Original Researcher Article

Ungoverned Spaces and the Dynamics of Kidnapping for Ransom in Zamfara State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between ungoverned spaces and the rising incidence of kidnapping for ransom in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Routine Activity Theory and Failed State Theory, the study explores how weak governance and socio-economic deprivation contribute to the proliferation of organized criminal activities. Using an exploratory-descriptive research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 360 respondents across five local government areas most affected by kidnapping. The findings reveal that a significant majority of respondents identified the presence of ungoverned spaces characterized by poor infrastructure, lack of police presence, and alternative informal security arrangements. Additionally, the study identifies economic hardship, unemployment, poverty, and the influence of organized crime groups as major factors driving the surge in kidnapping incidents. The analysis underscores the critical role of state absence and socio-political instability in creating conditions conducive to insecurity. The study concludes that restoring governance and addressing the root causes of poverty and youth unemployment are essential for combating kidnapping and strengthening human security in Zamfara State. It recommends integrated rural security development strategies and targeted youth empowerment initiatives as pathways to sustainable peace and stability.

Keywords: Ungoverned spaces, kidnapping, insecurity, Zamfara State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Nigeria has experienced a surge in kidnapping incidents, marking it as one of the country's most pressing security issues. Initially regarded as a localized phenomenon, kidnapping has escalated into a nationwide crisis, with varying degrees of severity across different regions (Okoli & Agada, 2014). Kidnapping in Nigeria is no longer limited to isolated occurrences; instead, it has evolved into a pervasive, organized, and profitable crime. This rise is particularly alarming in regions characterized by "ungoverned spaces," areas where formal governance is weak or absent, allowing for the proliferation of criminal activities. These ungoverned spaces, often found in Nigeria's rural and border areas, are marked by poor infrastructure, minimal government presence, and limited law enforcement (Patrick, 2011). Understanding the dynamics of kidnapping within these ungoverned spaces is crucial to addressing the broader security challenges in Nigeria. Ungoverned spaces can be defined as regions within a state's territory where official authority is weak or nonexistent, resulting in governance vacuums that are exploited by criminal groups and other non-state actors.

According to Rabasa et al. (2007), ungoverned spaces are territories within sovereign boundaries where the government has limited control, leaving room for insurgent and criminal organizations to operate with impunity. These regions typically lack basic infrastructure, social services, and law enforcement, conditions that exacerbate socio-economic issues and create an environment conducive to crime. In Nigeria, these areas are often marked by economic marginalization, political neglect, and social instability, which contribute to the breakdown of state control and the rise of alternative governance systems, such as those led by vigilante groups, traditional rulers, or criminal organizations (Clunan & Trinkunas, 2010).

The existence of ungoverned spaces in Nigeria has had far-reaching implications for national security. Without adequate government presence, these areas provide safe havens for armed groups and kidnappers who exploit the lack of formal oversight to carry out illicit activities, including kidnapping, banditry, and human trafficking (Menkhaus, 2010). The recent surge in kidnapping incidents in northern Nigerian states like Zamfara, Katsina, and Kaduna underscores the link between ungoverned spaces and organized crime. These regions, marked by limited state capacity and vast, under-patrolled areas, serve as operational bases for kidnappers who demand ransom payments and terrorize local populations (Okumu, 2013). The state's inability to maintain security in these regions has fostered a climate of fear and distrust, further isolating these areas from the broader national structure.

In sociopolitical terms, ungoverned spaces also reflect underlying systemic issues within Nigeria, including corruption, economic disparity, and regional marginalization. According to Turner (2016), communities in ungoverned spaces often rely on alternative systems of governance, such as local leaders, vigilante groups, or even criminal organizations, to provide security and basic services in the absence of the state. In Nigeria, these informal governance systems may tolerate or even collude with criminal elements, leading to increased incidences of kidnapping and other forms of organized crime. This reality highlights the role of socio-economic factors in the persistence of ungoverned spaces and the complex relationship between poverty, state neglect, and criminality in Nigerian society (Okoli & Agada, 2014). Given the complex nature of kidnapping for ransom in Zamfara State, addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that includes strengthening state presence, improving socio-economic conditions, and enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies. Additionally, fostering community resilience and building trust between the local populace and security forces are crucial for effective intervention and sustainable peace (Akinola, 2020). This study aims to delve into the intricate dynamics of kidnapping for ransom in Zamfara State, exploring the underlying causes, the interplay of local and external actors, and the broader implications for security and development in the region.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Zamfara State, Nigeria, has increasingly become an epicenter of kidnapping, banditry, and other forms of violent crime, largely due to the existence of extensive ungoverned spaces. These areas, often remote and sparsely populated, suffer from limited government presence, inadequate infrastructure, and weak law enforcement, creating a conducive environment for criminal activities (Okoli & Agada, 2014). Kidnapping, in particular, has escalated into a pervasive and organized crime in the region, affecting the daily lives, economic well-being, and overall security of residents. The situation in Zamfara exemplifies a broader challenge in Nigeria, where

