

Capabilities, Capture & Coercion: Analysing the Political Economy of Kidnap-for-Ransom Offences by Pastoral 'Bandits' in Northwest Nigeria

Osaremen Iluobe

What are the main drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria? This article deviates from existing literature on the phenomenon by delving into the capability failures of both pastoral bandits and the Nigerian state, while also examining the socio-cultural dynamics inherent within this phenomenon. First, I utilise Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to shed light on how socio-economic conditions in northwest Nigeria hinder the developmental capabilities of pastoralists, thereby driving some to commit kidnap-for-ransom offences as a means of economic survival. Second, I assess the role played by the political economy of land and climate change in driving these offences. Third, I examine the governance capability failure of the Nigerian state, framing it within the context of 'softened sovereignty' in the northwest region thereby challenging the prevailing Ungoverned Spaces Theory (UST). Lastly, I explore how the socio-cultural capabilities of pastoral bandits, such as their network capabilities and nomadic lifestyles, facilitate their engagement in kidnap-for-ransom offences. By providing a comprehensive analysis encompassing capability failures, governance shortcomings, and socio-cultural dynamics, this study advances an understanding of the complex drivers behind kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

'This banditry has become a northwestern scourge!' (TVC News Nigeria 2020)
- Nasir El-Rufai, Governor of Kaduna State

The severity of the threat posed to the Nigerian state by kidnap-for-ransom offences committed by bandits in the northwest of the country has inspired me to write this essay (See **Figure 2**; Rotberg & Campbell 2022). Northwest Nigeria consists of seven states (see **Figure 3**), all of which are predominantly populated by the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups. It is estimated that up to 30,000 bandits and 100 separate gangs operate within the region (Barnett, Ahmed Rufa'i and Abdulaziz, 2022, 50), and people of Fulani ethnicity are believed to make up the majority of bandits in the region (Oyero 2021). Despite being predominantly semi-nomadic pastoralists and owning around 90% of the country's livestock (Abbass 2014, 331), poverty, neglect, and other factors have led some Fulani pastoralists in northwest Nigeria to resort to kidnapping (Abdulaziz 2021). Against this contextual backdrop, I have decided to focus on kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoralists in northwest Nigeria and I will use the term 'pastoral bandits' to describe individuals who commit such offences having once assumed pastoralism as their everyday occupation.

One can plausibly claim that kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria constitute a severe danger to the personal security of many people in the region. This is evidenced by the fact that bandits in the northwest of the country are responsible for the internal displacement of 200,000 residents across the region (Ojo, Oyewole and Aina 2023, 19); the deaths of over 8000 people since 2010 (International Crisis Group 2020), and the abduction of 3,672 persons in Zamfara State alone between 2011 and 2019 (Osasona 2021, 10). The economic costs of banditry in the northwest are also acute. Fear of being kidnapped has

created a situation where farmers across the region have abandoned their land en masse. For instance, in Katsina State, up to 5,884 farmlands that cover up to 58,330 hectares have been abandoned by farmers because of kidnapping fears (Ojo, Oyewole and Aina 2023, 20). Given that 2.9 million people in northwest Nigeria are ‘critically food insecure’ (UNICEF 2023), the kidnap-for-ransom crisis in the region has made matters worse by driving food inflation (Mohammed 2021), thereby contributing to the cycle of precarity that many people in the area find themselves.

Given the extent of the problem, bandits committing kidnap-for-ransom offences have been subject to intensified academic, political, and media observation. They have been described as ‘Warlords’ (Barnett 2021); ‘Merchants of terror’ (Adeyemi 2022a; 2022b), and have recently been designated as ‘Terrorists’ by the Nigerian government (Ochojila 2022). Amid the controversy concerning how bandits ought to be understood, Osasona (2021, 2) notes a ‘problem of definitional haziness’ surrounding the discourse on bandits in northwest Nigeria. This indicates a lack of sound understanding that is characteristic of much of the academic literature on the matter. Hence, I contend that it is important to understand the *drivers* of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria as this matter has not been afforded the attention that one would expect considering the ever-growing scale of the problem. I aspire not only to address the gap in the existing literature but also to make a significant contribution to the scholarly discourse surrounding the insecurity crisis in Nigeria as a whole (see Okoli 2022).

RESEARCH QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE MAIN DRIVERS OF KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM OFFENCES BY PASTORAL ‘BANDITS’ IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA?

This article asserts that the ‘capability failure[s]’ (Alkire 2002, 156) of both pastoral bandits and the Nigerian state, alongside the socio-cultural capabilities of the former, constitute the main drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. In particular, this study identifies the ‘*developmental*’ (Sen 1999, 260) and *occupational* capability failures of pastoral bandits, as well as the *governance* capability failure of the Nigerian state, as the specific forms of capability failure propelling this phenomenon.

To start, I will assess the role played by the *developmental* capability failures of pastoral bandits in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. I will take a novel approach that is different from what has been discussed in the existing academic literature by using Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach (hereafter CA) to elucidate how socio-economic circumstances in northwest Nigeria have curtailed the developmental capabilities of pastoralists to ‘lead freer and more fulfilling lives’ (Sen 1997; 1960). Hence, it is my contention that certain pastoralists are compelled to engage in kidnap-for-ransom offences as a means of economic survival.

Chapter 2 of this article will analyse the roles played by the political economy of land and climate change in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria. By doing so, I will provide a comprehensive analysis that takes into account the *longue durée* when discussing the phenomenon. In this chapter, I will argue that the misgovernance of land and climate change have resulted in the *occupational* capability failure of pastoral bandits which has consequently driven kidnap-for-ransom offences.

In Chapter 3 of this essay, I will examine how the Nigerian state suffers from *governance* capability failure which is consequently driving kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits. I will frame the governance capability failure of the Nigerian state as owing to its ‘softened sovereignty’ (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010) in the northwest of the country. By making this argument, I will directly challenge Ungoverned Spaces Theory (hereafter UST) which has recently emerged as a popular explanation for banditry in northwest Nigeria (Okoli and Abubakar 2021; Ojo 2020). I will argue that the softened sovereignty of the Nigerian state in the northwest has given rise to bandits as political actors in parts of the region. Consequently, this has enabled the commodification of political relations within territories controlled by bandits, leading to kidnap-for-ransom offences. In addition, to explain the dynamics behind the political economy of kidnap-for-ransom offences, I will draw upon Shortland’s (2019) protection theory (hereafter PT).

In Chapter 4 of this essay, I aim to present a new evaluation of how pastoral bandits, despite their capability failures, are able to engage in kidnap-for-ransom crimes by drawing upon their socio-cultural capabilities. Specifically, I will argue that the capabilities engendered by the nomadic lifestyle, mobility, and networks among pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria give way to advantages that allow them to carry out kidnap-for-ransom offences in an adept manner.

It is important for me to clarify that kidnap-for-ransom is one of many activities that pastoral bandits have resorted to. Still, cattle-rustling, armed robbery, and murder are also activities that pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria engage in (Ojo, Oyewole and Aina 2023, 2). However, this article has sought to refine its focus on the drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences because the phenomenon has recently emerged as the primary enterprise pursued by bandits in northwest Nigeria in recent years (Toba-Jegede 2021).

