

NAVIGATING THE ANGLOPHONE CRISIS IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING CAMEROON: ARMED GANG KIDNAPPINGS AND THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC RAMIFICATIONS 2016-2025

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ABSTRACT

African countries continue to witness conflicts which often lead to insecurity and cause catastrophic impacts on their populations. In Cameroon, the quest for secession by the English-speaking part of the country (Northwest and Southwest Regions) plunged the country into a deep conflict resulting to a high rate of insecurity in the English-speaking regions. A major characteristic of the insecurity problem witnessed in English-speaking Cameroon over the past couple of years has been the rising cases of kidnapping for ransom. A plethora of causes have attributed the spate of insecurity in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon to multi-layered factors including leadership gap and absence of good governance. This has eaten so deep into the fabrics of the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon leaving undesirable consequences in the socio-economic life of the people. This study exploited primary sources consisting of oral interviews, and newspapers; and secondary sources, as well as using a qualitative and descriptive approach in the realization of its findings. This blended well with the Queer Ladder Theory (QLT) and the findings revealed that, while armed gangs have adopted kidnapping as a revenue generating model for themselves and their organization, kidnapping has caused undue socio-economic implications as it constitutes a huge threat to human and national security and further deepens poverty. This paper thus concludes by recommending a multidimensional approach to solving the perennial kidnapping in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon.

Keywords: kidnapping, insecurity, implications, ransom

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Insecurity has been a major predicament to most African nations since the attainment of independence. This insecurity has been caused by several factors such as ethno-religious conflict, armed robbery, insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, Herders-Farmers clashes, secessionist agitation, and ethnic militia. Of all these security challenges, that post by kidnapping has been of great concern as it has raised international attention with grievous consequences. One country in Africa which has suffered with incidences of kidnapping is Nigeria for example the kidnap of the 276 girls on April 14, 2014 by Boko Haram from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State of Nigeria (Amnesty, 2024). Cameroon equally faced degrees of kidnapping and as such, kidnapping has been a call for concern to many countries. However, the English-speaking regions of Cameroon which had previously not been accustomed to the issue of kidnapping, soon witnessed this crime in high proportion. Before the advent of the anglophone crisis in 2016, kidnapping in these regions

was very low or insignificant. This crime only increased to greater proportions in these regions following the advent of the socio-political crises which plagued the English-speaking Regions of Cameroon (John Angwa. Per. Com, 2019). The secessionist fighters popularly known as Amba boys adopted kidnapping as one of their strategies to achieve their goals. This made kidnapping to become a popular venture in these regions orchestrated by both the secessionist fighters and other criminal groups. Thus, people in these regions exercising their professional activities (public, private, formal or informal) meant risking being kidnapped or killed. Threats and intimidation were the daily reality of workers in these regions. Those in the public service seemed to be particularly targeted by this phenomenon. A host of teachers, military personnel, business people and other civilians including students became victims of kidnapping in these regions.

An empirical study of the security situation in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon reveals that armed gang kidnapping for ransom started in 2017 a year after the separatist leaders advocated for separation. The general belief of people is that these regions (North West and South West Regions of Cameroon) are under the grip of kidnappers because of the frequent occurrence of kidnapping in the area. The ongoing conflict in the regions cannot be overemphasized as armed groups especially the secessionist fighters in this region exploited the situation to their advantage. The secessionist fighters used the kidnapping of civil servants, military and other individuals in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon to raise international attention regarding their plight. For example, the kidnapping of Cardinal Christian Tumi, Fon of Nso, Fon of Regional House of Assembly North West Region, among others. The secessionist fighters targeted civil servants, military, and other individuals who did not respect their laws and those secretly working with the military known as blacklegs in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. The use of this tactic was also political in nature, as private individuals hired kidnappers to kidnap their colleagues or other individuals in which they had some misunderstandings. Announcements and reports of cases of kidnapping through radios and other social media platforms ended up with significant ransom payments through negotiations between the concern and kidnappers. These ransoms were used to fund the activities of these groups further. In fact, the tactic proved so lucrative that a number of criminal groups which were not the secessionists or which had no affiliation to the secessionist movement took on the task simply to make money. Apart from generating money, kidnapping had other serious consequences on the victims and their relatives, as well as on the regions and state at large (Fru Cornelius. Per. Com, 2023).

