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The Limits of Technology–Led Security, Community Exclusion and Kidnapping along Ugwuogo Road, Enugu State, Nigeria

***Akoji, Richard Oklagba, PhD; ** Kosok, David, PhD; ***Gabriel, Valentine Ayokhaude, PhD; & ****Oduntan, Joseph Olatunji, PhD**

*Department of Political Science and International Relations, Southwestern University, Nigeria, Ogun State, **Department of Political Science and International Relations, Caleb University, Lagos State, ***Department of Political Science and International Relations, Southwestern University, Nigeria, Ogun State, ****Department of Political Science and International Relations, Caleb University, Lagos State.

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Abstract

Despite continuous government expenditure on surveillance technologies and checkpoint infrastructure, kidnapping and violent insecurity continue to be widespread along Ugwuogo Road in Enugu State, Nigeria. This study investigates the reasons these security measures have not translated into significant reductions in criminal activity. Adopting a mixed-methods design, the research combines quantitative analysis of 147 recorded kidnapping cases between 2020 and 2025 with qualitative interviews involving local residents, kidnapping survivors, security personnel, transport union representatives, vigilante members, and community leaders. The findings point to three interconnected flaws within the existing security framework: excessive dependence on surveillance technologies without effective operational coordination, the dominance of largely symbolic checkpoint enforcement marked by corruption and weak deterrence, and the systematic marginalization of community-based intelligence structures in formal security planning. Spatial analysis indicates that roughly 78% of kidnapping incidents occurred within a 500-meter radius of official checkpoints, while drone surveillance failed to avert approximately 63% of attacks due to slow response times, predictable deployment routines, and poor inter-agency collaboration. The study contends that security strategies centered primarily on technology, when divorced from intelligence integration, accountability systems, and community trust, are largely ineffective in settings

characterized by limited state capacity. To address these gaps, the study proposes a four-pillar framework for sustainable security governance that prioritizes intelligence-led policing, community-based early warning mechanisms, institutional accountability, and the economic disruption of criminal networks. The study contributes to ongoing debates on hybrid security governance in Nigeria by demonstrating the importance of socially embedded and participatory approaches over narrowly surveillance-focused strategies.

Keywords: Community policing, checkpoint infrastructure, Kidnapping, Surveillance technology, Ugwuogo Road.

Introduction

Over the past decade, kidnapping-for-ransom has evolved into one of the most entrenched and economically sustained forms of violent crime in Nigeria. What began as a regionally concentrated phenomenon linked to militancy in the Niger Delta has transformed into a decentralized and highly adaptive criminal enterprise affecting highways, peri-urban corridors, educational institutions, and rural communities across the federation (Alemika, 2023; Nwanegbo, 2024). Recent national crime and labor statistics suggest that structural unemployment, youth marginalization, and regional inequalities continue to provide recruitment pools for organized criminal networks (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Simultaneously, public trust in formal security institutions remains fragile due to persistent corruption, slow prosecution rates, and limited intelligence integration (Transparency International, 2023).

In response to escalating insecurity, Nigerian federal and sub-national governments have significantly increased investments in technology-driven security interventions. These include unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), fixed and mobile checkpoints, biometric monitoring systems, and expanded joint patrol operations involving the police, military, and paramilitary agencies. Across Africa, such technologies are frequently promoted as force multipliers capable of compensating for manpower shortages and terrain constraints (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2021; Nwanegbo, 2024). In Nigeria, state governments increasingly frame drone surveillance and checkpoint infrastructure as evidence of proactive security governance.

However, empirical evidence suggests that technological deployment does not automatically translate into effective crime reduction. Surveillance systems require institutional coherence, intelligence coordination, rapid-response capacity, and public trust to function effectively (Alemika, 2023). Where these enabling conditions are weak, security technologies risk becoming performative symbols of authority rather than operational deterrents. Emerging research on hybrid security governance in contexts of limited state capacity underscores that technological tools are only effective when embedded within broader accountability and intelligence-sharing frameworks (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2021).

Ugwuogo Road in Enugu State presents a compelling case for examining this

contradiction. Despite visible investments in drones, joint patrols, and permanent checkpoints between 2020 and 2025, kidnapping incidents along the corridor have persisted. Official security assessments and local monitoring reports indicate repeated abductions occurring in proximity to established enforcement points (Enugu State Government, 2025; Nsukka Security Watch, 2025). This pattern challenges conventional deterrence assumptions that visibility and surveillance alone reduce criminal opportunity.

