

A Religious Insights to the Increasing Cases of Kidnapping in Southern Part of Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Kidnapping constitutes a criminal practice with far-reaching consequences for human society. Across Nigeria, it has long been treated as a major social evil that endangers lives, property and conditions required for peaceful coexistence. This study examines religious interpretations of the reasons associated with the increasing cases of kidnapping in Southern part of Taraba State, while also investigates the prevailing types of kidnapping and their effects. A quantitative research design was adopted, using a descriptive method alongside simple percentage-based analysis, and drawing on both primary and secondary materials. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to respondents. Analytically, the study is situated within Anomie Theory, Religious Ethics Theory, and Social Disorganization Theory. The paper maintains that, from the standpoint of religious institutions, the increasing cases of kidnapping is tied to decline in moral and spiritual commitments, greediness and quest for materialism, unemployment and poverty, collusion involving security agents or influential individuals, and persistent ethnic tensions. Outcomes include huge ransom payments, loss of lives and properties, social instability and pressures that scare both local and foreign investors, and in turn deepen unemployment, poverty, and hunger. The study recommended among other things, that religious institutions should strengthen the culture of hard work and religious ethical teachings. These will aid in preventing the rising incidences of kidnapping in Taraba state and Nigeria at large.

Keywords: Religious Insight; Kidnaping, Christianity; Islam; African Traditional Religion, Moral values

I. INTRODUCTION

Across many parts of the world, kidnapping is widely recognized as a serious threat to the security of life and property. In Nigeria, reports of abduction have increasingly drawn international attention. For some individuals and organized groups, it has become a profitable venture, even a routine mode of criminal enterprise. Yusuf & Abdullahi (2020) contend that the contemporary pattern of kidnapping in Nigeria began on 25 February 2006 in the Niger Delta, when expatriate oil workers were abducted, an incident framed as a public protest against long-standing exclusion, political and social oppression, and underdevelopment in the region. Over time, what began with political messaging became an income-driven crime that spread across Nigeria. No category of person appears exempt: religious leaders, business people, traditional authorities, security personnel, ordinary citizens, and government officials have all faced the risk.

Southern Taraba State has become one of the zones heavily burdened by increasing cases of kidnapping. The area includes Local Government Areas such as Wukari, Donga, Takum, Ussa, Ibi, and the Yangtu Special Development Area.

Repeated kidnappings have involved farmers, traders, civil servants, students, clerics, traditional rulers, commuters, and at times even security agents. The spatial setting helps explain why the area is vulnerable. Thick forest cover, difficult terrain, porous inter-state borders, and proximity to neighbouring states combine to give criminal groups room to operate with limited constraint. The disruption does not end with the immediate victimization of individuals; agriculture, trade, schooling, and routine community life have all been unsettled, with fear becoming embedded in daily experience.

Several studies accounts for kidnapping in Nigeria through different perspectives. Socio-economic explanations stress poverty, unemployment, inequality, and shrinking prospects as key drivers of kidnapping (Okeshola&Adeta, 2013; Nwagboso, 2012). Political approaches focus on failures of governance, corruption, weak policing, and limitations within the justice system (Onuoha, 2021). Conflict-oriented literature points to communal violence, farmer–herder tensions, ethnic rivalry, and political instability as enabling conditions for organized crime (International Crisis Group, 2022). Yet given religion’s centrality in

Nigerian life, it is striking that many of these discussions treat religious dimensions only lightly. Religion remains a major foundation of Nigeria's social, cultural, and political life. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion continue to shape moral judgement, social expectations, political behaviour, and forms of belonging (Pew Research Center, 2019). Southern Taraba reflects this religious plurality: Christianity is prominent, Muslim communities are substantial, and African Traditional religious expressions continue to endure. Religious institutions operate as more than worship spaces; they serve as sites for moral instruction, mediation, humanitarian support, and local development.

