

# JPD | Journal of Politics and Democratization

E-ISSN 2449-2671/2449-2671

Vol. 5 Issue 25 Jul. 2025

JPD seeks articles based on the theory and philosophy of politics, democratization, and good governance; comparative analyses of the experiences of countries throughout the world; descriptions of exemplary practices in the transition toward democracy and good governance; personal perspectives and reflections, and other concise forms of writing on related topics.



# **The Transformation of Russia's Foreign Policy under Putin: Dynamics of Relations with the West from a Domestic Political Perspective**

**Davit Khutsishvili**

Master's student in International Relations

Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA)

Tbilisi, Georgia

## **Abstract**

This article explores the transformation of Russia's foreign policy under Vladimir Putin's rule and its connection to the internal political dynamics of the Russian Federation, particularly in the context of relations with the "collective West." The research argues that Putin's foreign policy actions are driven not only by structural shifts within the international system, as suggested by the neorealist theoretical approach, but also by the need for domestic legitimation, the balancing of elite interests, and the maintenance of authoritarian regime stability. The thesis examines the evolution of Putin's foreign policy across four key phases: 2000-2007, 2007-2012, 2012-2020, 2020-2022. The methodological framework is based on qualitative, content-based, comparative, and contextual analysis. The distinctiveness of this study lies in its departure from the classical neorealist paradigm, viewing foreign policy instead as a tool for domestic legitimation within an authoritarian regime. This complex approach enables a deeper understanding of Putin's foreign policy strategy and the motivations behind Russia's behavior in its confrontation with the Western liberal order.

**Keywords:** *revisionism, legitimacy, “siloviki”, multipolar world order, authoritarianism, Putin, sphere of influence, Russian World, special path, elites, social contract, Geopolitical Contract, Collective West.*

## **Introduction**

The transformation of the Russian Federation’s foreign policy particularly during Vladimir Putin’s time in power has become one of the most important topics in contemporary international politics, maintaining its relevance to this day. Putin’s foreign policy can be divided into several key phases: The first phase, from 2000 to 2007, can be described as a period of stabilization and pragmatic cooperation with the collective West. Despite some fundamental disagreements (for example the Iraq War in 2003) there was clear strategic alignment between Russia and the West on several major issues, including the fight against terrorism and energy security. The second crucial phase spans the years 2007 to 2012 and can be confidently characterized as a prelude to a more aggressive foreign policy. This was followed by the period from 2012 to 2020, marked by the consolidation of Putin’s autocratic rule and the beginning of overt foreign interventions. The years 2020 to 2022 represent a kind of culmination of both domestic and foreign political developments. It was during this time that all of Putin’s political moves, which had been gradually unfolding since his rise to power in 2000, converged. An openly anti-Western course was finally consolidated, Putin’s autocratic control was fully established and the preconditions emerged that ultimately led Russia down an irreversible path toward full-scale war and international isolation. Vladimir Putin’s foreign policy bears a distinctly revisionist character (Tsygankov, 2016). This is confirmed not only by widely accepted international relations theories and systemic approaches but also by the specific features of Russia’s domestic political landscape such as the need for internal legitimacy and the balancing of Russian “elite” interests. This article does not seek to dismiss the influence of international structures and theoretical frameworks on Russia’s foreign behavior. Rather, it aims to broaden that framework by integrating domestic political dynamics. A complex analytical approach one that combines

external, systemic, and internal political perspectives offers a more comprehensive understanding of the unique characteristics of the Russian Federation's foreign policy behavior.

### **Stabilization and Pragmatic Cooperation with the West (2000 - 2007)**

In terms of foreign policy thinking, Russian political elites have historically been divided into three broad categories: "Westernizers," "Statists," and "Civilizationists" (Tsygankov, 2016). Based on this typology, Vladimir Putin, during the early stage of his presidency, can be classified as a "Statist" leader who employed relatively pro-Western rhetoric while grounding foreign relations in pragmatic national interests. At this stage, Putin prioritized domestic political stabilization and economic modernization, which naturally led to a more balanced and cooperation-oriented foreign policy. During this period, despite some strategic disagreements with the West such as over the Iraq War, Russia and Western Nations shared important common interests, particularly in areas such as counterterrorism, energy security, and so on. Putin's pro-Western, pragmatic stance was clearly visible in his first presidential address to the State Duma, where he emphasized his commitment to building equal and productive partnerships with all countries, with a specific focus on the West. In his words: "We support equal and fruitful cooperation with all nations of the world and want predictable and friendly relations with the West" (Kremlin.ru, 2000). This approach was officially reflected in the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept, the first such document under Putin's presidency. Although the document advocated for a multipolar world order, it did not present the collective West as a threat but rather as a potential partner. It emphasized three key directions of cooperation: Russia - EU, Russia - NATO, and Russia - USA. The document highlighted particularly positive expectations regarding relations with the European Union, stating: "The Russian Federation considers the European Union one of its key political and economic partners and strives to develop intensive, stable, and long-term cooperation with it" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2000). Putin's seemingly pro-Western rhetoric was not driven by

ideological commitment but rather by strategic necessity. At the beginning of his presidency, Russia faced severe economic fragility, still recovering from the 1998 financial default. Oligarchic elites held excessive influence, limiting the central government's capacity to govern effectively. The state had only partial control over the security structures and separatist movements in the Chechen Republic posed an ongoing threat. In this context, cooperation with the West was not a matter of value-based alignment but a strategic tool to consolidate statehood and ensure internal stability. Putin understood that without Western support, these domestic problems could not be resolved. This domestic context shaped Putin's strong support for the United States following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Vladimir Putin was the first world leader to express solidarity with the U.S. Putin used the global anti-terrorism discourse as an opportunity to frame the Chechen conflict as part of the broader fight against international terrorism, ultimately aiming to reassert control over the region and strengthen Russia's territorial integrity. Economic interaction with the West also intensified, especially in the energetic sector. The oil and natural gas industries became central tools for Kremlin consolidation. Western capital, technology, and access to markets were crucial. Putin's administration enhanced cooperation with major Western corporations such as BP, Royal Dutch Shell, and Total. The involvement of Western firms such as Shell and Mitsui in the notable Sakhalin II project illustrated how Putin utilized foreign capital and expertise to strengthen the Russian economy. Another early priority of Putin's rule was to replace the so-called "oligarchic anarchy" with centralized authority. His strategy was to ensure that economic elites particularly the powerful oligarchs who held political and financial sway would play a politically loyal role. Under this approach, access to Western markets and foreign capital was conditional upon corporate loyalty to the Kremlin. However, even in this period of pragmatic cooperation, tensions with the West began to emerge. The first flashpoint was the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which Russia criticized as a violation of international law. Further friction arose over the so-called "Color Revolutions." In 2003, Georgia's Rose Revolution, backed by Western institutions, marked the beginning of a perceived campaign of regime change in Russia's neighborhood (Service, 2019). This was followed by Ukraine's

Orange Revolution in 2004 a much more serious challenge in the Kremlin's eyes, given Ukraine's deep historical and strategic importance to Russia's identity and also regional security. Russia feared that these revolutions would trigger a "domino effect." If a pro-Western revolution could overthrow a government in Kyiv, why couldn't the same happen in Moscow?(Service,2019). This fear fueled increasing suspicion toward the West. Meanwhile, NATO's 2004 enlargement, which included several Eastern European states and all three Baltic countries, brought the alliance directly to Russia's borders. While Putin publicly acknowledged that every state had the right to choose its own security arrangements, he also stressed that NATO expansion undermined mutual trust in Europe and ignored Russia's security interests. In response, Russia began revising its own military doctrine, where for the first time, the "Western threat" was formally recognized. The symbolic end of "harmonious" relations with the West came at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, where Putin openly criticized the unipolar world order led by the United States and outlined a new vision based on a multipolar balance of power(Putin, 2007). In this new order, countries like Russia and China were to be equally respected as global players. From that moment on, pragmatic cooperation gave way to an openly confrontational stance toward the West one rooted in domestic legitimization needs and an ambition to change the international system.

### **2007 - 2012: Prelude to an Aggressive Foreign Policy**

The period from 2007 to 2012 marked a critical turning point in Vladimir Putin's foreign policy. It was during these years that Russia began taking its first concrete steps toward a more assertive and aggressive international posture. Although Dmitry Medvedev formally assumed the presidency in May 2008, while Vladimir Putin became prime minister, it was clear that the real levers of power remained firmly in Putin's hands. This stage cannot be fully understood without considering the internal political dynamics of Russia. It was during this time that the informal "social contract" between the state and the public began to come under pressure. In the Russian context, the social contract implied an implicit

agreement: the government would provide economic stability, relative social welfare, and order primarily in the form of autocratic stability in exchange for the public's political passivity and abandonment of democratic demands. Compared to the chaos of the 1990s, this arrangement was broadly acceptable to most Russian citizens. However, the 2008 global financial crisis had a serious impact on the Russian economy, compounded by a decline in global oil prices. These developments began to undermine the foundations of the existing social contract. At the same time, tension within the political elite grew around Medvedev's presidency. The influential "siloviki" (the security and military elite) viewed Medvedev with suspicion (Medvedev himself was part of the technocratic loyalist elite), seeing him as too conciliatory toward the West and not one of their own (Zygar, 2016). In the West, Medvedev was widely perceived as a liberal-leaning so-called "Zapadnik" (Westernizer). Faced with economic pressure and elite fragmentation, the Kremlin sought to reframe the basis of its legitimacy. The so-called "social contract" was gradually replaced by a "geopolitical contract" instead of prosperity, the state now offered society a sense of national, patriotic pride grounded in global power and Russian imperial revival. National identity and the image of a resurgent Russia became central elements of the Russian state narrative. This shift was institutionalized in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, adopted in July of that year. The document presented the United States and NATO as expansionist actors and reflected growing skepticism about deepening cooperation with the West. A clear symptom of this new course was Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008. This move sent a dual message - internationally, that Russia remained a major power capable of projecting influence across the post-Soviet space and domestically, that the Kremlin would defend "its people" in this case, Russian passport holders in South Ossetia. The war significantly strengthened Putin's political authority and marginalized opposition forces in Russia. It was also followed by a wide-ranging reform of Russia's armed forces. While this reform was not aimed exclusively at external threats, it did serve to bolster Russia's image as a state capable of mobilizing against foreign adversaries. Internally, it helped reinforce Putin's vertical power structure and consolidate control over the military. The reforms included purges of the officer corps, reducing the

influence of old generals and corrupt networks that were not loyal to Vladimir Putin. In parallel, security service personnel(FSB) were promoted within the military structure, reflecting a broader process often described as the “FSB-zation” of the armed forces. Figures such as Lieutenant General Aleksandr Matovnikov and deputy minister of defence Aleksey Dyumin, both with backgrounds in the Federal Security Service(FSB) were appointed to senior military positions. This process illustrated the structural consolidation of Putin’s “siloviki“- based governance. Equally significant during this period was the emergence of an ideological counter-narrative to the West. This counter-narrative was not merely reactive, it was a deliberately constructed ideological platform designed to legitimize and promote Russia’s “special path” (‘Особый путь’) and Russia’s civilizational uniqueness. Through this lens, Putin increasingly aligned himself with “Eurasianist“ thinking, rejecting the universality of Western liberal norms and promoting a vision of Russia as a distinct geopolitical and cultural pole(Tsygankov, 2012). The development of this ideological discourse was also a reaction to dissatisfaction with Medvedev’s foreign policy. His pro-Western rhetoric and support for the “reset” in relations with the United States were seen by Putin and the conservative elite as ideological concessions. From their perspective, this approach had failed to deliver any tangible structural benefits, politically or economically. On the contrary, the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, which Russia had effectively allowed by abstaining from a UN Security Council veto, reinforced the belief within the Kremlin that the West exploited Russian weakness rather than reciprocated goodwill. These developments set the stage for Putin’s return to the presidency in 2012. His third term was not just a routine transfer of formal power, it was a clear signal that Moscow was no longer interested in pursuing liberal reforms or continuing cooperation with the West.

## **2012 - 2020: Consolidation of Power and Foreign Interventions**

In May 2012, Vladimir Putin returned to the Kremlin and once again presented himself to Russia and the world as the nation’s crowned leader. The period from 2012 to 2020 is critically important in the development of relations between Russia and the collective



West. From his inaugural speech in 2012, Putin's rhetoric became noticeably more patriotic and openly anti-Western. Particularly significant is his speech at the Valdai Club on September 20, 2013, where he made several bold and, for many, controversial statements regarding both domestic and foreign policy. This speech can be compared in importance to his famous Munich address in 2007, where Putin first openly embraced a sharply anti-Western tone. At Valdai, Putin openly criticized the Western liberal order and emphasized that Russia should follow a traditional and conservative agenda. He claimed that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had lost its "political identity"(Putin, 2013). By this, he meant that the USSR once had a clearly defined ideological stance that served as a counterbalance to Western democratic ideals, and Russia was its stronghold. In some periods, even communism itself could be considered a form of Russian soft power especially since it had a degree of popularity among Western youth and academic circles. After the Soviet collapse, however, Russia found itself in an identity crisis. "We must find and develop a national identity based on tradition, culture, and moral values"(Putin, 2013), Putin declared. He also touched upon topics such as family, religion, morality, spirituality, and historical memory concepts that gained particular relevance for domestic politics, as they were intended to revive national identity and mobilize patriotic sentiment among Russian citizens. Furthermore, Putin openly declared Western values to be immoral and incompatible with Russia. Most importantly, he introduced themes like a "multipolar world order" and "Eurasianism," also referred to as "civilizationalism"(Putin,2013). He also touched upon topics such as family, religion, morality, spirituality, and historical memory concepts that gained particular relevance for domestic politics, as they were intended to revive national identity and mobilize patriotic sentiment among Russian citizens. Furthermore, Putin openly declared Western values to be immoral and incompatible with Russia(Putin,2013). Most importantly, he introduced themes like a "multipolar world order" and "Eurasianism," also referred to as "civilizationalism."This stage of Putin's rule marked another turning point in Russian politics. It was during this period that the state vertical of power grew stronger, and Putin consolidated his authority. One of the main instruments of this consolidation was the so-called "foreign agent" law, adopted in 2012,

allegedly in the name of national security(Greene,2014). According to this law, any NGO receiving funding from abroad especially from the West had to register as a “foreign agent.” The law clearly aimed to eliminate what little Western influence remained and to suppress the already weak civil society in Russia. Another turning point was the Ukrainian crisis of 2013–14. President Yanukovych’s refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union sparked the Euromaidan protests, which led to a change of government, the annexation of Crimea, and war in the Donbas. The Kremlin presented these events as a Western - organized coup and a threat to national security framing them for domestic audiences as justification for patriotic consolidation. The concept of the “Russian World,” which emphasizes language, religion, and shared historical roots, officially became a part of Russia’s geopolitical strategy. It was included in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation marking a significant departure from previous versions, such as that of 2013(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016). While earlier documents still aimed at cooperation with the West, the 2016 concept explicitly described the “collective West” as a strategic threat. In this sense, the concept institutionalized the new course of confrontation. The document also emphasized the importance of alternative international institutions. According to the 2016 concept, Russia had made a practical decision to reject cooperation with the West, due to the “futility” of such efforts. This shift meant increased focus on structures such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016). Thus, the declaration of the West as an adversary, the official formulation of the “Russian World” doctrine, the push for a multipolar world order, and the strengthening of alternative institutions all reflected a fundamental change in Russia’s foreign policy paradigm from cooperation to confrontation. This shift ultimately culminated in the full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022. During this same period, the Syrian conflict and Russia’s military involvement in it played a particularly important role. Russia’s direct engagement in the Syrian civil war began in September 2015, a move consistent with the Kremlin’s foreign policy trajectory. The intervention was presented as a fight against terrorism, but it also had deep geopolitical and ideological significance for Russia, both externally and