Since 2017, kidnappings in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon have put the people in a state of fear as a good number of people have been kidnapped or killed while victims who survived after payment of ransom continue to suffer psychological trauma. In addition, the socio-economic implication of kidnapping in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon is hugely felt as the menace elicited fear, insecurity, poverty, and hunger among the people known for food production as most farmers abandoned their farms for safety in urban spheres. As a result of these high levels of kidnapping and insecurity, the inhabitants of these regions as well as the government have been alerted to take quick actions to combat the menace. Thus, government at all levels, community leaders, and the people have made frantic efforts to combat kidnapping, however, these efforts appeared not to have yielded the desired results of keeping the marauders off in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of kidnapping has been defined variously by different authors all based on the perception they have on it as well as the type of it. This is because, different forms of kidnapping do occur in different geographical spheres and for different motives too. Joe-Akunne, and Chine (2016) posits that kidnapping is difficult to define and could only be attempted in relation to a country's legal and moral perspectives as well as the availability of various forms of kidnapping such as hostage-taking and hijacking. Robertson (1968) views kidnapping as a crime of seizing, confining, abducting, or carrying away persons by force or fraud often subjecting him or her to involuntary servitude in an attempt to demand a ransom or in furtherance of another crime. Walsh and Adrian (1983) on their part handle kidnapping from the perspective of the forceful seizure of a person to another country for instinctive servitude or the impressment of males into military or naval service by force or fraud. Asuquo (UP) defines kidnapping as an act of forceful confiscation, taking away, and illegal confinement of a person against his/her will. An essential feature of this type of kidnapping is that it is motivated by political or economic reasons and the victim suffers both physical and psychological abuse. To Ogabido (2009), kidnapping is the abduction, capturing, carrying-off, removing, or stealing away a person. Siegel (2002) sees kidnapping as a serious crime because the key part of it is that, the victim's fundamental rights particularly freedom of movement are violated.

Going by the various studies on kidnapping, it can be deduced that kidnapping is a crime orchestrated by an individual or group of persons in order to obtain different benefits. In the case of the armed conflict in the English-speaking regions in Cameroon, kidnapping in this period of discussion was/is principally motivated by the need for political power by the secessionist fighters and for economic gains or ransom for the secessionist fighters and other criminal armed groups. In line with Asuquo's connotation, kidnapping is motivated by economic or political purposes, including ransom collection, political power, ritualism, and retribution, among others. Despite the reasons advanced for this outrageous act, kidnapping remains a grievous crime against humanity. As a result, this study opines that kidnapping is the act of seizing or illegally taking someone away and keeping him/her as a prisoner to receive a ransom. It is the act of abduction of an individual against his or her will, usually in furtherance of other criminal intentions such as ransom collection and retribution. This has thus pushed the local inhabitants and the government of Cameroon to find solutions towards ending this predicament in English-speaking Cameroon.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Several authors have developed theories to explain Kidnapping. The Economic Theory view Kidnapping from the economic concept of making ends meet. Nseabasi (2009) citing (Tzanelli, 2006) opined that Kidnapping is regulated by the laws of demand and supply. This according to him is the reason the perpetrators of this crime choose their victims based on their ability to pay good money. The Political Theory of Kidnapping see the act as a political tool which is motivated by the attempt to suppress, outsmart, intimidate, and subjugate political opponents. Turner (1998) as cited by Nseabi (2009), established a relationship between "money and politics" accordingly, where there are political motivations for Kidnapping and where ransoms are also demanded. Such ransoms are often employed to strengthen and further the political

objectives of the Kidnapping organization or simply to facilitate the survival of the organization. This argument supports the continuous kidnappings in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, where the secessionist fighters known as the “Ambazonia” fighters or Amba Boys kidnap people for ransom which enables them to keep the sustainability of armed militia by providing their needs such as weapons. The persistent nature of this crisis has made the armed groups to exploit the population and created a high level of insecurity in the areas through kidnappings for various reasons as earlier mentioned. This thus usher in the Queer Ladder Theory (QLT) on which this study is anchored.

Daniel Bell (1919-2011) influenced the Queer Ladder Theory (QLT) when he attempted to explain the instrumental crux of organized crime as a desperate means of economic empowerment and social climbing power. Okoli and Orinya while citing Mallory summarizes the rudimentary assumptions of QLT as follows:

- i. Organized crime is an instrumental behaviour it is a means to an end;
- ii. It is an instrument of social climbing and/or socioeconomic advancement and;
- iii. It is a means to accumulate wealth and build power.