From within Christian ethics, kidnapping is read as an assault on the sacredness of life affirmed in the creation narrative (Genesis 1:26–27). It stands against scriptural prohibitions regarding theft, oppression, violence, and injustice (Exodus 20:15; Amos 5:24). Islamic teaching likewise rejects kidnapping as injustice and corruption, emphasizing justice, mercy, and the protection of human dignity as central moral commitments (Qur'an 5:32; 16:90). African Traditional Religion stresses communal harmony, respect for life, kinship solidarity, and restorative justice, values fundamentally opposed to kidnapping and associated violence (Mbiti, 1969; Idowu, 1973).

Beyond doctrinal rejection, religious institutions also possess practical capacities relevant to insecurity, particularly through moral formation and community mobilization. Churches, mosques, and traditional religious structures often command public trust and maintain extensive grassroots networks, resources that can complement formal security responses. Work on conflict transformation and peacebuilding frequently indicates that religious organizations can contribute to reducing violence (Appleby, 2000; Gopin, 2002; Abu-Nimer, 2003). Even so, the role of religious institutions in relation to kidnapping in Southern Taraba remains under-studied.

Instead of treating kidnapping mainly through economic or political accounts, this study addresses that gap by examining religious interpretations of the reasons associated with the increasing cases of kidnapping in Southern Taraba State, the dominant types of kidnapping and their effects and propose measures religious institutions can adopt to reduce kidnapping in Taraba State and other states in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall objective is to examine religious insight to the increasing cases of kidnapping in Southern Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Identify prevailing types of kidnapping in Southern Taraba State
- ii. Examine the reasons for the increasing cases of kidnapping in Southern Taraba State
- iii. Evaluate the effects of kidnapping in Southern Taraba State
- iv. Suggest measures religious institutions can use to curb rising kidnapping in Southern Taraba State and Nigeria at large

ORIGIN OF KIDNAPPING

Kidnapping is not a new form of violent crime. Narratives within Christian and Muslim traditions account the capture of Joseph by his brothers, suggesting that kidnapping has been present since early human history. One of the earliest recorded legal references appears in the Bible: "anyone who captures another and either auctions him or retains him when apprehended must be executed" (Exodus 21:16). That such a prohibition was codified indicates that kidnapping was sufficiently common to demand explicit regulation.

Links between kidnapping and early organized societies have also been noted. Oliver, Collin, & Damon (1993) report renewed attention to the crime in 1874 following the abduction of four-year-old Charlie Ross in Philadelphia, accompanied by a ransom demand of 20,000 US dollars. In their account, Charlie and his brother Walter were taken; Walter was released the same day, while Charlie was held until ransom payment. The case shocked the public because no clear motive appeared, though economic hardship during the recession was associated with higher kidnapping rates. Oliver et al. (1993) also maintain that by 1932 kidnapping for ransom had become a profitable criminal industry, comparable to the wine, vice, and drug trades. Turner (1998) points to earlier European precedents in the Middle Ages, when wealthy merchants were abducted for ransom, and he notes that in the twelfth century the Archduke of Austria held Richard I of England for an extended period.

In Nigeria, the origin of kidnapping is often described in three phases. A first phase, in the early 2000s in the Niger Delta, involved militant groups abducting expatriate oil workers to draw attention to environmental destruction and demands for resource control (Okoli&Agada, 2014). Although originally linked to political messaging, ransom payments soon made the crime financially attractive. A second phase saw expansion across southern Nigeria between 2008 and 2015, with gangs targeting politicians, business elites, clergy, traditional rulers, and other affluent figures. A third phase, emerging around 2015, has involved rural banditry and mass abductions across northern and central Nigeria, affecting schools, highways,

farming communities, and religious institutions (Onuoha, 2021).

Taraba State lies in Nigeria's Middle Belt and borders Benue, Adamawa, and Cameroon Republic. Southern Taraba includes many ethnic groups, among them Jukun, Kuteb, Tiv, Chamba, and Ichen, with other smaller communities, and it is religiously diverse, reflecting Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Research frequently situates Southern Taraba as a recurrent conflict space shaped by contestations over indigene/settler relations, land access, political inclusion, and resource distribution (Best & Rakodi, 2011; International Crisis Group, 2022). Such tensions erode cohesion and can create openings for organized crime, including kidnapping.