domestically. By intervening, Putin helped to save the Assad regime and the ruling Ba'ath Party from collapse. Moreover, Russia secured long-term military bases in the Middle East namely the Khmeimim Air Base and the Tartus Naval Base (Kozhanov, 2018). This intervention can be seen as a symbolic return to global politics with the status of a “great power,” which the Kremlin successfully used to bolster both its foreign and domestic legitimacy. Putin himself stated: “Our goal is not to protect Assad’s presidency, but to preserve Syria’s statehood. We do not want to see another Libya, Somalia, or Afghanistan” (Charap, Treyger, & Geist, 2019). In this statement, Putin addressed two major themes central to his domestic political strategy and ideological confrontation with the West. By referencing these failed states, he directly blamed Western interventions for the chaos and instability they produced. At the same time, he sought to present Russia as a stabilizing force and a defender of state sovereignty. He further emphasized this perspective by stating that the fall of the Assad regime would be perceived as a victory for transnational terrorist forces and as legitimization of Western-backed regime change something he portrayed as a direct threat to Russia’s national security (Charap, Treyger, & Geist, 2019). This reference to “regime change” resonates with events in Ukraine and other post-Soviet states, which Putin also interprets as Western - engineered coups. A major domestic concern in this context is the threat posed by radical Islamism and terrorism. With around 25 million Muslims living in the Russian Federation particularly in regions such as Dagestan, Bashkortostan, and Tatarstan internal unrest remains a real risk. Ultimately, through the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas, and the Syrian intervention all of which involved gross violations of international law Putin’s Russia found itself under unprecedented Western sanctions. These sanctions deepened the confrontation with the collective West and led to the development of a so-called “sovereign economy” or “fortress economy,” aimed at reducing Russia’s dependence on the West, especially in technology and industry (Åslund, 2020). The government launched an import substitution policy (‘импортозамещение’), further isolating the country while allowing Putin to consolidate power and portray the West as an enemy. The Kremlin effectively

politicized these challenges, presenting them to domestic audiences as yet more evidence that the collective West is constantly trying to weaken or “bring Russia to its knees.”

### **Full Consolidation of Power and the Path to Conflict: Russia’s Domestic and Foreign Policy, 2020-2022**

The years 2020–2022 represent the culmination of Russia’s internal and external political trajectory under Vladimir Putin. During this period, the key trends that began with Putin’s rise to power in 2000 became fully consolidated. It was in these years that Russia’s anti-Western course was clearly finalized, Putin’s autocratic rule was fully institutionalized, and the foundations were laid for the country’s path toward full-scale war and international isolation. A major event that marked the beginning of this period was the constitutional reform of 2020. Among its most notable results was the removal of term limits for presidential re-election, allowing Vladimir Putin to remain in office potentially until 2036 (Constitution of the Russian Federation, 2020). While this was the most visible change, the amendments also introduced far-reaching shifts with serious implications for both domestic and foreign policy. The new constitution incorporated what may be described as “value-based” clauses, rooted in a narrative of traditionalism. One article, for example, states that “the Russian Federation, united by a thousand-year history, preserves the memory of its ancestors who passed on ideals and faith in God,” and emphasizes “the historical continuity of the Russian state” (Constitution of the Russian Federation, 2020, Art. 67.1). Another article highlights the special role of the Russian language as a guarantor of national unity. Particularly significant is the new Article 79, which reshapes the relationship between Russian and international law (Constitution of the Russian Federation, 2020, Art. 79.1). It states that decisions of international organizations that contradict the Russian constitution shall not be executed on Russian territory. These changes entrenched the legal and institutional basis of Putin’s authoritarian system. The revised constitution further limited the already fragile principles of federalism in Russia, reducing them to little more than a formal facade. The second major theme of this period

was Ukraine. Beginning in 2021, Russia and President Putin personally intensified efforts to justify a future war against Ukraine on ideological grounds. On July 12, 2021, Putin published an article titled *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*, in which he questioned the legitimacy of the Ukrainian state (Putin, 2021). In the article, Putin described Ukraine as an inseparable part of Russia's historical, cultural, and political space. "Unfortunately," he wrote, "a wall has emerged in recent years between Russia and Ukraine's shared spiritual and historical space this is a tragedy, a shared catastrophe. The West deliberately divided 'one people' into two parts" (Putin, 2021). The narrative presented Ukraine as a historical mistake and served several functions - domestically, it reinforced national unity and the Kremlin's identity-building efforts through a revived imperial discourse; internationally, it sought to justify territorial claims and prepare Russian society for confrontation, while presenting Russia's future actions in moral and historical terms. The third key development was Russia's demand for so-called security guarantees from the West. On December 17, 2021, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published two draft agreements: one with the United States (Treaty between the Russian Federation and the United States of America on Security Guarantees), and the other with NATO (Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Security of the Russian Federation and the Member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization). These proposals clearly amounted to open ultimatums, demanding, among other things, that NATO cease its expansion, revoke the 2008 Bucharest formula, and withdraw its military infrastructure to its 1997 configuration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021). Unsurprisingly, both NATO and the United States rejected these demands. On February 2, 2022, during a meeting with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, President Putin declared: "It is already obvious... that Russia's fundamental concerns have been ignored" (Zinets & Soldatkin, 2022). He also accused the West of trying to drag Russia into war. From this point onward, the path toward military confrontation became irreversible. Russia's goal became clear: to block NATO expansion, prevent NATO infrastructure from approaching its borders, and ultimately to stop Ukraine from continuing to exist as a sovereign state. On February 21, 2022, Russia officially recognized the independence of the

two separatist regions in Ukraine the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Just three days later, on February 24, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. That morning, President Putin addressed the nation in a long televised speech. The core message was that Russia was beginning a "special military operation" to protect the people of Donbas from "genocide" allegedly carried out by the "Kyiv regime," to stop NATO's expansion into Ukraine, and to pursue the "denazification" and "demilitarization" of the country(Putin,2022). This marked the beginning of a fundamentally new stage in Russia's confrontation with the collective West.

## **Conclusion**

In the final analysis, the transformation of Putin's foreign policy cannot be explained solely through systemic or theoretical approaches. While the international system, shifts in the balance of power, and Western policies have indeed shaped important external conditions, it was ultimately the domestic political dimension that played the most significant role. This kind of perspective allows us to go beyond the classical analytical frameworks and to assess Russian behavior on a deeper level. The core idea is that, in authoritarian regimes like Russia, foreign policy is often not simply a response to external threats, but also a reflection of internal political challenges such as declining legitimacy or domestic crises. During the first stage of Vladimir Putin's rule, the pragmatic cooperation with the West and the pro-Western rhetoric were largely driven by internal political needs. These efforts were directly linked to ensuring domestic stabilization and economic consolidation. Thus, Putin's pro-Western discourse and his initiatives for cooperation should be seen as instrumental choices rather than ideological or value-based ones. Over time, as the internal political structure changed with the consolidation of Putin's vertical power, the growing loyalty of the elite, and the full control over the media these shifts began to shape the country's foreign policy. As Russia's internal stability became more firmly established, its foreign policy turned increasingly assertive, with the collective West being framed as the primary threat. Foreign policy became one of the main tools for strengthening domestic

power. Therefore, the evolution of Putin's foreign policy toward the West should not be viewed merely as a reaction to external pressures. On the contrary, it was primarily an expression of internal power logic. Each new foreign policy step was guided by the Kremlin's domestic political needs, the regime's resilience, and its goal of maintaining political control. Ignoring this factor may prove extremely detrimental when it comes to making strategic decisions within the collective West.

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# Impact of Electoral Reform on Political Process in North-East Asian States: Patron-Clientelism and Individual Factor of Politicians

Grigol Kalandadze

Associate Professor

PhD in Political Science

Georgian International University GIU LLC

Tbilisi, Georgia

## Abstract

The electoral system is an important mechanism for the political enhancement of any state. It can be said that elections are the intermediary link between the people and political parties. In this regard, it is possible for a particular electoral system to weaken or eliminate specific tendencies of relations between politicians and voters, or conversely, strengthen them. From this perspective, it is interesting to explore the specific trends created by changes in the electoral system in the countries of North-East Asia in the 1990s-2000s.

The purpose of this paper is to study the influence of electoral reforms on the political process of the North-East Asian states during the last decade of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century. Thereafter, the major attention is drawn to the aforementioned factors in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

**Keywords:** *North-East Asia; patron-client relations; clientelism; electoral reform*

## Introduction

The relevance of studying electoral reforms in North-East Asian countries is determined by the fact that the political situation created by various electoral systems is a very important topic precisely in comparative politics and in political science in general. At the same time, based on my observation, the political environment of the Asian continent, including the North-East Asian region, has not yet been fully explored. A scientific novelty lies in the fact that the political situation created by electoral reforms carried out in specific years in this yet underexplored region should be examined.

Specifically, it is interesting to study the shift from a Single Non-Transferable Vote system (SNTV) to a Mixed-Member system in three countries in the northern part of the region—Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—and its impact on patron-clientelism (a trend where individuals in a disadvantaged socio-economic position are influenced by those who control resources and power, gaining their continuous trust and support through these effects (Scott, 1972)) and the overall picture of individual political figures' significance in politics (Reilly, 2007).

The study of these countries is relevant in terms of their relatively democratic path, as confirmed by Benjamin Reilly's observations. Specifically, in the 1990s-2000s, the region witnessed significant political events, such as the pro-democratic election of Kim Dae-jung as president in South Korea in 1997, the peaceful transfer of power from one party to another after the victory of opposition leader Chen Shui-bian in Taiwan's 2000 presidential election, and the formation of Japan as one of the main democratic states in the region by the late 1980s and early 1990s.

It should be noted that before the electoral reforms, the Single Non-Transferable Vote system made competition between parties practically irrelevant. In this case, the emphasis was more on individual candidates, which gave room to tendencies such as patron-clientelism and a focus on individual politicians in these developing democracies (Reilly, 2007). It can be said that the initiators of the Mixed-Member system in these countries were motivated by the creation of strong party infrastructures and the establishment of a

virtuous political process. For them, the main obstacles appeared to be these two tendencies. Therefore, it is interesting to examine whether the shift to a Mixed-Member system succeeded in eliminating or neutralizing the personal politics that fostered patronage and intra-party tensions in North-East Asian countries.

In this regard, the aim of the research is to analyze the electoral reforms carried out in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The subject of the study is the outcomes of these electoral reforms in relation to patron-clientelism and the personal factor in politics. Based on the aforementioned aspects, the research question will be: What impact did the introduction of a Mixed-Member Majoritarian electoral model in the 1990s-2000s have on political patron-clientelism and the prominence of individual figures in politics in North-East Asian countries?

## **Literature Review**

In order to thoroughly investigate the political outcomes of electoral reforms carried out in the 1990s-2000s in the three North-East Asian countries—Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea—it is essential to review the scientific sources and perspectives related to the region as well as those regarding patron-clientelism and the political factors of individuals.

Firstly, the thoughts of Allen Hicken and Yuko Kasuya are important. The authors emphasize that the political processes and constitutional order in Asian countries have not been adequately studied by scholars (Hicken & Kasuya, 2003). This observation highlights the need for a more complete academic analysis of the electoral and political processes in various regions of Asia, including North-East Asia. In this context, the relevance of my research is further emphasized. The governance systems of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea presented by the authors are also interesting. Their analysis is particularly notable because it provides insight into the legal and political path taken by various Asian states, including Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan (Hicken & Kasuya, 2003). However, this does not focus on the situation created by electoral reforms or on patron-clientelism and the political factors of individuals. Therefore, this gap in the literature can be filled by a scientific examination

of patron-clientelism and the political role of individuals resulting from electoral changes in the countries of North-East Asia.

The views of Benjamin Reilly are also remarkable. Among other topics, the author focuses on the aforementioned North-East Asian states, which, during the 1990s and 2000s, opted for a transition from a Single Non-Transferable Vote system to a mixed one, partly or fully, with the aim of eliminating patron-clientelism (Reilly, 2007). This perspective is significant for my research, as it focuses specifically on the electoral reforms of that period and the subsequent developments, which are the focus of my own work. Reilly concludes that in East Asian countries (including North-East Asia), electoral changes mainly contributed to strengthening the majoritarian component, which, in turn, increased the likelihood of a two-party political environment (Reilly, 2007). While the source provides an interesting overview of electoral reforms and their subsequent political outcomes, it does not delve deeply enough into two key factors: patron-clientelism and the political role of individuals. Additionally, Reilly addresses multiple East Asian countries rather than focusing solely on the North-East Asian region. Therefore, based on Reilly's analysis, it is crucial to investigate these two factors specifically within the context of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

Also relevant are the views of Olli Hellmann. According to the author, political leaders in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan actively engaged in patron-client activities by utilizing state administrative levers for electoral purposes and increasing party ratings (Hellmann, 2013). This aligns with the core theme of my research: the use of administrative resources for political purposes, which creates a solid foundation for the development of political patron-clientelism. In this context, it is of interest to examine the political scenario created by such an institutional environment. Hellmann notes the growing scale of competition among political forces in Japan, where, amidst democratic development, there was a struggle to control state levers. As a result, party leaders had to maintain a calm attitude towards patron-client relations with specific candidates and their voters to avoid internal conflicts within their political organizations. This situation led to the growth of the role of individuals and the institutional dysfunction of parties (Hellmann, 2013). Hellmann provides valuable insights into the institutional development and factors of the political

systems in North-East Asia. However, there is no clear connection between the electoral reforms of the 1990s-2000s and changes or continuity in patron-clientelism and the role of individuals. Therefore, it is important to conduct research on the development of patron-clientelism and the growth or reduction of the role of individual politicians after the establishment of the mixed electoral system in these countries.

The views of Orell Croissant are also interesting. According to the author, the political system in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan is less polarized, with moderate fragmentation. He emphasizes the importance of program-oriented parties with charismatic leaders and patron-client approaches. Croissant observes that both programmatic and patron-client characteristics are prominent in the political systems of Japan and Taiwan, with charisma and patron-clientelism especially evident in Taiwan (Croissant, 2002). In this regard, his analysis directly highlights the pathways that may help determine how patron-clientelism and the role of individuals evolved politically in these countries as a result of electoral reforms in the 1990s-2000s. Croissant's study provides thoughtful considerations that are essential for examining the potential impact of the introduction of the mixed electoral system on patron-clientelism and the role of individuals in North-East Asian states.

