

Public Perception of the Effect of Kidnapping on the Socio-Economic Development of Ideato South Local Government Area Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This work investigated public perception of the effect of kidnapping on the socio-economic development of Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. The Social Disorganization Theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. The study adopted the mixed methods research design, using the multistage sampling procedure in the selection of 204 respondents. The target population consisted of adult residents, defined as people aged 18 years and above in Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State. The questionnaire and In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide served as instruments for data collection. The quantitative data were coded and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Frequency tables were used to analyze, describe and present the quantitative data, while the qualitative data were transcribed manually and analyzed using thematic analysis. Two research hypotheses were formulated and tested using chi-square inferential statistics. The study found economic downturn to be the major effect of kidnapping in Ideato South LGA, Imo State. Based on the findings of the study, the work recommended that the government should implement programmes aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment in Ideato South, which can diminish the economic incentives for engaging in kidnapping. The study also recommended that NGOs should advocate for stricter penalties for kidnappers, including life imprisonment or the death penalty for repeat offenders. This could serve as a deterrent against kidnapping.

Keywords: public perception, kidnapping, socio-economic development & Ideato South

Introduction

Kidnapping has emerged as a pervasive socio-political and economic challenge in Nigeria, undermining national security and community well-being (Okoli & Agada, 2014; Nwankwo, 2021). The growing incidence of abductions across various parts of the country, particularly in the South-East, has generated widespread anxiety, eroded public trust, and

impeded socio-economic activities. In Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State, kidnapping has not only instilled fear among residents but has also disrupted local commerce, reduced agricultural productivity, and discouraged both public and private investments. Kidnapping, which is the unlawful seizure and detention of a person against their will, is a serious crime that can have severe legal and psychological consequences. Kidnapping incidents are generally underreported in Nigeria because so many people do not trust the police or fear that contacting security services will put their loved ones at greater risk. This results in a lack of reliable official crime data in the country (Anagba, & Sokoajin, 2025).

Over the decades, kidnapping in Nigeria has evolved into a lingering, pervasive security threat and fast-paced and multifaceted criminal enterprise. It is now perpetrated by diverse armed groups and criminal gangs operating across the country, on land and at sea, pursuing different agendas and driven by different motivations: political, ideological, financial, social and cultural (Saminu, Mohammed, & Empowerment, 2022).

According to Akpan (2010), the roots of this phenomenon can be traced to abductions by Niger Delta militants in the early 2000s. To bring attention to environmental degradation and underdevelopment in oil-producing towns, the militants would abduct foreign workers in the oil industry and utilize them as leverage in negotiations. It grew more and more profitable to do this over time. Oil firms were eager to pay large ransoms in order to secure the release of their employees. They began abducting local officials, their families, and other wealthy people after realizing how profitable their newfound skill was (Chinwokwu & Eraye, 2019). The most common form of the crime in terms of geographic prevalence has been kidnapping for ransom by criminal gangs, notably on roadways.

Additionally, there is ritualistic kidnapping. The belief that using human body parts in ritual magic will bring prosperity, power, protection, and success is deeply ingrained in some parts of Nigeria. Relative to monetary or political goals, most kidnapping and missing person cases in Nigeria, according to certain analysts and experts, included ritual abductions rather than voluntary abductions (Oyewole & Ekpo, 2024).

Although kidnappings involving foreigners garner more publicity, the vast majority of victims are Nigerians. The primary targets are wealthy people: businessmen, politicians, traditional leaders, and their families, which includes public servants, kids, and religious leaders (Ugwuoke, 2011). Kidnappings of unidentified persons also occur, especially on the streets. It is believed that a ransom is typically paid in order to ensure the release of the victim. Kidnappers typically advise victims' relatives not to contact the police or security services because they oppose paying ransom (Oyewole, 2016).

Kidnapping in Nigeria has become a deeply rooted social problem. It remains a serious threat to our security and the well-being. If more proactive and effective responses are not developed to address the socio-economic factors promoting it, the situation could further deteriorate with the proliferation of criminal syndicates across the country. It is against this backdrop that this study is situated to investigate public perception of the effect of kidnapping on the socio-economic development of Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the effects of kidnapping on the socio-economic development in Ideato South LGA, Imo State?
2. What measures can be employed to control of kidnapping in Ideato South LGA, Imo State?