governance deficits in rural and border regions allow criminal elements to exploit these ungoverned spaces, leaving communities vulnerable to kidnappers who operate with relative impunity (Rabasa et al., 2007).

Ungoverned spaces are typically regions where the state's control is limited or absent, resulting in governance vacuums that non-state actors can readily exploit. In Zamfara, factors such as poverty, socio-political instability, and weak institutional structures exacerbate the challenge of governance in these spaces. According to Menkhaus (2010), ungoverned spaces create "safe havens" for criminal groups, insurgents, and terrorists who take advantage of the lack of oversight to conduct illicit activities. Zamfara's rugged terrain and under-resourced security apparatus make it particularly susceptible to such criminal exploitation, which has led to a rise in kidnappings. This crime has become a lucrative enterprise, with kidnappers demanding ransoms that, in turn, fund further criminal activities, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of violence and insecurity (Okumu, 2013).

The increasing prevalence of kidnapping in Zamfara highlights a complex interplay of socio-economic and political factors that weaken state authority and render the region susceptible to criminal governance. Clunan and Trinkunas (2010) explain that in areas where the state fails to provide adequate security and services, informal governance structures, such as local leaders or even criminal organizations, often emerge to fill the void. In Zamfara, local communities sometimes rely on these alternative governance structures due to the state's inability to protect them effectively. However, these informal authorities may be complicit or even actively involved in criminal activities, contributing to an environment where kidnapping flourishes. This situation undermines public trust in the government and creates a vicious cycle of dependency on non-state actors for security, exacerbating the insecurity of the region (Turner, 2016).

Objectives of the study
The primary aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between ungoverned spaces and the dynamics of kidnapping for ransom in Zamfara State, Nigeria. To achieve this aim, the paper focuses on the following specific objectives:
- To examine the nature of ungoverned spaces in Zamfara State, Nigeria
- To Analyze the Factors Contributing to Kidnapping in Zamfara State

METHODOLOGY
The study adopts an exploratory and descriptive design. The exploratory aspect helps to uncover the underlying causes and patterns of kidnapping in ungoverned spaces, while the descriptive part provides a clear picture of how these spaces operate and contribute to insecurity in Zamfara State. The population comprises individuals and groups with direct experience or knowledge of kidnapping. These

include residents of affected communities, victims and their families, security personnel such as police officers, vigilantes, and Askarawa, community and traditional leaders, and officials from government and non-governmental organizations. The study focuses on five LGAs most affected by kidnapping: Zurmi, Maradun, Maru, Shinkafi, and Anka. The total population is estimated at 10,600. Using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size table, a representative sample of 375 respondents was determined. This number is appropriate for generalization at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. A combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques was used. Stratified and systematic random sampling were applied to select community residents, ensuring representation across LGAs and households. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to reach specific individuals, such as security agents, community leaders, and kidnapping victims who possess specialized insights.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. It was administered to residents, security personnel, community leaders, and government/NGO representatives. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather measurable data and brief narratives. The closed-ended items allowed for statistical analysis, while the open-ended items captured personal insights and contextual experiences. Out of 375 questionnaires administered, 360 were returned and found valid for analysis, giving a response rate of 96%. Only 15 (4%) were either not returned or unusable. This high response rate strengthens the reliability of the findings.

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores summarized responses on kidnapping trends, ungoverned areas, and security perceptions. Inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and regression analysis, were used to test relationships between variables, such as law enforcement presence and perceived safety. A quantitative method was chosen to collect measurable and generalizable data from a wide range of respondents. The use of a structured questionnaire ensures consistency and allows for statistical analysis. Including both closed- and open-ended questions adds depth to the data, enabling a better understanding of the subject. The method is cost-effective, easy to administer across large areas, and appropriate for a study focused on security and governance issues.