Although my research is centred on kidnap-for-ransom offences committed by pastoral bandits, I acknowledge that it is important to avoid the mischaracterisation of the Fulani ethnic group. As such, it is crucial to note that not all bandits are Fulani, and not all Fulani are bandits. Despite the apparent nature of this statement, some existing literature (Omilusi 2016) implicitly engages in ethnic misrepresentation of the Fulani. Therefore, one must be aware of the dangers of perpetuating harmful ethnic stereotypes by falling into 'a single story about Fulani pastoralists' (Moritz and Mbacke 2022). Additionally, it should be noted that the Fulani are among those most affected by banditry in northwest Nigeria (Shehu 2022b).

DEFINING KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM OFFENCES IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

Given the nature of this question, it is essential for me to outline the nature of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. First, it is important for me to highlight the exceptional nature of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. The region has the highest rate of kidnap-for-ransom offences among Nigeria's 6 Geopolitical Zones (see Figure 3) and victims vary from schoolchildren (see Busari, Princewill and Abrak 2021) and ordinary citizens (see Adeyemi 2022a; 2022b) to local congregation leaders (see Gabriel 2021).

Due to the lack of data, this thesis is unable to assert the extent to which kidnappings in northwest Nigeria are targeted. However, it appears that bandits commit kidnap-for-ransom offences with the primary aim of attaining ransom in order to buy weapons and fund their operations. This was stated by a bandit who was behind the kidnapping of 317 schoolchildren from the Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara State in 2021 (BBC 2022). Additionally, I have gathered from my research that kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria are either *spontaneous* or *organised*. Spontaneous kidnappings refer to situations where bandits unexpectedly attack individuals in public areas, subsequently taking them captive and holding them for ransom. On the other hand, organised kidnappings pertain to scenarios where bandits carry out kidnap-for-ransom offences within areas they have established control over. In these cases, ransom payments function as protection payments within the protection racket organised by the bandits.

In Chapter 3, where I examine the role of governance capability failure in driving kidnappings in northwest Nigeria, I will draw on instances of organised kidnap-for-ransom offences. Meanwhile, in Chapter 4, while assessing the socio-cultural capabilities of pastoral bandits, I will utilise examples that illustrate spontaneous forms of kidnap-for-ransom offences. Thus, I will provide a full analysis of kidnap-for-ransom as it is manifested in northwest Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review looks at the range of academic scholarship that has sought to identify the main drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences by bandits in Nigeria. The review begins by assessing the literature that positions socio-economic factors as the main driver of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. It then goes on to analyse the academic literature that purports and challenges the validity of UST in accounting for kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. The review concludes with an assessment of the literature that looks at the effects of climate change and the political economy of land in driving kidnap-for-ransom

offences.

LITERATURE ON KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM OFFENCES BY BANDITS IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

Theories of state failure, such as the UST (Ojo 2020), and economic deprivation, such as Relative Deprivation Theory (hereafter RDT) (Ejiofor 2022), dominate the academic literature on the drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences by bandits in northwest Nigeria. Indeed, there is an ongoing debate among scholars about which of these two factors is a greater driver of the phenomenon. According to Ejiofor, kidnap-for-ransom offences by bandits 'owes not so much to ungoverned spaces but to the ethic cum material grievances of some pastoralists who have taken to criminality for survival and who pinpoint discrepancies between what they had, what they have, and what they think they should have' (2022, 111). Similarly, Nnam and Ordu (2020) position socio-economic marginalisation as the primary driver of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. The scholars claim that the socio-economic conditions in northwest Nigeria are causing frustration and anger among individuals which is consequently driving kidnap-for-ransom offences (2020, 4).

The insights offered by these works are crucial as they allow one to recognise the ways that socio-economic deprivation plays an instrumental role in determining the agency of actors in relation to kidnappings in northwest Nigeria. This is because literature that privileges the role played by economic deprivation implies that kidnap-for-ransom offences are the result of social immobility that arises from a lack of opportunity available to individuals, thus instrumentally influencing the behaviour of actors (Nnam and Ordu 2020, 5; Ejiofor 2022, 86).

While the literature that prioritises the explanation offered by RDT offers valuable insights into how socio-economic circumstances drive kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria, I argue that solely relying on RDT is insufficient to provide a comprehensive explanation. One must consider how bandits are, in spite of their deprivation, adept at committing kidnap-for-ransom offences. That is to say, it is necessary to understand how relative deprivation is accompanied by other factors that are driving kidnappings in northwest Nigeria. Accordingly, this essay will utilise Amartya Sen's CA to undertake a more comprehensive evaluation of the various factors that are driving kidnappings in northwest Nigeria, which surpasses the insights provided by proponents of RDT. Moreover, I will continue to make use of the notion of 'capabilities' to examine how the capability failures of pastoral bandits interact with other socio-cultural factors, thereby enabling them to proficiently commit kidnap-for-ransom offences.

As mentioned, proponents for the primacy of ungoverned spaces theory (hereafter UST) as an explanation for kidnappings by bandits in northwest Nigeria also exist aplenty. According to Ojo (2020), Okoli and Ugwu (2019), the existence of ungoverned spaces in northwest Nigeria is the major driver of kidnap-for-ransom offences in the region. This is because these spaces supposedly allow bandit groups to operate without restraint, consequently enabling the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) that are used in kidnappings. Indeed, Ojo highlights the arguably consequential fact that 'out of the 1,978 overall entry points across the country [Nigeria], 84 are legally approved while 1,894 remain illegal entry points that exist across the borderlands' (Ojo 2020, 102). Hence, proponents of UST believe that effective governance of all spaces is the most critical measure that the state can take to curb kidnappings in northwest Nigeria (2020, 77-110).

While it is true that the governance capability failure of the Nigerian state has played a role in driving kidnappings in northwest Nigeria, as implied by UST, I maintain a dissenting position from proponents of this theory who contend that the region is 'ungoverned' and consequently susceptible to kidnap-for-ransom offences. Indeed, we can scrutinise the applicability of UST by drawing on empirical cases. In 2021, a notable kidnapping of 317 schoolgirls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Jangebe, Zamfara State took place merely four minutes away from a military checkpoint (Busari, Princewill and Abrak 2021). As this incident did not happen in a remote area that is insufficiently governed, it raises questions regarding the effectiveness of UST in explaining the prevalence of kidnap-for-ransom offences

in northwest Nigeria. Therefore, I argue that an alternative and more satisfactory explanation than UST is required. As such, I will use SST to correctly describe the governance capability failure of the Nigerian state in the northwest.

The academic literature on kidnappings in northwest Nigeria has largely neglected the significant contributions of the political economy of land and the impact of climate change in generating occupational capability failure among pastoralists which has, in turn, driven kidnap-for-ransom offences. For instance, the disruption to the lives of Fulani pastoralists, caused by land misappropriation—which has limited the availability of pasture for livestock (International Crisis Group 2020, 7); as well as the ‘severe’ level of land desertification in five out of the seven states in northwest Nigeria (Ani, Anyika, and Mutambara 2021, 162), are matters that I believe warrant academic attention. In order to comprehensively understand the main drivers of kidnappings for ransom in northwest Nigeria, it is crucial to avoid the issue of myopic presentism that pervades the current academic literature on the topic (see Ahmed Rufa’i 2018). To achieve this, a thorough investigation into the long-term impact of climate change and the political economy of land on the occupational capabilities of pastoralists is imperative.