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the effects of kidnapping on the socio-economic development in Ideato South LGA, Imo State.
2. To recommend measures that can be employed to control of kidnapping in Ideato South LGA, Imo State.

Review of Literature

Kidnapping, a criminal act defined as the unlawful seizure and carrying away of a person by force or fraud, has been a subject of extensive study across various disciplines including sociology, criminology, psychology, and law (Ekebosi, Nwene & Maduagwuna, 2021).. The

motivations behind kidnapping can vary widely, encompassing financial gain through ransom demands, political motives such as terrorism or hostage-taking and personal reasons like domestic disputes or revenge (Inyang, & Abraham, 2013).. The legal definitions and consequences of kidnapping differ significantly across jurisdictions. In many countries, kidnapping is classified as a felony with severe penalties that may include lengthy prison sentences. For instance, in the United States, federal laws impose strict penalties for kidnappings that cross state lines or involve minors (Smith & Jones, 2020).

Kidnapping has indeed become a significant barrier to socio-economic development in Nigeria, manifesting through various channels that affect both individual livelihoods and broader economic stability. The prevalence of kidnapping, particularly in regions such as the southeast Nigeria, creates an atmosphere of fear that directly impacts investment decisions. Investors, both local and foreign, are often deterred by the risks associated with potential abductions, leading to a decline in business activities (Oketa, 2018). This reluctance to invest results in reduced economic growth, as businesses either shut down or relocates to safer areas, which further exacerbates unemployment rates and diminishes local economic vitality.

Moreover, the diversion of resources towards security measures to combat kidnapping further exacerbates socio-economic challenges. Funds that could have been allocated for essential development projects, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure are often redirected to enhance security operations (Molobe & Odukoya, 2021). This reallocation diminishes the capacity for socio-economic progress, as critical areas necessary for community development suffer from underfunding (Raifee et al, 2013). The long-term effects can be detrimental: a poorly educated populace may struggle to find employment opportunities, inadequate healthcare can lead to increased morbidity and mortality rates, and insufficient infrastructure hampers economic growth. Thus, the cycle continues as communities become less resilient and more vulnerable to both crime and poverty (Adepegba, & Oyewo, 2024)

One of the primary measures to control kidnapping is the establishment of robust legal frameworks that define and penalize the act of kidnapping severely. Such laws must be stringent enough to deter potential kidnappers by imposing harsh penalties, including

long-term imprisonment or life sentences, depending on the severity and circumstances of the crime (Wright et al, 2017). Also, a specialized unit within police forces can be dedicated to handling abductions; these units focus on rapid response and negotiation tactics that are crucial in the early stages of a kidnapping incident (Gossman et al, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Social Disorganization Theory has been adopted as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory posits that a breakdown in social institutions, such as family, school, and community organizations, leads to increased crime rates and social instability. The Social Disorganization Theory is particularly suitable for examining public perception regarding kidnapping because it emphasizes how weakened social ties and community cohesion contribute to criminal behaviour. In areas where social networks are fragmented due to economic hardship or political instability, residents may feel less inclined to engage in collective action against crime. This disconnection can lead to an environment where criminal activities, such as kidnapping, flourish unchecked. Thus, utilizing adopting this theory as a framework for this study provides valuable insights into the interplay between crime and community structure. It underscores how social cohesion or lack thereof can shape both individual attitudes toward safety and broader economic outcomes within Ideato South Local Government Area.

Research Design Method

The study adopted the mixed methods research design.

Area of the Study

The area of study was Ideato South LGA of Imo State, Nigeria. Ideato South is a Local Government Area in Imo State, South-eastern Nigeria. Ideato South has its headquarters in the town of Dikenafai, the source of Orashi River. Ideato South has an area of 88 km² and a population of 159,879 at the 2006 census. The postal code of the area is 475. The people of Ideato South are farmers, who produce both cash and food crops. Moreover, traditional religion coexists with Christianity in this region. Many inhabitants still practice indigenous beliefs alongside their Christian faiths.

