

The Socio-Religious Perspective of Kidnapping and Democratic Sustainability in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

This study focuses on the socio-religious perspective of the problem of kidnapping as a threat to democratic governance in Akwa Ibom State. Kidnapping has emerged as a notorious form of violent crime in many societies of the world today because it is lucrative. In Akwa Ibom, this crime is rampant and the rationale behind it has gone beyond just economical into a political tool for witch-hunting perceived opponents. Given the fact that Akwa Ibom State is a predominantly Christian State, the researcher sought to investigate the socio-religious perception of the people about the threat of kidnapping to democratic sustainability. The study employed the use of a structured questionnaire developed and distributed to respondents drawn randomly across the state. We found that the people of Akwa Ibom are fully aware of the prevalence of kidnapping in the state, the crime of kidnapping in the state has been politicized and it has become a threat to democratic sustainability within the state. The significance of this study therefore is to expose the root of the threat of kidnapping to democratic sustainability in the State. The study recommends a comprehensive reorientation of the people on the evil of politicizing any crime in the state.

Key words: kidnapping, democracy, religion,

1. Introduction

Kidnapping and violent crime have become a prominent, but complex and multi-dimensional issue on the public policy agenda of states and international organizations. This awakening is in response to myriad of perceived social injustice and criminal and violent activities of armed gangs in different parts of the world. The issue of violent crime is today perceived not only as a narrow juvenile problem of how to ensure a symbiotic and congruent interface between youth development and societal progress it is more than that. Its inner core has psychological, political, social, religious and developmental implications on the existence of a society.

Interestingly, the Holy Bible condemns the crime of kidnapping in its entirety. The Mosaic Law says “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 21:16) (KJV). This law is corroborated by an affirmative statement found in the bible book of Deuteronomy, it says “if a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and maketh merchandise of him, or selleth him, then that thief shall die, and thou shall put evil away from among you (Deut. 24:7) (KJV). These are clear cases of biblical injunctions against the crime of kidnapping. Despite these holy pronouncements, the crime of kidnapping flourishes beyond measure in different parts of the world today. Over centuries, the causal factors of the crime have developed from economic to social, political, religious and psychological. Today, myriad of reasons can be argued to account for cases of kidnapping around the globe.

Kidnapping has emerged as the most lucrative form of violent crime among youths in the oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Hardly does a week pass without the news of a new case of kidnapping in the region. This has far reaching social-religious implications on democratic sustainability within the area. For one, it calls the religious belief or standard of a people who are predominantly Christians into question. Christianity abhors kidnapping in its entirety because it is a crime that is biblically sanctioned by death. Throughout history, youth violent crimes have played a destabilizing role in social, religious and economic life of a society. Wunder (2003) rightly observed that they have also been a major reason for characterizing a society as crises-prone.

The society has been at the receiving end and has been overburdened with the implicational aftermath of youth excesses in the society. Turner (1998:145) attempted a documentation of how kidnapping originated. According to him, the term “kidnapping” originated in the 17th century England where children were kidnapped and often sold as slaves or agricultural workers to colonial farmers. Akpan (2010:33) describes how centuries before, in ancient Rome, the Emperor Constantine (AD 315) became so alarmed by the incidence of kidnapping that he ordered the death penalty as the punishment for the crime. Therefore, the crime of kidnapping is not new in human society. However, the incidence of kidnapping is relatively a new entrant into the African Continent. Akpan (2010:36) noted that the crime had remained a prominent feature of criminology literature in other parts of the world, unlike in Africa.