Studies also observe that kidnappers exploit forest reserves, difficult terrain, and inadequately policed highways connecting Takum, Wukari, Donga, Ussa, and nearby states. Rural farming communities are exposed because travel routes often pass through isolated areas where security presence is limited (International Crisis Group, 2022). Beyond ransom demands, kidnapping has contributed to displacement, school closures, reduced farm output, and declining investment. Everyday movement and social interaction have shifted as fear increasingly informs routine choices.

RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON CRIME OF KIDNAPPING

Religious organizations in Nigeria are often treated as institutions that transmit moral standards to adherents. Through teaching and communal practice, religion seeks to shape integrity, reliability, and responsible social participation. Ogwo & Asemah (2013) describe religious institutions as the structures through which religious traditions conduct their activities. Anyacho (2013) argues that religion communicates moral symbols and principles that bind followers into integrated communities. In his view, beliefs, symbols, worship centres, and sacred spaces form organized systems that regulate conduct by marking acceptable lifestyles and distinguishing good from evil. When religious leaders and adherents sustain these moral expectations, they can contribute to reducing kidnapping.

Religious organizations therefore do more than gather believers; they also frame behaviour. Okobia (2017) suggests that social stability and other valued elements are often represented symbolically in religious life. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion cut across age categories, children, youth, and adults, and religious affiliation shapes conduct in each group. Anyacho (2013) argues that such groupings carry rules of behaviour aligned with social ideals, giving social norms a

sacred character. This position aligns with Ubrurhe (2000), who holds that religions can reduce abduction by shaping behaviour in line with communal norms and encouraging stability and peaceful coexistence.

Christian ethics consistently treat kidnapping as incompatible with justice, love, and human dignity. Prohibitions against theft (Exodus 20:15), oppression (Isaiah 1:17), and violence against innocents (Proverbs 6:16–19) frame kidnapping as morally unacceptable, while New Testament teachings on love of neighbour (Matthew 22:39), reconciliation, and peace reinforce that position. Wright (2004) interprets biblical justice as protection of the vulnerable, restoration of relationships, and affirmation of dignity; on such a reading, kidnapping becomes both a legal offence and a theological violation. Islam also condemns kidnapping. The Qur'an treats harm to an innocent as equivalent to harm against humanity (Qur'an 5:32). Justice, compassion, and protection of life are central objectives of Islamic law (Kamali, 2008). Contemporary jurists often classify kidnapping as evil because it violates liberty, dignity, and property rights. African Traditional Religion emphasizes communal responsibility, kinship ties, reciprocity, and restorative justice (Mbiti, 1969; Idowu, 1973). Crime is not seen only as injury to individuals; it disrupts communal and even cosmic balance. Kidnapping therefore attracts social sanctions and spiritual consequences, given its threat to collective welfare.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories provide organized tools for interpreting social problems. Creswell and Creswell (2023) describe a theoretical framework as an analytical lens that structures how a research problem is examined, indicating relationships among variables and assisting in explaining deeper causes. Because kidnapping in Southern Taraba has multiple dimensions, this study uses an interdisciplinary framework that brings together Anomie Theory, Religious Ethics Theory, and Social Disorganization Theory. Read together, these perspectives clarify how socio-economic strain, ethical breakdown, and weakened community structures interact to sustain kidnapping, and they also suggest points where religious institutions might support social order and moral conduct.

Anomie Theory. Anomie Theory is associated with Durkheim (1897/1951) and Merton (1938). Durkheim used "anomie" to refer to normlessness, a condition in which moral regulation weakens and individuals lack clear standards for behaviour. Rapid social change, instability, or institutional failure can erode norms and raise deviance (Durkheim, 1897/1951). Merton (1938) extended

the argument by stressing the gap between socially approved goals, such as wealth and status, and the legitimate means available to achieve them. When access to education, employment, and opportunities is blocked, some individuals adopt illegitimate strategies, kidnapping among them.

