

Security Risks Report – Nigeria

July 2026

Executive summary

- Nigeria remains beset by multiple serious security challenges, the most currently concerning of which are the actions of several violent Jihadist groups, particularly their targeting of civilians in public places, such as markets, places of worship and above all, schools.
- A school kidnap by one such group in the south-western Oyo State in May was the most notable single incident of this reporting period, illustrating the continuing geographic spread of these groups' attacks away from their strongholds across the north of the country.
- Two teachers and one unrelated civilian were killed in the Oyo incident, which ended when army operations forced the captors to abandon their hostages in early July. Forty-four children and teachers were rescued, and eight suspects arrested—the trial of three began in late July.
- Multiple school and other mass kidnaps occurred during this reporting period, primarily in northern states where the tactic has been seen more frequently in the past, including one in Borno State believed to have been co-ordinated with the Oyo incident. Other mass abduction incidents have included a group requesting a meeting with villagers in Sokoto state, then kidnapping them.
- South Africa-based think tank the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) published an article in May suggesting that the growing use of crowdfunding by Nigerians has made the kidnap of locals more attractive to criminal and extremist elements, because higher ransoms can be demanded.
- By contrast, no kidnaps-for-ransom targeting foreign nationals have been reported since the last edition. This seems more likely to be a temporary change in focus, rather than a permanent shift, however, and knock-on ransom inflation for future incidents with foreign victims appears likely.
- Following the US airstrikes on Jihadist targets in the north-west of the country in December 2025, joint US-Nigerian military operations in May targeted Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Borno State, killing about 200 militants, including Abu-Bilal al-Minuki, the group's leader, and much of his inner circle.
- Public confidence in the security forces and their political leaders continues to dwindle in the face of the increasing severity and widening geographic spread of incidents, with the first serious calls for President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's resignation coming as the Oyo kidnap incident dragged on.
- The US Department of State authorized the evacuation of non-essential personnel and family members from its Abuja embassy in April, and added Jigara, Kwara, Niger, Plateau and Taraba States to its *Level 4: Do Not Travel* instruction, taking the total number of states at Level 4 to 23.





Review of recent developments

US-Nigerian operations target ISWAP in Borno State

The detachment of US forces deployed initially to various locations in north-central and northern Nigeria in February concentrated in Borno State in March. In May, these forces, with further US support, were involved in several operations against targets believed to be linked to Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

The first and most significant of these operations targeted ISWAP's leader (considered by some to be second in command of Islamic State globally), Abu-Bilal al-Minuki, at his compound on a lake island near Metele, in the Chad Basin area of Borno State. Al-Minuki and several other senior ISWAP figures were killed in an air-strike after a protracted surface firefight. Three further rounds of airstrikes on nearby encampments in May resulted in the deaths of about 200 ISWAP fighters, according to joint Nigerian-US military statements. The US forces were reported to have left Nigeria on 3 July.

Mass kidnaps dominate security environment

The school kidnapping in Oyo State has been the dominant security incident in this reporting period (see **In Focus**). However, it is only one of a large number of mass kidnappings to have occurred in the last quarter, including several more in schools. Another school kidnap occurred on the same day as the Oyo incident in Borno State, with Boko Haram believed to be responsible, and the authorities believe the incidents were co-ordinated. In June a delegation from a village in Zamfara State travelled to meet local bandits to discuss ways to improve relations, only for the bandits to capture them all and remove them to a remote area. Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) has recorded more than 400 kidnaps so far this year in the North-West region alone, the majority apparently related to banditry rather than Jihadism.



Suicide bombings in Borno State

Operatives linked to Boko Haram conducted three suicide bombings against crowded public areas in Maidiguri, capital of Borno State, on 16 March, killing 23 people. ISWAP also attacked in Maidiguri that day, clashing with the military, and raising suspicions of co-operation between the two groups, despite ongoing conflict between them.

Herder/farmer conflicts intensify

Plateau State was the focus of conflict between Fulani herders and local communities in this reporting period, with a significant spike in attacks against local people in April, resulting in the largest number of violent incidents in the state recorded by ACLED since their records began in 1997. Bandits spreading from neighbouring Kaduna State have been blamed for some incidents, in addition to the herder/farmer dynamic.





