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From Protection to Precarity: Examining Human Rights Protections Amidst Nigeria's Converging Security Frontiers



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Abstract

Purpose: The study investigates the systemic erosion of human rights in Nigeria resulting from the convergence of four primary security threats: terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, and the commercialization of kidnapping. It aims to analyze how the state's inability to secure its security frontiers has transitioned the civilian experience from a framework of constitutional protection to a state of permanent socio-economic and physical precarity.

Methodology: The study employs a qualitative, multi-disciplinary approach, utilizing a trend analysis of longitudinal data from 2010 to 2026. Primary data includes reports from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and International Watchdogs (Amnesty International), while secondary data is drawn from peer-reviewed journals, the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST), and legislative reviews. The theoretical model adopted for the study was the securitization approach. The utility of the theory to the discourse is that it explains how the state justifies shifting from a framework of protection (human rights) to one of precarity (extraordinary measures).

Findings: The findings from the study revealed that the convergence of security threats has created a rights vacuum in rural and semi-urban Nigeria.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study advocates for a shift from a regime-security model to a human-security model. Specifically, it recommends the decentralization of policing to secure ungoverned spaces, the establishment of a specialized victims' rights fund to address the psychological and economic trauma of kidnapping, and the institutionalization of a rights-first protocol for military engagements in civilian-heavy conflict zones. While existing literature extensively covers individual security threats, there is a significant lack of research on the synergistic impact of these converging frontiers on the legal right to development.

Keywords: *Banditry, Human Rights, Kidnapping, Nigeria, Precarity, Security Frontiers, Social Contract.*

Introduction

Nigeria, often referred to as the “Giant of Africa,” is currently grappling with an unprecedented era of multi-dimensional insecurity. It was expected that with the return in 1999, democratic governance would give rise to political stability, national cohesion, and ethnic-religious tolerance, but these have not been achieved. Instead of peace and national cohesion, insurgency has remained an abiding feature of state-society relations. What was once a nation dealing with localized pockets of unrest has evolved into a complex landscape of converging security frontiers. This shift has fundamentally altered the lived experience of millions, moving the needle from a state of expected state protection to one of chronic precarity.

The contemporary Nigerian security crisis is not defined by a single threat, but the toxic intersection of four distinct yet overlapping phenomena: terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder clashes, and kidnapping for ransom. No country, whether developed or developing, can thrive economically, socially, and politically in an environment of insecurity. The incidence of insecurity reflects the antitheses that have characterized the Nigerian state since its colonial past. It appears that globalization, climate change, national disasters, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons of mass destruction, executive lawlessness, corruption, a weak security system, lack of institutional capacity, porous borders, and leadership ineptitude have converged to drive general insecurity in the country, leading to scores of deaths of innocent citizens (Piate, 2013; Piate, 2014; Piate, 2017, Sunday and Piate, 2024, Sunday, Piate, Abunimye, Ishaya and Edet, 2024, Eke, 2013).

The convergence of these crimes has exacerbated the human rights situation in Nigeria, as these conflicts have resulted in mass displacement, loss of livelihoods, destruction of property, and fatalities, contributing to a climate of fear, which hinders economic development and exacerbates poverty. Despite the government's responses to stem the tide of insecurity through planned, strategic, institutional, comprehensive, mutual, and integrative approaches, insecurity persisted, intensified, and remained impervious. Not only has this continued state threatened Nigeria's existence as a federation and created fear, disquiet, and anxiety, but it has also dealt a deadly blow to industrial development. The destruction of necessary infrastructure has set the country back many years (Onifade et al, 2013; Imhonopi and Urim, 2011; Taafor, 2018).

At the heart of this study is the erosion of the social contract. According to section 14(2) (b) CFRN 1999 (as amended), “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government”. However, the convergence of these threats has stretched the capacity of the Nigerian security apparatus to its breaking point. This failure has birthed a state of precarity, a condition where the fundamental human rights of citizens are no longer guaranteed but are subject to the whims of non-state armed actors. The impact of these security frontiers extends far beyond physical violence. It strikes at the core of International Human Rights frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (AFCHPR), where key areas of concern include the Right to life and Dignity, the Right to

education, Food security, and internal displacement. Recent data from 2025 and early 2026 highlight an alarming trend: the state is no longer merely facing isolated insurgencies but a security frontier where terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder clashes and kidnapping for ransom have blurred into a single, continuous threat. The core problem lies in the shift from state protection to a condition of perpetual precarity for the Nigerian people.