With regard to political patron-clientelism, the views of James Scott are also insightful. The author focuses on the nature of patron-clientelism in the context of South Asian political processes. Scott emphasizes that this phenomenon is not unique to Asian countries and is not unfamiliar to other developing regions of the world (e.g., African countries) (Scott, 1972). This demonstrates that the formation of patron-client relationships between voters and politicians is a relevant phenomenon in numerous countries across different continents, which further underscores the academic significance of my research. It can confidently be stated that the study of political patron-clientelism in North-East Asia is valuable both scientifically and practically. Additionally, Scott defines the clientelism phenomenon as a situation where an individual from a higher social class uses their authority and resources to encourage someone from a lower social class to provide various services, such as voting in their favor in elections (Scott, 1972). Scott's analysis is quite valuable for investigating patron-clientelism and the role of individuals in North-East



Asian countries. However, there is no emphasis on electoral reforms, which necessitates further research.

From the sources discussed above, it is clear that the impact of electoral changes in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan during the 1990s-2000s on patron-clientelism and the role of individuals in politics is a topic worth investigating. It will be interesting to explore this issue in the context of all three countries in North-East Asia. It is also worth noting that there is limited literature available on the electoral and political processes in these countries, which is a constraint for the research.

## **Research Design**

For an in-depth study of the political outcomes of electoral reforms in North-East Asian countries, it is essential to establish a clear research design. Key aspects in this regard include conceptualization, operationalization, and research methodology (Babbie, 2016).

In the conceptualization phase, it is necessary to discuss key concepts and underlying theoretical foundations (Babbie, 2016). Therefore, it is important to focus on both dependent and independent variables (Van Evera, 1997). In this case, the dependent variables are political patron-clientelism and the personal factor, while the independent variable is electoral system reform. The literature review highlights that the patron-clientelism factor involves a person from a higher social class using their influence to create mutually beneficial connections with someone from a lower social class, improving their conditions or providing one-time assistance (Scott, 1972). This implies a stable relationship where the protégé always feels indebted to the influential person and performs tasks beneficial to them without official documentation. From a political perspective, patron-clientelism involves the use of various state and administrative levers to achieve political goals, such as winning elections (Croissant, 2002). In a political context, patron-clientelism arises when influential political figures use democratic facades to perform favors for supportive voters, ensuring unwavering political support in return. Politicians do not necessarily follow party discipline and form personal connections with citizens (Croissant,

2002). Political patron-clientelism may not always be conducive to healthy political processes and may even undermine stable political conditions. Therefore, it could be argued that for a healthy, competitive, and stable political process, it would be beneficial to reduce or even eliminate this phenomenon. This will be emphasized in the research. The personal political factor refers to a party system based on the personal talents and approaches of specific politicians. This refers to a situation where the charisma of a political figure is more important for political processes than party programs or infrastructure (Reilly, 2007). This focuses on how political figures in electoral and party competition emphasize their personal qualities as a primary weapon. The focus of my research is to examine the importance of political figures' individual skills and influence compared to other elements of political strategy.

Regarding the independent variable, electoral system change refers to the shift from a Single Non-Transferable Vote system to a Mixed-Member system in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan in the 1990s to 2000s (Reilly, 2007). A Single Non-Transferable Vote system (SNTV) is a simple majority system in which an individual candidate receives voter support in multi-member constituencies, with no transfer of support between candidates (Lin, 2006). It is important to clarify a Mixed-Member Majoritarian model (MMM) and a Mixed-Member Proportional model (MMP). These electoral systems essentially involve two parallel elections: one in which voters elect a party list proportionally, and another in which they elect individual candidates in single-member constituencies. The difference is that in the Mixed-Member Majoritarian model, results from party lists and single-member constituencies are added together to calculate the party's overall result, while in the Mixed-Member Proportional system, results from single-member constituencies are considered within the party list, contributing to the proportional result (Thames & Edwards, 2006). My research focuses specifically on the in-depth study of the changes in political patron-clientelism and the political importance of personal factors in these countries after the transition from one electoral system to another.

In the operationalization phase, it is crucial to identify indicators that will allow us to investigate the above variables (Babbie, 2016). In this regard, to study patron-clientelism,

Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan cases have to be examined by using the following indicators: 1. Unequal, asymmetric relationships (Scott, 1972) – the article investigates how, after the shift to a Mixed-Member system, politicians continued using levers to ensure the well-being of voters in exchange for their political support; 2. Unwavering faith (Scott, 1972) – this involves analyzing whether the tendency for personal trust between politicians and voters in the political process, especially during election campaigns, persisted, decreased, or disappeared after the electoral reforms of the 1990s-2000s; 3. Stable relationships based on needs (Scott, 1972) – the article explores how often patron-client relationships were used without formal structures and frameworks after these changes. Furthermore, to study both political patron-clientelism and the political importance of individuals, investigate voter and candidate behaviors need to be observed after the shift to a Mixed-Member system. Specifically, it is crucial to examine how candidates manage relationships with citizens during election campaigns and how citizens make their electoral decisions in light of the 1990s-2000s reforms (Croissant, 2002). This involves analyzing whether the personal factor of political leaders became weaker or stronger during the election campaign and the relative importance of personal factors compared to party infrastructure during this process. To fully examine these indicators, attention must be paid to sub-indicators such as the individual abilities and behaviors of candidates/politicians and party programs in the political process (Croissant, 2002). In the research, attention must be given to what was prioritized during election campaigns and which sub-indicators were characteristic of the main political parties in each country.

Regarding the research methodology, it is necessary to present the methods through which the research will be conducted. First of all, it is essential to note that both qualitative and quantitative methods are required for studying the cases of North-East Asia, with attention to the validity and reliability of each method (Babbie, 2016). In this context, process tracing (Keohane, King & Verba, 1994) is significant, as it allows for the analysis of the relationship between independent (electoral reform in the 1990s-2000s) and dependent (political patron-clientelism and the personal factor) variables, guiding the proper direction of the study. At the same time, the case study method (Van Evera, 1997) provides an opportunity

to determine the political outcomes of these reforms in each country, as it allows for the study of changes or trends in patron-clientelism and personal political significance in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Additionally, based on the indicators and sub-indicators from the operationalization phase, document analysis (Bowen, 2009) is necessary to fully explore the frequency of asymmetric relationships, unwavering faith, and stable relationships without formal structures. Document analysis also allows us to understand the political leader's personal phenomenon in relations with voters, comparing it with the importance of party programs and administrative resources. This approach ensures validity and reliability by analyzing results from different periods in the 1990s-2010s/2020s regarding patron-clientelism. Descriptive statistics (Babbie, 2016) are also important for this purpose, using sources like Freedom House (Freedom House, n.d.), which will help to assess the importance of patron-clientelism and personal factors in elections and political activities post-reform.

This research design enables the study of political patron-clientelism and the personal factor of politicians in the three North-East Asian countries following the electoral reforms of the 1990s-2000s. Thereafter, the research methods as well as conceptualization and operationalization have an important essence for the perfection of a research about a link between the electoral system and political process of all three aforementioned states of the same region.

## **Analysis**

### *Case Study of Japan*

It is interesting that as a result of changes made in Japan in 1994, a mixed electoral system was established, with a single-member district element brought to the forefront (Lin, 2006). In this regard, it is important to analyze how events unfolded in Japan following this change.

Notably, Japan, which had been considered one of the prominent countries since the 1960s, was affected by the global economic crisis in the 1990s. It is interesting to note that elections played a very significant role in Japan's political life. Considering that the system ideologists of the so-called developing countries viewed elections held under the principle of a Single Non-Transferable Vote as an effective tool for implementing their individual aspirations (Lin, 2006), it becomes clear that the electoral process in Japan was highly utilized by politicians to serve their personal interests. From this perspective, one might argue that this, in turn, created a problematic situation in terms of the health of competition in the political field. The Single Non-Transferable Vote system, which existed in the country prior to the electoral reforms of the 1990s, gave room to political patron-clientelism. Since party leaders and influential figures had their favorite candidates who would serve their narrow political interests (Lin, 2006), it can be concluded that before the activation of the Mixed-Member system in Japan, patron-clientelism and the individual factor of politicians were relevant. Therefore, it can be said that this created serious tension in the political process.

This led to public protests, after which, following lengthy discussions between the parties, a consensus was reached in 1994 to elect members of the lower house of the country's legislative body, the Diet, under a Mixed-Member Majoritarian model with 300 single-member district seats and 180 (originally 200, later reduced) proportional representation seats (Lin, 2006). Practically, the electoral procedure in the country was changed, but it is interesting to examine the results of this change in terms of the rise or decline of patron-clientelism and the role of individuals in politics. It is evident that, based on the analysis above, both phenomena were firmly rooted and had a significant influence on the political life of the country under the old electoral system. It is important to follow the events chronologically in order to fully study their development in the context of the new electoral system.

It is essential to emphasize that these changes, carried out with prior expectations, were aimed at improving the political process. After the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost control, Japan's political system embarked on a path of bipartisan development. After 2000,

the Democratic Party of Japan was established as the main opposition to the LDP (Lin, 2006). Thus, it could be said that the situation should have developed in the direction of diminishing party competition and the role of individuals, but in practice, this did not happen. In other words, despite the enthusiastic start of the reforms, the processes did not unfold as expected. Following these events, in the 1996 electoral race, politicians relied on their individual supporters to win, a factor that was facilitated by the possibility of running in both proportional and majoritarian elections simultaneously (Lin, 2006). This actually shows that during the first elections under the reform, the individual abilities of politicians were more important than party programs or party platforms, which emphasizes the strength of the role of individuals in politics. All of this raises the question of how the situation evolved after the first elections to the legislative body.

It can be said that the increased role of parties in the political process, and the move towards appealing to the interests of a broader electorate rather than a specific loyal segment, began to take shape. Replacing internal party conflicts with a unified infrastructure and common strategy became the key to success under the new electoral system. In this battle, the barrier between urban and rural voters seemed to fade, and the focus shifted to gaining as many supporters as possible, regardless of location, social status, or other factors (Rosenbluth & Yamada, 2015). This creates the impression that party programs were becoming more important and valuable in the electoral and political process than administrative resources and individual politician skills. Interestingly, in 1996, the LDP nominated a single candidate in almost 80% of constituencies, in 2000 it was 89%, in 2005 it was 100%, and in 2009 it was 99%, among others. This significantly reduced the practice of obtaining votes through material resources in political life (Rosenbluth & Yamada, 2015). In this regard, it seems that the tendency of patron-clientelism was on the decline. This, on one hand, reaffirms the previously expressed point about administrative resources, while on the other, it develops the logic that the importance of individual candidates remained relevant in the political life of the country, despite the seeming decline in their individual influence. Therefore, it can be concluded that at the early stages of the reform, some successes were visible, but it was difficult to predict what long-term results this would yield.

In this context, it is interesting to explore in more depth the significance of individual candidates' charisma. For example, the LDP, before the change in the electoral system, focused more on its loyal rural voters. After the change, the priority in the government's funding shifted to social security for urban populations, rather than public projects for rural areas, which had been prioritized before the reform (Rosenbluth & Yamada, 2015). The logic suggests that patron-clientelism was seriously shrinking in scope and was practically becoming irrelevant in the relationship between politicians and voters, largely due to the system change. At the same time, it can be said that the internal restructuring of parties and their updated priorities, made possible by the Mixed-Member Majoritarian model, led to the reduction of individual charisma and the personal element of candidates, preparing fertile ground for ideological platforms and programmatic battles. This indicates that the electoral reform of 1994 in Japan effectively reduced the tendency of winning elections through the manipulation of loyal voters by administrative, material, or other resources, while increasing the role of parties in political life compared to the personal factor. However, the practical experience of the following years showed a different picture.

It is remarkable that there was an active group in Japan known as Koenkai, a circle of loyal voters who supported a particular candidate in exchange for certain benefits (Greenwood et al., 2020). Thus, despite the reduction in the number of candidates in the same constituency, which seemingly strengthened the party platform, it can be said that this tendency actually helped preserve Koenkai. According to my research operationalization, an unshakable bond was formed between voters and politicians. This shows that the campaign to remove administrative resources from political life and strengthen the political significance of party programs was not entirely successful in Japan. In practice, patron-clientelism and the political factor of individuals remained intact and gradually increased.

It should be noted that under centralized financial and budgetary resources, the LDP maintained its ability to fund local-level politicians, which once again drew a line between rural and urban voters and reinforced the support of segmented voters through funding public projects (Greenwood et al., 2020). This situation exhibited an asymmetric relationship between politicians and voters, as, on one hand, the funding of certain projects

helped politicians exert influence over their voters, while on the other, it fragmented and divided voters based on certain criteria. According to the 2012 Freedom House report, the tendency for mutually beneficial business relationships between the banking sector, the ruling party, and large private enterprises was also confirmed (Puddington et al., 2013). This again underscores the asymmetric relationship and the absence of formal structures in the relationships between politicians, voters, and other segments (including the private sector), where politicians freely demanded any type of resources from businesses and directed voters as per their interests.

This ultimately shows that the asymmetric relationship between politicians and voters, unwavering belief, and stable relationships without any formal framework continued to strengthen, and personal interests and individuals came to the forefront in electoral and political arenas over parties. In this regard, it can be said that the seemingly weakened personal factor of politicians actually strengthened, becoming more significant than party platforms and infrastructure. Consequently, political patron-clientelism and individual charisma remained relevant in Japan. While summarizing the case of Japan, it can be said that despite some initial successes, political patron-clientelism and the strength of individuals in politics ultimately remained relevant aspects in the country's ongoing processes. In this regard, it is worth noting that the shift to the Mixed-Member Majoritarian model did not eliminate these two phenomena from Japan's political life.

### *Case study of South Korea*

It is important to note that authoritarian tendencies were prevalent in South Korea until the second half of the 1980s, which provided a solid foundation for patron-client relationships and personal factors in politics (You, 2015). In this context, it is interesting to examine the issue of patron-clientelism and the role of individuals in politics following the electoral reform that was implemented.



Notably, the ruling party in the country focused on rural constituencies to win votes in exchange for specific benefits (You, 2015), a situation that mirrors Japan's political dynamics. Despite democratic shifts in the 1980s, the electoral process continued to be marked by the biased division of voters and the strengthening of patron-clientelism during the 1990s (You, 2015). Additionally, since 1973, South Korea had employed a Single Non-Transferable Vote system (Grofman et al., 1999), which likely accelerated the pace of patron-clientelism. These developments suggest that before the transition to a Mixed-Member system, the political process was largely shaped by support from loyal voters, highlighting the significant role of political leaders over party platforms. This raises an interesting question about the development of events after the electoral reform.