DATA PRESENTATION

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Table 4.1 Age Distribution of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percent
18 – 25	130	36.1
26 – 35	145	40.3
36 – 45	53	14.7
46 – 55a	24	6.7
56 and above	8	2.2
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Respondents were predominantly between the ages of 26 and 35 years, accounting for 40.3% (n = 145) of the sample. Those aged 18–25 made up 36.1% (n = 130), followed by 14.7% (n = 53) in the 36–45 age group. Respondents aged 46–55 constituted 6.7% (n = 24), while only 2.2% (n = 8) were aged 56 and above. This age distribution indicates that the majority of respondents were within the youth and early adulthood categories, reflecting a population likely to be socially active and more exposed to the consequences or knowledge of kidnapping activities. The youth-dominant sample suggests that younger individuals are likely more aware of or impacted by kidnapping incidents. This may influence the nature of their perceptions and experiences regarding ungoverned spaces. Their views could serve as critical insights into community vulnerabilities and potential solutions.

Table 4.2 Gender Distribution of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percent
Male	232	64.4
Female	128	35.6
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Of the 360 participants, 64.4% (n = 232) were male, and 35.6% (n = 128) were female. This gender disparity indicates a stronger male representation in the sample, which may reflect either population structure or the accessibility of male respondents during data collection. Given the male-dominant respondent base, interpretations may be skewed towards male perceptions and experiences. Gender-specific security interventions may be necessary, as men and women may experience the threats and effects of kidnapping differently.

Table 4.3 Occupation Distribution of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percent
Civil Servant	178	49.4
Private Sector Employee	26	7.2
Self-Employed	36	10.0
Unemployed	5	1.4
Student	104	28.9
Other	11	3.1
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Nearly half of the respondents (49.4%, n = 178) identified as civil servants. Students comprised 28.9% (n = 104), followed by self-employed individuals at 10.0% (n = 36). Only 7.2% (n = 26) worked in the private sector, 3.1% (n = 11) reported "other" occupations, and a small fraction (1.4%, n = 5) were unemployed. The predominance of civil servants and students suggests that the study reflects the views of individuals with relatively stable social and economic backgrounds. However, these groups may also be more at risk of kidnapping due to their perceived economic worth, especially in areas affected by ungoverned spaces.

Table 4.4 Educational Level of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percent
No Formal Education	25	6.9
Primary School	8	2.2
Secondary School	75	20.8
Tertiary Education	226	62.8
Other	26	7.2
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Most respondents (62.8%, n = 226) had tertiary education, followed by 20.8% (n = 75) with secondary education. Those with no formal education constituted 6.9% (n = 25), while 2.2% (n = 8) had only primary education. An additional 7.2% (n = 26) fell into the "other" category. The high level of educational attainment among respondents may contribute to more informed and nuanced perspectives on the causes, effects, and dynamics of kidnapping for ransom. It also suggests that interventions and policy frameworks could be effectively communicated through formal educational channels and civic education platforms.

Table 4.5 Area of Residence of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percent
Rural	159	44.2
Semi-urban	67	18.6
Urban	134	37.2
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Participants were relatively well-distributed across residence types, with 44.2% (n = 159) residing in rural areas, 37.2% (n = 134) in urban areas, and 18.6% (n = 67) in semi-urban settings. The high rural representation highlights the vulnerability of rural communities to insecurity and the presence of ungoverned spaces. This residential pattern supports the need for spatially targeted security measures and the strengthening of governance structures in rural areas to curb kidnapping.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS
Objectives 1: Nature of Ungoverned Spaces in Zamfara State

Table 4.6 Respondents' Responses on How They Would Describe the Presence of Government and Law Enforcement in Their Community

Category	Frequency	Percent
Strong	111	30.8
Moderate	175	48.6
Weak	55	15.3
Non-existent	19	5.3
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Respondents were asked to describe the presence of government and law enforcement in their community. Results show that 48.6% (n = 175) perceived the presence as moderate, while 30.8% (n = 111) described it as strong. A smaller portion,

15.3% (n = 55), perceived the presence as weak, and 5.3% (n = 19) believed it was non-existent. Although nearly half of the respondents perceive a moderate presence of government and law enforcement, a significant portion still views it as weak or absent. This highlights an uneven or inconsistent state presence, which may create vacuums of power that non-state actors or criminal elements can exploit.

