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Response and the Limits of Kinetic Security Strategy: Evaluating Law Enforcement and Amotekun's Effectiveness Against Kidnapping in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria's response to increasing kidnap cases have predominantly been based on kinetic initiatives-patrols, arrests, rescue operations, use of state & community-based armed units. This paper sets to examine the extent to which the present architecture of security in Ondo state, Nigeria, comprising both the Nigeria police and the state-backed community based armed unit –Amotekun (the Western Nigeria Security Network)- is institutionally equipped to effectively respond to kidnapping as a human-security-scale problem, and not just a law-and-order incident. Employing a convergent mixed-method design on three local government areas in Ondo state-Akure North (Iju), Akoko south East (Isua) and Akoko North East (Ikare Akoko), it used a survey instrument on 280 residents (93% response rate) and three Focus group discussion sessions with community members and security agents. The study found out that despite 96% awareness of the police and 85.4% attribution of credit for some accomplishments to them, only 36.1% rated themes very effective to 38.2% who described as not very effective, with 36% who said their responses were unsatisfactory. Kidnapping was found to critically impair economic (stoppage of local business, M=4.83) food (obstructed farming, M=4.73) health (pilgrimage of healthcare providers

away from locality, M=4.24) and transport (disrupted movement of goods, M=4.67) security respectively. While qualitative evidence has attributed better responsiveness and higher level of trust in Amotekun compared to the conventional police, the forces still suffer from inadequate vehicles, poor surveillance technologies, ineffective coordination with the conventional police. Both forces were said to be institutionally designed as kinetic and incident-driven which may not equip them to tackle a threat that is predominantly economic, agricultural, medicinal and logistical. Suggestions are hereby posited on development of an all-layer security-governance approach with focus on kinetics linked with structural investment of rural economies and on proper inter-agencies coordination.

Keywords: kidnapping, kinetic security, effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, Amotekun, human security, Ondo state, Nigeria, security governance.

1. Introduction

Historically, Nigeria's approach to internal insecurity, and particularly to kidnapping, has favored kinetic strategy - use of armed individuals, patrols, raids and rescue operations that physically seek to engage or neutralize offenders (Okeke, Ikezue, & Oli, 2023). The kinetic infrastructure deployed in Ondo State relies on two institutions: the standard Nigerian Police Force and its specialised outfits, and Amotekun, the community security organization developed by the state, "intended to supplement the traditional law enforcement institutions' responsiveness to crime, especially in their ability to incorporate community-based knowledge and respond faster given the terrain." Both institutions are noted to have had notable successes involving arrests and the rescue of victims; nonetheless, the occurrence of kidnapping in Ondo State continues largely unabated-victims are often abducted from various major expressways, farm settlements and forest routes.

This poses a question that is inadequately addressed in existing literature on security in Nigeria. Is the problem the volume of kinetic resources and capacity (vehicles, personnel, patrols); or does the problem of kidnapping in Ondo State rise to the level of a human-security-scale problem with economic, agricultural, medical and logistical components that cannot realistically be addressed by any kinetic body, however well-provisioned? Human security discourse emphasizes the fact that threats to security may be defined by, and contribute to erosion of, the livelihood, food, health and human systems, making any response through purely policing insufficient (United Nations Development Programme, 1994; Opakunbi, Mohammed, & Osah, 2023). Nigeria's security budgets and attentions continue, however, to disproportionately flow towards kinetic means.

In this paper, we analyze the performance of law enforcement and Amotekun with regards to kidnapping in Ondo State and analyze the structural capacity of the state's security response to effectively tackle the scale of human-security loss from abduction in the state. Using primary survey and focus group data drawn from 3 local government areas in the state, we analyze: (a) the popular perceptions on the effectiveness of Police and Amotekun and (b) how and to what level economic, food, health and transport securities are threatened. We find that, despite extensive engagement with kinetic responses, a reason for continuous abduction is not solely a failure of institutions, but that of the structural inadequacy of the kinetically based approach when faced with a human-security-scale challenge.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This paper defines two security response registers. Kinetic security strategy is where state/local use the instrumentalities of force/reactive means-patrol, raid, arrest, armed rescue among others, and the success is measured by ability to intercept/apprehend individual offenders- Okeke, Ikezue and Oli (2023). Human security, according to UNDP (1994) expands the referent object of security from the state to the individual and recognizes economic, food, health, personal and community security as components of a single human condition of safety.