Participants of the Study

According to the National Population Commission Census (2006), Ideato South LGA has a total population of 159,879 persons. However, the target population for this study was the adult residents of Ideato South LGA aged 18 years and above because people within that age range are generally mentally developed enough to participate in a study of this nature. The population of people 18 years and above in Ideato South LGA is 51.7% of the total population. Going by that figure, our target population is therefore: 120,680.

Sample Size & Sampling Techniques

The sample size of 204 adult residents of Ideato South LGA was selected for this study. The sample size was determined statistically using the Taro Yamane formula (1967). This study adopted both probability and non-probability sampling methods. Both probability and non-probability sampling methods play vital roles in research design. This study equally adopted the multi-stage sampling procedure. In the first stage, the 13 villages in Ideato South LGA namely: Ntueke, Umuchima, Ubiohia, Umuobom, Umueshi, Umuakam, Amnator, Umunna-Isiaku, Ugbelle, Awa-Izuogu, Ndiuche-Nzuogulsiekenesi and Dikenafai were divided into 4 clusters A, B and C. Cluster A contained Ntueke, Umuchima, Ubiohia, and Umuobom; cluster B contained Umueshi, Umuakam, Amnator and Umunna-Isiaku; while cluster C contained Ugbelle, Awa-Izuogu, Ndiuche-Nzuogu, Isiekenesi and Dikenafai. The choice of these clusters was informed by their physical closeness to one another, as well as their cultural affinity with one another. Each cluster was placed in a bowl, and using the hand drawing method without replacement, a village was selected from each of the clusters, namely, Ntueke, Amnator, and Dikenafai. The second step was to number the communities in the selected villages. Using the balloting method of simple random sampling technique, 2 communities from each of the three villages were selected without replacement, making a total of 6 villages. The third step was to select the clans in the selected communities, and using the balloting method, 5 clans were selected from each community. This gave a total of 30 clans. Using the systematic sampling technique with a random start after every second household, 7 houses were selected. This gave a total of 210 households. Furthermore, in

each of the selected households, one eligible respondent was selected using the availability sampling technique. In situations where an eligible respondent was not in a selected household, such a household was skipped for the next available household. This process was repeated where applicable until the target was achieved.

Purposive sampling technique of the non-probability sampling method was adopted to select the participants for the qualitative aspect of the study based on their knowledge of the themes of the study. Six participants were selected for the In-Depth Interview (IDI). They included 2 community leaders, 2 community members and 2 members of the vigilante group. They were all selected from the 3 villages selected in the first stage.

Instruments for Data Collection & Administration of Instruments

In this study, questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data, while the In-Depth Interview (IDI) was used to collect the qualitative data. Copies of the questionnaire were produced and administered to the sampled respondents on a face-to-face basis, with the help of one research assistant. The administration of questionnaires on a face-to-face basis offers several advantages that enhance the quality and reliability of the data collected. The IDI was conducted by the researcher with the help of a research assistants on a schedule and at the leisure of the selected participants.

Method

The quantitative data collected from the field were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 software. However, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and simple percentages. The data were also presented using tables and charts. On the other hand, the qualitative data that were collected through IDI were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Result

Question 1: What are the effects of kidnapping on the socio-economic development in Ideato South LGA, Imo State?