The theory goes further to argue that organized crime flourishes when the government is incapacitated to dictate, direct, control, sanction, and deter crime. This describes the prevailing situation in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon since 2016 resulting from the outbreak of the anglophone crisis which has created an atmosphere of anarchy and insecurity in the area. The ineffectual government has created a situation that fuels impunity, while corruption is prevalent, and the possibility of legitimate living is thin. Citizen's hope to live a prosperous life is dim. Under these circumstances, the probability of indulging in crime is high because the government is weak in deterring criminals. Many people indulge in criminal activities because the benefits of committing a crime surpass the costs and/or risks. Okoli and Orinya (2013) conclude that the government's weakness would provide ample opportunity and motivation for criminal impunity and franchise. This has thus provided strong grounds for kidnapping and other crimes to be perpetuated in English-speaking Cameroon.

3.1 Planning and Targets of armed gang kidnappers

Like other crimes that were carried out in English-speaking Cameroon, such as armed robbery, kidnappers too engaged in planning. A target was selected and his/her activities monitored to know when he/she was vulnerable. Such moments were exploited for the kidnap. These kidnappings were either for financial or political gains. Victims were originally military and civil servants, but it later changed and included many locals, who were not necessarily wealthy; but anyone whose family had the ability to pay a ransom was targeted. Most of the people kidnapped according to the kidnappers who were generally known as the secessionist fighters (Amba Boys) were people who had gone against the roles set by them. Such roles included opening of business premises on lockdown days (Ghost Towns), civil servants like teachers who still went to their job sites, administrative officials like Divisional Officers and Mayors and many others. A suitable location for the kidnap was chosen which in most cases had a clear escape route from the scene of the kidnap. At times the victims were taken from their homes at night, very early in the morning or some afternoons when the area was less concentrated and very little obstruction could be gotten from security forces. The victims were blind folded and taken to the hide outs of the criminals mostly on motorbikes (Tebah Brisnev, Per. Com, 2023.,

Che James, Per. Com, 2024). Victims who were lucky had a ransom placed on them in which they were released upon the payment of ransom while unlucky victims were killed by the kidnappers (Otang George, Per. Com, 2023). Otang George gives an example of someone who was kidnapped because of violating the roles of the secessionist fighters in 2018 as follows;

I had a neighbour by name Obele Chuku a Nigerian married to a Cameroonian lady and lived in Widikum. He operated bar and was a serious business person. He violated the roles of the secessionist fighters and continuously opened his business premise of Mondays which were ghost town days and even during lockdowns. This was even made worst by the fact that those he sold to on such days were military officers of the Cameroon government. He went further to provide charms of protection to the military officers and the Divisional Officer of Widikum Sub Division. This led to his kidnap and a huge amount of ransom was demanded. His wife was unable to provide the amount and he was killed by drowning. His body was later found in River Momo with his legs and hands tied (Otang George, Per. Com, 2023).

From 2017 till date, armed separatists in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon (North-West and South-West regions) have kidnapped thousands of people, including students and clergy, amid growing calls for the Anglophone regions to secede from the state of Cameroon. Some cases of kidnapping included Chief Williams Mbanda Njie of Lysoka Village in the Southwest Region and Divisional Officer for Batibo in the North West Region Marcel Namata Diteng, who died in captivity in 2017. Ewane Roland the Divisional officer of Idabato Subdivision, Ndian Division of the South West Region was abducted on October 1, 2024 with the kidnappers requesting 1.9 billion FCFA as ransom for his release (Njingang Godwin, 2024). Many of the captives remained unaccounted for (Cameroon Human Rights Report, 2018).

On 19 October 2018, five students of the Atiela Bilingual High School were taken by gunmen to an unknown destination. However, they were later released upon payment of ransom by their parents. This was followed by a mass kidnap on Presbyterian Secondary School (PSS) Mankon. At least 79 students and three others, including the principal, were kidnapped early on 31st October and 4th November, 2018 from the Presbyterian Secondary School in Bamenda. Some of these students were released but others left behind for reasons best known to the kidnappers. However, the rest in custody, that is one teacher, the principal, and two students - were finally released on Monday, 12th November, 2018. Though the circumstances behind their release remained unclear (Cameroon 2018 Human Rights Report).