It is important to highlight that South Korea fully implemented the Mixed-Member system in 2004. As a result, the National Assembly, consisting of 299 legislators, included 243 majoritarian and 56 proportional representatives. A 3% threshold was introduced for parties to gain seats in the legislature (Reilly, 2007). These electoral changes seem to have been aimed at addressing the regionally concentrated nature of political parties and their election strategies, which were more aligned with regional rather than national interests, posing a challenge to the democratic process. This logic still implied a division of voters based on benefits, suggesting that patron-client relationships remained a key phenomenon. Therefore, it is essential to analyze how events unfolded following these electoral reforms.

It is noteworthy that, in parallel with the 2004 electoral changes, the Political Parties Act was revised to combat patron-clientelism. This revision focused on reorganizing the organizational structure of South Korean political parties and their local offices. As a result, leading parties abolished over 200 local organizations that had been staffed primarily through personal connections (Han, 2021). This indicates that initial steps were taken to address patron-clientelism and to emphasize party infrastructure over individual politicians. This suggests that the reform aimed to eliminate personal relationships and voter segmentation from the electoral and political process. Thus, it seems that South Korea's reform mirrored similar efforts seen in Japan's electoral changes. However, the regionally concentrated voter base still persisted, and between 2004 and 2018, state funding

for the two main parties – the Democratic Party and the Conservative Party – grew by almost 10%. During the same period, membership contributions to the Conservative Party decreased by almost 15%, and to the Democratic Party – by about 30% (Han, 2021). This suggests that long-term changes did not contribute to the stabilization of the party system or the institutional environment, leading to the conclusion that patron-clientelism and the role of political personalities continued to shape the political process.

Compared to Japan, South Korea exhibited signs of concern much earlier regarding the Mixed-Member Majoritarian model's inability to curb patron-clientelism and the role of political charisma. Research by Han indicates that in 2012, unlike in 2004, the electoral approaches and messages of the Conservatives and the Democrats were significantly out of sync with the demands of the general voter base. This prompted the parties to segment the electorate (Han, 2021). This indicates that patron-clientelism continued to play a prominent role eight years after the reform, despite efforts to prioritize party platforms over individual personalities. The situation in South Korea, as in Japan, shows that after the shift to the Mixed-Member Majoritarian system, initial steps were taken to prevent patron-client relationships between voters and politicians. However, political circles did not display enough will to effectively address this, allowing patron-client relationships and the regional loyalty of voters to persist. As a result, party platforms were not sufficiently emphasized, and individual politicians' roles remained central.

To understand patron-clientelism and the role of political figures in South Korea, it is important to consider the operationalization aspect. It is clear that a strong loyalty remained between voters and politicians, as individual politicians maintained loyal voter groups, known as *Sajojiks*, which were actively used during elections, independent of party agendas (Hellmann, 2011). This supports the idea that, despite the shift towards party platforms, South Korean politicians continued to rely on loyal electorates in the electoral process. The presence of *Sajojiks* emphasizes that, despite the development of party platforms, individual politicians still played a dominant role. This is further evidenced by data from Transparency International, showing that in 2010-2011, nearly 70% of South Korean respondents accused political parties of corruption and unethical behavior. Despite

the legislative changes starting in 2004, political organizations continued to use traditional, unofficial practices, such as school boy and house boy systems, to gather votes (Hellmann, 2014). This demonstrates that stable relationships between voters and politicians, without formal constraints, remained intact, confirming that patron-clientelism continued to thrive in South Korean politics after the introduction of the Mixed-Member Majoritarian model.

It is also worth mentioning that, according to Freedom House data for 2018 and 2019, South Korea experienced malapportionment in rural areas, similar to Japan (Freedom House, n.d.). The New Village Movement, which has existed in the country for many years (How the African Development Bank and Korea are transforming African villages and boosting rural economies, 2018), likely played a significant role in supporting the ruling party's patron-client interests. In other words, politicians continued to use their leverage over loyal rural voters to secure their support in elections, representing an asymmetrical relationship.

A comprehensive analysis of the situation reveals that, despite some steps toward developing party infrastructure, individual politicians' roles remained more significant in the political process. Lee and Shin confirm this aspect in their 2016 article, asserting that individual political leaders, rather than party politics, remained crucial in South Korea's political process (Lee & Shin, 2016). This may explain why, in 2020, the political elite of South Korea reverted to a Mixed-Member Proportional model instead of the Mixed-Member Majoritarian system, also motivated by the desire to create a multiparty political field (Kim, 2020). This suggests that insufficient political will and the personal interests of politicians prevented the decline of patron-clientelism and individual political charisma.

To sum up, similar to Japan, South Korea's shift to the Mixed-Member Majoritarian system failed to eliminate patron-clientelism and the importance of individual politicians. While South Korea faced regionalism more acutely than Japan, it became evident more quickly after the electoral reform that patron-clientelism and the role of political leaders remained influential in electoral and political processes, mirroring trends in Japan.

### *Case study of Taiwan*

In Taiwan, just like in South Korea, the movement towards democratic governance began in the second half of the 1980s (Reilly, 2007). It is also important to note that the political life of Taiwan has been significantly influenced by the People's Republic of China (Freedom House, n.d.). From this perspective, it is interesting to analyze the patron-client and personalist political tendencies in this country. Thereafter, all the important details that followed the democratization process in Taiwan need to be examined.

Interestingly, Taiwan's system of a Single Non-Transferable Vote was replaced by a Mixed-Member Majoritarian model (Huang, Kuo & Stockton, 2016). This can be seen as evidence of a reform similar to those in Japan and South Korea. At first glance, the logic suggests that similar events might have unfolded here as well. The reform initiated in 2005 aimed to reduce and eventually eliminate both political patron-client networks and the dominant role of individuals in politics (Reilly, 2007). This creates the impression that, just like in the previously discussed countries, patron-client relationships and the focus on individuals had a wide scope in Taiwan, which many did not consider a healthy political condition. This created the necessity for such a reform. As a result, 73 out of 113 legislators were elected according to the majoritarian principle, while 34 were elected through proportional representation. At that time, the election of six additional representatives was also made possible through local elections (Reilly, 2007). Against this backdrop, it is essential to examine the developments that followed the reform.

At the outset of the discussion, it is important to note that Taiwan, like South Korea, had the problem of a regionally concentrated electorate (Reilly, 2007). This supports the earlier argument that conditions for patron-clientelism were created in the country, as the phenomenon of a regionally aligned electorate is a clear illustration of this. Especially considering the fact that Kuomintang (KMT) formed patron-client relations with influential groups (Lin, 2006) and that there were numerous cases of vote-buying in the early 21st century (You, 2015), it becomes clear that clientelism was a significant phenomenon in Taiwan's electoral and political processes. During the 2004 parliamentary

elections, foreign observers emphasized the material incentives provided by individual politicians to voters, especially in rural areas (You, 2015). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that patron-clientelism and personalism had deep roots in Taiwan's political life. Additionally, given that intra-party tensions and divisions under the non-transferable vote system were driven by the significant role of individual candidates (Stockton, 2010), it becomes clearer how diminished party competition and the prominence of individual politicians shaped Taiwan's political process.

While looking at the World Economic Forum's corruption ratings for the years 2002-2004 and 2006, an average corruption score appears to be 4.5 (You, 2015). Considering also the reformists' desire to strengthen party platforms (You, 2015), it is clear that initial progress was made, and there seemed to be groundwork for reducing patron-clientelism and increasing party competition. However, the revelation of over 5,000 cases of vote-buying in 2008, which led to legal proceedings against a legislator (Puddington et al., 2009), clearly shows that patron-clientelism persisted in Taiwan's political process even after the electoral reform.

While considering these facts from the perspective of operationalization, several important elements can be figured out. In 2013, Lin Yi, who was elected to the legislative body under the KMT list, was exposed for being involved in secret dealings with a large business, mismanaging millions of dollars in assets, and engaging in vote-buying (Puddington et al., 2015). This case illustrates, on the one hand, that there were illegal relationships between politicians and businessmen, conducted without formal standards or boundaries. On the other hand, it highlights the asymmetry of these relationships, as business structures provided money to the ruling party representative for electoral and other political goals, while the politician used their influence to create favorable conditions for the business's existence and development. These details can lead to a judgement that even after the implementation of the Mixed-Member Majoritarian model, patron-clientelism continued to thrive in Taiwan's political process, fueled by the strengthening of individual politicians' roles and the dysfunctional party competition.

This conclusion is further supported by the case of former president Lee Teng-hui in 2011, when illicit funds were obtained through obscure channels to finance analytical groups (Puddington et al., 2015). This not only reinforces the strong influence of individuals in politics but also contains elements of patron-clientelism. This case demonstrates the necessity of building unwavering trust between politicians and their loyal electorate or business circles because the head of state used illegal income to finance research groups that would support his electoral and other political objectives. Interestingly, during 2019, large business figures closely connected to the KMT had significant influence in the political process. Compared to the country's second major party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the KMT received more financial and material resources from the country's production, which eventually led to discussions about the responsibility of specific KMT members (Freedom House, n.d.). This further reinforces the argument that patron-clientelism played a major role in Taiwan's political life, as well as the continued importance of individual politicians' charisma in the political arena. This suggests that due to the pursuit of private interests by politicians and the dysfunctional political environment, neither of these phenomena was eliminated from Taiwan's political life.

In sum, it is clear that, after the introduction of the Mixed-Member Majoritarian model, both patron-clientelism and the personalist political nature of Taiwan remained firmly in place. Moreover, Taiwan's case is more similar to South Korea's, as both countries saw only a brief influence of the electoral reform on the reduction of patron-clientelism and individualistic politics. As the analysis showed, the impact of this reform in Japan lasted longer, but in all three countries, patron-clientelism and the influence of individuals in politics did not diminish in the long term. In fact, they persisted and even continued with a new dynamic.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, in response to the research question above, the following hypothesis can be formulated: The introduction of the Mixed-Member Majoritarian electoral model in North-

East Asian countries in the 1990s and 2000s failed to eliminate the factors of political patron-clientelism and the prominence of individuals in politics, despite initial attempts. Consequently, in the long-term, these two factors remained relevant in the political life of all three countries.

It is worth noting that the weak aspects of this research were the lack of literature on the electoral and political systems of North-East Asian countries, as well as the limited time and financial resources. Nevertheless, the consistent analysis with the available resources revealed that, in Japan, following the electoral reform, there was some temporary reduction in both patron-clientelism and the desire for party platforms to be placed ahead of individual politicians. However, ultimately, both factors became so ingrained in the political and social consciousness of the Japanese that their elimination was impossible, and over time, they re-emerged. As the analysis shows, a similar situation developed in South Korea and Taiwan, but with the difference that in these countries, the strength of patron-clientelism and the personal charisma of politicians became evident much more quickly in their political processes.

Furthermore, the research clearly shows that groups such as Koenkai (Greenwood et al., 2020), Sajojik (Hellmann, 2011), and various business and analytical teams (Puddington et al., 2015) created the basis for political leaders and their parties to develop loyal electorates and groups of supporters. Consequently, the factor of unwavering belief remained in place. At the same time, as the analysis made clear, the relationships between politicians and their loyal electorates or business circles proceeded without formal structures, as evidenced by the existence of the schoolboy institution (Hellmann, 2014) and many other cases described above. Moreover, the employment of loyal voters in rural development and other projects using state leverage, which gave politicians significant influence over voters, created asymmetrical relationships between political leaders and specific representatives of society. This, in turn, further reinforced the grounds for patron-clientelism.

The research clearly demonstrates that, despite the development of some bipartite competition and the refinement of party infrastructure, significant influence by political

figures remained in the political processes of North-East Asian countries, and party competition did not fully develop. In conclusion, it can be said that the transition from a Single Non-Transferable Vote system to a Mixed-Member Majoritarian model failed to reduce the prominence of patron-clientelism and individual politicians in the political life of North-East Asian countries. A recommendation would be to conduct more in-depth research into the social, cultural, and other aspects that may influence the increasing role of patron-clientelism and political charisma in the political processes of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

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# Economic Diplomacy and Economic Security: Theoretical and Practical Intersection

**Lali Khurtsia**

Assistant professor

PhD in Economics

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

Tbilisi, Georgia

## **Abstract**

In the 21st century, the interdependence of global economies and the rise of geo-economic tensions have significantly elevated the strategic importance of economic diplomacy as a tool of national security. This paper explores the theoretical and practical intersections between economic diplomacy and economic security, drawing from liberal, realist, and neo-mercantilist schools of thought. It analyzes the functional roles of economic diplomacy, including preventive, resilience-enhancing, and predictability-building dimensions and demonstrates how these functions contribute to strengthening a country's economic sovereignty and mitigating external vulnerabilities.

Through comparative case studies of Singapore, the Netherlands, and Turkey, the paper highlights how diverse national strategies utilize economic diplomacy to support sustainable development, geopolitical positioning, and risk management. The analysis shows that successful economic diplomacy can serve both as a growth mechanism and a strategic buffer against external shocks.

Despite Georgia's extensive network of free trade agreements and pro-Western orientation, the country still lacks a coherent strategy for economic diplomacy. The paper recommends policy and institutional reforms aimed at integrating economic security considerations into foreign policy, strengthening public-private dialogue, and diversifying regional partnerships. These steps are essential to enhance Georgia's resilience, credibility, and influence in the global economic system.

**Keywords:** *economic diplomacy; economic security; resilience; international relations; trade policy; strategic autonomy; foreign policy; geo-economics; national interests; institutional coordination; global competitiveness*

## **Introduction**

In the global political and economic landscape of the 21st century, the strategic interests of states are increasingly intertwined with economic factors. Alongside traditional military and diplomatic tools, growing importance is being placed on economic security and economic diplomacy as mechanisms for shaping contemporary international relations and safeguarding national interests.

Economic security encompasses a state's ability to ensure the resilience of critical sectors such as energy supply, access to food and medicine, financial stability, and resistance to external economic and political shocks. In a context where the global economic order is in flux, economic security is no longer merely a dimension of development—it has become a central prerequisite for national and regional stability.

Economic diplomacy has become an important instrument through which states protect their economic interests, expand global connections, diversify markets to reduce risks, establish strategic partnerships, and employ trade, investment, and technological cooperation within the framework of foreign policy. The institutionalization of economic relations often replaces traditional political negotiations and creates new conditions for global competition.

The role of economic diplomacy is particularly significant for countries like Georgia, which is located in a geopolitically important region and is heavily dependent on external economic processes. Economic diplomacy serves not only as a tool for development but also as a lever for supporting stable security.

This paper aims to provide a critical review of the existing literature on economic diplomacy as a determinant of stable economic security. It examines theoretical approaches, analyzes the practical application of diplomatic instruments based on country

examples, and discusses how the role of economic diplomacy is reflected in the context of economic security.

The analysis of the concepts presented in this article is structured as follows:

We review the conceptual and theoretical foundations of economic security, with a focus on the evolution of the security paradigm—from military to economic—highlighting energy, financial, food, and technological security as core components; Next, we examine the theories and functions of economic diplomacy; and finally, we analyze the impact of economic diplomacy on economic security based on both theoretical perspectives and practical case studies.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Economic Security**

The concept of economic security emerged relatively late in the security discourse, but today it occupies a central place in the strategic agendas of states and international organizations. Traditionally, the notion of security was associated with military threats and the protection of national territory. However, since the 1990s, contemporary theorists have begun to conceptualize security as a multidimensional phenomenon, where economic factors play a role as decisive as military or politico-diplomatic elements.