Kidnapping has grown over the years as an industry involving every level of the society and motivated by many reasons. One State where kidnapping has become a recurrent event of recent is Akwa Ibom State, one of the core oil producing states in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region. Nigeria’s Niger Delta is rich in petroleum oil and has been explored by multinational corporations and the Federal Government of Nigeria amid high incidence of poverty, absence of infrastructures and deprivations of the locals and oil communities. Various forms of crime, including kidnapping have emerged as a consequence. These crimes have gone virtually unabated and now threaten the sustainability of democratic government in this region. The spate of kidnapping in Akwa Ibom State is extremely high. Kidnapping being a major kind of violent crime can have destabilizing effect on the socio-religious economic and political existence of the people. Kidnapping can cause disruption of social peace and economic sabotage. When an entrepreneur is kidnapped, it could lead to closure of his business, dis-engaging his labour force and creating more unemployment among the youth. High unemployment could lead to more violent crimes. When the crime rate becomes no longer bearable, the Federal Government could declare a state of emergency, thereby putting the democratic governance in jeopardy. The result reveals whether the people are aware of the threat of kidnapping. Besides, the government alone can not fight the crime.

The crime of kidnapping poses a huge threat to the sustainability of democratic governance in Akwa Ibom State. Public educational programmes that enlighten the public on the socio-religious implications of kidnapping are almost non-existent. It is in the light of the foregoing, that this study aims to investigate the socio-religious perspective to the problem of kidnapping as a threat to democratic governance in Akwa Ibom State. The major objectives of the study are first to find out whether citizens of Akwa Ibom State are aware of the threat of kidnapping to the sustenance of democratic governance in the state. Secondly to evaluate the level of efficiency in the control and management of kidnapping in Akwa Ibom State. Again, to investigate the socio-religious stand of the people of the state as it concerns the prevalence of kidnapping in Akwa Ibom State. Finally, To identify various ways of improving the response of security agencies and the judiciary/legislature to the crime of kidnapping.

This study is significant and timely as it will be beneficial to many agencies in the area of policy formulation and control strategies against kidnapping in the society. The study would equally contribute to the scarce literature on the crime of kidnapping in Africa and Akwa Ibom in particular. Hence, the study would equally serve as a reference material to future researchers. This study is primarily concerned with the examination of the socio-religious perspective of the threat presented by kidnapping on the sustenance of democratic governance in Akwa Ibom State. Hence, the core of this research centres around the subject of kidnapping and democratic sustainability in Akwa Ibom State.

The method of research used to gather information were through oral interview and questionnaire. Selected number of people, especially knowledgeable people who are in better position to give a vivid, accurate and authentic information on the socio-religious perspective to kidnapping and its threat on the sustainability of democratic government in Akwa Ibom State will be interviewed to get information for this study. Apart from conducting oral interview, relevant data were gathered from distributing a structured questionnaire to respondents. The size of the sample is 100 respondents (3 Senatorial District) to be drawn randomly following the principle of convenient sampling which refers to a non-probability sampling method involving selection of individual on the basis of their availability and willingness to respond. The strength of this method is that the result is objective since respondents made themselves available out of their own volition. Therefore, the outcome of research cannot be spurious. Data generated from field is analyzed using simple percentage analytical techniques. Before proceeding, it is important to understand the background of kidnapping and governance in Akwa Ibom State.

2. Background of Kidnapping in Akwa Ibom State

The root of kidnapping in Akwa Ibom can be traced to what Townsend (2008:18) referred to as “natural resource nationalism” – the tendency to seek bigger shares of the returns from natural resources. That is, the clamour by aborigines of the Oil Producing Niger Delta region to get better and bigger share of the fortune made from the resources got from their land. It is also compounded by what Akpan termed “accumulation politics” – the tendency for the ruling class to be involved in endless accumulation of natural resources rents accruing from the region through deliberate act of marginalization and deprivation. Here the author means the resolve of the ruling class to deliberately take the return that should go to the aborigines for their resources.

The Niger Delta question or unsolved problem of today is a heritage of Nigeria’s structural flaws which is fundamentally constitutional and political. Onduku (2001:No22) classified these flaws into two categories. The first has to do with the division of the country into three unequal regions, with the population and size of the northern region alone exceeding that of the two southern regions put together. The second flaw involves the political and demographic domination of the northern, western and eastern regions, being the majority ethnic nationalities and the attendant marginalization of the minority ethnic nationalities that comprise approximately one third of the population of each region. The Niger Delta is one of such minority ethnic groups and its position becomes so important given that Nigeria’s economy depends on petroleum resources, which is drilled in the region.