On 28th June 2019, armed separatists beat and kidnapped John Fru Ndi National Chairman of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party in Cameroon, a well-known Cameroonian politician considered by some as one of the country's old guards of political activism, from his home in Bamenda while shooting his bodyguard in the leg. This was his second kidnapping in two months. Three days before his most recent abduction, armed separatists abducted and released another high-profile figure, Cornelius Fontem Esua, the Archbishop of Bamenda (Lewis Mudge, 2019). The kidnapping of this high profiles was a way of attracting foreign attention to the crises and possibly getting support from world powers and international organisations.

Six students of The University of Bamenda were reportedly kidnapped by gun men. The six students were taken away Thursday 28 November 2019 around Mile 6 Bambui on their way back from school. The kidnappers demanded one million FCFA for the release of each of the students. This kidnap came less than a week after the Senior Divisional Officer for Mezam

Division, North West Region of Cameroon, Emile Simon Mooh banned the circulation of Motor Bikes on campus of The University of Bamenda on the basis that they were informants to kidnappers who took away students on their way to or back from school (Band on circulation of motorbikes, 2019). Professor Tata a lecturer of the University of Bamenda narrates how he escaped from being kidnapped on the same stretch of road on December 3, 2019;

I was driving to school with five other people in my car around 7:30am on the stretch of road linking Bambui and Bambili. Suddenly around the C-bend on the road, three guys just jumped into the road with guns and requested that I stop with a show of the hand. Out of fear and knowing what they wanted to do because it was not the first time a colleague or student was kidnapped at that spot; I increased the speed of my car and ran away. I being the driver was shot at but luckily no one was hurt although my car was damaged with several bullet holes and the windshield was equally destroyed (Tata Simon. per. Com 2019).

Professor Tata was lucky to escape but his colleague Dr. Ami Nyoh Hyacinth was not so lucky as he was kidnapped on the same morning at the same C-Bend. This all happened few days after the University of Bamenda chapter for National Union of Higher Education Teachers had signaled the authorities of the region that they were embarking on a two-day strike to condemn attacks and kidnappings on them. However, when the authorities failed to meet with their promise of providing extra security on the Bambui-Bambili stretch of road and on campus, the lecturers finally went on strike especially as two theirs that is Prof Tata Simon and Dr Ami Nyoh Hyacinth were attacked and the later kidnapped (Unku Dice, 2019)

Nchang Augustin Amongwa, the Attorney General at the Court of Appeal in Bamenda, North West Region of Cameroon was also kidnapped in Bamenda on December 29, 2024 (Amadu Tarnteh, 2024). On January 10, 2025, Ndikum Willibroad Tanto was kidnapped in front of his residence at Below Foncha in Bamenda III Subdivision of the North West Region of Cameroon. He was abducted from his car and forcibly taken away on a motorcycle to an unknown destination (Makatinews, 2025). Again, on January 23, 2025 a pregnant woman was kidnapped in Ghana Street Bamenda. An eye witness narrates;

We were in area relaxing when Gunmen stormed the business site. It was a motorcycle shop near Nfuh House in Ghana street. The owner of the shop had just left the shop for other business transactions when the gun men arrived. The men demanded asked the pregnant wife of the shop owner where her husband was. When she replied, the husband was not in, they took her away on a motorcycle despite the fact that it was in brought day light. Myself and other onlookers watched helplessly because the men were heavily armed (Makatinews, 2025).

These are just few of the many cases of kidnapping in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon as hardly a day went by without cases of kidnapping being reported.

3.2 Socio-Economic Ramifications of Armed gang Kidnappings

The ramifications of armed gang kidnappings in English-Speaking Cameroon have been numerous on the socio-economic life of the people. Kidnapping has affected the socio-economic life of the people as there is perpetual fear among the people. The fear has restricted the movement of people as people move with caution because they do not know who is likely to be the next victim. The restriction on movement has greatly affected sources of livelihood

particularly the farmers, the traders, the drivers, and commuters. For instance, many farmers have been victims on their way to their farms because they were kidnapped or killed. Some informants' reveal that in Okoyong village in Mamfe Division, kidnapped farmers were freed or killed for alleged personal reasons or considered as black legs by their kidnappers. This greatly affected food crop production and limited the livelihood of the farmers who relied on farming for their livelihood. This equally affected the quantity of food stuffs like Irish potatoes, maize, beans, garri among others available in the market. The result was the increase in prices making life expensive in these regions and Cameroon in general (Emeka Christian, Per. Com, 2022). There were several other kidnapping cases on the roads involving drivers and commuters making everyone scared and not secured.