This literature review has examined the frameworks through which kidnap-for-ransom offences are commonly understood in northwest Nigeria. The following section will seek to demonstrate the validity of the factors that I have identified as the main drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria. To reiterate, these are the developmental and occupational capability failures of pastoral bandits; the governance capability failure of the Nigerian state, and the socio-cultural capabilities of pastoral bandits in the region.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis was shaped by engagement with various secondary sources, academic journals, and semi-structured online interviews with academics, researchers, journalists, and politicians, all of whom have an interest in, or expertise on kidnappings in northwest Nigeria. I managed to secure 14 interviews with participants in this bracket by way of email, and I used snowball sampling to widen my access to prospective participants. I managed to secure three non-academic focused interviews with Nigerian citizens wherein we discussed their experiences of living in Nigeria and the issue of kidnappings on a national level. Of those I interviewed, only two persons can trace their origins to northwest Nigeria specifically and these two individuals admitted that they had not visited the region for a considerable period of time. In this respect, the interviews I conducted were primarily useful for my contextual understanding when conducting research and are therefore used sparingly in this essay. Interestingly however, all of the individuals I interviewed who have lived in Nigeria shared that they avoid the seven states in the northwest region as much as possible due to the prevalent kidnapping situation. This illustrates how the issue of kidnap-for-ransom in the northwest region has far-reaching implications for Nigerians beyond the region, as it limits the mobility and sense of security among citizens across the country.

I conducted semi-structured interviews, allowing the interviewees to freely discuss topics they deemed relevant, without confining their responses to specific questions. Academic researchers who were interviewed for this essay gave written permission to be referred to by their name and position in their respective institution(s). The aim of this primary research was to enable me to better understand the main factors that have played a role in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

BRINGING CAPABILITIES BACK IN

I will use Amartya Sen’s CA and the discourse of capabilities as my conceptual framework in my analysis of the main drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria. Because Sen’s CA is primarily concerned with well-being, opportunities, and freedom of choice so as to ensure that an individual can live a ‘good life’ (Sen 1999, 14), I contend that it provides a useful perspective for understanding the topic of this article.

Central to Sen's CA are the notions of 'capabilities' and 'functionings' (Sen 1999). Capabilities refer to a person's opportunities to achieve states of being if they choose to (Roebyns and Byskov 2011). Meanwhile, functionings are the capabilities that a person realises, such as a state of being well-nourished, well-educated, or income secure (Roebyns and Byskov 2011). In Chapters 1 and 2, I will argue that among the main drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria are the developmental and occupational capability failures of pastoral bandits. The notion of capability failure refers to the lack of opportunities that an individual has to realise any given capabilities and subsequently achieve states of functionings (Alkire 2004, 156). Therefore, by making these arguments in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively, I will provide an analysis of the ways that pastoral bandits are deprived of the opportunities, and thereby *real freedom*, to accumulate the necessary capabilities that would make committing kidnap-for-ransom offences less economically and politically appealing for pastoral bandits.

I will 'stretch' the idea of capability failure in Chapter 3 of this essay, wherein the term will assume a more flexible definition that is intended to serve a descriptive purpose that captures the governance failure of the Nigerian state. Therefore, to summarise, Chapter 1 will focus on the developmental capability failure of pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria. Chapter 2 will pay attention to the occupational capability failure of pastoral bandits in the region. Chapters 3 and 4 of this essay will not explicitly use Sen's CA, but I will maintain the discourse of 'capabilities' to explore how the governance capability failure of the Nigerian state, as well as the socio-cultural capabilities of pastoral bandits, are driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

I am aware of the fact that Sen's CA is contentious (Sugden 2006; Pogge 2010). Additionally, given that Sen does not provide us with a formal list of capabilities against which one can assert the capability status of persons, unlike Nussbaum's capability approach (2011), I am necessarily required to take on the onus of evaluating the capability failures of pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria against metrics of my own choice. However, I regard this as an advantage. As Sen notes, any assessment of capabilities ought to be contextual (Sen 2005, 157) because the pre-listing of capabilities may serve as a hindrance that prevents one from accounting for the uniqueness of a given context that gives rise to incapacities.

Given this, I have decided to use the intellectual autonomy afforded to me by Sen's CA by adopting the latest Multidimensional Poverty Measure (hereafter MPM) statistics for northwest Nigeria as my benchmark for analysing the developmental capability failure of people in northwest Nigeria. Moreover, I will employ Sen's insights into the effect of employment exclusion on one's capabilities to highlight how pastoral bandits' occupational capability failure, prompted by the political economy of land and the effects of climate change in northwest Nigeria, is contributing to the prevalence of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPMENTAL CAPABILITY FAILURE OF PASTORAL BANDITS IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

Using Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, this chapter will seek to position the developmental capability failure of pastoral bandits as a main driver of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. First, I will assess the socio-economic situation in northwest Nigeria. Furthermore, I will demonstrate the great extent to which pastoral bandits lack developmental capabilities, and thereby opportunities, leaves them with a limited agency that results in their resorting to kidnap-for-ransom offences.

Overall then, I will imply two things in this chapter. First, in order for kidnap-for-ransom offences to be prevented, the developmental capabilities of pastoralists need to be improved. Second, because of the developmental capability failure of pastoral bandits, kidnap-for-ransom serves as a form of 'social banditry' and economic 'self-help' (Hobsbawm 1969).

1.1: DEVELOPMENTAL CAPABILITY FAILURE OF PASTORAL BANDITS IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

In this section, I will establish the context necessary to comprehend the profound degree

to which pastoralists in northwest Nigeria are affected by developmental capability failure, which is a key driver of kidnap-for-ransom offences in the region. The goal of this segment is to substantiate one of my central thesis claims, namely that developmental capability failure is a primary factor driving kidnap-for-ransom offences committed by pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria.

Aligned with Sen's Capability Approach (CA), the World Bank's MPM adopts a comprehensive perspective on well-being, recognising it as comprising multiple factors and circumstances (World Bank 2022). These are income, educational attainment, educational enrollment, drinking water, sanitation, and electricity (World Bank 2022). By adopting the World Bank's MPM as the lens through which I analyse the developmental capability failure of pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria, I aim to demonstrate how socio-economic conditions in northwest Nigeria compromise the agency exercised by pastoral bandits, consequently driving kidnap-for-ransom offences. As highlighted to me by Folahanmi Aina - a Nigerian researcher specialising in security and development studies at the Royal United Services Institute - "Poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment are all things that have taken root in the northwest of the country [Nigeria]" (personal communication 2022). This claim is supported by the fact that the MPM rate in each of the 7 states in northwest Nigeria exceeds 50%. Sokoto State tops the list among states in northwest Nigeria with a rate of 91.1%; this is followed by Jigawa State which has an MPM rate of 89.2%, meanwhile, Zamfara State, ranks third in terms of MPM levels among northwestern states with an MPM rate of 82.2% (World Bank 2022, 4). As for the Fulani pastoralist community in the region, the average person has received a mere 3.02 years of formal education, and only 15% have completed their high school education (Ibrahim et al 2021). The lack of developmental capabilities among persons within the Fulani pastoralist community serves as a hindrance for many to become persons capable of achieving various functionings, or states of being.