An intervention has only addressed the issue of security threats when economic, nutritional, medical, and mobility impairments that are suffered by population have been reversed not just when an offender is apprehended. (UN Human Security Unit, 2022); Opakunbi, Mohammed, and Osah, 2023). This definition matters analytically as it enables, we evaluate the effectiveness of an institution such as the police or Amotekun on two separate axes first-it's kinetic effectiveness as an institution (does it arrest kidnappers, free kidnapped victims, stop attackers?

Second, it's human-security effectiveness (does its functioning help to restore economic confidence, farming, access to medicine and transport?). An institution can perform successfully at one level while structurally incapacitated to function effectively at another level because livelihood restore, foods, medical supplies and transports can only be achieved outside the scope/responsibility/resources of policing and paramiltary institutions (Dami, 2021; Asmau & Abdulrasheed, 2020). It utilizes the two-dimensional axes for assessing law enforcement and Amotekun of Ondo state.

3. Literature Review

The literature on police enforcement against abduction has identified a wide number of constraints on police operations in Nigeria. Weak intelligence apparatus and inadequate manning constitute "recurring features in reports on crime in Nigeria" (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017:750) and more recently, logistical deficiencies – including the "lack of vehicles, communications, and surveillance technology necessary to effectively respond, particularly to incidents occurring in the often rural and forest terrain" - have continued to present barriers to prompt response (Okeke, Ikezue, & Oli, 2023:203). Judicial impediments also frustrate law enforcement efficacy, particularly through the slow progress of investigations and suspect prosecution following arrests, and eventual suspect releases on procedural or evidentiary technicalities, which then deter public trust and willing witness testimony (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017).In part due to these limitations of the formal police system, vigilante institutions such as the Ondo State Community Security Agency (Amotekun) have proliferated. Owagbemi & Olaseinde (2021), for example, found evidence that respondents trusted Amotekun more than the police, preferring them due to their proximity and their ability to traverse familiar terrain more easily than the more cumbersome formal institutions" . This finding correlates broadly with evidence elsewhere in the literature that state-community partnerships enhance response times and local intelligence networks, although not necessarily resource or legal parity, in cases where the community presence outweighs the utility of state agents alone (Opakunbi, Mohammed, & Osah, 2023).

Separate bodies of literature explore the wider implications of abduction for human security dimensions outside of enforcement. For instance, Kwanga, Iormanger, Vesta, and Shabu (2022) found that abduction

hinders economic activity such as trade and farming in Benue State; similarly, kidnapping-for-ransom is linked to socio-economic breakdown in Katsina State (Audu, Gana, & Aliyu, 2023). Beyond these direct examples, Anyanwu, Wonah and Osaro (2023) highlighted that the direct cost of kidnapping ransom money only hints at its greater cost in terms of lost productivity, reduced investment and immobility. Dami (2021) and Asmau and Abdulrasheed (2020), wrote separately on the situation in Northern Nigeria, articulated that banditry and kidnapping related insecurity severely weakens social security by also undermining both food and economic security. The link between the literature on operational constraints against enforcement and the literature on consequences for human security remains largely unexplored: will kinetic responses to kidnapping be structured or sufficient to meet human security demands? This study attempts to bridge this gap in knowledge, utilizing empirical data from Ondo State, Nigeria.

4. Methodology

A convergent mixed methods design integrating a quantitative survey with structured responses and qualitative discussion with groups (FGDs) in three study settings-selected local government areas in Ondo State that have histories of documented kidnapping: Akure North (Iju); Akoko South-East (Isua); and Akoko North-East (Ikare Akoko) were carried out with respondents selected using a stratified random sampling process. A survey research tool with face- validated scales for awareness and perception of law enforcement, perceptions about satisfaction with the performance of law enforcement, perception of effectiveness of the law enforcement agencies on the crime, contributions of kidnapping to the poor and worsening economy, food situation, health, transportation and overall human security using five-point Likert scales (anchoring each item at 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree) was administered through research supervisor and by staff within the postgraduate school. From 302 questionnaires administered and expected to reach potential subjects across the three towns selected, 280 valid questionnaires were returned indicating 93 % response rate.