The convergence of these threats has not only led to mass casualties but has also decimated the socio-economic rights of Nigerians. In the North-East and North-West, for instance, terrorism and banditry have displaced millions, turning productive farmers into Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS), thereby violating their right to food, shelter, and livelihood. Also, state absence in rural frontiers has allowed non-state armed groups to establish parallel sovereignties. In these zones, human rights are nonexistent, replaced by a reign of terror where kidnapping serves as a primary economic tool and extrajudicial killings are routine. Despite increased military spending, the state's kinetic approach often results in collateral human rights abuses, further complicating the precarity of the civilian population. Perhaps most concerning is the normalization of these violations. The sheer frequency of kidnappings and clashes has led to a desensitized judicial and executive response, leaving victims with little to no access to justice or reparations. While existing literature often treats those security issues as isolated silos, there is a critical need to examine how they converge to create a systemic environment of rights violations. It is within this context that the study examines how these security frontiers have negatively impacted human rights development in Nigeria and, by extension, interrogates how multi-dimensional security failures have systematically dismantled the human rights infrastructure in Nigeria, transforming the citizens' experience from one of state-guaranteed safety to one of perpetual vulnerability.

Theoretical Explication of the Discourse

The study utilizes the securitization theory to explain the main argument of this work. Securitization theory is a fascinating lens in international relations (IR) that suggests that security is not just a physical fact, but a speech act. Essentially, something becomes a security issue because someone in power says it is, not necessarily because it is an objective threat. Securitization theory was primarily developed at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute in the 1990s. Major proponents include Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jdap de Wilde. The theory rests on the idea that security is constructed through language and social interaction. The most fundamental assumption is that security is a speech act. When an actor says “this thing is a security threat,” they aren't just describing a situation; they are acting. For an issue to be securitized, it generally follows a specific three-step process: Referent object, something that is seen as being under threat (e.g the state, the environment, national identity), Securitizing Actor, someone with the authority to make the claim (a government), and audience acceptance, which is crucial. A leader can claim a crisis all they want, but if the public or relevant audience doesn't believe them, securitization fails. The primary goal of securitization is to move an issue out of the realm of normal politics (where things are debated and slow) and into emergency politics. This allows the state to bypass democratic

processes, use secretive methods, and allocate massive resources without standard oversight. It shifts the focus from what is a threat to how something becomes a threat. The utility of the theory to the discourse is that it explains how the state justifies shifting from a framework of protection (human rights) to one of precarity (extraordinary measures).

Terrorism, Banditry, Farmer-Herder Clashes, Kidnapping, and Human Rights Development in Nigeria.

Since 1999, Nigeria has faced different security issues, and these have been described as criminal activities, depending on their context. Nevertheless, after the Al-Qaeda terrorist network bombed the World Trade Centre (WTC) in the United States on September 11, 2001, the protection of national state territorial authority and sovereignty by those who act on their behalf became a global issue as terrorism is now seen as a global threat to the security and sovereignty of countries. For this reason, there was a push by many countries to label some crimes with certain traits as terrorism. As a result, the actions of the Niger Delta militants who kidnapped and damaged oil facilities to protest the state's resource takeover, along with the terrorism of religious extremists in Northern Nigeria, were now seen as terrorism.

Terrorism is just one type of action that can be taken by those who strongly disagree with the current situation (Piate, 2025, Piate, 2025, Sampson, 2014; Duru, 2014; Pillar, 2001). It is linked to the use of violence by a group to achieve certain political aims or to persuade the government to act in a way that suits their group's interests. It is a way of using threat or violence against innocent and unarmed people to scare a target group into giving in to some of their demands. Terrorism is a particular way to fight, a tool, a tactic, or a strategy for causing violence. The main feature is that it is designed to attack and harm ordinary people. It is a planned attack on people who are not involved in fighting, carried out by groups that want to influence people outside the immediate area. For an act to be called terrorism, it must have these characteristics. Terrorism is driven by political motives, uses violence or the threat of violence, and is intended to cause widespread fear in people, sometimes carried out by groups or individuals influenced by an ideology (Eselebur and Owonikoko, 2021; Udama, 2013).

