

# Insecurity worsens under Tinubu as 2,140 are abducted in 200 days

## *see states most affected*

**N**o fewer than 2,140 people were reported kidnapped across 24 states of the country between January and July 2024, findings by *SUNDAY PUNCH* have shown. The research was conducted through a careful analysis of various kidnapping incidents reported in four Nigerian newspapers, namely *The PUNCH*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, and *Vanguard* during the period under review. It also showed that families of 62 victims, representing 2.89% of the total abductees, paid the sum of N389m as ransom to secure their release from the kidnappers. Over the seven months, gunmen reportedly kidnapped 193 people in January, 101 in February, 543 in March, 112 in April, 977 in May, 97 in June, and 117 in July, totaling 2,140. A total of 667 victims were kidnapped in Zamfara, 454 in Kaduna, 252 in Niger, 183 in Abuja/FCT, 121 in Borno, 117 in Katsina, 60 in Kogi, and 47 in Ogun. Others are Delta (35), Nasarawa (31), Oyo (20), Benue (19), Rivers (13), Ondo (33), Sokoto (15), Ekiti (10), Akwa Ibom (29), Abia (10), Anambra (5), Taraba (6), and Edo (2). Among the reported incidents by *The PUNCH* was the case involving 85 travelers abducted along the Kaduna-Abuja highway near Katari, in the Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State, between January 4 and 5.

The most significant incident in February occurred on the first day of the month when a terrorist gang abducted no fewer than 60 wedding guests who were believed to be escorting a bride home in the Sabuwa Local Government Area of Katsina State. The country also witnessed the outrageous kidnapping of no fewer than 280 pupils and teachers of Government Secondary School and LEA Primary School at Kuriga, Kaduna State, by bandits on Thursday, March 7. That same month, terrorists kidnapped 87 people after launching a fresh attack on the Kajuru-Station community in the Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna State. This was in addition to 10 other different kidnapping incidents recorded during the month. In April, 30 children were kidnapped by suspected bandits at Kasai village in Batsari Local Government Area of Katsina State. May witnessed the most horrific case since the beginning of the year as bandits abducted over 500 persons, killing five in 50 villages in Zamfara State, according to a House of Representatives member from the state, Bello Shinkafi, as reported by *The Guardian*.

Also, on May 24, bandits killed four security task force members, and three villagers in a midnight attack. They abducted no fewer than 200 residents in Niger State. Members of the Kuchi community in the Munya Local Government Area of Niger State, which the bandits invaded, described the attack as the worst of its kind in the last five years. In June, terrorists kidnapped 20 travelers along the Maiduguri-Kano Highway, among several cases reported that month. The increasing rate of kidnap may have contradicted a recent claim by the Inspector General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, who said there had been a decline in crime rates across the country. Egbetokun attributed the decline to the strategies deployed by his officers.

Between January and July, a total sum of N389m was reported to have been paid to secure release of 62 kidnap victims. In January, the sum of N25m was paid to a gang of kidnappers to secure the release of a hotelier in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Also, the former Minister for Communication and Digital Economy, Ali Pantami, mobilised the sum of N60m, which was paid as ransom to secure the release of Nabeeha and five of her sisters, who were abducted at their house in Abuja on January 2, 2024. In February, the wife of a kidnapped former governorship candidate of the Labour Party in Anambra State, Obiorah Agbasimalo, told an Ihalia High Court sitting in Nnewi that her family paid N5.4m to her husband's kidnappers. Also, kidnappers of nine persons in Ekiti State, comprising six pupils and three others, collected N15m as ransom before releasing them. In May, the gang, which kidnapped and murdered a retired military officer in Owerri area of Imo State, Major General Richard Duru, collected the sum of \$50,000 (N79.8m) as ransom from his family. Also, the 30 kidnapped students of the Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa, said they paid N40m as ransom before they were freed. Similarly, the Paramount Ruler of the Mbo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Ogwong Okon Abang, paid the sum of N50m to secure his freedom from kidnappers in May. In June, some bandits killed a ransom negotiator in Kaduna after collecting the sum of N16m to release the hostages in their custody. In July, kidnappers collected the sum of N76m as ransom to free three among the six persons they abducted near the office of the Federal Road Safety

Corps in Awka, the Anambra State capital.