In Southern Taraba, this perspective speaks to youth unemployment, poverty, limited infrastructure, and restricted social services, pressures intensified by displacement, recurring conflict, and insecurity, all of which weaken informal controls. With lawful avenues narrowing, kidnapping can appear as an alternative strategy for survival (Alemika, 2022; Onuoha, 2021). The theory also points to normalization: where profit is high and prosecution weak, public condemnation declines and deviance can become tolerated. Yet anomie accounts privilege structure and inequality while giving less attention to religion, culture, and ethical formation, and they do not explain why many individuals facing similar conditions do not offend. These shortcomings support the inclusion of Religious Ethics Theory.

Religious Ethics Theory: Religious Ethics Theory provides a normative angle by focusing on how belief and moral instruction shape conduct. Instead of framing crime mainly as a product of economic strain or institutional weakness, this approach draws attention to ethical codes derived from religious traditions that regulate behaviour and support social harmony (Appleby, 2000). Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion treat human life as sacred and condemn violations of dignity. Christian ethics rely on the belief that all people bear God's image (Genesis 1:26–27), and scriptural prohibitions against theft, violence, oppression, and injustice conflict directly with kidnapping (Exodus 20:15; Proverbs 6:16–19; Matthew 22:37–40). Islamic ethics describe kidnapping as injustice and corruption; the Qur'an emphasizes the sanctity of life (Qur'an 5:32). Islamic law prioritizes the protection of life, dignity, property, intellect, and religion all of which are violated by kidnapping (Kamali, 2008). African Traditional Religion links morality closely to religion, reading wrongdoing as disruption of social and spiritual balance and applying sanctions that reinforce order (Mbiti, 1969; Idowu, 1973).

This perspective supports the claim that kidnapping is simultaneously criminal practice and moral collapse, and it points to faith institutions as possible sites of ethical formation, reconciliation, conflict mediation, and collective mobilization against crime. Yet moral instruction alone is often insufficient where poverty, corruption, and weak governance persist, and faith organizations also face constraints, limited resources, internal divisions, and politicization among them.

Social Disorganization Theory: This theory originally developed by Shaw & McKay in 1942. The theory argues that crime increases where community institutions, including families, schools, religious bodies, and local leadership, lose the capacity to maintain informal control. Poverty, residential instability, ethnic fragmentation, weak networks, and institutional breakdown contribute to disorganization; supervision of youth declines, disputes go unresolved, and crime prevention weakens. Southern Taraba shows many such characteristics: recurring violence, displacement, declining livelihoods, and intergroup distrust undermine local governance. Insecurity disrupts schooling, worship, and economic exchange, reducing opportunities for collective action. The theory also helps explain how kidnapping networks benefit from fragmented communities, fear of retaliation, and diminished trust in public institutions, factors that discourage reporting and permit offenders to operate. Its limits include limited attention to broader political and ideological forces, and to the spiritual and moral concerns emphasized by Religious Ethics Theory.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative design guided the study's data collection. Descriptive method and simple percentage analysis were used, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. The primary instrument consisted of survey questionnaires administered to respondents. Four (4) sections were included: socio-economic background, types of kidnapping identified in Southern Taraba State, religious understandings of the reasons behind the increasing cases of kidnapping, and perceived effects of kidnapping. Responses were organized into frequency and percentage tables for interpretation.

In total, 450 questionnaires were distributed across Ussa, Takum, Donga, Wukari, and Ibi Local Government Areas and the Yangtu Special Development Area, all within Southern Taraba State. Stratified sampling was used, followed by random selection to reach the targeted number of respondents. Not all questionnaires were returned, and only properly completed copies were included in the tables. To strengthen validity, specialists in religious studies and criminology reviewed the instrument. Analysis relied on descriptive statistics and simple percentages, consistent with the study's objectives. Responses were coded for interpretation. Secondary sources included newspapers, electronic media, books, journals, articles, and published theses related to kidnapping and insecurity.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of responses on religious insight into the increasing cases of kidnapping in Southern Taraba State, Nigeria.