Akwa Ibom constitutes one of core states in the oil rich region. Despite being a minority ethnic group, the Niger Delta has a long history of organization and social mobilization capability and this predated the emergence of oil resources as economic revenue as well as Nigeria’s emergence as a British colony (Akpan 2001:33). Niger Delta communities had their own local leaders who distinguished themselves in the service of their people while serving the British. Such services led to the creation of Rivers Province in 1947, that paved way for the emergence of the Niger Delta Congress founded by Harold Dappa Biriye. The purpose of such a group was to fight for equity for the disadvantaged people of the region. The group later emerged as a platform that serves to internationalize the Niger Delta cause as their leaders made it a point of duty to mount vigorous campaigns against marginalization and deprivation of their people at various international fora, including the London Conference of the Minorities in 1958 (Akpan 2010:69).

The mounting campaign generated by the representative leaders of the Niger Delta cause paid well in raising the Consciousness of the people leading to the demand for resource control and developmental attention. At Nigeria’s independence in 1960, the situations had gotten to a crisis point when Isaac Adaka Boro, a radical nationalist and an Ijaw born revolutionary championed a revolt against the government of Nigeria. On February 23, 1966, he landed at Tontoubau, a sacred forest in Kaiama town in the present Bayelsa State in the riverine areas of the Niger Delta with one hundred and fifty-nine comrades to launch a guerrilla war against the then Federal Military Government (Akpan 2010:40). Following his proclamation of the region as an independent entity (the Niger Delta Peoples Republic) with himself as the Head of State, a battle ensued with the Nigerian Police which he defeated. The Federal Military Government then deployed the Armed Forces against Boro and his men and they were able to hold up the federal troops for a while before he was defeated on the 12th day. This rebellion has come to be known in the political history of Nigeria today as the “Twelve-day Revolution” according to Omeje (2005:321-334).

According to Akpan and Akpabio (2003:40) by all calculations, it has always been argued that the marginalization of people in the Niger Delta, the despoliation of their environment and the resultant conflicts have their roots in the discovery of oil as well as its exploration and production activities by the oil multinationals. The government of Nigeria has been compounding these problems through deliberate acts of oppressive policies and persistent instances of marginalization in development. Government attitudes toward the region is also reflected in the general absence of developmental attention as the people continue to live in pristine conditions and in most cases without electricity, pipe borne water, hospital, housing and schools in spite of the enormous wealth the government derives from the region.

Concerns for the development of the Niger Delta region are age-old phenomenon. The communities of the region have been protesting the injustices peacefully for decades, until recently when such protests took on a violent form.

The parties in the conflict do not involve only the Federal Government and the Niger Delta people but also the oil multinationals. In summary, the grievances of the people have involved three closely interrelated but analytically distinct issues. Firstly, that laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership be abrogated; secondly, the issue of natural resource control and self-determination; and thirdly, that appropriate institutional and financial arrangement should be put in place by the oil producing communities or the developmental and environmental problems associated with oil exploration and exploitation (Onduku 2001:60). The government seemed not to be taking this matter seriously given its attitude of using military option to suppress the people's demand. The locals therefore opted for hostage taking, hijacking and kidnapping of oil workers in all the Niger Delta States, including Akwa Ibom.

The Niger Delta people have now become more organized in their demand for the development of the region, which has been denied them for a long time. These conflicting positions of the Federal Government and the locals have set the stage for violent conflicts. Of late, kidnapping of foreign workers have become one of the key elements of such conflicts as a deliberate attempt to challenge government's hegemonic powers over their resources. The Yar'Adua Government granted amnesty to the Niger Delta militants in a bid to end the violent confrontations. Although this move greatly reduced the spate of violent crimes in the region, the main effect was diversionary. That is, the crime of kidnapping, in particular degenerated from targeting oil workers and multinationals to targeting politicians, clergy, entrepreneurs, and business owners.