Another impact of kidnapping is the indebtedness of the family who struggles to raise funds for the release of the victims. A substantial amount is paid as ransom. Some of the victims stated that ransom is paid in Millions of Francs depending on the bargaining power, which of course put the victim's family in a tight financial situation. Most of the ransom is usually borrowed with interest since the aim is to secure the freedom of the victims. To this end, this has made many people to sell off their hard-earned properties such as cars, landed properties, etc to pay the loan. The economic loss as a result of kidnapping is not quantifiable. According to Inyang and Ubong (2013), both individuals and the government lose huge economic value which is paid as ransom to kidnappers. Huge amounts running into Millions and even Billions of Francs have been demanded or paid as ransom to kidnappers in the last decade. Even though the amount paid as ransom is hardly disclosed, there is no doubt that the huge sum of money spent as ransom payment affected the household economy, this could have contributed to the growth of the economy. For instance, 1.9 billion FCFA was demanded as ransom for the release of Ewane Roland the Divisional officer of Idabato Subdivision, Ndian Division of the South West Region who was abducted on October 1, 2024 (Njingang Godwin, 2024). A family member of a kidnapped victim explains the ordeal as follows:

My sister Racheal was kidnapped twice in Widikum in 2019 because she was accused of selling to the Cameroon military. My sister operated a small business in Widikum where she sold roasted fish at on one of the popular areas in town. At her place, all sorts of people came to buy her roasted fish and this made her to be kidnapped. Some say it was masterminded by her competitors because she pulled a majority of the customers and they wanted her out of the way. We spent more than 2 million FCFA to secure her release. After the second kidnap, she left Widikum for Yaounde where she was safer (George, Per.com, 2022)

Another sector that was greatly affected by the high rates of kidnapping in English-Speaking Cameroon was the transport sector. The movement of goods in and out of English-speaking Cameroon boost the economy of the area and the nation at large. But this witnessed a serious problem as a result of kidnapping. A lot of businesses were affected directly or indirectly because the major facets of transportation which are the availability of good roads, efficient means of transportation, and security on the road was absent or affected by the crises in English-speaking Cameroon. The high rate of kidnapping, attacks and road blocks on many roads made many drivers and commuters to avoid or abandon certain roads in favour of safer roads. For example, the Bamenda-Mamfe-Buea Road which was shorter was at one point abandoned in favour of the Bamenda-Dschang-Douala/Buea Road. Also, the Buea-Kumba Road was avoided at certain times. The Bamenda-Nkambe road, Bamenda-Njikwa road and

many others were abandoned at certain periods by drivers and commuters for the same reason of insecurity. Also, some businesses that are appendages to transportation like roadside trading and restaurants are affected. This was the case with many areas that acted as resting areas for travelers and had thriving business mostly patronized by travelers such as the business areas in Widikum market square, Mayime and many others. All these show that kidnapping has a serious adverse ramification on the socio-economic development of English-Speaking Cameroon.

The psychological and emotional trauma which victims and their families faced was another major impact of armed gang kidnappings in English-Speaking Cameroon. Okorie et al (2018) posit that some victims of kidnapping are killed, while many sustained various degrees of injuries like lacerations, and bullet wounds. Some of the female victims get raped by the kidnappers. Buttressing the above assertion, some of the victims while narrating their ordeal noted that they experienced life-threatening treatment which included torture, trekking for hours without food and water, sleeping in the bush under unconducive weather, etc. Not all the victims survive such horrendous treatment. But those who survived the hazards lived with the trauma for life. Also, a god of number of victims died in recuered operations or on attacks on the camps of the kidnappers. Some victims were even mistakenly considered as part of the kidnappers and killed in operations on the camps of these kidnappers. Others like Angoh Milton died while in the custody of the abductors because of the harsh treatment with no food or water to drink, coupled with beatings. This was also the case of the Divisional Officer for Batibo in the North West Region Marcel Namata Diteng, who died in captivity in 2017 (Ofe, 2022). The family members also suffered psychological trauma as they are kept in a worrisome state until the victim is released. Some women became widows as a result of the death of their husbands who were equally the breadwinners of the family.