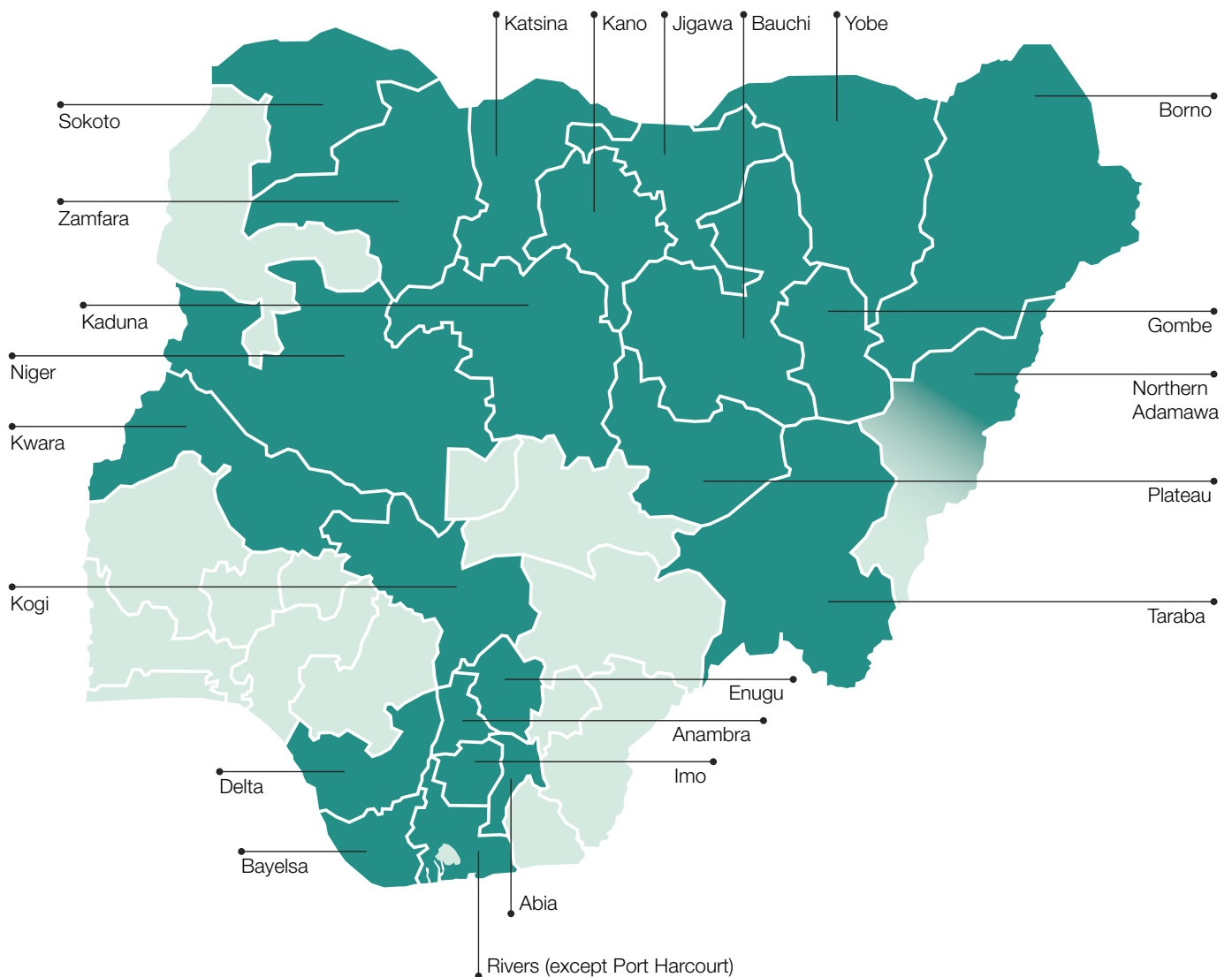
The Oyo incident and the escalation of mass kidnaps