3. *Kidnapping and governance in Akwa Ibom state*

As part of the Niger Delta region, kidnapping in Akwa Ibom started as a liberation struggle for the general development of the region. Over time, the crime degenerated into political and economic dimensions. It is arguable that it is this degeneration in the motive and purpose of the crime that enthroned it as a threat to democratic sustainability in Akwa Ibom State.

According to Tzanelli (2006:929ff), kidnapping is a business venture that is regulated by the laws of demand and supply and is a type of social action that involves the calculation of the most efficient means to the desired ends⁷. Kidnapping is an enterprise and according to Akpan (2010:36), "Kidnappers are businessmen, they just happen to be on the illegal side of it.... If you deprive them of the demand then there is not going to be any supply. Why would I kidnap somebody who will not pay".

As kidnapping was first used as a weapon to fight for economic and environmental justice in Akwa Ibom, the economic motivation was intermittently used as a means to fund and sustain the fight. The beginning of 2007 saw the emergence of various other deviant groups by various names who hide under liberation struggle to commit economic crimes. It takes few persons to organize somebody's kidnap. In this case the victim would be snatched and taken to a safe location. Such operation is always well-planned and well-executed. The family of the victim is then contacted and a ransom demanded, which is subject to negotiation.

In this category, there is heavy financial motivation and the victims are always from the upper class; which include politicians, foreign workers, and men and women and people of very rich background. Some national dailies have documented few of such incidences as follows.

- a. "... the trend of kidnapping reached a climax when they (kidnappers) stormed Ikot Abasi local government area last year (2007) and whisked away six Russians working for an aluminum company. The whitemen stayed with their captives in an unknown place for two weeks before they were released. According to Akasike (2008) the militants had asked for a N100m ransom before they would release their victims"
- b. "Again these daredevil militants accosted a Lebanese working for a construction company in Ikot Ekpene, pulled him out of his company's Toyota Hilux Vehicle and forced him into a waiting car before he was driven away to an unknown destination" (Akasike (2008:2).
- c. "The mindset of the people before this time was that only men were good for abduction in the state. That thinking dissolved into insignificance when the wife of the Senator representing Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, Mrs Comfort Etok, was kidnapped in broad day light in Uyo" (Akasike :2008:3).
- d. "Unknown gunmen suspected to be kidnappers on Thursday night kidnapped the chairman of Onna Local Government, Mrs Owoidighe Ekpoattai, and shot dead two policemen attached to the council boss as security aides" (Kazeen 2005 August 5).

- e. “There was pandemonium at Uyo yesterday as un-identified gunmen whisked away to unknown destination, the wife of ANPP gubernatorial candidate and former military governor, Sam Enwang. As at press time, Capt. Enwang (rtd) was yet to get brief from the abductors of his wife (okon:2010, September 9)
- f. On the 31st of January 2010, some armed men suspected to be kidnappers attempted to kidnap Maj. Gen. E. A. Akpan (rtd) at Qua Iboe Church Iwok 1, Ikot Ubok Udom Superintendency in Nsit Atai Local Government Area. In the process shut two persons to death and injuring several others thereby bringing the church service to an abrupt end. Benjamin (2010).

Kidnappings of this dimension cut across every area of Akwa Ibom but the common denomination is immediate and lucrative pay-off. This explains why they opt for the rich. As at the last count, over 100 indigenes of the state have been kidnapped while not less than another 30 narrowly escaped being abducted. Unfortunately, not all the kidnapped persons return alive. One common factor that supports this form of kidnapping is the rising incidence of endemic poverty and unemployment among youths mostly in the midst of abundant resources.

Some analysts have argued that kidnapping in Akwa Ibom State is used as a political tool. This case qualifies for what Turner describes as “money and politics” where there are political motivations for kidnapping but where ransoms are also demanded. Such ransoms are often used to further the political objectives of the kidnapping organizations or simply to facilitate the survival of the organization. Recently, according to Akpan 2010: 65ff) it was insinuated that most top kidnapping operations are master minded by top government officials, opposition groups, unrewarded or uncompensated members of election rigging groups, among others.