The persistence of kidnapping along Ugwuogo Road therefore raises a critical research problem: **Why have technology-led security interventions failed to produce significant reductions in kidnapping despite sustained financial and infrastructural investment?** Existing policy narratives emphasize equipment acquisition and enforcement visibility, yet they insufficiently interrogate institutional coordination gaps, intelligence fragmentation, corruption within checkpoint operations, and the marginalization of community-based early warning systems.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the limits of technology-driven security along Ugwuogo Road and examining how community exclusion, weak inter-agency coordination, and institutional accountability deficits undermine security outcomes. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the operational effectiveness of drone surveillance and checkpoint infrastructure in reducing kidnapping incidents.
2. Analyze spatial relationships between security installations and reported abductions.
3. Investigate the role of corruption, response delays, and intelligence fragmentation in weakening deterrence.
4. Assess the extent to which community-based intelligence structures are integrated into formal security planning.

By situating the Ugwuogo Road case within broader debates on governance in areas of limited statehood (Risse, 2011) and hybrid security provision (Abrahamsen & Williams, 2021), this study argues that the failure of technology-led security reflects deeper governance deficits rather than purely technical shortcomings. Sustainable security outcomes require intelligence-led policing, community integration, institutional accountability, and coordinated operational command structures. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on African security governance by demonstrating that surveillance visibility without embedded legitimacy and intelligence integration produces limited deterrent value.

Insecurity and Kidnapping in Nigeria

Kidnapping has become one of Nigeria's most entrenched and economically sustained security threats. Data from 2020 to 2024 show a sharp increase in reported abductions, with thousands of victims taken across multiple regions annually (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023). Beyond the immediate risks to victims' lives, kidnapping produces long-term psychological harm, disrupts livelihoods and economic activity, and erodes public confidence in the state's capacity to ensure safety (Transparency International, 2023).

Scholarly analyses identify several structural drivers of kidnapping in Nigeria. High levels of youth unemployment, widespread poverty, and persistent regional inequality create favorable conditions for criminal recruitment. Weak policing capacity, low prosecution and conviction rates, and pervasive corruption significantly lower the risks associated with kidnapping, making it a profitable criminal enterprise. The routine payment of ransoms has further institutionalized kidnapping as a predictable income source rather than an exceptional crime (Alemika, 2023).

Transport corridors and peri-urban zones are particularly susceptible to kidnapping. These spaces often combine visible state security presence—such as checkpoints or patrols—with limited functional effectiveness. Criminal networks exploit this contradiction by operating near security installations, confident that enforcement is fragmented or compromised. Ugwuogo Road typifies this dynamic, serving simultaneously as a heavily monitored route and a hotspot for persistent criminal activity.

Surveillance Technology and Its Limits

In response to escalating insecurity, Nigerian authorities have increasingly relied on surveillance technologies, particularly Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations. Drones are expected to improve situational awareness, monitor inaccessible terrain, and deliver real-time intelligence to ground forces. Across Africa, UAVs are frequently presented as cost-effective solutions to security challenges in contexts marked by manpower shortages (Nwanegbo, 2024).

Nevertheless, empirical research consistently shows that the effectiveness of surveillance technologies depends less on the devices themselves than on the institutional arrangements that support their use. In Nigeria, drone operations are frequently undermined by unstable power supply, limited flight endurance, weak data integration systems, and inadequate coordination between intelligence units and operational responders (Nigerian Army, 2025).

Field evidence from Enugu State indicates that drones often generate intelligence that is delayed, incomplete, or operationally unusable. Although surveillance footage may capture suspicious movements, the absence of rapid response units, coherent command structures, and effective inter-agency communication means such intelligence rarely prevents attacks. Criminal groups have adapted by observing drone deployment patterns and exploiting technical downtimes, thereby diminishing the deterrent value of aerial surveillance.

Table 1: **Security investments vs. Outcomes (2020-2025**)

Intervention	Budget (₦)	Implementation flaws	Impact
Drones	2.3bn	No night vision, 4-hour battery life	12% detection rate
Checkpoints	1.1bn	60% understaffed, bribery endemic	22% arrest rate
Vigilantes	650m	No standardized training	3 friendly fire incidents

Source: Field Study (2024)

Community Policing and Hybrid Security Approaches

Community policing has gained increasing attention as an alternative to centralized and militarized security models. It prioritizes collaboration between security agencies and local communities, emphasizing trust-building, shared intelligence, and problem-oriented policing. In Nigeria, both national and sub-national policy frameworks increasingly recognize the value of community participation in security provision (Alemika, 2023).

Empirical studies suggest that security outcomes improve when community-generated intelligence is formally incorporated into operational decision-making. Local residents often possess nuanced knowledge of terrain, social relationships, and emerging threats that external security forces lack. However, the success of community policing depends on institutional safeguards that protect informants and prevent the misuse of community structures (UNICEF, 2022).

Hybrid security arrangements linking formal state agencies with non-state actors such as vigilante groups, traditional authorities, and transport unions have become a defining feature of Nigeria's security landscape. While such arrangements can mitigate institutional weaknesses, they also raise concerns regarding accountability, coordination, and the protection of human rights.