Barry Buzan (1991) views security as a complex system encompassing five sectors: military, political, economic, social, and environmental. According to his model, economic security is defined by a state's and society's ability to withstand internal and external economic pressures without harming the country's independence, prosperity, and stability. In Buzan's interpretation, the economy is not just a platform for economic growth but a pillar of national security.

Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler (1992) associate security with the idea of collective human well-being, emphasizing that security cannot be defined solely in military terms. In this view, economic stability, healthcare, employment, and income distribution are considered critical components of security theory.

David Baldwin (1997) emphasizes that economic security is a multidimensional phenomenon and cannot be defined unambiguously. He considers security on both

individual and state levels and introduces the principle of expectancy—how likely it is that a state can operate within a secure economic environment. According to Baldwin, economic security includes the ability to respond to threats such as inflation, unemployment, trade dependency, growing debt, economic sanctions, and global crises.

Contemporary literature often defines economic security as a combination of systemic resilience and vulnerability management. This approach emphasizes the presence of mechanisms that ensure the proper functioning of the economic system under crises, global shocks, and political pressures.

Key indicators of economic security include:

- The level of independence in energy and food supplies
- Stability of the financial system
- Access to capital and markets
- Functionality of critical infrastructure
- Degree of diversification in foreign trade

The concepts of systemic resilience and vulnerability management significantly expand classical security theories, helping policymakers better understand the stability of economic systems under shocks and crises.

Systemic resilience is defined as the ability of a system—be it a state, region, or sectoral economy—to withstand external pressure, maintain core functionality, and, if necessary, adapt or transform in response to new environmental conditions. This concept gained prominence after the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and global energy shocks.

J. Joseph (2013) interprets systemic resilience as part of a modern, neoliberal security framework, where responsibility for resilience is partly delegated not only to state institutions but also to the private sector, local governments, and civil society organizations. Similar approaches are found in annual reports by the World Bank and OECD (2014–present), which link economic security with maintaining stability and adapting to challenges.

Adam Rose and Shu-Yi Liao (2005) study how economic agents respond under crisis or disaster conditions (e.g., floods, earthquakes), and whether they can maintain systemic resilience and effective functioning during such events. In subsequent works (Rose & Wei, 2013; Rose et al., 2007), they emphasize that systemic resilience depends significantly on the ability to use investments and alternative resources aimed at the economy's rapid recovery.

Martin & Sunley (2015, 2020) examine regional economic resilience and are among the most influential researchers in this field. Their work focuses on how economic systems—especially at local and sectoral levels—respond to external shocks and what mechanisms enable recovery or adaptation. For Martin and Sunley, economic resilience is not merely about one-time responses to crises but a dynamic process involving:

- Vulnerability – how exposed the region is to external shocks
- Resistance – the ability to avoid or minimize harm
- Impact – the actual damage caused by the shock
- Recovery – the speed and quality of return to pre-crisis levels
- Transformation – the ability to emerge with a more resilient structure

They apply their model to analyze, for example, the effects of the 2008 financial crisis on local markets, the impact of COVID-19 on SMEs, and compare how different regions handle industrial recessions.

Martin & Sunley's framework highlights that economic security is not just a political game at the state level, but the capacity of multi-level economic organization to adapt and maintain stability under constantly changing global conditions.

A second key concept is vulnerability management, which focuses on identifying and reducing the factors that make economies susceptible to external pressures. These may include dependency on energy imports, low trade diversification, high sectoral concentration, or lack of investment.

Susan Cutter et al. (2003, 2008) developed the hazard vulnerability framework, integrating economic, social, and infrastructural factors. Initially designed for environmental and climate risk assessments, this model has since been applied to economic security analysis.



Cutter aims to identify what makes a society vulnerable to disasters, economic crises, and other shocks. Her model includes:

- Hazard Exposure – the shock or threat impacting the system (e.g., financial crisis, energy shortage)
- Social Vulnerability – societal factors that amplify the impact (e.g., low income, poor infrastructure, limited education, inequality)
- Place-based Factors – local specifics like economic diversity, governance effectiveness, population mobility, social networks
- Mitigation & Response Capacity – the system's ability to cope: preparedness, early warning systems, recovery speed

Cutter expresses this concept through the formula:

$$\text{Risk} = \text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability}$$

This highlights that risk is not only determined by the size of the hazard but also by the degree of vulnerability of the exposed subject.

Cutter's framework fits well in developing countries like Georgia, where it enables analysis of how well the country can cope with economic shocks, which internal factors increase or decrease vulnerability, and how economic diplomacy might help mitigate these vulnerabilities.

Eriksen & Kelly (2007) argue that vulnerability management is closely linked to development policy, particularly in small and developing countries where exposure to external shocks is high and institutional response capacity is limited.

They view vulnerability not as a natural outcome, but as the result of socio-economic, institutional, and political-historical processes that make some regions or groups more vulnerable than others. Their analysis includes issues like access to economic resources, structural barriers, and legacies of past policy decisions.

According to Eriksen and Kelly, statistical indicators (e.g., poverty rates, trade dependency) are not enough. Effective assessment must include context-sensitive indicators such as local knowledge, political engagement, strategic planning capacity, and quality of governance.

They warn of the “technocratic trap”—adaptation policies based solely on metrics may ignore social roots of vulnerability, deepen inequality, and generate secondary risks or inefficiencies in resource use.

Their model is particularly relevant for countries like Georgia, which face economic colonialism, geopolitical pressure, weak institutions, and struggle to design inclusive policies for vulnerable groups. For example, Georgia’s energy security is fragile due to dependence on Russia; agriculture is climate-vulnerable and adaptation policies have often failed to meet farmers’ needs; and economic diplomacy sometimes overlooks structural roots of internal vulnerability such as regional inequality.

In sum, resilience and vulnerability management are deeply interconnected: a system’s vulnerability determines its need for resilience. For instance, heavy dependence on a single trade partner increases vulnerability, while market diversification and balanced investment strategies form the foundation of resilience.

In modern economic security analysis, these concepts are linked to practical instruments like:

- National crisis response plans
- Strategic reserves policies
- Trade and investment partner portfolio management
- Investment risk assessment systems

Ultimately, these approaches show that economic security extends beyond traditional economic policy and encompasses broader strategic contexts—sovereignty, political stability, and social equity. While scholars like Buzan and Baldwin treated economic security as a systemic challenge, contemporary authors propose a dynamic framework where security is defined not by status but by the system’s capacity to act in crisis situations.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Economic Diplomacy**

With the rise of globalization and increasing geo-economic rivalries, economic diplomacy has assumed a central role in foreign policy strategies. It encompasses the set of instruments used by states to achieve economic interests, including trade liberalization, investment

promotion, technological cooperation, trade agreements, sanctions, and development assistance mechanisms. Economic diplomacy functions both as a tool for economic growth and as a mechanism for protecting and positioning national interests in global affairs.

Economic diplomacy operates on both bilateral levels (through a wide range of agreements) and multilateral platforms—such as participation in international economic organizations like the WTO, IMF, OECD, and others.

The theoretical interpretation of economic diplomacy is mainly based on three major schools of thought: liberalism, realism, and neo-mercantilism, each of which offers a distinct perspective on the role of the state in international economic relations.

### **Liberalism**

Liberal theory argues that international economic relations foster cooperation and interdependence, reducing the likelihood of conflict and enhancing global stability.

Keohane & Nye (1977) developed the Theory of Complex Interdependence, which posits that economic ties make states mutually dependent, thereby making military confrontation less likely.

From a liberal perspective, economic diplomacy is seen as a tool for promoting cooperation and strengthening a rules-based global economic system.

### **Realism**

The realist approach views economic diplomacy primarily as an instrument of state power projection. For the state, economic resources are equivalent to military capabilities—they serve as mechanisms for pressure, coercion, or control.

Economic sanctions, technological restrictions, and tariff barriers are classic examples of realism in economic diplomacy.

Robert Gilpin (1987) describes the international economy as an arena of power relations, where strong states can manipulate the global economic order using informal rather than formal tools.

### **Neo-Mercantilism**

The neo-mercantilist perspective views economic diplomacy as a state-controlled tool to safeguard national interests—primarily against external competition.

Its three core principles are:

- Maintaining a trade surplus
- Protecting strategic sectors
- Reducing external dependencies

Robert Gilpin (1987), in *The Political Economy of International Relations*, argues that international economics reflects power and interests. The state's goal, for him, is not integration into a global liberal order, but rather mobilization of economic tools to enhance political security.

Susan Strange (1994), in *States and Markets*, asserts that despite globalization, states remain central actors in the economic game and frequently use economic policy as a tool of power preservation.

Eric Helleiner (2002), in his work *Economic Nationalism as a Challenge to Economic Liberalism*, explains neo-mercantilism as a modern form of economic nationalism that obliges the state to promote local production, reduce external vulnerability, and enhance economic sovereignty.

Friedrich List (1841), though a 19th-century thinker, laid the ideological foundation for contemporary neo-mercantilism in his work *The National System of Political Economy*. He argued that liberalism works only when economically strong actors are on equal footing—while weaker states require protective policies.

In this context, economic diplomacy serves both protective and mobilization functions—it is used to balance competition and reinforce sovereign positions on the international stage.

### **Functional Dimensions**

In practice, economic diplomacy encompasses the following key areas:

- Trade diplomacy – promoting trade and improving access to markets
- Investment diplomacy – attracting foreign direct investment (FDI)
- Sanctions policy – applying economic pressure to achieve strategic state goals
- Innovation diplomacy – fostering technological cooperation and addressing digital economy issues

- Economic branding – positioning the country as an attractive trade and investment partner

### **How Can These Approaches Be Applied to Georgia?**

Understanding the theoretical foundations of economic diplomacy is particularly important for Georgia for the following reasons:

- The country's economy is highly dependent on external markets and foreign investment
- Its geopolitical location gives it a corridor function, which—if supported by effective diplomatic policy—can be turned into a strategic advantage
- Association agreements with the EU and other partners are the result of successful economic diplomacy
- In a region marked by growing instability, economic diplomacy could serve as a means to strengthen national security

### **The Impact of Economic Diplomacy on Economic Security**

In today's global landscape, economic diplomacy is no longer merely a means for advancing national economic interests; it is increasingly recognized as a multi-functional instrument of national security. In a world where both internal and external vulnerabilities of states are on the rise, economic diplomacy serves as a proactive mechanism for risk mitigation, prevention, and resilience-building.

The influence of economic diplomacy on economic security can be understood through three core functional dimensions:

#### **1. Preventive Function**

Economic diplomacy reduces the likelihood of strategic threats and helps identify vulnerabilities before they escalate into crises. Tools such as trade agreements are actively used to shield the economy from external risks like sanctions, logistical disruptions, and supply chain shocks. These instruments create an added layer of security that underpins economic stability.

A notable case is the 2019 Japan–South Korea trade conflict, when Japan restricted the export of three critical high-tech materials—fluorinated polyimides, photoresists, and hydrogen fluoride—to South Korea. These materials are essential for semiconductor and display production, which are vital sectors for South Korea (e.g., Samsung, SK Hynix). While Japan cited national security concerns, the move was widely interpreted as a reaction to a South Korean court ruling demanding compensation for wartime forced labor. This strategic denial of key resources represented a targeted economic coercion effort.

South Korea responded by diversifying imports and ramping up domestic production, leading to a partial lifting of restrictions by 2023. This case illustrates how supply chain disruptions can function as geopolitical pressure tools in the absence of formal sanctions (Sources: Council on Foreign Relations, 2019; Kim, H. (2020), *Journal of East Asian Studies*).

Another instructive case is China's de facto coal import ban on Australia in late 2020, imposed after Australia called for an independent investigation into COVID-19's origins. While never officially acknowledged as a sanction, the ban was widely understood as political retaliation. In response, China diversified its coal imports, sourcing more from Mongolia, Indonesia, and Russia. Although the ban has since been partially relaxed, import levels remain below pre-ban volumes. (Sources: Zhang, M. (2021), *The Diplomat*; Drysdale, P. (2022), *East Asia Forum*)

Similarly, in 2021, Saudi Arabia and its allies (Kuwait, Bahrain) recalled their ambassadors from Lebanon and imposed a trade blockade after a Lebanese minister criticized Saudi involvement in Yemen. The blockade severely impacted Lebanon's agricultural exports and logistics, worsening its economic crisis and showcasing how border closures and trade embargoes can serve as prolonged tools of geo-economic pressure. (Sources: BBC News, 2021; Gause, F. G. (2022), *Foreign Affairs & International Relations Review*)

These examples demonstrate how export restrictions, trade route disruptions (e.g., Suez or Panama Canal blockages), logistical bottlenecks, or even energy supply cuts (e.g., gas pipeline sabotage) function as preventive tools within economic diplomacy.

Additionally, sanction diplomacy is employed to deter hostile actors. U.S. and EU sanctions against Iran, Venezuela, North Korea, and Sudan exemplify this approach, aiming to

pressure governments to revise technological and political behaviors perceived as threats to global peace and stability.

## 2. Resilience-Building Function

Through economic diplomacy, countries can enhance institutional and structural capacity to absorb and adapt to external shocks. Trade diversification, foreign direct investment (FDI), and strategic partnerships strengthen the economic base and reduce dependence on vulnerable sectors or single trade partners.

South Korea responded to disruptions in semiconductor and battery supply chains (exacerbated by the pandemic and U.S.–China tensions) by pursuing multilateral and bilateral trade agreements (e.g., RCEP, CEPA with India, rare-earth deals with Japan, Australia, Vietnam) and launching the “K-Semiconductor Belt” initiative to boost domestic capabilities. (Source: Wilson Center, 2022)

Chile, vulnerable to climate-related agricultural risks, responded with over 60 FTAs and international cooperation in water management with Israel, the Netherlands, and Canada. The “Chile on the Move” program helped improve technological resilience and opened new East Asian markets. (Sources: Alliance for Water, Berkeley’s Center for Belonging)

Australia, following China’s coal import ban, accelerated export diversification and initiated rare-earth production. Strategic deals with the U.S. and Japan reduced reliance on Chinese markets and reinforced economic sovereignty. (Sources: News.com.au, The Australian, 2022)

These examples highlight how economic diplomacy helps build economic resilience in the face of trade tensions, logistical crises, and strategic decoupling.

## 3. Predictability Function (Stability & Credibility)

Economic diplomacy plays a pivotal role in enhancing the predictability and credibility of a country’s economic environment by fostering rule-based international engagements and transparent policy frameworks. This function is particularly vital for attracting foreign investment, maintaining stable trade relations, and integrating into the global economy.

### **Rule-based frameworks enhance credibility**

By participating in multilateral institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and aligning domestic regulations with international norms, countries reduce uncertainty for global partners and investors. These rule-based commitments act as “credibility anchors”, reassuring market actors about long-term stability.