The global security landscape is increasingly defined by the persistence of violent extremism, with Sub-Saharan Africa becoming a primary hub for terrorist activities. As of 2026, Nigeria remains one of the most impacted nations, recently ranked fourth globally in the global terrorism index due to the entrenched presence of insurgent groups in the North-East and the emergence of new threats like the Lakurawa group in the North-West. Terrorism in Nigeria has transitioned from a localized religious uprising in 2009 to a complex, multifaceted conflict involving Boko Haram, ISWAP, and various bandit groups. These actors have committed systematic human rights violations, including mass abduction targeting schools (Chibok and Dapchi) and vulnerable communities for ransom and forced conscription, the deliberate destruction of farmlands, markers, and schools, infringing on the rights to education and livelihood, and widespread use of women and girls as suicide

bombers and victims of forced marriages. While the Nigerian state has a constitutional mandate to ensure the security of its citizens, its response and military operations have often been criticized for failing to balance national security with fundamental liberties. Reports from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and international observers indicate that counter – terrorism efforts have sometimes resulted in extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention without trial, and inhumane conditions in military detention facilities (Okeye and Adejoh, 2025; Piate, 2026).

There exists a critical tension where the measures intended to protect the right to life often end up infringing upon other fundamental freedoms. If left unaddressed, this lack of balance not only undermines the rule of law but also erodes public trust, creating a cycle of grievance that fuels further radicalization (National Human Rights Commission, 2025). The nexus between terrorism and human rights violations is a complex, circular relationship. In the Nigerian context, this nexus is not a straight line but rather a vicious cycle, where the actions of terrorists and the reactions of the state constantly overlap and influence one another.

Terrorism itself is a massive violation of human rights. Under international law, the state has a positive obligation to protect the lives of its citizens. When terrorist groups operate, they directly strip away the right to life through mass killings and suicide bombings, the right to liberty through mass abductions and forced conscription, and socio-economic rights through the destruction of schools (violating the right to education) and the displacement of millions (violating the right to shelter and dignity).

When states respond in efforts to restore order, the government may implement policies that inadvertently violate the very rights they are trying to defend. When they engage in arbitrary arrests or extrajudicial killings, it creates a sense of injustice, which terrorist groups use as a recruitment tool, claiming that the state is the enemy of the people (Abodike and Marangwe, 2024). At present, terrorism is the cause of the physical and structural violence that Nigerians experience in different places in Nigeria, especially in the North-East and North-West.

The abduction of 276 female students from Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok, by Boko Haram on April 14–15, 2014. The kidnapping of more than 300 school children in Kankara, Katsina State (BBC News, 2020). The kidnapping of 42 people, including 27 students in Kagara, Niger State (The Guardian, 2021). The 317 schoolgirls kidnapped in Zamfara (BBC News, 2021). In all, the Boko Haram sect has killed 3118 people, injured 2793, and displaced 9305 people in 88 coordinated attacks from 2009 to 2023 (Piate, 2025).

Table 1: **Incidents of Terrorism and Human Rights Violations (2010 – 2026)**

Year	Significant Incident	Perpetrator	Key Human
2010	Bauchi Prison Break	Book Haram	Right to life, violation of public safety; academic escape of 700 inmates
2011	UN Building Bombing in Abuja	Book Haram	Right to life: 21 dead; violation of diplomatic immunity and protection
2014	Chibok School Girl Abduction	Book Haram	Right to education, right of the child
2015	Baga Massacre	Book Haram	Right to life, 200 killed, and massive displacement
2017	Kann IDP Camp bombing	State forces (Air forces)	Right to life: Accidental bombing of 100 civilians/and aid workers
2018	Dapchi Abduction	Book Haram (ISWAP)	Right to liberty, targeting of female students
2020	Zabarmari Massacre	Book Haram	Right to life: 70 farmers beheaded. Violation of the right to livelihood
2021	Kaduna Train Attack	Bandits/Terrorists	Right to freedom of movement, kidnapping for ransom
2022	Dwo Church Attack	ISWAP	Right to life: 40 worshippers killed, right to freedom of religion
2024	Borno Displacement Camps	State/Terrorists	Right to dignity: sexual and gender – based violence (SGBV) reported in the camp
2025	North – West Drone Strikes	State forces	Right to life: civilians killed during kinetic operations against bandits
2026	Lakurawa Incursions	Lakurawa Group	Right to life, property. New extremist threat in Kebbi, Katsina, and Sokoto