Kidnapping is then seen as an instrument for political vendetta and settling of political scores. The operation is organized and targeted mainly at key serving politicians or contactors working directly for government. Once the victim is kidnapped, a high level negotiation is expected which will ultimately lead to a very heavy ransom. Such a ransom is used to further political goals, self-settling of aggrieved groups or a way of financially crippling an aspiring politician.

According to Akpan (2010:33), the most notable kidnapping gangs in the state are “used and dumped” political thugs. Most of them were used during election and dumped at swearing-in still armed and without any compensation. On the strength of the sophisticated weapons at their disposal, the members regroup themselves and target their political mentors or enemies. They specialize in high profile kidnapping that even surpasses the capabilities of the security agents; thus threatening the very democratic government in the state.

4. Presentation and analysis of data

The analysis of findings is done using simple percentages. This is intended to aid a deeper exploration of the research findings and promote a better understanding of the opinion of the people regarding the threat of kidnapping as a crime against democratic sustainability in the state.

The questionnaire for this study was divided into two sections. The first section is for demographic data while the second part captures the research questions. For proper analysis, the data shall be presented and analyzed section by section. That means that we first present and analyze the responses to section A of the questionnaire before looking at the section B.

Section A – Bio Data

Table 1: Gender

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Female | 27 | 30 |
| Male | 63 | 70 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The above table shows that 63 persons (corresponding to 70% of total respondents) were male while 27 persons (which is equivalent to 30% of the respondents) were female.

Table 2: Age bracket

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| 18-23 | 9 | 10 |
| 24-29 | 28 | 31.1 |
| 30-35 | 27 | 30 |
| 36-41 | 26 | 28.9 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

A breakdown of the age distribution of our respondents reveals that 9 persons (or 10% of total sample) were between 18-23 years of age, 28 people (or 31.1% of sample) were between 24-29 years of age, 27 people (or 30% of them) were between 30-35 years while the remaining 26 persons (or 28.9% of total) were between 36-41 year of age.

Table 3: Occupation

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Student | 35 | 38.9 |
| Civil Servant | 28 | 31.1 |
| Business | 13 | 14.4 |
| Professional | 14 | 15.6 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The above table presents the occupational distribution of our respondents. A total of 35 respondents (corresponding to 38.9% of our samples) were students, 28 people (or 31.1% of total) were civil servants, 13 persons (equivalent to 14.4% of them) were business people, while the remaining 14 respondents (or 15.6% of total sample) were professionals.

Table 4: Marital Status

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Simple | 61 | 67.8 |
| Married | 29 | 28.2 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result presented in the above table shows that 61 respondents (which is equivalent to 67.8% of total sample) were single while 29 of them (or 28.2% of total) were married.

Table 5: Residence in Akwa Ibom

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 90 | 100 |
| No | Nil | Nil |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The above table shows that all our respondents agreed to be residents within the state.

Section B - Research Questions

Table 6: The table below presents responses to the question: What is your perception about the security situation in Akwa Ibom State?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Calm and conducive | 17 | 18.9 |
| Chaotic | 51 | 56.7 |
| Neutral | 22 | 24.4 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result presented in the above table shows that 17 people representing 18.9% of total sample described the security situation in Akwa Ibom State as calm and conducive, 51 persons (which is equivalent to 56.7% of total) said the security situation is chaotic while the remaining 22 respondents (or 24.4% of sample) decided to be neutral on the matter. Thus majority of our respondent described the security situation as being chaotic.

Table 7: The table below presents responses to the question: Have you ever heard of kidnapping case in Akwa Ibom State?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 90 | 100 |
| No | Nil | Nil |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result portrayed in the table above shows that every respondent agreed to have heard of kidnapping in the state. This is a clear pointer to the fact that kidnapping is a notorious crime within the state.