Demographic characteristics appear alongside descriptive findings and discussion. Out of the 450 questionnaires distributed, 430 were returned and 420 were correctly completed.

Section 1: Socio-Demographic Information of Respondents

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	220	52.3%
Female	200	47.7%
Total	420	100%
Age		
18-20yrs	70	16.7%
20-30yrs	70	16.7%
31-50yrs	150	35.7%
50-above	130	30.9%
Total	420	100%
Marital status		
Single	130	30.9%
Married	230	54.7%
Divorced	15	3.7%
Widowed	30	7.2%
Separated	15	3.5%
Total	420	100%
Level of education		
Primary	90	21.4%
Secondary	140	33.3%
Tertiary	120	28.6%
Uneducated	70	16.7%
Total	420	100%
Religion		
Christians	255	60.7%
Muslims	95	22.6%
Traditionalist	70	16.7%
Total	420	100%
Occupation		
Unemployed	122	29.1%
Self-employed	118	28.1%
Employed	180	42.8%
Total	420	100%

Source: Fieldwork 2026.

The respondent profile indicates 52.3% male and 47.7% female participation. All age groups were represented, reflecting the understanding that kidnapping affects people across the life course.

Most respondents were married (54.7%); singles constituted 30.9%, with smaller numbers divorced, widowed, or separated. Educational attainment ranged from no formal schooling to primary,

secondary, and tertiary levels. Christians constituted the largest group (60.7%), followed by Muslims (22.6%) and traditionalists (16.7%).

Employment status showed 42.8% employed, 28.1% self-employed, and 29.1% unemployed.

Section 2. What is the Prevailing Types of Kidnapping in Southern Taraba State?

Table 2. Responses on Prevailing Types of Kidnapping

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Kidnapping for ransom	175	41.7%
Kidnapping associated with communal conflict	95	22.6%
Political Kidnapping	82	19.5%
Kidnapping for rituals and spiritual purpose	68	16.2%
Total	420	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Four perceived types of kidnapping were identified. Kidnapping for ransom received the highest proportion (41.7%), suggesting it is regarded as the most common and a central security concern. This aligns with Turner (1998), who identifies ransom kidnapping as a major category internationally. It involves seizing individuals to compel payment by families, employers, or authorities. In Nigeria, this pattern emerged in the Niger Delta and later spread nationwide, affecting students, farmers, religious leaders, business owners, and travellers (Okoli&Agada, 2014; Nwankpa, 2021). Kidnapping linked to communal conflict ranked second (22.6%), indicating that respondents perceive abductions tied to ethnic tensions, rivalry, and retaliation. Egwu (2018) describes ethnic kidnapping as abduction driven by identity-based motives or reprisal during communal violence. Historical grievances, weak conflict-resolution mechanisms, hate speech, and ineffective interventions are often identified as sustaining conditions (Best, 2007; Okoli&Lenshie, 2018).

Political kidnapping accounted for 19.5%, reflecting perceived abductions connected to political advantage, intimidation, or electoral manipulation. Onuoha (2019) links political kidnapping with electoral violence, while Albert (2017) argues that political actors sometimes sponsor criminal groups during election cycles to abduct opponents or officials, suppress participation, or influence outcomes. Such practices weaken democratic legitimacy and spread fear. Kidnapping for rituals and spiritual purposes received the lowest share (16.2%), yet its inclusion indicates that respondents perceive ritual-related abductions, including the taking of persons for body parts or blood linked to beliefs about supernatural power, wealth, protection, or influence. Ojo (2020) relates this pattern to ritual killings and occult belief systems, while Adinkrah (2020) links it to materialism, greed, moral decline, and persistent belief in supernatural wealth. Victims are often children, women, or other vulnerable groups.