Table 4.7 Respondents' Responses On Do They Consider Certain Areas In Zamfara State As 'Ungoverned' (I.E., With Minimal Or No Government Presence)?

Category	Frequency	Percent
Yes	254	70.6
No	106	29.4
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

When asked whether they considered certain areas in Zamfara State to be ungoverned—that is, having minimal or no government presence—70.6% (n = 254) of respondents affirmed this, while 29.4% (n = 106) did not (see Table 4.7). This overwhelming agreement indicates a widespread recognition of ungoverned spaces across the state. The high percentage of respondents identifying ungoverned areas points to a significant governance gap in Zamfara State.

Table 4.8 Respondents' Responses on Which Areas in Zamfara State They Believe Are Ungoverned?

Category	Frequency	Percent
Mada Town	70	19.4
Rijiya, Bukuyum	33	9.2
Maru, Tsafe	82	22.8
Rural Area	89	24.7
Zarmi, Maru	48	13.3
Maru, Shinkafi	38	10.6
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Respondents identified several specific areas perceived as ungoverned. The most frequently mentioned locations were rural areas (24.7%, n = 89), followed by Maru and Tsafe (22.8%, n = 82), Mada Town (19.4%, n = 70), Zarmi in Maru (13.3%, n = 48), Maru and Shinkafi (10.6%, n = 38), and Rijiya in Bukuyum (9.2%, n = 33) (see Table 4.8). This data provides valuable geographic targeting for security intervention. Rural and semi-urban districts appear disproportionately affected, possibly due to their remoteness or lack of strategic infrastructure.

Table 4.9 Respondents' Responses on What Are Some Indicators That an Area Is Ungoverned or Lacks Government Presence

Category	Frequency	Percent
Lack of Police Presence	176	48.9
Lack of Infrastructure	83	23.1
High Level of Crime	76	21.1
Presence of Vigilante Groups	25	6.9
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Respondents were asked to identify key signs that signify an area is ungoverned or lacks adequate government presence. As illustrated in Table 4.9, nearly half (48.9%, n = 176) of the respondents cited the lack of police presence as the most significant indicator. This was followed by a lack of infrastructure, mentioned by 23.1% (n = 83), and high levels of crime, identified by 21.1% (n = 76). A smaller proportion (6.9%, n = 25) pointed to the presence of vigilante groups as a signal of weak formal governance. These findings reveal that the most visible and tangible sign of state absence is the absence of police and formal security structures, which reinforces a perception of vulnerability and lawlessness. The noted lack of infrastructure, such as roads, schools, electricity, and health facilities, suggests broader developmental neglect that often accompanies weak governance.

Table 4.10 Respondents' responses on in their opinion, how does the lack of governance affect the security situation in these areas

Category	Frequency	Percent
Refusing to obey rules and regulations	131	36.4
Living discomfort in the community	109	30.3
Insecurity	59	16.4
Because of the negative consequences	22	6.1
Army bandits operate freely	23	6.4

Lack of security presence	16	4.4
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Respondents were asked to describe how the absence of governance affects the security situation in their communities. As shown in Table 4.10, the most common consequence cited was refusal to obey rules and regulations, reported by 36.4% (n = 131) of respondents. This was followed by general discomfort in the community (30.3%, n = 109) and insecurity (16.4%, n = 59). Other responses included free operation of armed bandits (6.4%, n = 23), negative consequences (6.1%, n = 22), and lack of security presence (4.4%, n = 16). The responses reflect the deep societal breakdown that occurs when governance structures are weak or absent. A significant proportion of respondents acknowledged that lawlessness, manifested through the refusal to obey rules, is a direct outcome of such a vacuum. Without the rule of law or visible enforcement mechanisms, individuals may feel unbound by regulations, further deteriorating communal order.

Objectives 2: Factors Contributing to Kidnapping in Zamfara State

Table 4.11 Respondents' Responses on What They Think Are the Main Reasons For The Increase In Kidnapping In Zamfara State?