The mean, median and mode, minimum and maximum value for each scale item response will be computed using descriptive. Data were gathered on the perceptions, performance and effectiveness of the law enforcement and Amotekun through three FGD sessions with community members and officers from Amotekun and Anti- Kidnapping squad. The FGDs were recorded with consent and augmented with researcher's observations; the resulting transcriptions and observations will be analyzed using a six-step thematic analysis; familiarization with data, assignment of conceptual codes and categorization of these codes into preliminary themes, identification and development of themes through review, finalization and labeling of themes and preparation for the write up-and preserved quotes from research participants will be used to convey the lived experience of the respondents in relation to law enforcement and Amotekun performance.

5. Results

5.1 Public Perception of Law Enforcement Effectiveness

Awareness of Law Enforcement Agencies Combating Kidnapping In study area respondents' awareness of law enforcement agencies operating against kidnapping was fairly high (96% of all respondents indicated awareness of these entities). Respondents, were neither entirely unsatisfied nor satisfied with

the law enforcement response to kidnapping; 36% said “somewhat unsatisfied”, 28% “somewhat satisfied” and 28% “very satisfied” while only 8% were “neutral” and 1% “very unsatisfied”. A comparison between responses indicated: 38.2% considered the agencies not very effective to combating kidnapping; closely followed by 36.1% who identified them as very effective;20.7% as modern.

Perception Indicator	Min	Max	Mean	Rank
Aware of law enforcement agencies operating against kidnapping	—	—	96% Yes	—
Rated agency response as “somewhat dissatisfied” / “very dissatisfied”	—	—	37% combined	—
Rated agencies as “not very effective” against kidnapping	—	—	38.2%	1
Rated agencies as “very effective” against kidnapping	—	—	36.1%	2
Believe agencies have achieved some success against kidnapping	—	—	85.4% Yes	—
Perceive agencies as engaged with local communities	—	—	80% Yes	—

Table 1. Public Perception of Law Enforcement Awareness, Satisfaction, Effectiveness, and Community Engagement (Survey, 2025)

From the numbers presented, the institution appears transparent but by no means unproven in its successes; it is, however, undeniably viewed with widely differing opinions concerning the efficacy of its services. "Not very effective" slightly outpolls "very effective" as the mode of opinion.

5.2 Contribution of Kidnapping to Deteriorating Human Security

Table 2 summarizes respondents' ratings of kidnapping's contribution to deterioration across four human-security domains, plus a general index of overall human security.

Economic Security	Min	Max	Mean	Rank
Disrupts local businesses and livelihoods	3	5	4.83	1
Ransom demands cause financial instability for victims/families	1	5	4.61	2
Discourages external investment and economic development	1	5	4.52	3

Table 2a. Contribution of Kidnapping to Deteriorating Economic Security (Survey, 2025)

Food Security	Min	Max	Mean	Rank
Disrupts agricultural activities due to fear in farming communities	1	5	4.73	1
Reduces food availability via decreased farming activity	2	5	4.59	2
Increases food prices due to kidnapping-related disruption	1	5	4.41	3

Table 2b. Contribution of Kidnapping to Deteriorating Food Security (Survey, 2025)

Health Security	Min	Max	Mean	Rank
Shortages of healthcare personnel migrating to safer locations	1	5	4.24	1
Increased physical and mental health issues from fear/trauma	1	5	4.02	2
Difficulty accessing healthcare due to insecure transport routes	1	5	3.75	3

Table 2c. Contribution of Kidnapping to Deteriorating Health Security (Survey, 2025)

Transportation Security	Min	Max	Mean	Rank
Disrupts movement of goods and services on major routes	1	5	4.67	1
Increases transportation cost via longer, alternative routes	1	5	4.62	2
Reduces availability of public transport on key routes	1	5	4.43	3

Table 2d. Contribution of Kidnapping to Deteriorating Transportation Security (Survey, 2025)

General Human Security	Min	Max	Mean	Rank
Undermines overall sense of safety and security	2	5	4.73	1
Causes decline in community cohesion and trust	1	5	4.35	2
Worsens poverty and inequality in the community	1	5	4.33	3

Table 2e. Contribution of Kidnapping to Deteriorating General Human Security (Survey, 2025)

In each of these four, of the four dimensions listed, the single best-regarded human-security measure is economic or routine logistical disruption – that of conducting business, farming, providing or receiving care, and traveling; not violence directly – that of not being abducted at all is the most viscerally felt, in terms of avoiding the market, the farm, the clinic or the road.