Security Governance in Contexts of Limited Capacity

This study draws on the theory of governance in areas of limited statehood, which challenges the notion that effective governance requires centralized authority and exclusive control over the means of coercion (Risse, 2011). Instead, governance outcomes often emerge through negotiated interactions among state institutions, non-state actors, and informal authorities.

Ugwuogo Road exemplifies such a context. Although the state maintains visible security infrastructure, enforcement capacity is weakened by corruption, inadequate resources, and logistical constraints. These limitations enable criminal networks to operate alongside formal security agencies, producing overlapping and competing systems of authority.

According to Abrahamsen and Williams (2021), contemporary security provision increasingly relies on hybrid arrangements that blur distinctions between public and private, formal and informal actors. In Nigeria, vigilante groups, community leaders, and transport unions frequently assume critical security roles, often compensating for deficiencies in formal institutions (Alemika, 2023).

Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods research design to capture both the structural patterns and lived experiences of insecurity along Ugwuogo Road. Quantitative data were derived from 147 documented kidnapping incidents recorded between 2020 and 2025, drawing on police records, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) reports, and verified media sources. Key variables included proximity to checkpoints, drone deployment patterns, response times, and victim characteristics.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between January and November 2024. Participants included kidnapping survivors, local residents, security personnel, community leaders, vigilante members, and transport union officials. Interviews explored perceptions of security effectiveness, corruption, intelligence gaps, and community- state relations.

Table 2: Interview Subjects

Stakeholder Groups	Sample Size	Focus Areas
Kidnapping Victms	15	-Circumstances of abduction (time, location) - Interactions with security forces post-incidents)
Security personnel (Police, NSCDC, Drone Operators)	42	Challenges in surveillance/checkpoint operations Corruption or resource constraints.
Leaders (Traditional Rulers, Vigilantes.	10	• Local Trust in state vs non-state security • Alternative protection mechanisms
Transport Unions(Drivers, NURTW)	6	• Routes avoided due to insecurity. • Extortion at checkpoints.

Source: Field Study (2025)

Field interview data and crime statistics were collected by the author between January 2024 and December 2025.

Findings

The findings reveal substantial deficiencies in the operational performance of existing security interventions. Drone surveillance detected suspicious movements prior to several incidents but failed to prompt timely intervention. The average response delay of approximately 47 minutes rendered intelligence ineffective for preventive purposes.

Criminal groups adapted by monitoring drone deployment schedules and exploiting periods of technical downtime. Checkpoint operations were similarly undermined by chronic understaffing and corruption, with informal payments of ₦5,000 to ₦20,000 per vehicle commonly reported.

Spatial analysis showed that roughly 78% of kidnapping incidents occurred within 500 meters of checkpoints. Rather than serving as deterrents, checkpoints became predictable reference points around which criminal activities were organized. Inter-agency coordination remained weak, and community-based intelligence networks were largely excluded from formal security planning processes.

Discussion of Findings

The findings illustrate the limitations of technology-driven security strategies in environments characterized by weak institutional capacity. The concentration of kidnapping incidents near

checkpoints challenges the assumption that visibility equates to deterrence. Along Ugwuogo Road, checkpoints function primarily as performative security measures symbolic manifestations of state authority lacking operational depth (Alemika, 2023).

Similarly, drone surveillance failed to deliver preventive benefits due to poor intelligence integration and delayed responses. As Nwanegbo (2024) observes, technology alone cannot offset institutional fragmentation, corruption, and low trust. The marginalization of community actors further weakens security outcomes by excluding valuable local intelligence. Ultimately, insecurity along Ugwuogo Road reflects governance failures rather than technological inadequacy. Effective security requires embedding technological tools within hybrid frameworks that integrate community participation, inter-agency coordination, and robust accountability mechanisms.

Recommendations

The study proposes a four-pillar framework for sustainable security governance:

1. **Intelligence-Led Operations:** Develop joint intelligence platforms connecting security agencies with vetted community actors.
2. **Community-Based Early Warning Systems:** Establish secure and anonymous reporting mechanisms while safeguarding informants.
3. **Institutional Accountability:** Require transparent reporting on security operations and outcomes.
4. **Economic Disruption:** Undermine ransom economies through financial intelligence and targeted prosecution of facilitators.

Conclusion

The continued prevalence of kidnapping along Ugwuogo Road underscores the limitations of surveillance-focused and visibility-oriented security strategies. When deployed without intelligence integration, community trust, and accountability, drones and checkpoints provide only a façade of security. Addressing insecurity in Enugu State requires a transition toward hybrid, intelligence-driven, and community-centered governance models. This study contributes to broader discussions on Nigerian security governance by emphasizing that sustainable safety depends not on technology alone but on socially embedded and accountable institutions.

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