave stimulus for negative image perception of Nigeria is the inability of the state to punish the perpetrators of violence. The problem is not just with kidnapping alone, but the government's disposition towards heinous acts. Several state governments, particularly in the northern part of the country, have been negotiating ransom with kidnappers. The earlier the government begins a proactive measure rather than reactive one towards this menace, the better.

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