5.3 Qualitative Findings: Institutional Effectiveness and Human-Security Fallout

Focus group participants described a conventional police response that is frequently slow and logistically constrained.

"In Iju, the other year someone was kidnapped we call the police, they eventually came after some six hours and the kidnappers has already gone very deep into the forest. They seldom arrest people on time".

— Participant, Male Community Member, Akure North (Iju)

"We receive some calls, but we have no vehicles or fuel for them; you cannot chase armed criminals on foot in the bush and radio reception is very poor in certain parts".

— Participant, Male Amotekun Officer, Akoko South-East (Isua)

Judicial follow-through was raised as a second constraint, with arrests frequently failing to result in sustained prosecution.

"There was this one, in Ikare where, two, two persons were arrested, and then after some two, two weeks, it was heard that they have been released. No one was prepared to, was courageous enough to, to give a statement. Everyone was frightened. The whole thing discouraged a lot of persons from even coming".

— Participant, Female Community Member, Akoko North-East (Ikare Akoko)

By contrast, Amotekun was consistently described as faster and more trusted, owing to its embeddedness in local networks and terrain knowledge.

"If an incident occurs within our community, our first call is to the Amotekun. They know our community and do not wait for approval from Abuja to respond to our request. While our first point of call to the police station is for them to request us at the station to make statements, our contact to Amotekun is immediately responded to and the bush explored".

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— Participant, Male Community Member, Akoko South-East (Isua)

However, it was Amotekun officers themselves who recognized a problem with the underlying structure of the organization, poor cooperation between the Amotekun and the police, and unwillingness within communities to share information.

"We have a sense that perhaps the locals are hiding the kidnappers. Either out of fear or for gain, or for the heck of it? Annoying, as we are only trying to hel"p.

— Participant, Male Anti-Kidnapping Squad Officer, Ikare Akoko

Beyond institutional performance, participants directly connected kidnapping to deteriorating human security across all four domains under study. On economic security:

"Nowadays there is nobody buying farm product coming all over the places from neighboring village to our place Isua because they are feared of the road. There is not even sufficient money to recover cost".

— Participant, Male Farmer, Akoko South-East (Isua)

On food security:

"Many farmers now grow a lot of their food within the compound as close to their houses as they can manage and so the large bush farmlands that were in use are left to grow wild. Food prices continue to rise".

— Participant, Female Trader, Akoko North-East (Ikare Akoko)

On health security:

"*The nurse left our health center when their relation was abducted on the road to town. That was 2 months ago and until this day the antenatal women & sick children are using herbs or have to go to Akure for treatment".*

— Participant, Female Community Member, Akure North (Iju)

On transportation security:

"Even ambulances are afraid to pass through some of these roads at night. It's not just about goods and services—it's about lives being cut off from help."

— Participant, Anti-Kidnapping Squad Officer, Akure

6. Discussion

The findings are supportive of the core kinetic-and-human security distinction. Along the kinetic scale, both police and Amotekun achieve real if partial success. Citizens have near-universal knowledge of their presence and a majority credited the police, while Amotekun was specifically praised for rapid, route-aware patrol. These are consistent with findings from Ondo state demonstrating high trust in local, embedded security arrangements (Owagbemi & Olaseinde 2021), but the near-split between perceiving agencies as \"very effective\" (36.1%) and \"not very effective\" (38.2%) suggested an institution at the absolute limits of its capacity-an account consistent with broader narratives about the Nigerian police's logistically- and manpower-, and coordination-constrained work (Ibrahim & Mukhtar 2017; Okeke, Ikezue, & Oli 2023).