Source: Amnesty International, 2025.

The “banditry” phenomenon might be described as a subset of a much wider theme of sustainable development that exists as an expression of organized violent crime by groups of organized criminals known as bandits, whose activities are those of outlawed entities that exist beyond the legal system and resort to the use of force, advanced weapons, and intimidation as their tools for fulfilling their objectives. Among the most striking ones are kidnapping for ransom, where people or groups are taken, and money paid to release them, armed robbery, where people are targeted and robbed of what they have, livestock rustling, which often entails high numbers of animals stolen, a business activity that is very economical in most of the areas involved, and assault of travelers on highways and intrusions into communities. Bandits usually dwell in ungoverned areas

such as forests, mountainous regions, or abandoned villages with little or no government presence (Piate, 2025; Piate, 2026). Several reasons have been put forward for the causes and prevalence of banditry in Nigeria. Some of these factors include, but are not limited to, the fragility of the Nigerian state; weak state institutions, especially the security agencies; the availability of grossly ungoverned spaces; the porosity of Nigeria's borders with its neighbouring countries; arms proliferation; weak leadership; corruption; unemployment; and poverty (Albert et al, 2025; Abdulrashed, 2021; Adegoka, 2019).

The escalation of banditry in Nigeria, particularly within the North West and North Central geopolitical zones, has transitioned from localized communal clashes to a sophisticated kidnapping-for-ransom economy. While banditry was historically linked to cattle rustling and farmer-herder conflicts over dwindling resources, it has evolved into a major threat to national sovereignty and human rights (Abubaker & Shuaibu, 2022). Between 2010 and 2023, banditry-related violence resulted in approximately 13,485 deaths and the displacement of over one million individuals (P.I. Global Observatory, 2024). Systematic rape and abduction of women and girls are frequently used as tools of terror and extortion. Bandits frequently impose levies on farmers to access their lands, leading to the abandonment of thousands of hectares of farmland and worsening national food insecurity. The government, on its part, in its efforts to curb the menace, has also been implicated in human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and unintended civilian casualties during airstrikes (Human Rights Watch, 2023; UNIDIR, 2024; Ojo et al, 2023; Okoli et al, 2024). As noted by Abdullahi and Mukhtar (2022), the escalation of armed banditry in North Western Nigeria has transitioned from a localized communal conflict into a systemic humanitarian crisis that defies conventional security measures. Despite various military interventions (such as Operation Hadari Daji), criminal syndicates continue to operate with near-total impunity, transforming vast rural ungoverned spaces into theaters of extreme violence. Bandits have moved beyond cattle rustling to a kidnap-for-ransom economy, systematically violating the right to life, the right to personal liberty, and freedom from torture through mass abductions and extrajudicial killings. The deliberate targeting of schools has created a pervasive fear that undermines the right to education, leading to a surge in out-of-school children and the long-term degradation of human capital in the region. The proliferation of small arms and the bandits' tactical use of difficult terrain (Like the Rugu forest) highlights a significant sovereignty gap, where the state is unable to provide the most basic requirement of governance, that is, public safety. The nexus between banditry and human rights violations in Nigeria is defined by a causal and cyclical relationship where criminal violence directly strips citizens of their constitutional protections. The intersection of these two issues is not merely coincidental but structural. Banditry acts as the vehicle for the systematic erosion of human rights. The primary link here is the transition of banditry from economic crime (theft) to lethal violence. The indiscriminate killings and scorched-earth tactics used during village raids constitute a direct assault on the most fundamental human right: the right to life. Again, by

adopting kidnapping as a business model, bandits turn human freedom into a negotiable commodity.