- For those outside the country, the key reference point for kidnapping in Nigeria remains the Chibok attack in Borno State in April 2014, in which 276 girls were seized from a government school by Jihadist group Boko Haram.
- This incident drew the attention of a largely powerless international community to the growing problem of Jihadist violence in Nigeria's northern states. However, it also demonstrated the effectiveness of the tactic, and mass kidnaps have been a feature ever since—schools are most favoured by assailants, but churches, mosques and village gatherings have also been targeted.
- A re-escalation in mass kidnaps in the north has been notable since at least early 2025. However, it is the spread of incidents in the last quarter of that year and the first half of 2026 that has caused more concern than the number.
- A mass kidnap at a school in Niger State in November 2025 confirmed the spread of Jihadist activity into the previously relatively calm North-Central region, and combined massacre-kidnaps at two Muslim-majority villages in neighbouring Kwara State in February 2026 underlined this spread. An offshoot of Boko Haram had relocated to the Kainji forest area, which straddles the two states, taking over after the arrests of the leaders of the Ansaru group earlier in the year.
- Shortly after the beginning of class on 15 May, a group of armed men on motorbikes attacked three schools in villages in the north of Oyo State, killing a teacher and a bystander, and kidnapping 45 children and teachers. The group had arrived from the Kainji area of Niger State, and was swiftly traced to a large forested area in Oyo, moving regularly, but a rescue operation was not attempted owing to the risk that the kidnappers might harm the hostages. A video clip of the kidnappers beheading one of the teachers was widely circulated throughout Nigeria.
- The kidnappers demanded the release of the Ansaru leaders and an unspecified cash sum in exchange for the release of the hostages. On 5 June, they increased their demands to include a payment of NGN1bn and the implementation of Sharia law in Oyo State. Public pressure on the government to effect a rescue intensified.
- President Bola Tinubu eventually announced that all the hostages had been rescued on 10 July—reports suggest that the army had succeeded in surrounding the captors and had cut off their supply chain. Eight men were arrested—legal proceedings against three (all from Niger State) began on 23 July.
- The Oyo raid has been seen within Nigeria as something of a watershed moment, as the sort of incident seen regularly in the Muslim-majority north has now occurred in the predominantly Christian south-west, just 250km from Lagos, threatening an explosion of similar attacks by Jihadists and copycat criminals nationwide.
- The extent of the ransom demand (in both financial and political terms) reflects the kidnappers' appreciation that crowdfunding for the families of kidnap victims has become a factor in Nigeria, with headline demands for the group now exceeding all but a handful of previous foreign kidnap victims.
- Kidnapping of foreigners appears to have eased, with none reported in the last quarter, though this is almost certain to be temporary, and the inflation of ransom demands will likely impact on cases involving foreigners when they resume.



US State Department advice

The US State Department ranks Nigeria overall at Level 3: Reconsider Travel. The risks listed are crime, terrorism, civil unrest, kidnapping, armed gangs and health. However, 23 of the country's 36 states are rated at Level 4: Do Not Travel, with five states (Jigawa, Kwara, Niger, Plateau and Taraba) having been added to this list in April 2026 in response to an expansion in the reach of bandit and Jihadist groups in late 2025 and early 2026. The list of states at Level 4: Do Not Travel is as follows:



Groups engaged in kidnap and extortion

Petty criminals and criminal groups

- Kidnapping, extortion and financial scams are widespread in Nigeria, carried out at all levels from petty criminals – street youths and gangs – to larger, more organised groups. The victims of these crimes will vary depending on the reach and resources of the perpetrators involved (see **Targets**), but the overall effect is to make Nigeria one of the countries with the highest security risk in the world.
- Autonomous, opportunistic armed groups – referred to interchangeably as **bandits** or **militias** – carry out a wide range of crimes, with kidnapping for ransom and extortion being two of their most common activities.
- While armed banditry is endemic in Nigeria, it is especially prevalent in the North-West; Zamfara State is seen as the historical epicentre of the current banditry and has the highest incidence of kidnapping in the country, followed by Kaduna and Niger States, respectively.
- Marine piracy and kidnapping of cargo – mainly oil cargo – is another lucrative revenue stream for criminal groups in the Niger Delta.
 - The groups involved are experienced and professional in terms of their modus operandi, meaning their financial expectations – and therefore the average demands, settlements and durations in such cases are higher and longer.
 - The scale of the resources required to conduct these operations – including oil tankers to transport the cargo to Europe – suggests that powerful political figures must be involved.

Ethnic groups

- The territory of Nigeria is home to hundreds of ethnic groups, the smallest reported number being 250. Most of these groups are very small. The three largest ethnic groups by population are the **Hausa-Fulani**, who are Muslim and based mainly across the North of the country, and the **Yoruba** and **Igbo** (or Ibo) in the South – both Christian.
- The disparity in religious affiliation between ethnic groups means that interethnic conflict often overlaps with religious conflict. An additional dimension is that, historically, the Fulani are nomadic pastoralists, whereas the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are settled farmers.
- There has been a resurgence of an Igbo-led Biafran separatist movement in the Niger Delta, composed of two main groups: the **Indigenous People of Biafra** (IPOB) and the **Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra** (MASSOB). IPOB is the more recent of the two, and the more violent; it was founded in 2012, and in 2020 its leader, Nnamdi Kanu (sentenced to life imprisonment on terrorism charges in November 2025), founded the **Eastern Security Network** (ESN) as a militant fighting wing of the organisation.
- Herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria, which has a long history, is mainly attributed to so-called **Fulani militias**; some Nigerian media observers talk about a single Fulani militia, but there is little evidence of the existence of a single, centrally organised group.