This is especially important given the long-term dangers facing pastoralists, such as the misgovernance of land and climate change - as will be analysed in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this essay. Due to the developmental capability failure among Fulani pastoralists in northwest Nigeria, they are constrained in terms of the opportunities available to them, which ultimately affects their well-being and agency. This claim is reinforced by Shehu Rekeb, a bandit leader from Zamfara State, who claimed that "This whole agitation is caused by a lack of education. None of us [pastoralists] here is educated!" (Daily Trust 2021). Furthermore, Umah Mohammed, the chair of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACABAN)—a prominent lobby group for Fulani pastoralists—asserts that the development of educational infrastructure and improvement in human development among Fulani pastoralists are pivotal in order to resolve the kidnapping crisis in the northwest region (Anyadike 2021).

It is crucial to acknowledge the profound implications of the role played by the developmental capability failure of pastoral bandits in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. To address the previously mentioned 'problem of definitional haziness' (Osasona 2021, 2) while recognising the central role played by developmental capability failure, I propose interpreting pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria as akin to 'Social bandits' (Hobsbawm 1969). Hobsbawm defines social banditry as 'a form of self-help to escape particular circumstances' (Hobsbawm 1969, 29) and I contend that this definition is applicable to bandits in northwest Nigeria, who, because of their lacking developmental capabilities, commit kidnap-for-ransom offences. As such, Hobsbawm's notion is useful in advancing our understanding of the implications surrounding the agency of actors involved in kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria.

Likewise, Sen's CA allows us to recognise the effects that deficits in the developmental capabilities of persons have on one's individual agency. Sen notes that 'human capabilities constitute an important part of individual freedom' (Sen 2007, 273) and, therefore, believes that we should recognise the varying extents to which persons have agency, especially when accustomed to poor conditions (Sen 1999, 274), as is true of pastoralists in northwest Nigeria. Having taken this into consideration in this chapter, I have sought to highlight the manner in

which pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria lack the opportunities, and thus agency, to pursue alternative livelihoods amid the developmental challenges that they face. It is important for me to state that I am not legitimising kidnap-for-ransom offences. Rather, I have emphasised the instrumental role that developmental capability failure is playing in driving the phenomenon. Consequently, this means that the response of the Nigerian state must address the developmental capabilities of persons in the northwest for the situation to improve.

CHAPTER 2: CLIMATE CHANGE, THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LAND, AND OCCUPATIONAL CAPABILITY FAILURE

In this chapter, I will examine the long-term factors that have contributed to the *occupational capability failure* of pastoralists in northwest Nigeria which has resulted in some resorting to kidnap-for-ransom offences. Specifically, I will focus on the roles played by climate change and the political economy of land in driving these offences in the region.

I will argue that the combined effects of climate change and the political economy of land have resulted in the occupational capability failure of pastoralists, which is to say that many pastoralists have been constrained in their capacity to make a living from their ‘*ancestral occupation*’ (Shehu 2022a). As a consequence, a considerable number of pastoralists have turned to kidnap-for-ransom as a means of ensuring economic survival, and notably, in response to the political economy of land, to uphold the traditional norms of a pastoral ‘moral economy’ (Thompson 1971).

2.1: CLIMATE CHANGE, OCCUPATIONAL CAPABILITY FAILURE, AND KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM

In this section, I will account for how climate change has driven kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria by way of facilitating the occupational capability failure of pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria. I recognise that demonstrating the long-term link between climate change-induced phenomena and kidnap-for-ransom offences is a challenge. However, considering that climate change is understood to have adverse effects on the socio-economic resilience of pastoralist communities in different parts of the world (see Abraham and Mekuyie 2022; Ahmad and Afzal 2021), and is taken to be a driver of conflict and insecurity across the Sahel (Ojewale 2022) it would be a mistake to regard the pastoralists of northwest Nigeria as exceptional to its effects.

The impact of climate change in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits can be grasped by noting its role in hastening the process of land desertification. For example, Burell, Evans and De Kauwe (2022, 1) note that between 1982 and 2015, approximately 6% of the world’s drylands experienced desertification due to unsustainable land use practices exacerbated by human-induced climate change, leading to the degradation of approximately 12.6% (equivalent to 5.43 million square kilometres) of these drylands. This phenomenon has had detrimental effects on approximately 213 million individuals, with 93%—or approximately 200 million - of them residing in developing nations, such as Nigeria. This claim matches the empirical realities taking place in northwest Nigeria, which is subject to land desertification at an alarming rate in the northwest—it is estimated that 3,500 square kilometres of land is lost every year in the region due to land desertification (CAP 2012, 15). As a result of this, rivers and watering holes across the northwest have started disappearing (Barnett and Hassan 2022, 7) which has consequently led to the loss of cattle for many pastoralists amid the lack of resources required to keep them alive (Ibrahim et al 2021, 6).

The financial importance of this is significant as livestock serves as the primary mode of accumulating and storing wealth for Fulani pastoralists in northwest Nigeria (Ibrahim et al 2021, 6). Considering this, we can acknowledge how climate change has enabled the occupational capability failure of pastoralists which has, in turn, driven some pastoralists to commit kidnap-for-ransom offences. Indeed, because of the loss of wealth that the desertification of land has initiated among pastoralists in the northwest region, Ojewale (2021) contends that it is a key reason why young people join bandit groups when looking to earn a living.

Therefore, it can be said that the occupational capability failure among pastoralists in

northwest Nigeria, resulting from the desertification of land, provides an explanation for the atypical number of kidnap-for-ransom offences in the region (see Figure 4). According to Ahmadu Shehu, a Fulani pastoralist in northwest Nigeria, the loss of cattle among pastoralists in the region has a profound effect on the economic security, self-esteem, and social standing of a Fulani pastoralist in northwest Nigeria (Shehu 2022a). Given this, it becomes increasingly clear to comprehend how climate change, by causing the loss of livestock among several pastoralists in the region, has initiated a type of occupational capability failure that is economically and socially damaging for many. This allows for a finer understanding of how the occupational capability failure of pastoral bandits is driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

2.2: LAND EXPROPRIATION, OCCUPATIONAL CAPABILITY FAILURE, AND KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM

In this section of the chapter, I will evaluate the role played by the political economy of land in Nigeria in advancing the occupational capability failure of pastoral bandits, consequently driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in the northwest. Specifically, I will explore how the expropriation of land and underdevelopment of grazing land and routes have compounded the occupational capability failure of pastoralists in the region. Additionally, in the latter part of this section, I will examine how kidnap-for-ransom offences have been partially driven by political actors and the Nigerian state and what implications this ought to have on public policy. Thus, I will imply that a significant portion of the responsibility for reducing kidnap-for-ransom offences lies with political actors by restoring a moral economy of land rights.