Table 2: **Timeline of Banditry and Human Rights Violations (2010 – 2026)**

Period	Key Incidents/Trends	Primary Health Rights Violations
2010 – 2014	Emergence: modern banditry traces to a013 extrajudicial killings of a pastoralist leader in Zamfara. Attacks were sporadic, peaking in 2014 with 64 recorded incidents.	Right to property (cattle rustling), right to life (communal reprisal killings)
2015 – 2017	Expansion: Insecurity spreads from Zamfara to Kaduna and Katsina. Armed groups begin occupying ungoverned forest spaces like the Rugu forest.	Freedom of movement; right to livelihood (farmers forced to abandon lands)
2018 – 2020	Escalation: Incidents surged from 124 in 2018 to over 1000 by 2020. Introduction of mass school abductions (e.g Kankara, 2020)	Right to education (closure of schools), freedom from torture, and sexual violence
2021 – 2023	Terrorist Designation: The government formally labels bandits as terrorists. Mass abductions of students continue. (Kebbi, Niger States). Deaths exceed 1300 by mid 2023	Right to personal liberty (ransom economy), right to life (massacres in village raids).
2024 – 2025	Sophistication: Bandits project high-intensity violence with military-grade arms. Over 2,900 people were kidnapped in the North West between July 2024 and June 2025.	Right to food (levying harvest taxes), state failure to protect (social contract breach).
2026 (Jan. - March)	Current Crisis: New Year massacres in Niger and Kebbi Massacre. Bandits openly occupy villages and burn police stations.	Systematic crimes against humanity, right to human dignity, freedom of worship

Source: Human Rights Watch, 2026.

Key statistics summary from 2010 to 2026 shows that approximately 1500 deaths directly attributed to banditry, over 1.1 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) across the North West and North Central regions, Nigerians paid an estimated \$18 million in ransoms between 2011 and 2020 alone and about 300,000 children were disenfranchise from their right to education as a result

of closure of schools in the high-risk zones (Abubakar & Schuaibu, 2022, Human Rights Watch, 2026).

Trailing behind banditry are the conflicts between farmers and herdsmen. Arbert and Thaddaeus (2025) argued that there have been strong relationships between herdsmen and farmers in their respective communities over the years. For them, their relationship was symbiotic in some respects and competitive in others. Herdsmen take their cattle to the grassy farmlands and help farmers to fight weeds and get manure from cows from each other in the production of agricultural produce. In some instances, there has always been a competitive relationship between farmers and herdsmen, often leading to conflict. Farmers' and herdsmen's relationships have also been seen as complementary, which has, in most cases, led to clashes. These clashes are devastating as the activities of bandits in most cases are associated with negative consequences, destroying farming, business, and socio-cultural activities.

The causes of these clashes, aside from disputes over farmland and cattle rustling, are closely related to those of banditry. Historically, the conflict centered on competition for natural resources. Two main factors have intensified this conflict, which are climate change and desertification. Increasing aridity in the far North has pushed pastoralists (predominantly Fulani) southward in search of water and green grass for their cattle, and land scarcity, that is, rapid population growth and urban expansion, has encroached on traditional grazing routes, forcing herders into settled farming communities. What used to be settled through traditional mediation has turned violent due to the proliferation of small arms and ethnic and religious overtones. Because the herders are mostly Muslim Fulani and many farmers in the middle belt are Christians, the clashes are often framed through the lens of identity politics, deepening social divisions. The introduction of Anti-open Grazing laws, while viewed by the farmers as necessary protection of their crops, is seen by the herders as a threat to their livelihood. The conflict has led to a breakdown of the rule of law, resulting in abuses by both sides and state actors. There are mass killings and reprisal attacks on villages, millions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in dire conditions without basic amenities, high rates of gender-based violence against women in conflict zones, and the burning of schools, churches, mosques, and granaries, leading to severe food insecurity. In essence, the problem is not merely the competition for grass and water, but the collapse of the rule of law and the state's inability to protect the fundamental human rights of its rural populations. The nexus between farmer-herder clashes and human rights violations in Nigeria represents a profound breakdown of the right to life, security, and property. This relationship is not merely a resource struggle but a systemic cycle where environmental pressure and state fragility trigger gross abuses of fundamental freedoms.