Current State of play

- Banditry has been spreading across the North and creeping down towards the FCT for some time, endangering the federal capital, Abuja. Residential estates in the suburbs of Abuja have been targeted by gangs based in Kaduna State and may become targets for the new Jihadist gangs operating in Kwara and Niger States.
- The distinction between pure banditry and attacks motivated by ethnic conflicts or religious affiliation has become extremely blurred, and indeed none of the most high-profile attacks appear to have been perpetrated by groups with any specific affiliation.
 - Surveys of internal refugee camps in April 2024 showed that the most frequent reason given for displacement by far (45% of those surveyed) was banditry and kidnapping, followed by farmer-herder clashes (36%).
 - However, these numbers are likely to have changed with the frequency of high-profile attacks on villages and places of worship attributed to Islamist extremists in 2025-26.





Islamist groups

Three prominent militant Islamist groups operate in Nigeria, historically concentrated in the North-East of the country, around Lake Chad, but increasingly found in other areas.

- **Boko Haram** (*Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad* – People Committed to the Prophet's Teachings for Propagation and Jihad) emerged in 2002 and was originally affiliated with Al-Qaida. From 2009 it was led by Abubakar Shekau and gained international notoriety for its large-scale and indiscriminate attacks on both government and civilian targets – most notably the abduction of around 300 schoolgirls in April 2014. Shekau killed himself in 2021 during a battle with ISWAP that Boko Haram was losing.
 - A splinter of Boko Haram is **JAS** (an initialism for the original full name of Boko Haram, given above, but now rarely used by the main group), led by a former lieutenant of Shekau, Abubakar Saidu 'Sadiku'. This group has sought to spread Boko Haram's influence into other areas of Nigeria, and in 2025 settled in a forested area of Niger State, close to the border with Kwara State. JAS has been particularly active since late 2025, including the large-scale attack on and kidnapping from Woro and Nuku villages in Kwara State and may have been involved in the Oyo kidnapping in May 2026. The group appears likely to remain active throughout 2026 as it seeks to expand its territorial control.
- **Islamic State West Africa Province** (ISWAP) is the offshoot of a splinter within Boko Haram. In 2015 Shekau publicly pledged Boko Haram's allegiance to Islamic State (IS) and renamed his group ISWAP. However, IS recognised Habib Yusuf – a rival leading figure in Boko Haram also known as Abu Musab al-Barnawi – as wali (leader) of ISWAP instead of Shekau, reportedly owing to the latter's willingness to attack Muslims. Shekau and his followers abandoned ISWAP and went back to using the Boko Haram name. Joint US-Nigerian military operations in May 2026 killed ISWAP's leader Abu-Bilal al-Minuki and a number of other senior personnel, as well as around 200 fighters—the extent to which this has weakened the group is yet to be seen.
- **Ansaru** (*Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan* – Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa) announced its formation in 2012. The group broke off from Boko Haram after Shekau ordered a large-scale attack in which 200 civilians, mostly Muslim, were killed. Ansaru carried out several high-profile attacks in 2012-13; however, the group was under constant attack from Shekau's Boko Haram. Weakened, it seemingly lay dormant until 2020, when it claimed the killing of six soldiers in an ambush in Kaduna State. Since then, the group has officially declared its allegiance to and common purpose with Al-Qaida, but was again weakened after the arrest of its leaders in August 2025. However, the government's attribution of the Oyo state school kidnapping in May 2026 to Ansaru (largely on the basis that the kidnappers demanded the release of the group's leader) suggests that the group is active and ambitious once more, and possibly collaborating with JAS.