Table 8: The table below present responses to the question: If yes, through which medium did you hear it?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Radio | 19 | 21.1 |
| Television | 10 | 11.1 |
| Newspaper | 21 | 23.3 |
| Interpersonal Communication | 40 | 44.4 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result presented above shows that 21.1% of respondents got their information about kidnapping cases from the radio, 11.1% of them said they got informed through television, 23.3% said they got informed through newspaper while 44.4% said they got informed through interpersonal communication. Thus, among the local Akwa Ibom population, interpersonal communication is a faster and more accessible means of spreading news on kidnapping cases.

Table 9: The table below presents responses to the question: How was the event of the kidnapping case portrayed?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Fearful and Intimidating | 63 | 70 |
| Sweet and entertaining | 5 | 5.6 |
| Neutral | 22 | 24.4 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result displayed in the above table reveals that 63 respondents (which represents 70% of total sample size) said the event of kidnapping cases they were informed about were portrayed in fearful and intimidating manner, 5.6% of them said it was portrayed as sweet and entertaining while 24.4% chose to remain indifferent.

Table 10: The table below presents responses to the question: Do you think kidnapping is a major security challenge in Akwa Ibom State?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 67 | 74.4 |
| No | 23 | 25.6 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result shows that 67 persons (equivalent to 74.4% of total sample size) agreed that the crime of kidnapping is a major security challenge in Akwa Ibom State while the remaining 23 respondents tended to see the crime not being a major security challenge in the state. Thus, it is clear that majority of people in the state see kidnapping as a major security challenge in Akwa Ibom

Table 11: The table below presents responses to the question: What do you see to be the main cause of kidnapping in Akwa Ibom State?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Unemployment | 61 | 67.8 |
| Poverty | 7 | 7.8 |
| Politics | 22 | 24.4 |
| Resource Control | Nil | Nil |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

A distribution of responses to the question on the main cause of kidnapping in the state shows that majority of the people believe that the high incidence of unemployment among youths in the state is at the root of the menace of the crime of kidnapping. A total of 61 respondents (equivalent to 67.8% of total sample said unemployment is the cause, while 22 persons (corresponding to 24.4% of sample) said it is politics.

Table 12: The table below presents response to the question Do you have a religious view of kidnapping?

| Option | No of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|--------|-------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 63 | 70 |
| No | 27 | 30 |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

The table shows that 63 people representing 70 percent of total respondents said they have a religious view of kidnapping. While 27 person (equivalent to 30 percent) said “No”.

Table 13: The table below presents response to the question: if yes, what is it?

| Option | No of respondents | Proportion (%) |
|----------|-------------------|----------------|
| Positive | 7 | 11.1 |
| Negative | 56 | 88.7 |
| Total | 63 | 100% |

The above table shows that 88.9 percent of those who agreed to have religious view of kidnapping said their view is negative while the remaining 11.1 percent (Which is equivalent to 7 respondents) said their view is positive.

Table 14: The table below presents responses to the question: Do you have a religious view of kidnapping?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 63 | 70 |
| No | 27 | 30 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

The table shows that 63 people representing 70% of total respondents said they have a religious view of kidnapping, while 27 persons (equivalent to 30%) said “No”.

Table 15: The table below presents responses to the question: If Yes? What is it?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|----------|--------------------|----------------|
| Positive | 7 | 11.1 |
| Negative | 56 | 88.9 |
| Total | 63 | 100 |

The above table shows that 88.9% percent of those who agreed to have religious view of kidnapping said their view is negative while the remaining 11.1% (which is equivalent to 7 respondents) said their view is positive.

Table 16: The table below presents responses to the question: Do you think kidnapping in Akwa Ibom is politically motivated?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 22 | 24.4 |
| No | 68 | 75.6 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result presented in the above table shows that only 22 respondents (which is equivalent to 24.4% of total samples) said that kidnapping is politically motivated. The remaining people; which constitutes the majority (68 respondents or 75.6% of total samples) said kidnapping is not politically motivated.

Table 17: The table below presents responses to the question: Do you think kidnapping can be a treat to democratic sustainability in the state?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 90 | 100 |
| No | Nil | Nil |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The above result shows that every of our respondents said the existence of kidnapping in the state can undermine democratic sustainability within the state. This is an expression of adequate understanding of the destructive potency of the crime within the society.