The activities of armed groups such as kidnapping for ransom, made some inhabitants of English-Speaking Cameroon to flee from their homes, quarters or even towns to other quarters still in the city and in some cases, out of the city to other towns and regions of the country especially to French speaking regions. An example was Vidzefonyuy Eric a lorry driver who ran away from his residence at Belewa- Mile 4 Nkwen, Bamenda in 2018 and rented a single room at mile 2 Nkwen because of constantly being harassed and kidnapped by the "Amba boys". (Vidzefonyuy Eric. Per. Com, 2021). This forced and unprepared migration also saw the influx of people of other areas into the city of Bamenda. The result was that criminal activities were perpetrated again by some of these forced migrants who wanted to make ends meet in their new destination (Ntimba Paul. Per. Com, 2019). These forced migrants became known as Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and they had serious difficulties living as they had abandoned everything and ran for safety. In cities like Douala, it was not uncommon to see about 6 or mor IDPs living in a single room with others not even having a place to stay. This made some of these IDPs to be taken advantage of by people who had already settled in these towns.

In my quarter in Douala, there are several IDPs roaming around. You could give them just a plate of food and they will do your household chores for you. The situation is so bad on them that guys take advantage of the ladies. Just taking them in and the ladies were happy they had a place to sleep and food to eat. On the part of the guys, they did menial jobs to survive and

many young children who ought to be in school are out of school (Christel. Per.Com, 2024) Stakeholders' Responses to kidnapping in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon.

The growing rate of kidnapping accompanied by other crimes in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon pushed various stakeholders to address the issue of insecurity in the regions. These efforts ranged from that of the state of Cameroon to include the efforts of the local communities. The government in responding to these crime waves, deployed military and police personnel to the major areas under attack and in some instances, a multi-joint taskforce was formed. The multidimensional characteristics of serious crimes and modern crimes called for a multidisciplinary approach to be adopted in the prevention of and fight against increasing criminality. Faced with an increase in criminal activities, particularly organized crimes like kidnapping with the use of arms which greatly threatened persons, their property and the business community in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon, a series of multidisciplinary teams of the forces of law and order were set up with the mission to carry out operations aimed at strengthening existing intervention forces. Mixed security teams were setup in the city made of Police and Gendarmes to fight against crime (Ade Divine. Per. Com, 29 December 2020). One of such joint operations to fight against crime was/is operation "Keep Bamenda clean" launched on September 8, 2020 (Rodrigue Forku, 2020). Operation Bamenda Clean is an ongoing Cameroonian special counter-insurgency operation in Bamenda, Northwest Region, aimed at preventing armed Ambazonian separatists from operating in the city thus stopping one of the major crimes carried out by this group which is kidnapping.

Also, military check points were setup in all major, as well as some secondary routes in the area charged with the responsibility of protecting the citizens in these areas. As a result, these security agencies or personnels organized what can be referred to as "operation stop and search". The goal was to thwart all efforts of the kidnappers. According to authorities of the University of Bamenda, the Apostolic Junction between mile 6 Nkwen and Bambui, and the C-bend on the Bambui-Bambili stretch of road were hot spots for the kidnappers' taking students and lecturers of the University of Bamenda for ransom. Thus, the stationing of military check points in these areas, greatly reduced incidences of kidnapping on this road. Another vivid example has to do with the number of police/military check points on the road from City Chemist Round about in the City of Bamenda to Bambili a short distance of about 15 kilometers having up to seven (7) checkpoints (Achu Fred, Per. Com, 2022). That was the scenario with almost all the roads in the English -speaking regions of Cameroon. However, some of these check points were permanent, while others were temporary.

The fight against kidnapping and other forms of crime in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon was not left in the hands of the state alone, as the indigenous community or population equally took steps individually or collectively to deter crime. Among some of the community driven responses were application of jungle or mop justice, strengthening of private security such as the use of iron doors and windows, surveillance cameras, joint security alarms in neighbourhoods, acquiring the services of private security agents and the creation of vigilante groups.