Even more relevant to the main question of this paper is the human-security scale, where the evidence appeared to show a structural, not just an operational limit. Across the four key areas investigated-economic security, food security, health security, and transport security-the most important negative consequence of kidnapping was not the incident itself but rather the erosion of conventional economic and social practices-shops closing, farms abandoned, medical staff fleeing, transporters shunning routes. Each of these none of these negative outcomes is undone either by arrest or patrol. An arrest or successful hostage rescue by either an Amotekun or a police team does not reopen the deserted farm; bring a fleeing

doctor or nurse back to a clinic; or restore a trader's confidence along a particular route. This is exactly the space the human security model addresses, since all of these are economic and social processes, affected by the general regime of risk that abduction induces, but entirely beyond the purely kinetic operations and training and equipment base of the state response (UNPD 1994; Dami 2021; Asmau & Abdulrasheed 2020).

The qualitative component supported this reading perfectly. The descriptions Amotekun officials gave of their resource limitations-of their vehicles, fuel, radio systems, surveillance technology-were all of a purely kinetic sort-their inability to penetrate deeper into the bush and thus to cut off kidnappers' escape routes required vehicles more capable of doing so. None of their descriptions-or indeed descriptions of police response-addressed any aspect of why a trader stops traveling, a nurse leaves, or a farmer abandons a field; these are economic and psychosocial responses to an overarching sense of danger rather than the specifics of patrol locations at any given time. It should also be noted that even kinetic successes could be limited by follow-through, as illustrated by the Ikare Akoko Case in which it appeared the released kidnappers actively intimidated witnesses, preventing police work and suggesting downstream prosecutorial weaknesses beyond kinetic command (as described in chapter 4 of this paper).This is not to say that a kinetic strategy is without any utility. Local, rapid patrol and reassurance may effectively reduce the incidence of and lethality of individual attacks and add significantly to police capacity-as predicted by the scholarship of Opakunbi, Mohammed & Osah (2023) about community policing; here the assertion is only that kinetic methods of response are not designed, and do not succeed, at their present scale at alleviating the deeper systemic collapse that fear-induced behavior retreat causes to the economy, agriculture, health care, and transport systems. Addressing the human security dimensions, the level consistent with broader studies of the economic and social cost of kidnapping in Nigeria (Kwanga et al, 2022; Anyanwu, Wonah & Osaro 2023) which requires investments into non-kinetic interventions-like rural financial sector and market access schemes, agricultural extension services, incentives for keeping rural health workers, and route-specific traffic assurances in addition to kinetic efforts.

7**. Conclusion and Recommendations for Policy:** The paper has critically reviewed the application of policing and Amotekun in the contexts of kidnapping incidence in Ondo State; questioned whether kinetic security response framework in the state is able to effectively deliver response to the wide range of human security impacts brought by kidnapping. The findings strongly suggest that, though institutional response in Ondo is active and seemingly recognized, it is in reality contested by the people it serves and the approach employed, by deploying patrols, conducting arrests and rescue operations fails to encompass the impact of kidnapping on economic, food security, health system and transportation networks. The argument here is, that continuing kidnapping in Ondo in the face of intensive kinetic approach signifies a structurally inappropriate response model for the magnitude of the problem, rather than an institutional defect of will or ability.

For these reasons this paper makes the following recommendations: First, enhanced operational capacity for Amotekun by introducing dedicated funding to increase vehicular capacity and sophisticated security gadgets for reliable data on movement; established a robust formal collaboration protocol with NPF; and; eliminated role redundancy and jurisdictional confusion between two agencies.

Secondly; development of parallel non-kinetic response intervention on key human security domains identified as major in this study including introduction of rural credit or micro-insurance Schemes that provides security for business along vulnerable zones, intervention support for abandoned farmland through agricultural extension services or secure farm access program, an enhanced system of reward to discourage withdrawal of doctors and nurses to urban centers and, establishment of escorted or rout-guaranteed transportation services for vital inputs and health-crisis-related-patients into concerned regions; thirdly, a strengthened judicial follow-up response through the provision of a specialized prosecutorial resources and protection programs for victims because a failed prosecution encourages non-cooperation by the people; finally; the paper suggests that long-term follow-up research would require tracking both of the human security dimension and kinetic performance criteria, to establish that commitment in human security elements indeed yields better results that the kinetic response alone has failed to. Indeed, what would achieve human security in kidnap-prone communities in Ondo State require a deliberate and independent system of restoring livelihoods; not only by swiftness that both the police and Amotekun command might possess in responding to security emergencies in the forest.

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