## Worsening security in August

In the last two weeks, more Nigerians have been abducted as security agents appear helpless. A total of 20 medical and dental students, along with a house officer, were kidnapped by gunmen in Benue State. The victims, who were students of the University of Maiduguri and Jos, were travelling to Enugu, when they were abducted along the Otukpo/Otukpa/Enugu road. The students were said to be heading for the Federation of Catholic Medical and Dental Students annual convention when they were ambushed around 5.30pm. Government functionaries are also becoming targets. The Commissioner for Youths Development in Anambra State, Patrick Aghamba, and his wife were also kidnapped on Friday. An aide to the commissioner was said to have been killed by the hoodlums, while the victims were reportedly travelling to Abuja for the wedding of Governor Chukwuma Soludo's daughter. Gunmen were also reported to have kidnapped eight wedding guests during a traditional wedding in Amakor village, Nanka Community of Orumba North LGA of Anambra State. An Ozo title holder, Emmanuel Ilo, said his escape was divine.

### Police track suspects

The Force Public Relations Officer, Muyiwa Adejobi, insisted that the number of kidnap cases had reduced compared to previous years. He noted that the police had built a full-fledged department headed by the Deputy Inspector-General of Police and were currently working with other agencies in the intelligence community for a proper identification index to trace criminals. He said, "We believe that by breaking the cartel of guns and ammunition supply, they are powerless. Without arms, they are nobody, and you could even use a pen to slap them. So, we know that the chain of supply must be broken, and we have been able to do that to a large extent. We have arrested many who produce arms locally and those who run guns and supply arms and ammunition to them." Another key step is our ability to work with other ministries, departments, and agencies for a proper identification index. Many of them, before now, had no traceable identity. So, we have been able to strengthen the identification index of certain individuals, including criminals. We are working with the NCC and NIMC to see how we can use our technology to enhance that. Then, the IG has just acquired some equipment for the Technical Intelligence Unit of the police. "The Technical Intelligence Unit monitors activities across the country and even beyond. The delivery of this new set of equipment is another feather in the cap of the police in that regard. The arrest of a large number of these criminals has been crucial. You know, we always go to their camps now. The Intelligence Response Team often goes to their camps, and in most cases, we have neutralised and arrested many of them, who are already in court." As I said, many of them are still in our cells. Since we have been able to identify some of these elements, we have dealt with the issue to a large extent. We still have some cases of kidnapping. We are not ruling out the fact that there are still kidnappings, but the ones happening now are just for them to have something to eat."

In July, 2020, the Senate proposed the raising of the

punishment for the offence of kidnapping from the former maximum punishment of 10 years imprisonment to life jail. The following year, the parliament passed the bill, imposing jail terms of at least 15 years for paying a ransom to free someone who has been kidnapped, and made the crime of abduction punishable by death in cases where victims die. But following the abduction epidemic in the country, no fewer than 10 states in January 2024, vowed to implement the death sentence and life imprisonment for convicted kidnappers.

### Security experts, proffer solutions

Speaking on the matter, the Executive Director of the Centre for Anti-Corruption and Open Leadership, Debo Adeniran, lamented that President Bola Tinubu had yet to fulfill his campaign promise of recruiting five million Nigerian youths into the country's security agencies as there was the need to increase the manpower in both the military and para-military to strengthen the security force. "What I believe could solve the problem is for us to have a kind of realistic proportion of security, intelligence, and safety personnel guarding the people. We have recommended forest rangers for every forest to be properly monitored, then there are equipment that can penetrate even the thickest canopy of trees to see what is underneath. There is a way other advanced countries do their security system. Why can't we do it and reduce the issue of kidnapping drastically? Basically, this is about the political will on the part of the government to ensure that we are adequately policed, secured, and kept safe wherever we are carrying out our economic activities," he added.

The Managing Director of Beacon Security and Intelligence Limited, Dr Kabir Adamu, advised the Federal Government to improve on the security architecture of the country. He said, "I mean the administration of President Tinubu through the National Security Advisor have all referred to the Terrorism Prohibition Act, to say that the administration will not pay ransom and those are the top people in security in the country. Unfortunately, despite that statement, ransom is still being paid. "The solution is simple and it is to improve public protection so that the perpetrators will find it more difficult to kidnap people. Secondly, let's make it very difficult or impossible for them to collect ransom and increase punishment for the kidnappers and kidnapping will become history." On his part, a fellow of the International Institute of Professional Security, Olalekan Jackson-Ojo, noted that there were leakages in the information management of the security forces in Nigeria as moles often revealed strategic information to some of the criminals. He added that security agencies should improve on their technological facilities so that they could track the kidnappers and nib the crime in the bud. Jackson-Ojo said, "I have suggested in the past that people should be checked when they are to be enlisted into the Army, Navy, Air force, NIA, DSS, police, Civil Defence, Immigration. They should begin to track their officers because the information must have been spreading out from them. All our technological facilities in the military, paramilitary and security agencies cannot track these people and they should improve on that. That means there are lots of complicities that need to be tackled."