To provide an analysis of how the political economy of land has contributed to the occupational capability failure of pastoral bandits, thereby driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria, it is crucial for me to highlight the importance of the 1978 Land Use Act. Before the enactment of this law, land use and land tenure were typically regulated by traditional leaders in local communities (Higazi 2022, 74), while in other cases, families and individuals were responsible for such matters (Otty, Chisom and Nnamdi 2021, 28117). However, by ensuring the ‘Power of Governor[s] to revoke the right of occupancy’ (1978 Land Use Act, Section 28), the law granted power over land governance to state governors.

According to the military government led by General Olusegun Obasanjo, the intentions of the 1978 Land Use Act were two-fold. First, the act sought to curb the inflationary effects of land speculation on ordinary Nigerians (Otty, Chisom and Nnamdi, 2021, 28116) and it was also implemented in order to stimulate the acquisition of land by private and public institutions for developmental purposes (Adefemi 2018, 670). As for the impact of this legislation on rural communities, General Obasanjo clarified in a national address that rural dwellers would be able to ‘continue to use land for agricultural, pastoral and residential purposes without any hindrance...[and] their right to continue to farm their lands without any encumbrances and part with their interest at will is assured’ (Francis 1984, 9).

Yet, despite the assurances given during its enactment, the 1978 Land Use Act can be said to have had a negative impact on rural communities. With the allocation of power over land governance to state governors, political actors have been empowered to seize land from pastoralists, resulting in an exacerbation of job losses and economic hardship among pastoralists in northwest Nigeria (Hassan and Barnett 2022, 7). State governors in northwest Nigeria have been known to expropriate land, as exemplified by a case in 2014 when Jigawa State Governor, Sule Lamido, unilaterally approved the transfer of 12,000 hectares of land owned by pastoralists to the Chinese conglomerate, Lee Group (Tukur 2017).

Additionally, in a separate incident of land expropriation by political elites that occurred in 2018, the Kebbi State government arbitrarily assumed control of 14,000 hectares of land (Adebayo 2018), thereby displacing hundreds of pastoralists from their lands. That instances such as these are contributing to the occupational capability failure of pastoralists, consequently driving kidnap-for-ransom offences, is asserted by some pastoral bandits. For example, one leading pastoral bandit based in Zamfara State claimed that by ‘taking over’ land and grazing areas in the northwest, politicians are playing a crucial role in driving pastoralists to commit

kidnap-for-ransom offences in the region (Abdulaziz 2021).

In view of this, the notion of 'eco-colonisation' (Carmody 2011, 121) is a useful tool through which a novel analysis of land expropriation by political actors can be provided. According to Carmody (2011, 121), eco-colonisation refers to situations where 'powerful domestic actors draw on the biocapacity of a given region to serve their economic interests'. The concept of eco-colonisation aptly describes the reality of land expropriation by political actors, thus allowing for an analysis of how kidnap-for-ransom offences arise from competing agencies. While pastoral bandits may lack the developmental and occupational capabilities to fully exercise agency within Sen's CA, they nevertheless resist the expropriation of their land by committing kidnap-for-ransom. Such a view was reinforced by Okoli who succinctly defined bandits in northwest Nigeria as 'Brigands who engage in organised gang criminality as a means of survival or resistance' (Personal communication 2022).

Taking this view forward, it can be said that by expropriating land, political actors have contributed to kidnappings, and viewing the phenomenon in such terms allows one to acknowledge the role played by resistance amid interplays between structure and agency.

Indeed, according to Ahmadu Shehu, a Fulani pastoralist from northwest Nigeria, any effort by external actors to interfere with the pastoral economy 'is considered as a direct challenge to the esteemed cultural values these communities embody' (Shehu 2022a). Considering this, I argue that kidnap-for-ransom offences may constitute the defence of a traditional moral economy in which the land rights of pastoralists were respected by elites. That is to say, due to the role of land expropriation in compounding their occupational capability failure, pastoral bandits may be understood as being motivated and 'informed by the belief that they [are] defending traditional [land] rights and customs' (Thompson 1971, 78). Hence, the prevalence of kidnappings in northwest Nigeria indicates that these offences may be predicated on a 'popular consensus' (Thompson 1971, 79) wherein they are regarded as legitimate by pastoralists in the face of hardships, such as that relating to their land rights.

2.3: MISMANAGEMENT OF GRAZING AREAS, OCCUPATIONAL CAPABILITY FAILURE, AND KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM

This section of the chapter will explore how the mismanagement and underdevelopment of grazing reserves and routes in northwest Nigeria contribute to the occupational capability failure of pastoralists, ultimately driving kidnap-for-ransom offences. Therefore, this section will continue to explore the role of political actors in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

The underdevelopment of grazing land and grazing routes in northwest Nigeria can be attributed to the government's lack of responsiveness to changing realities. Notably, over the past few decades, Nigeria's cattle population has doubled from approximately 9.2 million in 1981 (Kubkomawa 2017, 27) to over 18 million in 2011 (National Bureau of Statistics 2012, 27). Meanwhile, the human population in the country has significantly increased from 45 million in 1960 to 213 million as of 2021 (World Bank 2021). Given these demographic changes, it has become imperative to upgrade the infrastructure of grazing lands and grazing routes across the country. However, successive Nigerian governments have failed to address this issue, leading to the current state of underdevelopment in these areas. For instance, recognising the need to expand grazing reserves in the northwest of the country, the Nigerian government proposed the establishment of 22 million hectares of grazing land as part of the 1975-1980 National Development Plan (Ducrottoy et al 2018, 4). However, by the end of 1977, only 2 million hectares had been acquired and allocated for grazing purposes (Ducrottoy et al 2018, 4). Similarly, Nigeria's National Agricultural Policy of 1988 declared that at least 10% of the country's territory, equivalent to 9.8 million acres, would be allocated for the development of grazing reserves in an attempt to protect pastoralism (Okello et al 2014, 3). Despite this, as recently as 2014, 26 years after the introduction of the policy, only 2.82 million hectares of land had been allocated by the state for the development of grazing reserves (Okello et al 2014, 3).

Given this, I argue that the shortcomings of Nigerian governments have resulted in the 'disemployment' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2016, 44) of numerous pastoralists in northwest

Nigeria. This means that these individuals have been *actively excluded* from their primary form of employment, pastoralism, due to the inability of consecutive Nigerian governments to develop grazing lands and routes in the northwest. As posited by Edgell and Beck (2020, 939), Sen's CA serves as a comprehensive analytical tool for understanding the 'complexities of motivation, powerlessness, and agency' of persons who have been excluded from employment. Sen has also pointed out that exclusion from employment can have far-reaching negative consequences on individual freedom, initiative, and skills, ultimately leading to social exclusion and a loss of other capabilities related to one's economic and emotional well-being (Sen 1999, 21). Drawing on this assertion, it seems that those involved in kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria may be experiencing such consequences. A statement made by a bandit from Zamfara State lends support to this perspective:

Tell me, where can we rear our animals now? Are grazing routes still there? In the rainy season you must walk on roads or take them on rocky paths where they fall and die, [therefore] if you see Fulani resorting to so-called 'terrorism' it's because of this! (BBC 2022)

Amid the lack of access to grazing lands and grazing routes which has, in turn, severely limited their capability to assume their traditional occupation, several pastoralists in northwest Nigeria have resorted to committing kidnap-for-ransom offences and this is a factor that ought to be more accounted for within the existing literature on the topic. Nevertheless, by accounting for such a factor, this chapter has attempted to highlight the retrospective salience of this matter in relation to the occupational capability failure of pastoralists in the northwest region and by extension, the occurrence of kidnap-for-ransom offences. By highlighting the roles played by climate change and the political economy of land, I have sought to position the occupational capability failure of pastoralists as necessitating a *longue durée* analysis to fully understand the contemporary problem of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. The next section will explore how the governance capability failure of the Nigerian state, manifested in the form of its softened sovereignty in the northwest of the country, is driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in the region.