Section 3: What is Religious Understanding of the reason for Increasing Cases of Kidnapping in Southern Taraba State?

Table 3. Responses on the Religious Understanding of the reason for increasing cases of Kidnapping

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Decline in moral and spiritual values	99	23.6%
Greediness and the quest for materialism	93	22.2%
Youths' Unemployment and Poverty	74	17.6%
Security Agents and High Profiles' Collusion with the Kidnappers	88	20.9%
Ethnic and Communal Conflict	66	15.7%
Total	420	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Findings from the study indicates that declining moral and spiritual values accounted for 23.6% of responses. This suggests that many respondents interpret kidnapping through the language of

weakened norms, reduced accountability, and diminished ethical values. This aligns with Oriola (2004) argument that organized crime expands where institutions, norms, and values lose

effectiveness and social control breaks down. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion all condemn kidnapping as a violation of life and moral order (Nwankwo, 2021). Yet modernization, urbanization, corruption, and the commercialization of religion are often connected to value erosion (Akinwale, 2023; Eze&Ugwu, 2022). In such conditions, kidnapping risks being treated as a route to wealth instead of a moral wrong (Okoli&Agada, 2014). Within Southern Taraba, some leaders interpret the trend as linked to collapsing communal values and weakened accountability among youth (Yahaya&Ishaku, 2025), which can normalize violence and encourage criminal entrepreneurship.

Greediness and quest for materialism accounted for 22.2%. Respondents thus stressed the pursuit of quick wealth as a major driver, particularly through ransom demands. This fits research that identifies greed and materialism as central motivations in contemporary Nigerian kidnapping (Okoli&Agada, 2014; Nwagboso, 2018). As social status becomes increasingly measured by conspicuous consumption rather than integrity, pressure can intensify, especially for unemployed youth, to seek money through illegal means (Akinwale, 2023; Eze&Ugwu, 2022). Segun, Solomon, and Kehinde (2021) argue that public celebration of wealthy donors through religious or chieftaincy titles can reinforce distorted models of success, creating incentives for shortcuts such as kidnapping.

Youth unemployment and poverty received 17.6%. Respondents linked kidnapping to limited employment opportunities and inadequate skills development. National data also connect unemployment and poverty to recruitment into organized crime (NBS, 2023; UNDP, 2022). Onah,

Okwuosa, and Uroko (2018) and Dami (2021) relate deprivation, weak infrastructure, and lack of services to increased participation in crimes including kidnapping. Abdussalam, Olayiwola, and Akinniyi-Duyile (2022) emphasize the scale of severe poverty in Nigeria. Still, as Igbo (2007) notes, poverty alone does not fully account for crime, since offending occurs across classes and wealthy actors can engage in criminality in other forms.

Collusion involving security agents and high-profile persons accounted for 20.9%. Respondents therefore interpreted complicity as a major sustaining factor. This concur with Amaefule (2010) assertion that kidnapping expands when security collaborators enable it and share ransom proceeds. Umeagbalasi (2011) similarly suggests that suspects are sometimes released due to “orders from above.” Studies by Ezinwa (2019) and Obijiofor (2019) document relationships among kidnappers, some security personnel, and influential political or business figures, relationships that lower accountability and strengthen impunity. In Southern Taraba, respondents described such networks as part of the operational structure behind kidnapping.

Ethnic and communal conflict accounted for 15.7%. Respondents thus connected kidnapping to recurring disputes over land, representation, indigene-settler relations, and resources, tensions that weaken cohesion and provide cover for criminal activity (Best &Rakodi, 2011; International Crisis Group, 2024). In such circumstances, kidnapping can function as retaliation, intimidation, or economic sabotage directed at rival communities.

Section 4. What is the Effect of Kidnapping in Southern Taraba State?