Category	Frequency	Percent
Economic hardship	125	34.7
Weak law enforcement	34	9.4
Political instability	47	13.1
Unemployment	75	20.8
Influence of organized crime groups	64	17.8
Corruption	15	4.2
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Respondents were asked to identify the major reasons behind the increase in kidnapping incidents in Zamfara State. As presented in Table 4.11, economic hardship was the most frequently cited factor, with 34.7% (n = 125) of respondents selecting it. This was followed by unemployment (20.8%, n = 75), influence of organized crime groups (17.8%, n = 64), political instability (13.1%, n = 47), weak law enforcement (9.4%, n = 34), and corruption (4.2%, n = 15). The dominance of economic hardship and unemployment as perceived causes highlights the role of structural and socioeconomic factors in the proliferation of kidnapping for ransom. The mention of organized crime and weak law enforcement further indicates the presence of criminal networks thriving in the absence of state control.

Table 4.12 Respondents' Responses on to what extent do they believe poverty contributes to kidnapping activities in Zamfara State

Category	Frequency	Percent
Very high	175	48.6
High	35	9.7
Moderate	122	33.9
Low	13	3.6
Very low	15	4.2
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

When assessing the extent to which poverty contributes to kidnapping, 48.6% (n = 175) of respondents rated its contribution as very high, while 33.9% (n = 122) chose moderate. An additional 9.7% (n = 35) rated the contribution as high, and only a minority believed its influence was low (3.6%, n = 13) or very low (4.2%, n = 15), as shown in Table 4.12. This perception affirms the correlation between economic deprivation and criminal behavior in the region. The data suggests that individuals may resort to kidnapping as a survival strategy or an alternative income source in the absence of viable economic opportunities. Thus, policies aimed at reducing poverty and improving social welfare may serve as indirect yet effective strategies for addressing insecurity.

Table 4.13 Respondents' Responses on How They Would Rate The Impact Of Unemployment On Kidnapping In Zamfara State?

Category	Frequency	Percent
Very high	138	38.3
High	49	13.6
Moderate	141	39.2
Low	17	4.7

Very low	15	4.2
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

As shown in Table 4.13, a considerable number of respondents rated the impact of unemployment on kidnapping as moderate (39.2%, n = 141) or very high (38.3%, n = 138). Another 13.6% (n = 49) rated it high, while only 4.7% (n = 17) and 4.2% (n = 15) rated it low and very low, respectively. Unemployment appears to be viewed not only as an economic challenge but also as a critical driver of insecurity. The perception that joblessness significantly fuels criminality suggests that targeted employment programs, especially for youth, could play a preventive role in combating the spread of kidnapping activities.

Table 4.14 Respondents' Responses on What Other Socio-Political Factors Do They Think Contribute to Kidnapping In Zamfara State

Category	Frequency	Percent
Poverty/Illiteracy	88	24.4
Ransome and informers	31	8.6
Lack of employment	80	22.2
Lack of education	65	18.1
Opposition	65	18.1
To maintain power	31	8.6
Total	360	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Respondents were asked to identify other socio-political factors that contribute to the prevalence of kidnapping in Zamfara State. As presented in Table 4.14, the most commonly cited factors were poverty and illiteracy, accounting for 24.4% (n = 88) of responses. This was closely followed by a lack of employment at 22.2% (n = 80). Respondents also identified a lack of education and opposition-related factors, each cited by 18.1% (n = 65). Additionally, 8.6% (n = 31) believed ransom and informers play a role in facilitating kidnappings, while another 8.6% (n = 31) mentioned that kidnapping is used to maintain power. These findings point to a complex interplay of socioeconomic deprivation and political manipulation as root causes of insecurity. The prominence of poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment underscores the role of marginalization in pushing individuals towards criminality. Simultaneously, the identification of opposition politics and power maintenance as factors suggests that kidnapping may be strategically used as a tool of political intimidation or destabilization, especially in contested or weakly governed areas. Moreover, the mention of ransom and informers implies community-level complicity and profit-driven motivations that further entrench kidnapping as a normalized practice.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the study provide compelling evidence that ungoverned spaces are prevalent and deeply embedded in the security challenges faced in Zamfara State. A large majority of respondents (70.6%) confirmed the existence of ungoverned areas within the state, particularly in rural locations such as Maru, Tsafe, Mada Town, and Bukuyum. These regions are characterized by limited or non-existent government presence, which aligns with the assertions of Rabasa et al. (2007) and Menkhaus (2010), who describe ungoverned spaces as areas within a sovereign state where official authority is absent or ineffective, enabling criminal and insurgent activities. Respondents identified specific indicators of ungoverned spaces, including lack of police presence (48.9%), inadequate infrastructure (23.1%), and high crime levels (21.1%). These findings support Clunan and Trinkunas' (2010) argument that physical neglect, weak governance, and the absence of public services contribute to governance vacuums. The presence of vigilante groups (6.9%) as a substitute for formal security illustrates how non-state actors often fill the void left by ineffective state structures. Additionally, the study revealed that ungoverned spaces negatively impact social order and community