According to North (1990), institutions that reduce uncertainty in exchange reduce transaction costs and make investment more likely. Similarly, Bütte & Milner (2008) show that countries entering trade agreements or investment treaties signal reliability and a lower risk of expropriation or arbitrary policy shifts.

### **Credible commitments attract long-term investment**

The credibility of a country's economic institutions significantly affects its ability to attract FDI. For instance, countries that enter bilateral investment treaties (BITs) or deep trade agreements such as the EU Association Agreements commit themselves to transparency, dispute resolution mechanisms, and protection of investors' rights—all of which enhance predictability.

#### **Example – Georgia’s Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA):**

Georgia’s agreement with the EU not only improved access to the European market but also required the country to adopt EU-compatible regulatory frameworks. This, in turn, increased investor confidence and led to a rise in long-term investments in agriculture, logistics, and energy. (Source: European Commission DCFTA Report on Georgia, 2021)

### **Economic branding builds global trust**

Economic diplomacy also involves strategic branding, where countries shape their international economic image as reliable, transparent, and innovation-friendly. This soft-power element contributes to predictability by reducing reputational risks and improving investor and partner perceptions.

For example, Singapore’s reputation as a hub of legal transparency and regulatory efficiency is a deliberate product of its economic diplomacy and branding strategies. (Source: Kurlantzick, J. (2007). Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World)



This function underscores that predictability is not passive—it is actively constructed through institutional alignment, consistent policies, and strategic communication. Countries that use economic diplomacy to build stable, rules-based economic environments enjoy stronger resilience and global positioning.

### **International Examples of Economic Diplomacy**

Analyzing successful practices of economic diplomacy allows us to better understand how countries utilize economic policy both to expand foreign influence and to strengthen internal economic resilience. As discussed above, we explored several examples of economic diplomacy aligned with its preventive, resilience-building, and predictability-enhancing functions. Below are three selected case studies—Singapore, the Netherlands, and Turkey—which can serve as relevant comparisons for Georgia.

#### **Singapore – A Model of Economic Diplomacy for Small States**

Key Features:

- No natural resources; complete dependence on external trade.
- Active economic diplomacy as a guarantee of national security.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs operates an Economic Department that closely collaborates with the business sector.

Instruments and Results:

- Over 27 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) signed.
- Among the highest shares of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) globally.
- The “Singapore Inc.” model – state and private sector operate under a unified strategy.

**Takeaway for Georgia:** Small size and lack of natural resources are not obstacles to active economic diplomacy. The state must project an open, predictable, and business-oriented image on international markets.

#### **The Netherlands – Diplomatic Tools of an "Open Economy"**

Key Features:

- One of the largest exporters in agriculture and high-tech sectors.

- Implements differentiated economic diplomacy: combining aid and investment for developing countries; innovation-focused collaboration with developed economies.

Instruments and Results:

- Sectoral special envoys (e.g., water management, agriculture).
- Economic missions: delegations uniting diplomats, businesses, and academia.

**Takeaway for Georgia:** Sectoral specialization and multi-stakeholder engagement can enhance international credibility and influence.

### **Turkey – Economic Diplomacy as a Geopolitical Lever**

Key Features:

- Uses economic diplomacy as a form of "soft power" to influence neighboring regions.
- Actively pursues investments, trade agreements, and infrastructure projects in Central Asia, Africa, and the Balkans.

Instruments and Results:

- The Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) serves as a business diplomacy ecosystem.
- TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) – a development assistance mechanism that deepens economic engagement.

**Takeaway for Georgia:** Economic diplomacy can be strategically employed to strengthen regional positioning and political-economic influence, particularly in highly competitive zones (e.g., the Black Sea region).

Thus, Singapore's effective mobilization, the Netherlands' breadth of engagement, and Turkey's geopolitical orientation demonstrate that economic diplomacy—both as a theoretical and practical tool—can be tailored to suit the specific context of each country. For Georgia, a geopolitically significant yet economically small state, the following lessons may be applied:

- Developing tailored strategies and thematic specialization (e.g., green energy, logistics),
- Deepening economic interaction through diplomatic formats,

- Enhancing economic security through preventive guarantees and diversified partnerships.

A comparative table summarizing these findings is presented below for clarity.

Country	Key Characteristics	Instruments Used	Results	Lessons for Georgia
Singapore	No natural resources; trade-dependent; economic diplomacy as security tool	27+ FTAs; strong FDI policy; unified public-private strategy	High FDI inflow; strong international image	Small size is not a barrier; build open and business-friendly image
Netherlands	Major exporter of agriculture & tech; diversified diplomacy by country type	Special envoys by sector; economic missions combining diplomats, businesses, academia	Sector-specific impact; high international credibility	Leverage sectoral strengths; promote inclusive diplomatic missions
Turkey	Uses economic diplomacy for geopolitical influence in neighboring regions	DEIK business ecosystem; TIKA development assistance; strategic investments	Enhanced regional influence; growing economic ties in Africa, Balkans	Use targeted investments and diplomacy for regional positioning

Thus, although the review of major theories does not aim to provide a comparative analysis, we can still summarize the key conclusions regarding Georgia's economic security and diplomacy:

- **Lack of strategic conceptualization** – Unlike Singapore, Georgia lacks a unified vision for economic diplomacy. A national strategy needs to be developed that clearly outlines priority sectors (e.g., energy, transit, IT, agro-exports).
- **Deficit of institutional coordination** – There is no stable linkage between the government and the business community to represent economic interests. The establishment of a dedicated structure (e.g., “GeoTrade” or “InvestGeo”) could help bridge this gap.
- **Underdeveloped regional policy** – Georgia often plays a reactive role in Black Sea regional dynamics. There is a need for preventive and targeted instruments for regional engagement.
- **Insufficient integration of economic security** – In Georgia's case, economic diplomacy does not fully fulfill its security function. To address this, it should be integrated into the broader security policy framework (e.g., energy security agreements, strategic reserves systems, etc.).

## Conclusions and Recommendations

In the 21st century, the growing interdependence of economies and the diversification of global threats have assigned new significance to the concepts of economic security and economic diplomacy. This study demonstrates that these two concepts are closely interconnected: economic diplomacy is no longer merely a tool of foreign trade or investment policy, but has become a central lever of economic security.

The theoretical analysis of the literature has revealed the following insights:

- The liberal school views economic diplomacy as a mechanism for preserving peace and global stability;
- The neo-mercantilist perspective frames it as a tool for ensuring economic autonomy and managing vulnerability;
- Contemporary concepts of economic resilience emphasize the capacity of states to withstand external shocks and restore economic balance post-crisis;

International case studies—including those of Singapore, the Netherlands, Turkey, and China—illustrate how effective economic diplomacy enables states not only to position themselves in global markets, but also to construct flexible security architectures based on partnership, credibility, and multilateral cooperation.

For Georgia, a geopolitically vulnerable and resource-constrained country, these concepts are critically important. Despite its free trade agreements and pro-Western strategic orientation, Georgia still lacks:

- a coherent strategic vision for economic diplomacy;
- institutional coordination and active engagement of the private sector;
- proactive lobbying of economic interests at the foreign policy level.

Therefore, a new policy framework is needed to support Georgia's economic security and diplomacy, one that:

- is tailored to the country's real needs and capabilities,
- incorporates sectoral priorities and regional strategies, and
- is grounded in resilience-oriented economic approaches.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are outlined to strengthen economic diplomacy and economic security in the Georgian context:

### Strategic Policy Level

- Georgia needs a clearly defined economic diplomacy strategy that outlines priority sectors (e.g., energy, transport, agro-exports, ICT) and geographic priorities (EU, Central Asia, Middle East, East Africa).
- Economic security must be integrated into the national security strategy—resilience and vulnerability management should be formalized as an independent pillar of the country's national security framework.
- Coordination between external affairs and economic institutions must be significantly strengthened through the creation of a joint platform involving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economy, and business associations to lobby national economic interests.

### Institutional Level

- Specialized training in economic diplomacy should be offered to diplomatic personnel, including areas such as trade, investment, economics, and strategic planning.
- Public–private dialogue must be deepened—business actors should be included in diplomatic negotiations as expert contributors (e.g., in trade missions), particularly when exploring new markets.
- Economic intelligence and analytical capacity should be enhanced through systematic data collection and analysis of global risks and geo-economic dynamics. Establishing an Economic Security Monitoring Center could support this goal.

### Regional and International Level

- Georgia should economize its transit potential—leveraging geographic positioning not just as a passage corridor, but as a tool of economic influence. This includes transforming logistics platforms into instruments of economic diplomacy.

- Independent partnerships must be deepened beyond the Euro-Atlantic space, especially in Asia and the Middle East, to reduce over-dependence on any single market.
- Sustainable development goals (SDGs) and climate diplomacy should be integrated into the economic diplomacy agenda, including promotion of green investment initiatives.

#### Scientific and Educational Level

Thematic research in economic security and diplomacy should be supported through dedicated research grants and institutional funding.

Academic programs should be developed in universities, introducing specialized courses or modules such as: Economic Security and Global Affairs; Economic Diplomacy and Geo-economics.

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# Toward a Theory of Digital Rationality: Mental Codes and Symbolic Control

Maka Gurgenidze

Doctoral Program of Social Sciences

GIPA - Georgian Institute of Public Affairs

Tbilisi, Georgia

## Abstract

This article develops the concept of *digital rationality* to explain how digital platforms function as emotionally and symbolically charged environments that subtly shape the process of reasoning and guide behavior. Drawing on Max Weber's typology of rational action, Geert Hofstede's notion of *mental programming* and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *symbolic power*, the article argues that modern hybrid warfare strategies rely on emotional and value-based codes internalized during early socialization. *Digital rationality* thus emerges as a new medium of symbolic power that impedes transformative social change, demanding further research to better understand and critically scrutinize its mechanisms.

**Keywords:** *digital rationality, value-rational action, symbolic power, hybrid warfare, algorithmic manipulation, emotional coding, digital platforms, cognitive warfare*

## **Introduction**

This article introduces the concept of digital rationality to explain how hybrid—and more specifically cognitive — warfare actors use digital platforms to implicitly influence human behavior and guide it in preferred directions (Rid, 2020; Jeangène Vilmer et al., 2018; NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2020).

Drawing on Max Weber's typology of rational action (Weber, 1905/2002; Weber, 1946; Swidler, 1986; Parsons, 1951), Geert Hofstede's notion of mental programming (2001) and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power (1989), the article aims to conceptualize the essence and effectiveness of digital rationality as a mechanism for manipulating subconscious orientations shaped through early cultural imprinting.

We argue that digital platforms reinforce such deep-seated patterns by tailoring content to users' emotional and value predispositions, amplifying messages that resonate with these predispositions and creating algorithmic feedback loops that limit exposure to alternative viewpoints. In doing so, they simulate autonomy, generate conformity and subtly direct behavior (Chesney & Citron, 2019).

This process becomes especially consequential during hybrid conflicts (Fuchs, 2017; Morozov, 2011). Here, manipulation goes beyond misinformation—it reactivates emotional codes such as fear, threat perception, moral superiority, national pride or obedience (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018; Blackbird.AI, 2023). These sentiments are then embedded in persuasive digital narratives that bypass the process of reasoning (Tiilikainen, 2024; Murray & Mansoor, 2012; Pomerantsev, 2019). This article proposes a new conceptual lens to unpack this mechanism at a theoretical level. It seeks to explain how digital platforms sustain actions rooted in emotional and internalized values—even when such actions appear rational on the surface. Which is why in most technologically advanced societies, strategic way of thinking is unable to lead the collective action.

## **Methodology**

The methodological approach of this article is conceptual and theory-driven. It employs a qualitative, interpretive strategy grounded in political sociology and value theory, which is

well suited for analyzing the cultural and symbolic dimensions of power (Yanow, 2000; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

The primary aim is to explain a growing social and political tendency—the erosion of critical reasoning and the increasing reliance on emotionally and instinctively driven responses. To explore this phenomenon, the article introduces the term *digital rationality*, which is defined and elaborated through a conceptual framework that integrates sociological perspectives and complementary insights from cognitive psychology.

Building on existing literature on digital influence, disinformation, and algorithmic manipulation (e.g., Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018; Chesney & Citron, 2019; Tiilikainen, 2024), this study seeks to move beyond descriptive accounts by offering a theoretical interpretation of how emotionally encoded value systems are reactivated and operationalized through digital platforms—particularly in the context of cognitive warfare. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how digitally mediated communication influences political behavior through non-rational channels.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation of this article brings together three major perspectives: Max Weber's theory of rationality (1978), Geert Hofstede's (2001) concept of mental programming and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power (1977).

Max Weber's theory of rationality provides the conceptual starting point for this framework. Weber emphasized that human action reflects varying degrees of conscious deliberation and distinguished among actions shaped by habit, emotion, or value commitments and those guided by systematic calculation of means and ends. This graded view reveals that what appears rational on the surface may, in practice, be deeply rooted in cultural conventions or moral ideals inherited through socialization. As Swidler (1986) observes, such patterns offer actors stable guides for action, particularly in moments of uncertainty, and often bypass active critical reasoning. This insight is crucial for understanding how digital platforms replicate these ingrained tendencies, sustaining

patterns of thought and behavior that appear rational yet rest on enduring affective and cultural codes.

Hofstede's (2001) theory of mental programming expands on this idea by suggesting that cultural values are instilled through early socialization and persist as subconscious patterns—what he famously calls the “software of the mind” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 2). These mental scripts act as interpretive frameworks for evaluating meaning and guiding behavior. Drawing on Rokeach's (1973) concept of humans as “evaluating animals,” Hofstede argues that such internalized value-codes shape one's perception of what is reasonable or legitimate, often rendering them resistant to critical reflection.

Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic power* adds a structural dimension to the framework. Through his theory of *habitus*, Bourdieu (1977, 1989, 1990, 1991) explains how social structures are internalized and expressed in patterned behaviors. Symbolic power operates when dominant meanings are perceived as legitimate or self-evident, thereby reproducing existing hierarchies without overt coercion.

Taken together, these theoretical lenses help explain how *digital rationality* operates: not merely through logic or facts but by activating traditional and emotional dispositions to maintain emotional authority while simulating rational decision-making.

### **Digital Influence and Cognitive Manipulation in Contemporary Literature**

In the contemporary world, digital landscape often serves as a tool of cognitive warfare, which encompasses psychological manipulation, disinformation and the construction of strategic narratives to achieve political or ideological objectives (Blackbird.AI, 2023).

According to Rid (2020), cognitive warfare represents the most advanced form of information conflict, targeting the mind as the primary battlefield. It does not rely solely on spreading false information but aims to shape how individuals perceive reality itself.

Similarly, Vilmer et al. (2018) define cognitive warfare as a strategy that blends disinformation, narrative control and psychological operations to erode trust and fragment democratic discourse.

The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (2020) describes cognitive warfare as a long-term effort to exploit the vulnerabilities of human cognition, aiming to destabilize societies by subtly altering how individuals think, feel and act.