Jungle justice was a common measure which the population of the English-speaking Cameroon adopted to fight against crimes like kidnapping. Jungle justice refers to situations in which the population (an irate mob) took upon themselves the responsibility of inflicting penalty on

alleged criminals without proving them guilty of the offence. In other words, it was a situation where the masses took upon themselves to render judgment on a matter without hearing, or without giving the accused the right to a defence. This was 'justice' without trial. This often led to death by stoning, burning or lynching. This act was frequent with cases of aggravated theft. Here, persons most often presumed to be bandits, were lynched by the masses on grounds of alleged (armed) robbery. This usually took place after a public alarm was raised, followed by mass mobilisation and concluded by beating and lynching (Walters, 2006).

Several cases of jungle justice took place in English-speaking Cameroon following the rising cases of insecurity in the area. On Monday 9 August 2016, one of the two criminals who seized a motor bike belonging to a bike rider (Okada man) at Foncha Street in Bamenda and used it for kidnapping and robbery was burnt to ashes by an angry mob. Eye witness reports said, the rider resisted the heavily armed men and received a bullet from one of the thieves who made away with the bike. The "Okada man" held tied to the second robber until help finally came from some residents of Foncha Street who immediately applied jungle justice by roasting the criminal to death. The bike rider was rushed to the hospital where he received treatment (Cham Victor, 2022).

Another incident of jungle justice in English-speaking Cameroon was when two blood brothers were burnt to death for alleged involvement in kidnapping and robbery. On this faithful day, the brothers who had been on the wanted list by the population stole a motorcycle which triggered their chase, apprehension and lynching. The sad incident which saw the brothers burnt alive happened on Sunday, 3rd January 2016. After the young men were caught, the angry mob descended on them, beating them with sticks, rods and other dangerous weapons, before finally burning them to death with fuel, tyres and the suspected stolen motorcycle. Even a patrol team of police officers could not stop the mob from lynching the suspected motorcycle thieves (Isaac Dachen, 2016). These are just a few of the cases of jungle justice in English-speaking Cameroon orchestrated by the need to fight crime.

In addition, the government of Cameroon also encouraged the formation of Vigilante groups for community policing. The increasing wave of crimes around neighbourhoods in English-speaking Cameroon pushed residents in some quarters to create vigilante groups, in order to fight back perpetrators of frequent criminal attacks. This was made possible by the numerous laws passed by the government of Cameroon favouring the creation of vigilante groups. Some of these laws included, the June 1962 law in which the Minister of Armed Forces, Sadou Daoudou, proposed that the existence of vigilante groups in the country be normalized. This was reinforced by presidential instructions no. 005/CAB/PR of 27 August 1987 on security night watching (Mark Bolak, 2016).

This was a similar situation in 2014 though at this time, it affected just the Far North Regions when Paul Biya through a Presidential declaration on 17 May 2014 in Paris authorized the creation of vigilante groups to fight the Boko Haram insurgency in the region through arête no. 00000019/AR/SG/DPOA of 2 June 2014 (Saibou Issa, 2016). This vigilante groups in the entire nation were able to help in restoring peace during the 1992 post-elections saga in Cameroon, coupled with the increasing strands of banditry and robbery in the towns and on high-ways. This is corroborated by Saibou Issa when he acknowledges the vibrancy and the determination of the vigilante to change the criminal statuesque of the period by insisting on how it was not

uncommon to find several adult vigilante groups in the village acting simultaneously in the hunt- down of criminals (Saibou Issa, 2016).

Just like in the late 1980s and early 1990s when there was high crime wave in the country as a result of the economic crises, residents of English-speaking Cameroon again resulted to the creation of Vigilante Groups to combat crimes like kidnapping. The increasing wave of crimes around neighbourhoods in English-speaking Cameroon pushed residents in some quarters to create vigilante groups, in order to fight back perpetrators of frequent robbery attacks. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the robbers came as robbers this was because of the harsh economic crises alongside its adverse effects. However, from 2016, following the socio-political unrest in these regions, the rate of robbery cases increased and many of the thieves came around this time under the pretext of armed secessionists (Ofe, 2022).

The material upgrading the vigilante, the fluency of information flow and trust between the vigilante and the Cameroon armed/security forces and the promptness in response by both structures, in no little way, helped them track down and/or dismantle some criminals including secessionist fighters and their dangerous possessions. The vigilante, in the execution of their duties, moved along the quarter roads, from one end of their post to the other. At times, they moved on the principal and secondary road trajectories. More so, road blockades were erected at all principal entrances into the quarters in question, whereby every unknown person was interrogated before granted access. However, this system of work intensified, taking a more serious twist following the increasing kidnapping and murder by secessionist fighters and robbers (Emeka Christian. Per. Com, 2020). According to local authorities, more than 100 vigilante groups have been formed in the two Anglophone regions of North West and South West since conflicts between government forces and armed separatists started in 2017 (Ade Divine. Per. Com, 2020).