CHAPTER 3: GOVERNANCE CAPABILITY FAILURE, SOFTENED SOVEREIGNTY, AND KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM

This chapter will analyse how the governance capability failure of the Nigerian state, as exemplified by its softened sovereignty in the northwest of the country, is driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in the region. I will analyse the political economy of organised kidnap-for-ransom offences, utilising the notion of softened sovereignty to argue that kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria are driven by this form of governance capability failure, *contra* ungoverned spaces. Additionally, I will employ Shortland's PT to demonstrate the realities that underpin organised kidnap-for-ransom offences. **Figure 1** summarises the arguments of this chapter.

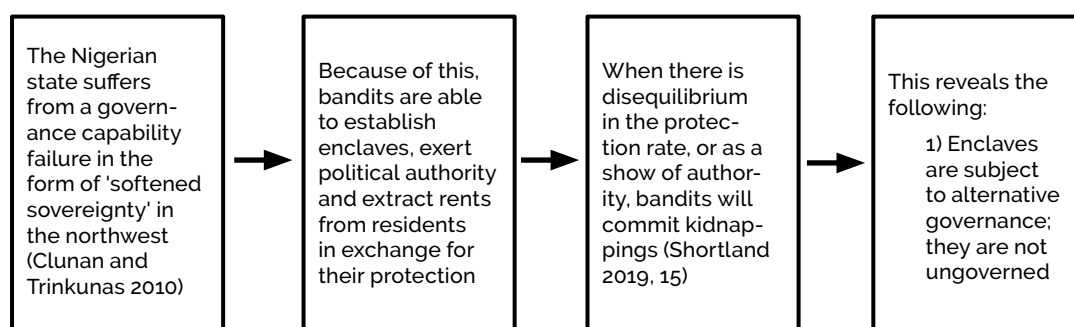


Figure 1 | Applying SST and PT to an understanding of kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria

3.1: WHAT IS SOFTENED SOVEREIGNTY?

'Softened sovereignty' is a term used to describe a situation wherein the state's 'control over a given area is contested, weak, or effectively absent' (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010, 17). Softened sovereignty theory (SST) is contrasted with ungoverned spaces theory (UST), which is a theoretical framework which views areas that are subject to less social, political and economic control as 'ungoverned' (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010, 17). Both SST and UST are what I refer to as *notions of governance capability failure*. However, I argue that SST better captures the type of governance capability failure that the Nigerian state is subjected to in the northwest region of the country. Thus, I intend to use SST to provide an improved analysis of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. In doing so, I will simultaneously challenge the paradigmatic hegemony of UST within literature on banditry in northwest Nigeria (see Okoli and Abubakar 2021; Ojo 2020; Onwuzuruigbo 2020). This chapter will demonstrate that northwest Nigeria conforms to the statement made by Clunan and Trinkunas (2017, 17) that 'many so-called ungoverned spaces are simply *differently governed*'.

3.2: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ORGANISED KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM OFFENCES

Evidence of the Nigerian state's softened sovereignty in the northwest of the country is demonstrated by political authority wielded by bandits in areas across the region. The inability of the Nigerian state to exercise governing authority over some parts of northwest Nigeria is illustrated by the presence of bandit groups who have taken control and imposed their own leaders in various areas spanning across the states of Zamfara and Sokoto (Anka 2021; Hassan-Wuyo 2021). As a result, this governance capability failure has contributed to the increasing prevalence of kidnap-for-ransom incidents.

As Adeyemi reveals (2022a), the foundation of the political economy of organised kidnap-for-ransom offences is the breach of a social contract, whereby residents within a given territory controlled by bandits pay fees in return for protection. Given this, I contend that Shortland's (2019) Protection Theory (PT) is a relevant tool to analyse the political economy of organised kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. According to PT, kidnap-for-ransom offences take place for at least one of two reasons.

Bandits may commit kidnap-for-ransom offences to assert their dominance and display their authority. Alternatively, residents who are unable to meet the stipulated payment rate for protection may fall victim to these incidents. The applicability of Shortland's protection theory in explaining the incidence of kidnap-for-ransom in northwest Nigeria is evident in the events that took place in May 2021 in Dada village, Zamfara State. In this case, bandits who were controlling the village demanded a protection fee of ₦3 million from residents, but when this payment was refused, six people were kidnapped and held until the full ransom was paid (Adeyemi 2022a). My assertion that the occurrence of organised kidnappings in northwest Nigeria aligns with the claims of Shortland's PT is additionally supported by the testimony of a resident of Dankurmi Village, Zamfara State who revealed that local residents are obligated to pay an annual protection fee of ₦1.7 million to bandits in order to avoid being kidnapped (Sahara Reporters 2020).

Indeed, in Zamfara State alone, between November 2021 and August 2022, bandit groups reportedly received N538 million in protection payments from residents (Adeyemi 2022a). Similarly, Alhaji Zubairu Abdulra'uf, a community leader in Kaduna State, disclosed that between ₦300 million and ₦400 million was paid to bandits within two years to ensure the safety of residents (Isenyo 2022). In another instance, residents of Sokoto State paid ₦67 million in protection fees to bandits within a single week (Sahara Reporters 2021). Given the significant sums of money being paid to bandit groups in exchange for protection across northwest Nigeria, it can be concluded that the state is significantly lacking governance capabilities throughout the region. The implications of this are crucial as it raises the question of whether the Nigerian government is satisfactorily upholding its *constitutional* requirement to ensure the security of its citizens (1999, Act No. 24, Chapter 2. Section 14(b)). Furthermore, given that bandits have successfully levied protection taxes on residents across parts of the

¹ See section on 'Defining kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria' for definition of *organised* kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

northwest, it can be said that they are political actors to the extent that they conform to the *Tillyian* notion of the state as ‘a quintessential protection racket’ (Tilly 1985, 170).

3.3: UNGOVERNED SPACES OR SOFTENED SOVEREIGNTY?

Despite evidence of the Nigerian state’s governance capability failure in the northwest of the country, I argue that the term ‘ungoverned’ is not an accurate description of spaces in the region. Rather, I contend they are subject to softened sovereignty. As Keister notes (2014, 1), proponents of UST hold that ‘Ungoverned spaces exist because integrating them offers few benefits and may pose high costs to host regimes’. This suggests that in instances where ungoverned spaces arise, the state is a passive actor.

Yet, this is not true for northwest Nigeria. As noted above, the Nigerian state has been actively attempting to counter the authority of bandits across areas in northwest Nigeria, a reality that contradicts the suggestion of UST. Therefore, it would be more accurate to characterise the relationship between the state and northwest Nigeria in terms of softened sovereignty, rather than ungoverned. Additionally, as shown in this section, areas within the northwest that are not controlled by the Nigerian state are not ungoverned, rather, they are governed according to the ‘alternative authority’ (Clunan and Trinkunas 2010, 17) of bandits in the region.