This process is facilitated by modern technologies and cyber capabilities, which have significantly reshaped the global strategic environment—enabling both state and non-state actors to employ cognitive manipulation to influence the mental processes of targeted populations (Tiilikainen, 2024).

Social media platforms are central to this transformation. According to Chesney and Citron (2019), bots, sponsored posts and targeted campaigns amplify curated narratives, tailoring emotionally resonant messages to segmented audiences. This content often leverages fear, moral outrage or identity-based mobilization to provoke specific behavioral responses (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018).

Such digital strategies are used for ideological thereby economic and geopolitical influence. Klaus Schwab, for instance, discusses the Fourth Industrial Revolution, defined by the convergence of technologies such as AI, blockchain and biotechnology. He underscores how these transformations are reshaping the economy, society and human life, demanding new policy frameworks and governance models (Schwab, 2017).

Meanwhile, Shoshana Zuboff critically examines how tech corporations like Google and Facebook commodify user data for profit a process she terms "surveillance capitalism." She warns that this model undermines personal privacy, freedom and democracy (Zuboff, 2019).

Likewise, Fuchs (2017) argues that digital platforms often simulate democratic participation without fostering genuine critical thought, reinforcing existing ideological biases due to algorithmic prioritization of user engagement over diverse deliberation. Morozov (2011) similarly cautions that the internet is not inherently a democratic force. In *The Net Delusion*, he explains how authoritarian regimes can exploit digital media to manipulate citizens through moralized narratives and identity-based appeals.

Together, these contributions highlight the increasingly sophisticated mechanisms through which digital systems influence cognition, perception and collective behavior.

## Discussion

This article interprets current hybrid, in particular cognitive, warfare strategies through the conceptual lens of digital rationality which draws on the theoretical insights of Max Weber, Geert Hofstede and Pierre Bourdieu. These thinkers help explain what digital platforms actually engage with—and why those structures are especially prone to manipulation.

At the center of this framework lies Max Weber's theory of rational action, developed across several of his works (Weber, 1905/2002; 1946; 1978). Weber regarded rationality as an evolving phenomenon. With the advancement of science, he believed that individuals would increasingly turn away from mysticism. Religion would not vanish, but rather become one worldview among others—alongside science, politics and economics. For Weber, gaining knowledge of how the world is organized would empower individuals to exert greater control over their lives and environment. This capacity for understanding would enhance critical awareness, allowing people to assess events rationally and to calculate costs and benefits more clearly. In the long run, such development of rational faculties was seen as a necessary condition for the social change (Weber, 1946: 139; Glock, 1988; Shiner, 1967: 216).

Weber distinguishes among four types of meaningful social behavior: traditional, affectual, value-rational and instrumental. According to him, all four are rational as long as they hold the meaning for the actor, but the degree of rationality varies. Traditional actions are based on habituated norms; affectual actions emerge from immediate emotion; value-rational actions (*Wertrationalität*) are driven by internal commitments to moral or cultural ideals; and only instrumental rational action (*Zweckrational*) relies on pure deliberate calculation - selection of means toward clearly defined ends. (Weber, 1978; Swidler, 1986; Parsons, 1951). While Weber emphasized the role of instrumental rationality in enabling systemic social change, he also acknowledged the enduring significance of non-instrumental forms of action.

In the conceptual framework of *digital rationality*, we rely on Weber's philosophy of rationality but distinguish more broadly between relatively weakly reflective forms—

traditional, affectual, and value-rational—and instrumental rationality, where critical reasoning is central. We argue that despite scientific and technological development, the less reflective forms remain dominant because of their strong presence in mental and emotional codes.

Here, Hofstede's concept of mental programming becomes particularly relevant. Hofstede (2001) argues that cultural values are instilled during early socialization unconsciously, shaping both perception and action. They serve as enduring beliefs that function as standards or criteria for judgment, making them resistant to change even when confronted with rational arguments (Rokeach, 1973).

Bourdieu's theory of *symbolic power* (1989) further enhances this analysis. Through the notion of *habitus*, Bourdieu (1977, 1990, 1991) explains how cultural dispositions become embodied over time, allowing dominant actors to impose meanings that appear legitimate not through force but through resonance with existing value systems. In digital settings, this symbolic influence operates through emotionally charged content, storylines and imagery that reaffirm inherited beliefs without invoking critical scrutiny.

In this light, digital platforms do not merely disseminate information—they reproduce cultural codes by delivering them in symbolic way. This mechanism becomes especially consequential in the context of cognitive warfare, where actors combine military, psychological and informational tactics to shape public perception. Rather than merely delivering propaganda, these strategies aim to strengthen pre-existing evaluative frameworks through which individuals interpret the world (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018; Chesney & Citron, 2019; Blackbird.AI, 2023; Tiilikainen, 2024).

We frame these processes as *digital rationality*—that implies the crafting of messages that appear logically coherent while being emotionally encoded to trigger pre-rational responses—especially those tied to fear, identity and obedience.

What makes these strategies effective is not only their emotional resonance but their alignment with a deeper human impulse: the demand for certainty, orientation and legitimacy. The collapse of sacred frameworks—whether religious or ideological—has not erased the need for structure, meaning and certainty. As Dostoevsky (Dostoevsky, 2003,



Book V, Chapter 4, p. 259) presciently warned: If God does not exist, everything could be permitted. This phrase encapsulates the existential vacuum left by the erosion of transcendent and ideological reference points.

Cognitive warfare actors take advantage of this vacuum by spreading digitally shaped stories that offer emotionally powerful but familiar meanings to replace lost certainty.

For example, a compelling example of *digital rationality* can be seen in the information environment surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies show that alternative media outlets framed vaccine narratives—particularly regarding AstraZeneca—using heightened sadness and fear, whereas mainstream sources adopted more neutral or hopeful emotional tones (Semeraro et al., 2022). On social media, politically polarized users clustered into dense echo chambers that amplified emotionally resonant misinformation while filtering out corrective messages (Park et al., 2021). Moreover, research demonstrates that emotionally charged fake news about COVID-19 spread significantly faster than factual corrections due to algorithmic prioritization of engagement-driven content (Alam et al., 2024). Together, these dynamics illustrate how digital rationality mobilizes inherited emotional and cultural codes—leveraged and magnified by algorithmic systems—to simulate reasoned discourse while guiding public behavior through affect and identity.

During the annexation of Crimea, emotionally charged appeals to national unity, historical justice and cultural belonging were disseminated through digital media. These narratives did not rely on factual argumentation but on symbolic associations and moral cues that resonated with value-rational mental frameworks. Such strategies repackage fear, loyalty, and moral duty in formats that largely bypass critical reflection and activate inherited ideological commitments (DeBenedictis, 2021; Atlantic Council, 2023).

## Conclusion

This article introduced the concept of *digital rationality* to explain how modern digital systems do not function as neutral infrastructures for reasoning, but rather as platforms charged with emotion and value-laden meaning. Drawing on Weber's typology of rational

action, Hofstede's notion of mental programming and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, the article shows how digital rationalization serves as a key mechanism in hybrid warfare strategies.

The purpose of this framework is not limited to theoretical contribution. It also helps explain why, despite modern ideals of reason—central to both Weber's vision and Enlightenment thinking—instrumental rationality has not led to meaningful social transformation. We argue that it remains overshadowed by traditional, affectual and value-rational modes of action—rooted during the early socialization and now constitute the foundation of digital rationalization.

In today's media environment, these inherited symbolic codes are reactivated by algorithmic systems that simulate rational discourse through emotionally charged messages. This value and emotional logic sustains the power of digital rationalization, allowing it to shape behavior without overt coercion.

Understanding the success of hybrid influence campaigns therefore requires us to consider the varying levels of reasoning that guide human action. From this perspective, the limits of rationality become clearer. In earlier eras, uncritical thinking was often shaped by rigid ideological or religious dogma. Today, these constraints are less visible but no less powerful: digital rationality increasingly structures perception through emotionally resonant narratives—especially those rooted in religion, national identity and moral conviction.

If *digital rationality* is indeed the new medium of symbolic power, then a central task for future research is to examine how its invisible mechanisms can be exposed and critically addressed—especially where they prevent transformative change.

Future research could build on this conceptual groundwork by exploring how cognitive schemas (Piaget, 1952), prototype categories (Rosch, 1975) and metaphorical frames (Lakoff, 2008) interact with the symbolic and cultural codes highlighted by Weber, Hofstede, and Bourdieu. Interdisciplinary studies bridging sociology, psychology, and linguistics could illuminate how these mental structures are mobilized alongside emotional triggers in digital contexts to influence political attitudes and collective behavior. Empirical investigations might also examine how specific algorithmic strategies amplify these

cognitive patterns, providing insights into how societies could encourage more critical and reflective engagement within digitally mediated environments.

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# **An Assessment of Security Challenges and their Impact on Sustainable Development in the North Central Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria**

**Success Esomchi Obi**

Department of Public Administration, School of Management Studies,

Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja PMB 1101

Orchid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4111-4077>

**Egwemi-Ugbeda C. Ejura**

Ph.D in Political Science.

Department, Prince Abukakar Audu University, Anyigba Kogi State, PMB 1008 Nigeria

Orchid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4309-8194>

**Yahaya Segun Alilu**

M.Sc in Political Science, LLB in Law.

Registrar/Lecture I with Political Science Department, Prince Abukakar Audu University,

Anyigba Kogi State, PMB 1008 Nigeria

Orchid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-3293-0556>

**Edegbo Sunday Jeremiah**

Department of Political Science

Prince Abukakar Audu University, Anyigba Kogi State, PMB 1008 Nigeria

**Abdul Yahaya**

Department of Political Science

Prince Abukakar Audu University, Anyigba Kogi State, PMB 1008 Nigeria

**OLORUNDARE, Abraham Sunday**

Department of Political Science

Prince Abukakar Audu University, Anyigba Kogi State, PMB 1008 Nigeria

### **Abstract**

Our current global reality is characterised by the frequent occurrence of insurgencies, kidnapping, banditry, terrorism and war. This study was undertaken to ascertain the impact of kidnapping and banditry on sustainable environment development in North Central Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. Using multidisciplinary approach, findings reveals that security challenges undermines sustainable development in the study areas due to poor security infrastructure, bad governance/corruption and poverty which had detrimental effects on economic development and human security, such as increase in government spending on security, costing the victim's family money and by extension elitist policies constituting a major challenge. However, findings further highlights that the central propelling factors of security challenges in Nigeria are weak institutions; executive, legislative, judiciary, institution of governance, political parties and oppositions and civil societies which are the hegemonic structure that diffuse the world view. We recommends, proactive policies by the executive arm of government to eradicate cost of governance, systemic corruption, unemployment, extreme poverty, and by extension national/states assembly passing bills that are citizen-centred extension integrating the informal security



network (vigilantee) to protect the ungoverned spaces and by extension strong institutions of the state over primordial loyalty and sentiments, ethnic/religious bias in policy making.

**Keywords:** *Insecurity, Human Security, Poverty/unemployment, Socioeconomic Development, Sustainable Development & Policy Implementation*

## Introduction

In the pursuit of addressing under-development AIDS, destitution, famishment, and gender bias, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were conceived in 2015 by United Nations. The United Nations in New York adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, following the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which nations agreed upon in 2000 and ended in 2015, (Kumari, Kumar, & Vivekadhish, 2016). The MDGs did not include important development goals like electricity and infrastructure, despite not completely neglecting social outcomes. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the fundamental drivers of sustainable development rather than merely quantifiable achievements, reflecting the difficulties we encounter in development. The SDGs have taken a global view, addressing issues that affect all countries and encouraging public-private partnerships to achieve them, (see Table 1). The United Nations birthed these aspirations in 2015, envisioning a more fortified and equitable future for all. It was envisaged that all nations would have diligently achieved these aspirations by the culmination of 2030.

**Table 1:** The 17 Sustainable Development Goals

SDG		SDG	
<b>1</b>	No poverty	<b>9</b>	Industry, innovation, and infrastructure
<b>2</b>	Zero hunger	<b>10</b>	Reduce inequality
<b>3</b>	Good health and well-being	<b>11</b>	Sustainable cities and communities
<b>4</b>	Quality education	<b>12</b>	Responsible consumption and production
<b>5</b>	Gender equality	<b>13</b>	Climate action
<b>6</b>	Clean water and sanitation	<b>14</b>	Life under water
<b>7</b>	Affordable and clean energy	<b>15</b>	Life on land;
<b>8</b>	Decent work and economic growth	<b>16</b>	Peace, justice, and strong institutions
<b>17</b>	<b>Partnership for the goals</b>		

UN SDG Policy Framework, (2015)

The SDGs encompass an array of seventeen distinct objectives, encompassing Goal 2 (pertaining to nourishment and human well-being), Goal 3 (embracing holistic well-being for every age bracket), and Goal 4 (dedicated to the realm of education). The fourth goal underscores the importance of education, endeavouring to ensure that everyone is endowed with fair and top-notch educational opportunities, facilitating lifelong learning. Alamin and Greenwood (2018) underscore the significance of Goals 11 (centred on safety and sustainability) and 17 (pursuing peaceful and comprehensive sustainable expansion). The attainment of pivotal objectives for sustainable growth and advancement hinges upon the safeguarding of lives and property, as observed in the SGD SAED Workshop of 2023. Encouraging systemic implementation involves distributing implementation targets throughout the goals. In order to achieve success, it is imperative to place a greater emphasis on the links that exist in three specific areas. 1. across different sectors (such as banking, agriculture, energy, and transportation); 2. among various stakeholders (such as municipal councils, government agencies, enterprises, and non-governmental organisations); and 3. Within and among nations with different levels of wealth. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an enhanced iteration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) designed to fortify the interconnections among economic, social, and environmental issues. However, it is crucial to ensure that enhancing human well-being in the immediate future does not jeopardise long-term well-being by causing harm to the social and natural resources that our global life support system depends on (Kumar et al., 2016). The United Nations categorises the methods of accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as funding, technology, capacity building, trade, policy consistency, collaborations, data, monitoring, and accountability. This is where the practical applications of sustainability science truly excel.

However, our main focus here is the security risk (kidnapping & banditry in North-central Nigeria) associated with the implementation of the sustainable development. Firstly, our current global reality is characterised by the frequent occurrence of insurgencies, kidnapping, banditry, terrorism and war. Secondly, non-state actors are increasingly

becoming a significant threat to state stability, regardless of their economic status. Throughout history, the occurrence and operation of kidnapping and banditry have been noted in various regions around the world, with records dating back to the 17th century. Banditry has historically thrived in the mountainous regions of countries like Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey in Europe (Aisha, 2020). Banditry has also been documented in diverse Asian nations, including Iran, the Philippines, and India (Mohammed, 2019). In Africa, especially in Nigeria, bandits typically carry out their criminal activities in remote areas such as villages, ungoverned space, community markets, and places of worship. Despite the government's continuous efforts to combat banditry, the issue persists in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region (Awwal, 2020). Banditry poses a significant security challenge in Nigeria as it continues to disrupt the country's economic, political, and social spheres. According to Aisha (2020), the prevalence and severity of banditry in Nigeria have led to increased regional insecurity, which potentially threatens the process of regional integration in Northern Nigeria. Additionally, research by Saleh (2015) has revealed that numerous bandits from West African countries like Niger and Mali have been recruited to carry out extensive attacks in various nations within the sub-region. They cross the porous borders of West Africa while armed, offering support to their fellow bandits in executing substantial acts of aggression or retaliation. Kidnapping on the other hand, is a prominent security concern that has significantly increased the risk to the overall security of the north-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Social insecurity is a harmful phenomenon (Alexander and Klein, 2019).