Table 3: **Timeline of major incidents and Human Rights Violations (2010 – 2026)**

Year	Region/Location	Key Incident Description	Human Rights Impact
2010	Dogo Na Hauwa, Plateau State	Fulani herders invaded three villages, killing hundreds, primarily women and children.	Mass killing, violation of the right to lifes
2012	Plateau, Benue, and Adamawa	Multiple clashes across the middle belt, over 00. Killed during a funeral in Plateau	Right to life, over 5000 people displaced in Nasarawa alone.
2014	Agatu and Guma, Benue State	Large-scale massacres by suspected herders resulting in over 1000 deaths	Massive displacement, destruction of food security (Nnaji et al, 2022)
2016	Nimbo, Enugu State	Herder attacks spread to Southern Nigeria, and houses and farmlands were destroyed.	Violation of property rights and right to adequate housing
2018	Middle Belt (Benue and Plateau)	Deadliest year on record, over 1,800 deaths in the first half of the year (NHRC, 2020)	3,641 deaths recorded between 2016 and 2018 (Amnesty International, 2018)
2020	Agatu and Ocholonya, Benue	Continued raids and monitoring teams identified a severe lack of health care and nutrition.	Right to health, poor access to basic services (NHRC, 2020)
2021	Asaba Declaration	Southern governors banned open grazing in response to persistent violence	Legal shifts affecting traditional livelihoods and movement
2022 – 2024	North Central and North West	Conflict increasingly overlaps with banditry and mass kidnappings for ransom.	Right to personal liberty, widespread fear, and psychological trauma
2025 – 2026	National	Ongoing implementation of the National Livestock Transportation Plan (NLTP)	Targeted efforts to resolve land disputes and restore security

Source: National Human Rights Commission, 2026.

In Nigeria, the definition of kidnapping is not found in a single kidnapping Act at the federal level, but rather across several key pieces of legislation passed by the National Assembly. These laws define the act based on the deprivation of liberty, the use of force, and, most recently, the intent to terrorize or extort. The Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022, is the current most significant Federal Legislation regarding kidnapping. It reclassified kidnapping as an act of terrorism when it involves certain motives. Section 1 of the Act states that terrorism includes

kidnapping or hostage taking intended to unduly compel a government or international organization to act or refrain from acting, seriously intimidate a population, or destabilize or destroy fundamental political, economic, or social structures. Section 24 on Hostage Taking specifically defines this as seizing or detaining a person and threatening to kill, injure, or continue to detain them to compel a third party, such as the government or a family, to meet a condition for release. In *Okashetu V. State* (2016) 15 NWLR (pt. 1534) 126, the supreme court held that for an act to be legally defined as kidnapping in Nigeria, the following must be present: the victim must be physically taken, carried away or confined, the act must be against the victim will (or the guardian's will in the case of minors), the use of violence, threats or deceit to achieve the detention and the person taking the victim must have no legal authority to do so.

In the wake of democratic construction, several criminal gangs have also appeared in different parts of the country, perpetrating armed robbery, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, rape, and other nefarious activities against which the police and other security agencies appear helpless. Thousands of people have been kidnapped in the country between 2005 and 2025, with over 150 billion naira paid in ransom (NPF, 2025). In July 2010, four journalists and their driver were kidnapped in Abia State. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of two hundred and fifty million naira. Around the same time in Kogi State, the mother of the former president of the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF), Sani Lulu, was kidnapped, and a demand of two hundred million was made. In Kano State, a businessman, Alhaji Salisu Mataba, was kidnapped and was only released after a ransom of eight million naira was made (Alli, 2010).