In this chapter, I have explored the role played by the softened sovereignty of the Nigerian state, a governance capability failure, in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. By facilitating the formation of enclaves controlled by bandits, which are, in turn, governed in accordance with logics akin to Shortland’s PT, the softened sovereignty of the Nigerian state in northwest Nigeria serves to drive kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits in the region. This chapter implies that to effectively address kidnappings in northwest Nigeria, the Nigerian state should prioritise restoring its legitimacy and governance capabilities instead of relying solely on a militaristic approach, as is currently the case. The following section will shift the focus from discussing capability failure to examining the socio-cultural factors that contribute to the proficiency of pastoral bandits in carrying out kidnap-for-ransom offences.

CHAPTER 4: SOCIO-CULTURAL CAPABILITIES AND KIDNAP-FOR-RANSOM OFFENCES

In this section, I will provide a novel analysis of the drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria by seeking to account for the ways that the socio-cultural capabilities of pastoral bandits play a role in driving the phenomenon. Through an analysis of the socio-cultural capabilities of pastoral bandits, I aim to highlight that the main drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits extend beyond developmental and occupational capability failures. As I have shown, these factors play a significant role in driving kidnappings, but they do not drive kidnap-for-ransom offences in isolation. Across three sections of this chapter, I will analyse the capabilities engendered by the nomadic culture, mobility, and networks among pastoral bandits. By providing this analysis, I seek to explain how these capabilities enable pastoral bandits to carry out spontaneous kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

4.1: NOMADIC CAPABILITIES

It is crucial to take into account how the nomadic culture of Fulani pastoralists in northwest Nigeria (Adebayo 1991) provides many pastoral bandits with capabilities that enable them to actively commit kidnap-for-ransom offences. The nomadic lifestyle of many pastoralists in northwest Nigeria engenders *spatial-epistemic* capabilities, which, in turn, facilitates their evading aerial attacks by the Nigerian Air Force (hereafter NAF), thus enabling their continuation of kidnap-for-ransom offences. Indeed, Ahmed Gumi, an Islamic cleric who serves as a mediator between the bandits and the Nigerian government, has revealed that several bandits have used their spatial knowledge of the northwest region to devise escape routes so as to avoid aerial bombardments conducted by the NAF (Shibayan 2021).

Additionally, the use of discreet rural areas as operational bases, a common practice

among pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria (Malumfashi and Kaina 2021; Barnett 2021), is something that further aids their ability to evade the state's attempts to hinder their kidnaping activities. The ability of pastoral bandits to strategically position themselves in areas conducive to the continuation of their activities can be attributed to their spatial knowledge of the northwest, which is acquired through their nomadic lifestyles and the resulting frequent movements across the region. The significance of this is underscored by the admission of Alhaji Lai Mohammed, Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture, who acknowledged that the government faces a formidable challenge in eliminating the danger posed by pastoral bandits in the northwest region due to the challenging 'terrain' in which they operate (Sunday 2022).

Therefore, I contend that to better understand kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria, it is essential to examine the spatial-epistemic dynamics that result from the nomadic lifestyle of pastoral bandits in the region. As Foucault argues, power, knowledge, and space are intertwined (1982) and one can acknowledge the utility of this idea when exploring the instrumental role played by the spatial-epistemic capabilities of pastoral bandits in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

4.2: MOBILE CAPABILITIES

The mobility of pastoral bandits is an important socio-cultural capability that serves as the means through which bandits put their spatial knowledge to effect, and it also facilitates their kidnap-for-ransom offences. Evidence suggests that bandits in northwest Nigeria often use motorcycles, colloquially known as *Okada*, to commit large-scale spontaneous kidnap-for-ransom offences. For instance, in December 2020, a group of bandits on motorcycles kidnapped 333 pupils from Government Secondary School in Kankara, Katsina State (Omorogbe 2022). Similarly, in July 2021, another group of motorcycle-riding bandits kidnapped 140 students from Bethel Baptist High School in Kaduna (Nwezeh 2021). That motorcycles have emerged as the *modus operandi* for bandits when they commit kidnap-for-ransom offences is worth highlighting as such demonstrates the banality of these offences, which paradoxically, makes them more difficult to tackle.

This is because, despite the introduction of a motorcycle ban in 2019 (Nasiru 2019), kidnappings remain prevalent in northwest Nigeria, thus illustrating the ineffectiveness of the measure in putting an end to such activity. Additionally, the ban may create negative unintended consequences that could exacerbate problems for the northwest. For instance, Aina (2022) warns that the motorcycle ban may lead to job losses in the informal economy, potentially driving more people towards crime, thereby raising the prospects that the insecurity situation in the northwest could intensify. Given this, I contend that the Nigerian government should focus on addressing the fundamental drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences in the northwest, rather than seeking to restrict mobilities. This would involve implementing measures aimed at improving the developmental and occupational capabilities of pastoralists in the northwest, while also working to restore the legitimacy of the Nigerian state among residents in the region.

4.3: NETWORK CAPABILITIES

An analysis of the drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences by bandits in northwest Nigeria ought to pay attention to the networks of pastoral bandits, which represent a critical capability that has been largely overlooked until now. This section will explore how the presence of *collaborative* networks between Nigerian and Nigerien bandits, as well as between Nigerian bandits and terrorist organisations, are driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria.

According to Ahmed Rufa'i (2018, 69), there exists a 'high level of connection and communication between the Nigerian and Nigerien bandits' which contributes to kidnap-for-ransom offences in the northwest. Evidence to support this claim can be seen from the fact that some of the most prolific bandit groups committing kidnap-for-ransom offences have ties across Nigeria and the Niger Republic. For instance, the 'Black and Standa' bandit group, which comprises 600 individuals from across northwest Nigeria and the Niger Republic, collected approximately F.CFA50 million from ransom payments in a single year

by kidnapping residents in northwest Nigeria (Adeyemi 2022b). Moreover, the suspension of telecommunications services across the states of Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto, intended to curb kidnap-for-ransom activity, was rendered ineffective as bandits operating in northwest Nigeria collaborated with groups in the Niger Republic to circumvent the measure (Barnett and Hassan 2022, 15). Therefore, the robustness of the networks between the Nigerian and Nigerien bandit groups is such that despite the Nigerian government's attempts to curb kidnap-for-ransom activities in the northwest, these offences persist and as a result, insecurity remains a problem for the region.

While some scholars have refrained from categorising bandit groups in northwest Nigeria as jihadist entities (Barnett, Ahmed Rufa'i and Abdulaziz 2022), there is, nonetheless, evidence supporting the existence of an 'organised crime-terror nexus' (Okoli and Nwangwu 2022) between some bandit and terrorist organisations. As noted by Okoli and Nwangwu (2022, 7), bandits and terrorist organisations have collaborated across various areas, including arms trafficking, intelligence sharing, and guerrilla training. The collaboration in the latter area is especially noteworthy, given that spontaneous kidnappings employ similar methods to that used in guerilla warfare, such as ambushing. Indeed, the kidnapping of 20 students from Greenfield University in Kaduna, perpetrated by both bandits and Boko Haram (Opejobi 2021), serves to demonstrate the consequential realities engendered by collaboration between bandit groups and terrorist organisations. Furthermore, the kidnapping of 168 passengers from a train running between Abuja and Kaduna by Boko Haram and northwestern bandits (Akinwotu 2022) serves to further support the idea that collaborative networks between these groups are increasingly important in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in the region.