- Since the military takeover in Niger, joint efforts to patrol the Niger-Nigeria border have collapsed and Nigeria is thus facing an increased risk that Islamist groups operating in Niger and Mali will establish a strong presence in north-western Nigeria. **Lakurawa** is reportedly an offshoot of these foreign groups, and this is likely at least part of the motivation behind the US decision to target its missile attack at Sokoto State.
 - One leading group is **Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen** (Group for Support of Islam and Muslims – JNIM), a conglomeration of Al-Qaida affiliated groups operating in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Since its foundation in 2017, JNIM has been consolidating its chain of command and tightening control over its territory.
 - Another such group is JNIM's main rival, **Islamic State Sahel Province** (ISSP) – also known as **Islamic State in the Greater Sahara** (ISGS). ISSP was established in 2015 and in 2019-22 operated as a branch of ISWAP before branching out on its own. JNIM and ISSP have been engaged in a turf war since 2018, although the entry of the Russian Wagner Group/Africa Corps into West Africa has caused them to redirect their military efforts towards it instead. ISSP claimed its first actions in its own name in Nigeria since 2019 in June 2026—these were attributed locally to **Lakurawa**, effectively confirming the latter group's affiliation to ISSP.

All Islamist groups engage in violent terrorist activities and kidnapping – whether it be to wrest political concessions from the government or as a source of funds. To finance their operations these groups also rely on extortion, which they present as Zakat – a religious obligation in Islam to donate a proportion of one's income.

Current State of play

- **Boko Haram** (main faction) and **ISWAP** are both based in Borno State, North-East Nigeria, where they have been fighting each other for control. Borno State is strategically important because it allows for the conduct of operations in Chad, Cameroon and Niger, and numerous attacks have taken place there in late 2025 and early 2026, the two groups seemingly attacking in the same location on the same day in January 2026.
 - **JAS** is based in the Kainji forest area of Niger State and is attacking primarily in Kwara and Niger States. Its leader Sadiku appears intent on reaching the personal notoriety of his mentor Shekau, in part by resuming the use of extreme violence (such as in the Woro/Nuku incident), associated with the earlier incarnations of Boko Haram.
- **Ansaru** is based in Kaduna State, and was reportedly moving towards other States in the North-West before a reduction in activities in 2025. Authorities announced the arrest of its leader in August 2025 and the group had been largely inactive since that date until the Oyo school kidnapping in May 2026, far from its usual base.
- **ISSP** and **Lakurawa** remain active (despite the US operation in December 2025, and continue to conduct cross-border activities in the North-West of Nigeria, into Mali, Niger and Benin, while maintaining a strong presence in Sokoto State.





Kidnapping and extortion: overview



Perpetrators

- Armed bandit groups across the country and petty criminals are the main perpetrators of kidnap strictly for ransom. Extortion is another key source of revenue for both these groups.
- High inflation and rising poverty are fuelling abduction rates, driving increasing numbers of predominantly young men to resort to kidnapping.
- Since around 2020, there has been a surge in kidnap for ransom by herdsmen.
- Religious groups engage in kidnapping for both financial and political purposes. This is especially true when groups lose control of territory, as ransoms replace the lost revenue derived from controlling villages and farms.
- Extortion by police officers and other state security agents is also a widespread problem.



Targets

- Victims of kidnap for ransom are overwhelmingly local inhabitants, especially in rural areas where mass kidnappings have become the norm.
- Foreigners are estimated to account for only around 1% of cases, according to various non-official sources and Convex's own estimates.
- Foreigners are targets of kidnap-for-ransom mainly in the oil-rich Niger Delta. However, in less developed areas of the country, foreigners working at mining sites, on infrastructure projects or for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can also be targets of kidnapping – the latter not only for ransom but also for political reasons.
- Extortion targets vary depending on the perpetrators. The transport sector is specifically vulnerable to police extortion, with truck drivers being routinely stopped at checkpoints and forced to pay arbitrary “tolls”.



Statistics

- Crime statistics made available by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on its website are not comprehensive or up to date, not having resumed effectively since a cyberattack in late 2024.
- A public domain source often used in reports of crime in Nigeria is the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), a US-based NGO.
- The data available suffer from limitations and almost certainly fail to reflect real levels; for example, many instances of kidnapping happen in rural areas and are not reported.

If you would like to discuss this or how Convex Crisis Response can support you, contact your broker, agent or Convex Crisis Response on:
crisisresponsemanagement@convexin.com



Principles of security

There are seven fundamental principles of security:



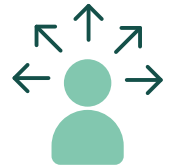
Layers of security



Planning



Communication



Situational awareness



Profile



Routine



Information security

These principles are applicable in any environment, however they are most relevant in unfamiliar surroundings or in areas with high levels of crime, terrorism or civil unrest. In terms of kidnap prevention, experience shows that given the relatively opportunistic nature of many kidnaps adherence to these principles can reduce the likelihood of someone becoming a victim of kidnapping.