Table 18: The table below presents responses to the question: Does kidnapping have any impact on the social ad economic life of the state?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 78 | 85.7 |
| No | 12 | 13.3 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result presented in the above table reveals that 78 respondents (which corresponds to 86.7% said kidnapping affects the social and economic life of the state. The remaining 12 persons (or 13.3%) said kidnapping does not affect the socio-economic life of the people of the state.

Table 19: The table below presents responses to the question: If yes, what is the effect?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|----------|--------------------|----------------|
| Negative | 72 | 92.3 |
| Positive | 2 | 2.5 |
| Neutral | 4 | 5.2 |
| Total | 78 | 100 |

The result presented in the above table shows that 92.3% of those who said kidnapping affects the social and economic life of the state actually believe that the effect is negative.

Thus, majority of the people believe that kidnapping produces or impacts negatively on the welfare of the state.

Table 20: The table below presents responses to the question: Do you think government is doing enough currently to contain the menace?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 38 | 42.2 |
| No | 52 | 57.8 |
| Total | 90 | 100 |

The result displayed above reveals that 38 respondents (corresponding to 42.2% of total) said government is doing enough currently to contain the menace while 52 respondents (equivalent to 57.8% of total) said government is not doing enough currently to contain the menace of kidnapping in the state.

Table 21: The table below presents responses to the question: If yes, in what ways.

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| By arresting kidnappers | 15 | 39.4 |
| By making the crime a capital offence | 12 | 31.5 |
| By equipping security agencies | 11 | 29.1 |
| Total | 38 | 100 |

The above table shows that 39.4% of those that said government is doing enough to contain the menace of kidnapping cited the arrest of kidnappers as a case in point, 31.5% cited the making of the crime a capital offence in the state while 29.1% said it is by equipping security agencies to better kidnappers in the state.

Table 22: The table below presents responses to the question: If No, how can government improve in its efforts to stop kidnapping in the state?

| Options | No. of Respondents | Proportion (%) |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| By creating jobs for youths | 41 | 78.8 |
| Through enlightenment campaign | 1 | 2 |
| Further equipping of security forces | 10 | 19.2 |
| Total | 52 | 100 |

The result above reveals that 78.8% of those who said government is not doing enough to contain the menace of kidnapping in the state stressed to need to create jobs for the youths while 19.2% of them said there is need to better and further equip security agencies to better combat kidnapers in the state

5. Discussion of findings

Our findings have shown in a robust manner that the people of Akwa Ibom are well vexed with the security situation as well as the notoriety of kidnapping within the state. With majority of the inhabitants describing the security situation in the state as chaotic can only suggest that security agents in the area are having a tedious situation in their hands. Also, it is practically obvious that people of the state are fully aware of the crime of kidnapping. In fact, it is undoubtedly the most popular kind of crime in the state right now (Interview with Mr. Uboh Ema, Businessman, at 28 Akpakpan Street, Uyo, Age 68 years on 26th November, 2011).

A higher proportion of the people equally claim to get briefed about kidnapping cases in the state through interpersonal communication. Thus, one-on-one medium of information dissemination seems to work better and spread faster in the state. Besides, our respondents reported kidnapping as a major security challenge within Akwa Ibom. This is because the crime is a surging one and it is always reported with fear and intimidation, whether in the radio, television, internet, print media or interpersonal communication. Interestingly, most of the people see high rate of unemployment among the youths in the state as the main fuel behind the surging flame of kidnappings in the state (Interview with Mr. Victor Silas, Clergy, at Idung Udoh Street, Eket, 72 years on 20th December, 2011. We equally found that a greater proportion of the people actually believe that kidnapping is not politically motivated in the state.