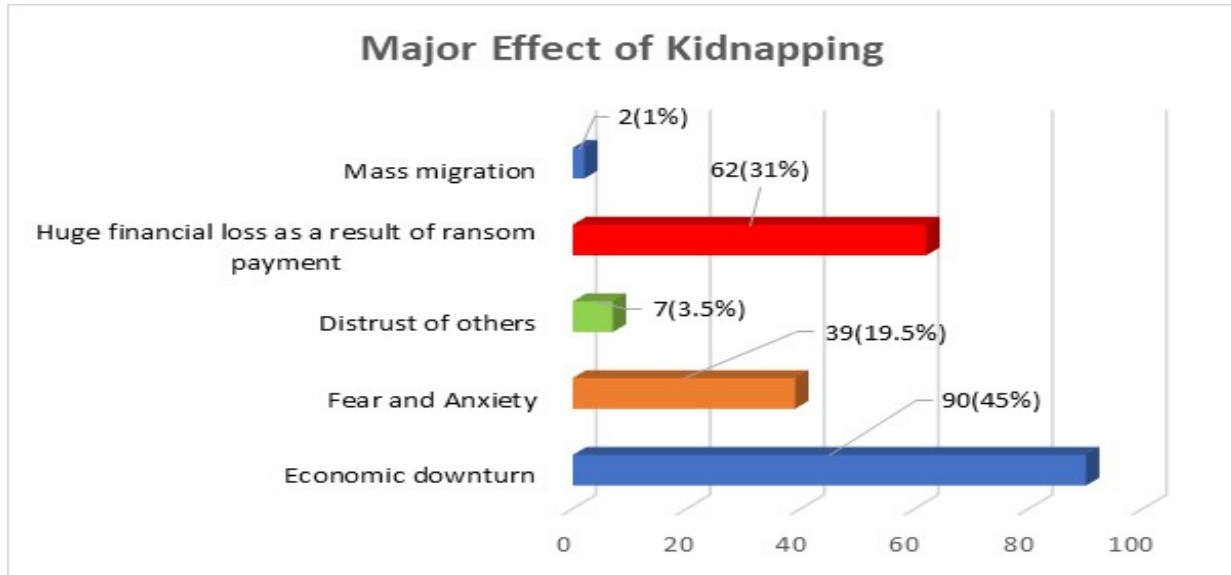


Table 1: Respondents' views on the major effect of kidnapping in Ideato South L.G.A.

Field Survey, 2024

The data presented in Table 9 highlights respondents' views on the major effect of kidnapping in Ideato South, with 45% identifying economic downturn as the primary consequence and only 1% pointing to mass migration. This disparity underscores the profound economic implications of kidnapping in this region, which far outweighs its impact on population displacement. Kidnapping disrupts local economies by instilling fear among residents, discouraging investment, and halting productive activities. Businesses close down or relocate due to insecurity, while individuals lose income opportunities as they avoid traveling or engaging in commerce out of fear for their safety. The

overwhelming focus on economic downturn reflects how deeply intertwined security is with financial stability in communities like Ideato South. According to an IDI participant:

When kidnappings occur frequently, people are afraid to go about their daily lives, farmers avoid their farmlands, traders stop traveling to markets, and businesses shut down early or relocate entirely. This creates a ripple effect across the local economy. For example, farmers who cannot harvest their crops suffer losses that affect not only their families but also food supply chains and market prices. Investors are also deterred from putting money into these regions because no one wants to risk operating in an area where employees might be kidnapped or goods hijacked during transport. Over time, this leads to stagnation and even regression in development projects that could have improved infrastructure or created jobs (Male, 43 years, Vigilante member).

Table 2: Respondents' on whether there has been economic development in Ideato South L.G.A. over the past few months

Responses		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	32	16.0
	No	168	84.0
	Total	200	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

The data presented in Table 10 reveals a significant disparity in perceptions of economic development in Ideato South over the past few months. A mere 16% of respondents believe there has been economic development, while a staggering 84% disagree, indicating that the

majority perceive little to no progress in economic terms. This overwhelming sentiment suggests deep-seated challenges hindering development in the region.

Table 3: Respondents' views on if they or anyone they know have ever been kidnapped