Overall then, an analysis of the collaborative networks between bandits and terrorist groups is crucial in order to understand the nature of spontaneous kidnappings in northwest Nigeria. Doing so may lead to more effective state responses to the kidnap-for-ransom problem in the region. This is especially true if collaboration between bandits and terrorist organisations intensifies going forward. By exploring the collaborative networks of pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria, we are presented with a better understanding of how socio-cultural capabilities as a whole, provide them with the means to commit kidnap-for-ransom offences and circumvent the state in a proficient manner.

This chapter has explained the importance of socio-cultural capabilities in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences by pastoral bandits in northwest Nigeria. On the whole, the analysis indicates that pastoral bandits are proficient at committing kidnap-for-ransom offences because of socio-cultural factors that endow them with the spatial knowledge, mobility, and collaboration required to commit kidnappings in spite of their lacking capabilities in other areas, and in the face of counter-measures taken by the state.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have sought to present, examine and demonstrate a new way of understanding the main drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria. Hitherto, Sen's CA and discourse on capabilities have been absent from all academic interpretations of the phenomenon. By applying this conceptual framework, I have identified new implications that contribute to a better understanding of potential solutions for the ongoing kidnap-for-ransom crisis in northwest Nigeria. Additionally, my attempt to address the specific factors that contribute to the prevalence of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria aims to provide an answer to a pressing question that has yet to be fully explored in the existing research literature.

Despite my use of a novel framework through which we can understand the drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences in northwest Nigeria, due to practical constraints, this thesis could not provide a comprehensive review of the role played by vigilante 'jungle justice' (Anka 2021) in driving kidnap-for-ransom offences in the region. There are two reasons for this. First, while the role of vigilantes in the insecurity situation in northwest Nigeria has been widely reported, it is unclear what role the different vigilante groups play in driving kidnappings per se. Second, the risk to my personal safety that would necessitate me finding out the extent to

which it is the case meant that a satisfactory analysis of this factor was ultimately impractical.

Overall, this essay provides four new contributions to the literature. First, it highlights the significance of approaching the drivers of kidnap-for-ransom offences through the lens of capabilities. Second, it demonstrates the *empirical* limitations of UST in comprehending the phenomenon of kidnap-for-ransom by bandits in northwest Nigeria. Third, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the role played by climate change and the political economy of land in driving the phenomenon. Lastly, it highlights the need to transcend understanding kidnap-for-ransom in northwest Nigeria as stemming from socio-economic factors and issues of state governance alone, and instead, to recognise the capabilities at the disposal of pastoral bandits that facilitate their involvement in kidnap-for-ransom offences.

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APPENDIX

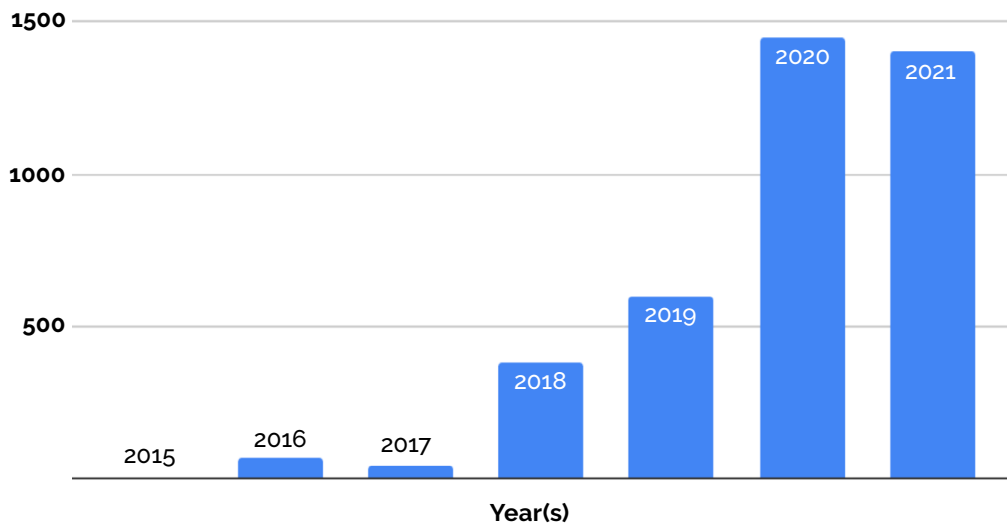


Figure 2 | Number of kidnapping offences in northwest Nigeria, 2015-2021

(Adebajo 2021)



Figure 3 | States in northwest Nigeria's Geopolitical Zone

(Self-illustration)

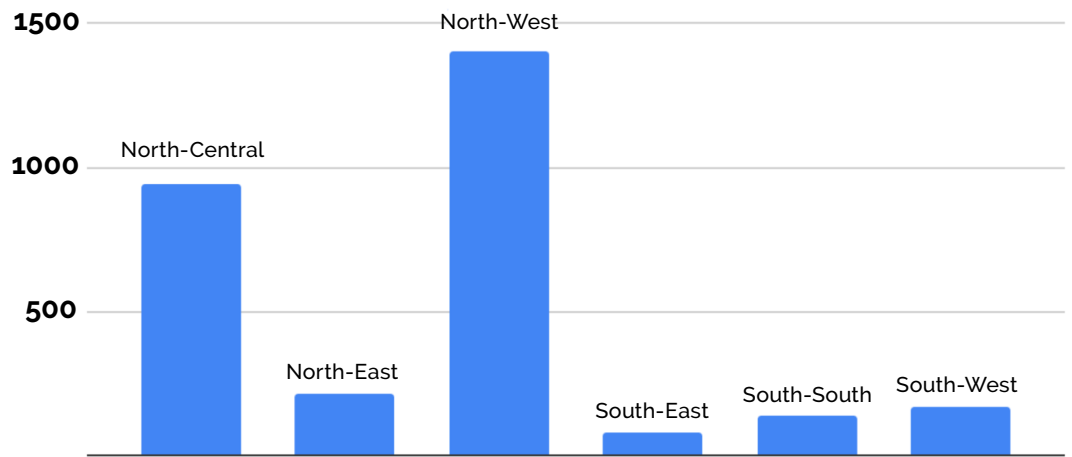


Figure 4 | Number of kidnapping offences across Nigeria's Geopolitical Zones (excluding FCT) in 2021 (Adebajo, 2021)

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
CA	Capability Approach
F.CFA	West African CFA Franc
LGAs	Local Government Area(s)
MPM	Multidimensional Poverty Measure
NAF	Nigerian Air Force
₦	Naira (Nigerian National Currency)
PT	Protection Theory
RDT	Relative Deprivation Theory
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SST	Softened Sovereignty Theory
UST	Ungoverned Spaces Theory