Table 4. Responses on the effect of kidnapping

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Huge payment of ransom	102	24.3%
Loss of lives and properties	100	23.8%
Social instability	68	16.2%
Scares local and foreign investors	70	16.7%
Increase poverty and hunger	80	19.0%
Total	420	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026

From the study, ransom payments ranked highest (24.3%), indicating that families, religious organizations, communities, and businesses frequently carry heavy financial burdens. Studies describe ransom payments as strengthening criminal networks by financing weapons, recruitment, and expansion, which then sustains further abductions (Dami, 2021; Mohammed &

Solomon, 2024; Enemuwe et al., 2025). Similarly, Aaron (2025) reports that households often sell land, livestock, houses, and other assets to raise ransom, with long-term consequences for livelihood.

Loss of lives and property followed closely (23.8%). Respondents pointed to deaths, injuries, and destruction during attacks or rescue attempts.

Mohammed and Solomon (2024) maintain that victims who cannot meet demands may be tortured or killed, while clashes between security forces and kidnappers can also produce casualties. Property losses, homes, vehicles, businesses, and farm assets, occur during such incidents.

Social instability accounted for 16.2%. Respondents described disruption to religious life and community cohesion, with worship and ceremonies carried out under fear. Clergy and traditional rulers are targeted because they are perceived as able to pay ransoms (Aaron, 2025). Attendance at religious gatherings was said to decline due to insecurity and travel risk, limiting religious institutions' development roles.

Scaring of local and foreign investors was 16.7%. Respondents argued that kidnapping pushes residents away from farms and businesses while discouraging investors. The respondents position agree with Dami (2021) argument that investors favour stable environments, and violent crime makes returns uncertain. In a similar vein, Fadipe, Uwadia, & Kayode (2021) describe investor relocation and contractor abandonment of projects due to kidnapping risk, which intensifies unemployment and poverty.

Increased poverty and hunger accounted for 19.0%. Respondents linked insecurity with reduced farming, commerce, transport, and schooling, which then reduces jobs and deepens deprivation (Aaron, 2025). Because agriculture is central to livelihoods in Southern Taraba, fear of abduction can prevent farmers from working distant fields; land remains uncultivated, food supply declines, and prices rise.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

Churches, mosques, and traditional religious institutions should strengthen ethical teaching on hard work, the sanctity of life, justice, honesty, and peaceful coexistence, while jointly organizing interfaith peace forums and community dialogue initiatives.

Religious institutions in collaboration with the Federal Government, Taraba State Government, and development partners should expand youth employment initiatives, vocational training, agricultural support, entrepreneurship schemes, and access to credit, reducing economic incentives for crime.

Government should strengthen the operational capacity of the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, and related agencies through improved funding, training, intelligence gathering,

surveillance technology, community policing and patrols in forested areas used as hideouts

Anti-corruption measures should be intensified, kidnapping cases should be prosecuted transparently, and judicial capacity should be strengthened to reduce impunity and restore trust in the justice system.

Schools should integrate peace education, civic education, ethics, and religious studies into curricula to support moral development, responsible citizenship, and respect for human dignity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Kidnapping in Southern Taraba State emerges from interacting socio-economic, political, institutional, and moral conditions. Poverty and unemployment can create openings for recruitment into crime, but the persistence of kidnapping is sustained by decline in moral and spiritual values, weak governance, corruption, ineffective security structures, communal conflict, and the spread of arms. These dynamics erode community capacity to prevent crime and allow kidnapping networks to consolidate.

The findings also indicate that religion remains a significant social institution capable of influencing attitudes, conduct, and collective responses to insecurity. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion uniformly condemn kidnapping as an assault on life, justice, compassion, honesty, and communal responsibility. Yet the continuation of kidnapping within a highly religious context suggests that religious instruction alone cannot be sufficient unless accompanied by socio-economic reform and stronger governance.

Faith-based organizations may still complement state responses through ethical reorientation, peace education, interfaith cooperation, mediation, youth empowerment, trauma support, and community-based intelligence. A durable response to kidnapping thus requires an approach combining security measures with moral renewal, economic empowerment, institutional reform, and active community participation.

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