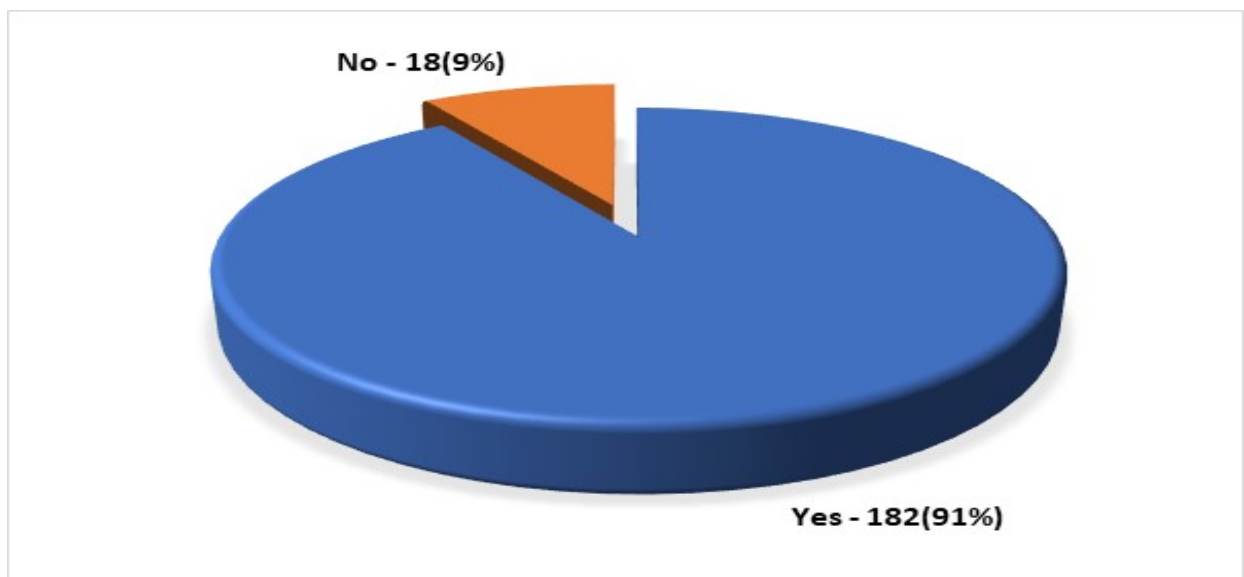
Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	23	11.5
No	177	88.5
Total	200	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

The data presented in Table 11 reveals that 11.5% of respondents indicated that they or someone they know have experienced kidnapping, while 88.5% responded negatively to this question. This highlights a concerning reality regarding the prevalence of kidnapping incidents, even though the majority of respondents have not been directly affected.

Research Question 2: What measures can be employed to control of kidnapping in Ideato South LGA, Imo State?

Table 4: Respondents' views on whether they think measures can be put in place to stem the tide of kidnapping in Ideato South L.G.A.



Field Survey, 2024

The data presented in Table 12 reveals that an overwhelming majority of respondents, 91%, believe that measures can be implemented to stem the tide of kidnapping in Ideato South, while only 9% think otherwise. This indicates a strong sense of optimism among the population regarding the potential effectiveness of targeted interventions to address the issue of kidnapping. The high percentage reflects a collective belief that with adequate planning, resources, and execution, the menace of kidnapping can be curtailed. Conversely, the minority who do not share this optimism may either lack confidence in existing institutions or have experienced repeated failures in past efforts to combat such crimes. This finding is in alignment with the submission of an IDI participant:

Yes. I believe kidnapping can be eradicated if we all get to work, and the government does the needful. One critical measure is addressing root causes such as unemployment and poverty which often push individuals into criminal activities like kidnapping. By collaborating with government agencies and NGOs to create job opportunities or vocational training programmes for at-risk youth in Ideato South, we can reduce the pool of potential kidnapers. Finally, community policing remains one of our most effective tools. Building trust between law enforcement officers and local residents ensures timely information sharing about criminal hideouts or suspicious movements within communities. With these measures combined—technological upgrades, socio-economic interventions, and community engagement—I am confident we can significantly reduce incidents of kidnapping not just in Ideato South but across Nigeria (Male, 26 years, Community member).

Table 5: Respondents' views on measures they would recommend to stem the tide of kidnapping in Ideato South L.G.A.

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Community policing	16	8.0
Law enforcement collaboration	39	19.5
Economic development programmes aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment rates	105	52.5
Implementing legislative frameworks that impose harsher penalties for kidnapping	40	20.0
Total	200	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

The data presented in Table 13 highlights respondents' views on measures they would recommend addressing the issue of kidnapping in Ideato South. A significant majority, 52.5%, believe that economic development programs aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment are the most effective solution. In contrast, only 8% of respondents advocate for community policing as a primary measure to combat kidnapping. According to an IDI participant:

Kidnapping is often a symptom of deeper societal problems. In Ideato South, poverty and unemployment are rampant, creating an environment where criminal activities thrive. The lack of economic opportunities and resources drives individuals to desperate measures, including kidnapping. It is essential to address the root cause of this issue by implementing economic programmes that provide jobs, skills training, and empowerment opportunities. These programmes can have a profound impact on reducing kidnapping in Ideato

South. By providing alternative livelihoods and opportunities, individuals are less likely to engage in criminal activities. Moreover, economic development can lead to increased investment, improved infrastructure, and enhanced security, making it more difficult for kidnappers to operate (Male, 43 years, Vigilante member).