Kidnapping in Nigeria has evolved from a localized grievance-based activity (historically in the Niger Delta) into a widespread commercial enterprise and a tool of terrorism. Fueled by economic instability, high unemployment, and security gaps, it now affects every geopolitical zone, moving from high-value targets to mass abductions of students and rural farmers. The high levels of criminal activity and public discontent indicate that Nigeria has not provided effective social support for its citizens. As McNamara (2000) noted, a society that prioritizes military security while facing food shortages, rapid population growth, low productivity and income, limited technological development, inadequate public utilities, and persistent unemployment maintains only a false sense of security. These conditions have led some to fear the potential failure of the Nigerian state. State failure occurs when a government cannot provide security, prevent internal conflict, or deliver basic public services to its population (Dervis, 2005).

Kidnapping is not merely a criminal act; it is a fundamental breach of section 33. Right to life which occurs in case of extrajudicial killing or death during captivity, section 34 – Right to dignity (where victims often face torture, inhuman treatment and sexual violence), section 35 – Right to liberty (unlawful detention) and section 41 – Right to movement of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) (as amended) and other international charters like the African charter on Human and People's Right (ACHPR). Despite the existence of the Terrorism Act and precedents like *Okashetu V. State*, the rate of kidnapping continues to climb. This suggests a

protection gap where the state is failing in its primary constitutional duty as enshrined in section 14(2)(b) 1999 CFRN (as amended, which provides that the security and welfare of its citizens shall be the primary duty of government. The nexus between kidnapping and human rights violations in Nigeria is a relationship where criminal activity functions as a primary driver of constitutional erosion. The National Human Rights Commission's 2025 dashboard indicates that women and children bear a disproportionate burden of kidnapping.

Table 4: **Timeline for major incidents and violations (2010 – 2026)**

Year	Major Kidnapping Incidents	Human Rights Violation/Trends
2010 – 2013	Rise of Boko Haram, sporadic kidnappings of foreigners in the Niger Delta and North	Extrajudicial killings during counter-insurgency operations, and arbitrary arrests of suspected militants
2014 – 2015	Chibok Girls (2014): 276 schoolgirls abducted. Malari (2015): 40 boys/men abducted	Forced conscription of child soldiers by Boko Haram, sexual violence against female captives
2016 – 2019	Dapchi Girls (2018): 110 school girls abducted by ISWAP	Repression of Shiite (IMN) protesters; excessive force by security agencies during civil unrest
200 – 2021	Kankara (2020): 300 boys. Jangebe (2021): 31 girls. Bethel Baptist (221): 121 students	#ENDSARS Protest (2020): Lekki Toll Gate massacre, widespread reports of police brutality and torture
2022 – 2023	Abuja – Kaduna Train (2022): 60 passengers. Rise in highway expressway kidnappings.	Suppression of freedom of expression and voter intimidation during the 2023 general elections.
2024	Kuriga (March): 287 students. Kaduna (August): 20 medical students	Lethal force by security agents, over 1000 deaths recorded in kidnapping attempts alone this year
2025	Papyri (Nov): 303 students and 12 teachers. Maga (Nov): 25 female students	Surge in mass abduction, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) reports 570 killings in April 2025 alone.
2026	Continuing mass abduction in the North-Central region, over 1,420 people killed in security incidents	Severe food insecurity (35m people) driven by insurgent attacks on farming communities, famine-like conditions in Borno

Source: Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC), 2026, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), 2025

Conclusion

The trajectory of Nigeria's security landscape from 2010 to 2026 reveals a fundamental erosion of the social contract. What began as localized counter terrorism efforts against Boko Haram has fractured into converging frontiers where terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, and a commercialized kidnapping industry operate with overlapping impunity. This convergence has transitioned the Nigerian Civilian experience from a state of seeking government protection to a permanent state of precarity. The study demonstrates that these security threats are no longer peripheral but are central drivers of systemic human rights violations. The state's response, often characterized by extrajudicial measures, arbitrary detentions and failure to secure rural frontier communities, has frequently exacerbated the crisis. Consequently, the right to life, the right to education (stalled by mass school abduction), and the right to food (severed by agrarian violence) are now secondary to the immediate logic of survival. The way forward is that addressing Nigeria's human rights crisis requires moving beyond kinetic military solutions. To bridge the gap between precarity and protection, the Nigerian state must transition from a reactive security posture to a rights-based framework that addresses the socio-economic roots of the issues and restores the rule of law across its ungoverned spaces.

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