Despite the enormous contributions which the vigilantes played in the fight against criminality especially in the English-speaking regions plagued by the socio-political crises, they, just like the security forces, were equally exposed to high risk. Some of them lost their lives, family and property. As such, they put in huge sacrifices in the fight against criminality. For example, A commander of a vigilante group in Bamenda I, Nkwenti aka Scorpio a renowned Leader of Hotspot vigilante group in Bamenda I, was killed in October 2019 by armed separatists according to local authorities. He was killed with another member of the group during a routine patrol at the cattle market in Bamenda. The Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF) said they carried out the attack because the deceased was preaching against the restoration of the independence of the Southern Cameroons, now preferred Ambazonia (mimimefoinfos.com, 2019).

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study has examined kidnapping in English-speaking Cameroon within the context of the Anglophone crisis. It has deduced that kidnapping unlike other crimes, is a new phenomenon which gained grounds in the area due to the insurgency that occurred in the area. Criminals exploited the socio-political unrest in the area to carry out various criminal activities among which was kidnapping for ransom. This has had different ramifications on the population of the area as well as the entire country of Cameroon. Different measures have been adopted both by the state and local population to thwart this malaise of kidnapping but with little results achieved as the phenomenon continues in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon amidst

the ongoing Anglophone crisis. There is no game saying that the various strategies used by the government of Cameroon has failed to solve the ongoing security crises in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon giving fertile grounds for criminals to continuously carry out their dastard activities like kidnapping, as such leaves to be desired. It is in this light that, some suggestions have been made.

Firstly, an all-inclusive dialogue should be held between the Cameroon government and representatives of the English-speaking community with a neutral third-party serving as mediator. This would be able to broker a ceasefire and peace deal between the warring factions and would include all conflict stakeholders. Such dialogue should be held under no pre-conditions and not making any subject a taboo.

Also, International bodies like the United Nations and the African Union should organize another plebiscite in the Southern Cameroons so that the people of the Southern Cameroons decide the fate of their future existence. This will be of great importance as it will satisfy one of the options that was not included in the 1961 plebiscite that is independence and self-government which has been highly echoed in the regions and which is in line with the UN Charter on Human Rights and Self-Determination.

Entrenchment of good governance as it is the antidote to insecurity. Good governance is a suppository to curing pervasive poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, and proliferation of arms, among others.

Border security is key to curtailing people and arm movement. Border personnel are required to conduct thorough checks to curtail illicit arms. The government should block all illegal border routes. Government as a matter of urgency should embark on a comprehensive policy to mop up illicit arms across the country.

Enactment and implementation of a dynamic anti-kidnapping law in the criminal justice system. Adoption of stringent penalties particularly capital punishment in the form of extra-judicial killing for convicted kidnappers and their collaborators. This will serve as a deterrent to those who may want to venture into kidnapping.

The Cameroon government should make a change in the legal framework for the creation of greater autonomy to the English-speaking regions.

There is need to put together an international team equipped with the political weight and experience to get people to change their positions, put pressure on the central government in Yaoundé, and mobilize the support of other key actors, such as Nigeria. In the absence of a leading role from the UN, mediation could take place under the tutelage of the AU if it has solid support from the UN.

The government should Invest in modern technology (drones), which can be mounted at strategic positions for surveillance, particularly on the highways. The government should partner with the telecommunication service providers (Orange, MTN, Camtel and Nextel) to track the conversation and location of the kidnappers since the kidnappers used mobile phones to negotiate a ransom. The security agencies should be equipped with modern equipment while obsolete ones should be discarded.

Good collaboration between the government security agents like the police, gendarmes and armies be enforced with the local population and vigilante groups to create a conducive working atmosphere. Continuous collaboration between all of this strengthened the security situation in English-speaking Cameroon. Also, classified information supplied to the security agencies should be treated with urgency with high decree of secrecy kept. In previous years, some locals have been skeptical to provide intelligence to the security forces because the high decree of secrecy was not kept which resulted in the death of so many informants.

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