Discussion

This study found that kidnapping is generally prevalent in Ideato South LGA, Imo State. This study found economic downturn to be the major effect of kidnapping in Ideato South LGA, Imo State. This finding resonates with the findings of many studies across Africa. For instance, a study conducted in Nigeria by Okwuosa et al. (2021) examined the economic implications of kidnapping in several states and found that businesses often suffer from reduced patronage due to fear among potential customers. The pervasive anxiety surrounding kidnapping not only deters investment but also leads to increased operational costs for businesses that must implement security measures to protect their assets and employees. This situation mirrors findings from a study in South Africa by Kitwe (2020), which reported that the prevalence of violent crimes, including kidnapping, resulted in significant declines in tourism and foreign direct investment. The fear instilled by such criminal activities creates an environment where economic growth is stifled, leading to job losses and increased poverty levels.

Economic development programmes aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment rates were found to be the most suitable measure to curb the prevalence of kidnapping in Ideato South LGA, Imo State. This finding aligns the findings of many studies. For instance, a study by Osei et al. (2020) examined the impact of youth unemployment on crime rates in Ghana and found that high levels of unemployment among young people were directly linked to increased criminal activities, including kidnappings. The researchers argued that when individuals lack legitimate means to earn a living, they may resort to illegal activities as a survival strategy. This finding resonates with the situation in Ideato South LGA, where

economic development programs could provide alternative livelihoods for vulnerable populations, thereby reducing their propensity to engage in criminal acts.

Summary of Findings

This study found that kidnapping is generally prevalent in Ideato South LGA, Imo State. Kidnapping, as a criminal phenomenon, has been a significant concern in Ideato South Local Government Area (LGA) in Imo State. This study found economic downturn to be the major effect of kidnapping in Ideato South LGA, Imo State. The prevalence of kidnapping can create an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, discouraging both local and foreign investments. Entrepreneurs may hesitate to establish or expand businesses in areas with high crime rates, leading to reduced economic activity and job creation.

Economic development programmes aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment rates were found to be the most suitable measure to curb the prevalence of kidnapping in Ideato South LGA, Imo State. Poverty is often a significant driver of crime. Individuals facing economic hardship may resort to criminal activities, including kidnapping, as a means of survival. By implementing economic development programmes that focus on job creation and skill acquisition, communities can provide individuals with legitimate means of income. This approach not only reduces the immediate economic pressures that lead to crime but also fosters long-term community stability.

Conclusion

The public perception of kidnapping in the Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria, reveals a complex interplay between fear, economic stagnation, and social disintegration. Kidnapping not only poses a direct threat to individual safety but also undermines community cohesion and trust. The pervasive fear of abduction has led to significant changes in daily life, with residents often altering their routines and limiting their movements. This heightened sense of insecurity adversely affects local businesses, deterring investment and stifling entrepreneurial initiatives that are vital for socio-economic development. In light of these challenges, it is crucial for stakeholders—including

government authorities, law enforcement agencies, and community leaders to collaborate on comprehensive strategies aimed at addressing the root causes of kidnapping.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this work, the following recommendations have been made:

1. The government should implement programmes aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment in Ideato South, which can diminish the economic incentives for engaging in kidnapping.
2. The government should launch campaigns to educate the public about safety practices, such as avoiding predictable routines, reporting suspicious activities, and forming neighborhood watch groups.
3. The government should establish a robust community policing strategy that involves local residents in security efforts. This can help build trust between law enforcement and the community, making it easier to gather intelligence on criminal activities.
4. Deployment of more police and military personnel to high-risk areas within Ideato South.

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