It is true that kidnapping can become a threat to the sustenance of democratic governance in the state. This much is supported with findings from this study. Democracy needs an atmosphere of peaceful and cordial coexistence of people in the society. It is a civil rule that is based on the wishes and aspirations of the people of the society. It does not thrive for long in an environment where chaos and crime are the order of the day. In Interview with Chief Okon, Village Head, at Otoro Abak, Abak Local Government Area on 27th December, 2011 it is now clear why kidnapping has impacted negatively on the social and economic welfare of the state and her people. Currently, majority of the people do not seem to believe that security agents are doing enough to contain this ugly menace of man hunting. Many believe that it is not enough to arrest the kidnapers, make the crime a capital offence in the state, or equip security agents; they believe it is equally crucial to create jobs for the youths so as to create a worthy distraction to those involved in the crime (which are mainly youths).

6. Ethical evaluation of our Findings

Findings of this study have revealed some salient issues regarding the crime of kidnapping and its threat to democratic sustainability in Akwa Ibom State. For one, the conventional media (that is both electronic and print) are lagging behind in spreading vital information about kidnapers and their activities in the state. More people learn about kidnappings through interpersonal briefings than through the electronic or print media. It seems that these media outfits are afraid to report kidnappings in the state and to follow up on such cases. This is not a healthy development.

Also, this study has revealed that people deliberately politicize kidnapping cases in the state thereby blowing the situation out of proportion. In fact, this is the origin of the threat of kidnapping to democratic sustainability in the state. When people willfully give a political coloration to kidnappings cases, they succeed in creating more potential victims for kidnapers, thereby throwing the entire paraphernalia of government into chaotic panic (Akpan 2010:33). People suddenly become potential targets just by the mere fact of either being in government or being related to someone in government. This has adversely affected the economy of the state in diverse negative manners.

Lastly, we found that kidnapping just like most social vices is a direct consequence of basic social lapse or dysfunction in the allocation of means of livelihood to the people. Majority of youths get involved in kidnapping purely because of unemployment and lack of social welfare. According to Akpan (2010:65ff), People are ready to work but cannot get employed because existing structure, due to multiple reasons do not have the capacity to employ everybody. In fact, they can employ only a few. And there is no social compensation whatsoever from the government to cater for the teaming unemployed army. The result is an upsurge in illegal activities to make ends meet. Kidnapping is one of such illegal but highly lucrative activities in the society today.

7. Conclusion

This research project looked at the threat of kidnapping to democratic sustainability in Akwa Ibom State. The researcher discovered that the crime of kidnapping assumed a threatening dimension towards the sustenance of democratic government in the state when cases of kidnapping in the state were politicized.

Other important findings included the fact that kidnapping was actually a threat to democratic government in the state and inhabitants of the state were fully conscious of that dangerous dimension. Equally important is the fact that unemployment among the youths is contributing to the growth of the crime in the state. Akwa Ibom State certainly has one of the highest incidences of youth unemployment in the country and this is not healthy for the state in any way.

It is the submission of this study that though kidnapping within the state has assumed threatening dimension to the peaceful governance of the state, the state still has ample opportunity to put the menace under control if ideal strategies are followed.

8. Recommendations

After a thorough study of the threat of kidnapping to the sustenance of democracy in Akwa Ibom State, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- a. The people need to be made to understand the negative consequence of politicizing the crime of kidnapping in the state. Hence, it is imperative to float a sensitization campaign especially for politicians in the state. This campaign should include seminars and workshops structure to expose and condemn the act of playing politics with kidnapping cases in the state.
- b. We found that the high rate of unemployment among the youths is the main reason for the increasing rate of kidnappers. It therefore follows that we need jobs for the youths. The government needs to realize that the costs of unemployment in the society far outweigh any thinkable benefit. Thus, it is ideal for government to create more jobs so as to directly disengage more youths from engaging in crimes such as kidnapping.
- c. While the effort of the state government towards combating the crime is quite commendable, it should be seen as only the beginning. More needs to be done. The current onslaught should be sustained and even increased. More combat equipment should be given to security agents and better collaboration should be sought from the general public to report every suspicion in their neighbourhood.
- d. Government and civil societies need to float some public enlightenment campaigns on basic tips about being self security conscious. There is need to raise the consciousness in people that it is their primary responsibility to be vigilant about the security situation around them at all times

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