- **Layers of security:** there is no single measure that enhances personal security, instead the focus should always be on applying several layers of mitigation involving physical, procedural and behavioural measures, as well as adopting a generally proactive attitude towards security.
- **Planning:** individuals can reduce risk simply by making an effort to understand the general security environment in their location and then pre planning appropriate security precautions (for example insurance, airport pick-ups, security escorts and/or other local support).
- **Communications:** identifying in advance key points of contact in emergencies (for example local office, hotel, police, embassy, security providers) and have a back-up method of communications in the event a phone does not work locally for network or other reasons. In higher threat environments share itineraries with others in advance and consider establishing lost contact plans involving periodic 'check ins'.
- **Situational awareness:** being aware of your general surroundings at all times but particularly with regards regular routines (for example arriving or leaving at home, the office, schools, or restaurants or shopping malls). Be aware of higher risk areas along routes you travel and be alert to unusual or suspicious incidents, behaviours, people or other occurrences in your vicinity. Avoid situations where you could become isolated and, above all, always trust your instincts.
- **Profile:** kidnappers – and criminals in general – normally target their victims because that individual has come to their attention for some reason. It is therefore important that individuals adopt a low profile in high kidnap threat environments. This should involve minimising overt displays of wealth, not unnecessarily sharing unnecessarily details of itineraries or business trips, and ensuring personal information such as home addresses, phone numbers and email address and family information are not easily accessible.
- **Routines:** kidnappers are most easily able to target and abduct victims who have a predictable routine. It is important therefore in higher threat kidnap environments to avoid setting predictable patterns of behaviour, particularly regarding places you regularly visit. Most kidnaps occur at the beginning or end of journeys, so it is critical to be alert during these phases.
- **Information security:** to reduce vulnerability to both kidnapping but also extortion it is important individuals and their families regularly undertake periodic reviews of their online profiles – including all corporate and social media – to enable an assessment of what personal information is easily accessible and could be utilised by criminals.

Kidnap and Extortion

INITIAL ACTIONS

IF YOU SUSPECT YOU ARE THE VICTIM OF A KIDNAP OR THREAT EXTORTION

DO

- ✓ Start a log of calls, events and any actions taken
- ✓ Form a small family crisis cell / company crisis team
- ✓ Preserve any physical evidence carefully (e.g. letters or parcels received)
- ✓ If possible record any telecommunications with the kidnapper/extortionist, or carefully note all details of what is said
- ✓ Note details of all demands, deadlines or threats received
- ✓ **If you are a Convex client call the 24/7 Response Helpline and ask to speak to the Convex Crisis Response Duty officer**

DON'T

- ✗ Agree to anything, make any offer or start negotiating
- ✗ Acknowledge, agree to or self-impose any deadlines (e.g. "I can get that for you in an hour")
- ✗ Discuss the incident with anyone who does not need to know about it or, if it is not yet publicly known, report the incident without first receiving advice
- ✗ Make any decisions until advised by Convex Crisis Response.

If a kidnapping

Prepare for a possible first call from the kidnappers by:

- Identifying someone (not a decision maker) to act as a 'Communicator' to speak on behalf of the family/company
- Identifying anyone who could potentially receive a call from kidnappers and brief them on how to respond if they are contacted (to say and promise nothing and direct the caller to the Communicator's number).

If communication from someone claiming to hold the victim is received the Communicator should:

- Listen carefully to what is said and ask the caller to repeat anything that is unclear
- Reassure the caller you wish to cooperate
- Explain that you are not authorized to make any decisions as you have to consult other family or company members
- Ask to speak with the victim to confirm that they are alive and well, or ask for other evidence of their well-being (e.g. the answer to a question that only the victim(s) can answer)
- If you do speak with the victim(s) reassure them you are doing everything you can to secure their release and that their family(s) are being looked after
- Stay calm in the face of threats, these are normal, but challenge threats of violence towards the victim(s) (e.g. 'We want to resolve this without anyone getting hurt')
- If possible arrange a time for a call back
- Stall for time pending the arrival of the Convex Crisis Response consultant.



REMEMBER

If in doubt call the Convex Crisis Response Helpline – we would rather help you prevent an incident than help you respond to one.





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