security. A significant number of respondents (36.4%) stated that the lack of governance leads to a refusal to obey rules and regulations, while others mentioned discomfort in the community (30.3%) and general insecurity (16.4%). This highlights the erosion of state legitimacy and the collapse of the rule of law, reinforcing the empirical conclusions drawn by Turner (2016) regarding alternative, informal governance mechanisms that often emerge in marginalized areas. These observations are further reinforced by the Routine Activity Theory, which contends that crime flourishes in environments where there is a motivated offender, a suitable target, and an absence of capable guardianship. In the case of Zamfara State, ungoverned spaces represent the absence of capable guardians, law enforcement, and formal governance structures, creating conditions conducive to criminal activity like kidnapping.

The study also provides insights into the complex factors driving the increase in kidnapping incidents across Zamfara State. The most commonly identified cause was economic hardship, cited by 34.7% of respondents. This was followed by unemployment (20.8%), influence of organized crime groups (17.8%), political instability (13.1%), and weak law

enforcement (9.4%). These findings align with the work of Okoli and Agada (2014), who emphasized the link between socio-economic deprivation and the surge in kidnapping and other violent crimes. Further analysis reveals that 48.6% of respondents rated poverty as contributing "very highly" to kidnapping, while 38.3% said the impact of unemployment was "very high." These responses mirror the Frustration-Aggression Theory, which posits that economic frustration and lack of opportunities can lead to antisocial behaviors, including criminal acts like kidnapping. In Zamfara, it appears that individuals, especially youth, may view kidnapping as a survival mechanism in the absence of viable livelihoods. Respondents also pointed to illiteracy, lack of education, and the use of kidnapping for political gain as contributing factors.

These findings suggest that kidnapping is not merely a criminal issue, but a symptom of broader systemic failures, including weak educational structures, manipulative politics, and a compromised justice system. The identification of informers and ransom payments as enablers of kidnapping also points to community complicity and normalization of the crime, echoing observations by Okumu (2013) that organized crime in weak states often benefits from local networks and perceived legitimacy. Linking back to the Routine Activity Theory, the data underscores how the absence of law enforcement (a "capable guardian") and the presence of economic motivation and vulnerable communities (suitable targets) create the perfect conditions for kidnapping to thrive.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that ungoverned spaces play in exacerbating insecurity, particularly kidnapping, in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The study revealed that a substantial proportion of respondents recognize the existence of areas with minimal or no government presence, especially in rural communities. These governance vacuums are marked by inadequate infrastructure, lack of police presence, and the rise of alternative, often informal security arrangements. Such conditions foster lawlessness, undermine public trust in formal institutions, and create fertile ground for criminal activities. Furthermore, the study highlighted key socio-economic and political drivers of kidnapping, including economic hardship, unemployment, poverty, and the influence of organized crime groups. These factors, reinforced by weak law enforcement and systemic neglect, have enabled kidnapping to evolve from isolated incidents into a widespread and organized criminal enterprise. The findings also suggest that kidnapping in Zamfara is not only a reflection of economic desperation but also of deeper political and governance failures.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the findings, the paper recommends the following:

Based on the widespread identification of ungoverned spaces in Zamfara State, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas, the government must prioritize a coordinated approach that combines physical security deployment with socioeconomic infrastructure.

Given the strong correlation between kidnapping and factors such as economic hardship, unemployment, and poverty, there is a need for broad-based economic inclusion policies. These should specifically target vulnerable youth populations in high-risk areas through job creation initiatives, vocational training, agricultural support schemes, and access to micro-credit.

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