The need for security emerges as a major concern within the field of social theory and practice, particularly in a context where perceived uncertainty and danger are present. In reaction to the intimidating pressures of uncertainty, rapid change, and complexity, this phenomenon shows a broad yearning for more reliability, stability, and concreteness. Ironically, there is no consensus on what is meant by the phrase "security," making it impossible to predict with any certainty. Contrarily, it establishes the boundaries of a region that is hotly contested. Obi, Job, Isyaku, Letswa, and Kolawole, (2018), defines security as the condition in which individuals are free from threats to their personal safety

and livelihood, including physical harm, illness, unemployment, and violations of their human rights, regardless of their location within a sovereign state. Security could be conceptualised as a "public good" to facilitate the promotion of sustainable human development and the advancement of peace and stability at regional, national, and international levels (Obi, 2017). In Nigeria, the escalating occurrences of terrorism, armed robbery, banditry, abduction, corruption, and ethnic conflict pose a significant threat to the safety and security of individuals and property. The lack of adequate safeguards for the protection of the lives and property of the general populace is a major impediment to the achievement of substantial progress. Both domestic and foreign investors may become uneasy in the presence of a gloomy atmosphere. Access to resources and control over the distribution of benefits are key determinants of numerous disputes (Obi, Usman, & Adegbe, 2020).

The aforementioned concerns function as divisive factors within Nigerian communities. This has led to an alarming state of insecurity, characterised by a variety of criminal activities, including terrorism, piracy, human trafficking, drug trafficking, cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery, advance fee fraud (419), assassination or political killings, thuggery, human sacrifice, and ritual killings, among others. According to Loertscher and Milton (2015), kidnapping incidents on a global scale have increased significantly since 2007. This trend is not restricted to a specific geographical region. In Nigerian society, the prevalence of kidnapping has reached an alarming level. In a similar vein, Kyrian (2009) documented the observations made by the former Inspector General of Police in Nigeria, who highlighted that kidnappers and hostage takers had obtained a total of \$15 million in ransom (equivalent to around \$100 million) during the period spanning from 2006 to 2009. The surge in incidents of kidnapping poses a significant threat to the well-being and assets of the populace. Kidnapping is a criminal act that is subject to legal consequences in Nigeria, as stipulated in Section 364 of the Criminal Code Act in Nigeria. Individuals found to be engaged in the aforementioned activity are anticipated to be subjected to a punitive measure of a decade-long period of incarceration. In addition to the aforementioned remark, certain states, such as the Southern States; Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Enugu,

Imo, Ebonyi, and Rivers, have enacted legislation known as the "Prohibition of Hostage Taking and Related Offences Law." Those found guilty under this statute are subject to death penalty. Human security and sustainable development are two main variables of this research. The main point is that banditry/kidnapping is a major problem that endangers people's safety in many ways. Human development and economic advancement become impossible goals in a setting of uncertainty and instability. The issue of sustainable development and human security in the north-central region has been neglected.

The presence of peace greatly facilitates the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of eradicating illiteracy, rendering it a more feasible endeavour. Conversely, the absence of peace renders life devoid of purpose. This study specifically focused on the socio-economic well-being, lives, and properties of individuals residing in the north central geopolitical zone, while also identifying the actors responsible for these incidents. This research aims to address the following inquiries: What are the root causes of banditry/kidnapping in the north-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria? What are the implications of banditry/kidnapping in terms of human security? What are the effects of banditry/kidnapping on socioeconomic development in the areas under study? What are the governmental actions implemented to address the issue of banditry/kidnapping? What are the obstacles associated with addressing the issue of kidnapping in the context of human security? The present study is organised into four distinct sections. Section one provides an overview of the background information pertaining to the paper. Section two focuses on the research methodology employed in the study. Section three encompasses the presentation and discussion of the obtained results. Lastly, Section four addresses the conclusion.

In the present context, this study would function as an enlightening investigation into the significance, origins, classifications, and nature of security challenges within the north-central geopolitical zone. The research holds substantial academic merit, as the significance of a society free from violence in fostering stable economic development cannot be underestimated. Within this particular setting, the study would examine the form and manner in which abduction and inadequate security infrastructure hinder economic

development. The analysis highlights the detrimental impact of the event not just on the path of democratisation but also on the economy. The primary focus of this study is to identify and analyse security lessons that may be shared inside the North-Central Geopolitical Zone, as well as on a broader scale within the entire Nigeria State.

## Methodology

The research work was carried out across five states in north central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, and the rationale was due to the geographical spread of banditry/kidnapping activities and its effects on human security and socioeconomic development from 2015-2023,

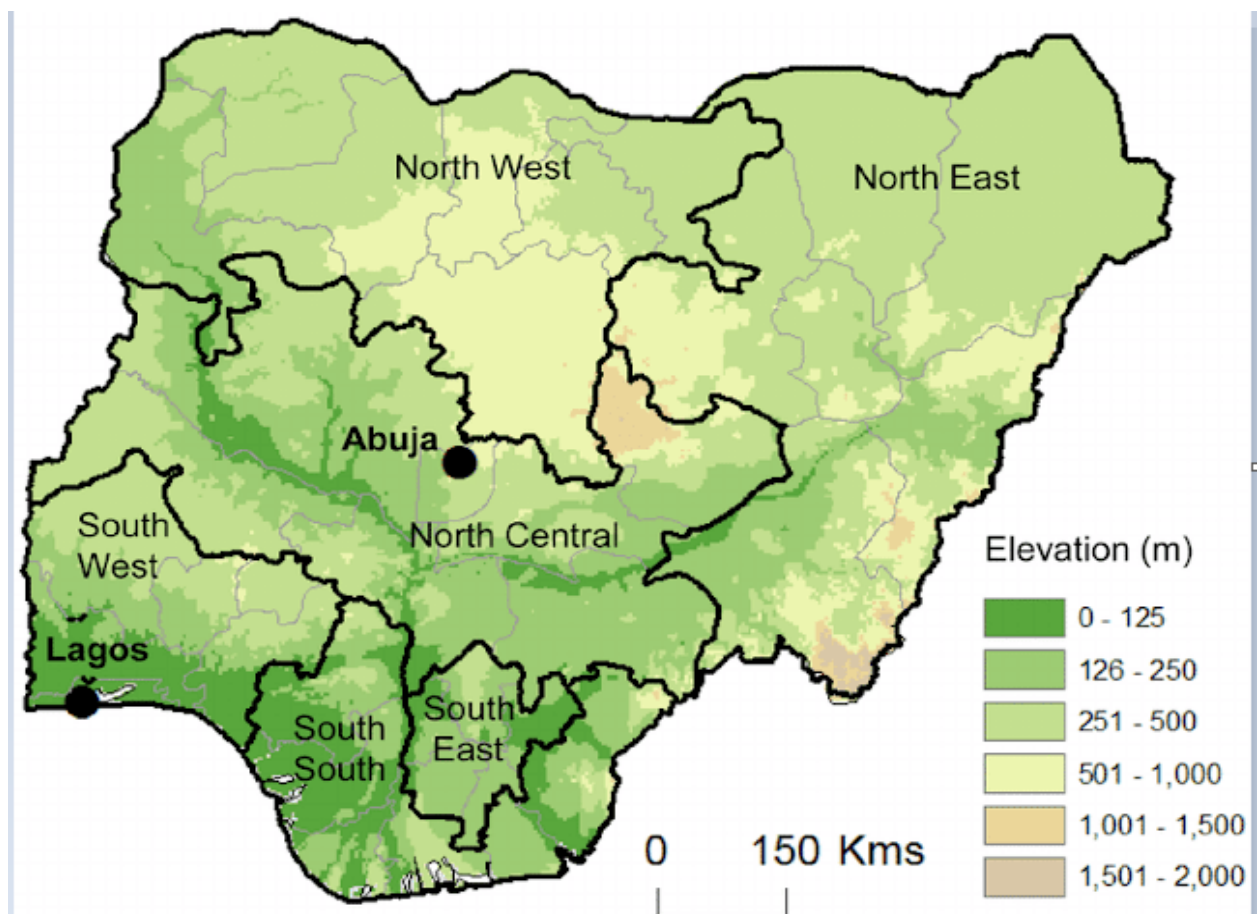


Figure 1: Map showing north central Nigeria,

(Source: Adapted from Usman, Enojo, Ujah, Kakwagh, Ocholi, Obi, 2023)

In this study, the objective was to draw general conclusions about the entire population by employing a multi-stage sampling approach. The sampling process involved several stages, and three random sampling procedures were used. Here's an overview of the sampling strategy:

1. **Selection of Study Units:** A random sample of 15 study units was chosen from the North-Central region, specifically from three Local Governments Areas each from Kogi, Benue, Jos, Niger, and Nassarawa states.
2. **Selection of Council Wards:** From the 15 selected study units, a total of 30 council wards were randomly chosen.
3. **Selection of Participants:** In the final stage, 13 participants were randomly selected from each of the 30 council wards. This resulted in a total sample size of 390 participants.

A pilot survey and pretest were conducted before the main survey to ensure the reliability of the research instrument. Sixty individuals who were not part of the main sample were given the instrument to complete as part of the pilot study. The Cronbach's alpha formula was applied to assess the reliability of the instrument, and the final value for the instrument's Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.86. Descriptive statistics, including tables and graphs, were used to analyse the data collected during the field survey. After a period of three months, 383 usable surveys remained for examination. The study focused on security challenges to sustainable development in North Central Geopolitical Zone, with reference to Kidnapping/Banditry and Human Security and the relationship between banditry/kidnapping (the independent variable) and its impact on sustainable development vis-a-vis human security and socioeconomic growth (the dependent variables).

## **Hypothesis**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Banditry/kidnapping does not significantly affect sustainable development in North-central geopolitical zone

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Banditry/kidnapping does significantly affect sustainable development in North-central geopolitical zone

Multiple Regression and Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypotheses, while the regression establishes how the variables under this research work affects each other, by showing how one causes the other to change, correlation coefficient established the relationship between the two variables.

### Model Specification

The model specification is stated as;

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + e \dots\dots\dots (i)$$

Represented as

$$SED = b_0 + b_1 EBKHS + b_2 SESD + b_3 SEIIDP + b_4 IPUBK + e \dots\dots\dots (ii)$$

Where;

Y = SED (Security Effect of Development),  $b_0$  = constant,  $b_1$ = EBKHS (Effect of banditry/kidnapping on human security),  $b_2$ = SESD (Security effect on socioeconomic development),  $b_3$ =SEIIDP (Security effect on Initiation and implementation of developmental projects),  $b_4$  = IPUBK (Influence of Poverty/Unemployment on Banditry/Kidnapping and e = error of terms.

### Results

**Table 2: Research Question One: What are the underlying factors responsible for kidnapping in North-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria?**

Table 2 presents finding, the factors that threaten human security and socio-economic development in Nigeria's north-central geopolitical zone are as follows: bad governance



(poor leadership or corruption) with 31%, poverty with 38%, insecurity with 7%, illiteracy with 2%, unemployment with 22%, the desire to become wealthy quickly with 0%, and political thuggery with 0%. This suggests that among the factors that have been identified as contributing to kidnapping are extreme poverty situation in study areas, poor governance and inadequate security architecture are at the top of the list in the research areas and in Nigeria as well. This finding agrees with Obi and Uche's (2019) assertion that poor governance and policies implemented by ruling elites, as well as the pervasive corruption that has ravaged the fabric of the Nigerian state to the point where even its security personnel have been corrupted, undermine national unity. This, in turn, breeds security challenges such as banditry/kidnapping for ransom, conflicts between farmers and herders, Boko Haram, arms proliferation, drug trafficking, and organ harvesting in certain regions of the country.

Table 2 and 3 offers information on the total number of reported cases of banditry and kidnapping during the years examined, as well as the corresponding ransom amounts paid. Here's a summary of the key findings: Benue State reported the highest number of cases, with 504 incidents accounting for 33% of the total, Kogi States reported 415 cases (27%), Jos reported 287 cases (19%), Niger reported 176 cases (11%), Nasarawa reported 164 cases (10%). These findings indicate that banditry/kidnapping incidents are more frequent in the peripheral areas of the states than in their respective state capitals. This situation raises concerns about the safety and security of lives in these areas, which negates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 2 (food and human security), Goal 3 (healthy lives for all ages), Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 11 (safety and sustainability), and Goal 17 (peaceful and inclusive sustainable development). The narrative also provides specific examples of banditry/kidnapping incidents, including the demanded ransom amounts in table 2.:

1. **May 2008:** A kidnapping occurred with a ransom payment of ₦1,500,000.
2. **October 2008:** Another kidnapping took place, with the ransom amount undisclosed.

3. **January 2009:** A man was taken hostage in Benue and was released upon payment of ₦3,000,000.
4. **September 2009:** Another person was taken hostage in an unspecified area with no public disclosure of the ransom.
5. **March 2010:** Someone was kidnapped, demanding a ransom of ₦1,550,000.
6. **September 2010:** Another kidnapping occurred, with a ₦2,000,000 ransom demand in Jos.
7. **June 2011:** An additional kidnapping incident
8. **January 2011:** A child was taken hostage in Nasarawa with a ransom request of ₦5,000,000.
9. **September 2012:** Another person was taken hostage, demanding ₦3,000,000 in Niger State.
10. **January 2012:** A man was kidnapped, but the ransom amount remains unspecified.
11. **2012 saw the abduction of another man by Fulani's, who demanded an undisclosed ransom.**
12. **October 2013:** A passenger on public transport was kidnapped, requiring a ransom of ₦2,000,000.
13. **March 2014:** Another kidnapping occurred in the north-central geopolitical zone, with a ransom request of ₦600,000.
14. **August 2014:** A man was taken hostage, demanding a ransom of ₦2,000,000. (see table 2-3).

The narrative goes on to describe other incidents, each with its own unique ransom demand. It's important to note that kidnapping is not exclusive to Nigeria or African countries. The report mentions that efficient policing and low poverty levels in Western Europe have made banditry and kidnapping for ransom extremely rare. However, it highlights "tiger" kidnappings in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, which involve the simultaneous occurrence of robbery and kidnapping. Additionally, kidnappings for economic reasons are becoming more common in Mediterranean countries. The primary concern raised is that the high incidence of kidnappings and banditry in north-

central Nigeria could hinder the region's progress in achieving its sustainable development goals by 2030.

**Research Question Two: What are the underlying effects of banditry/kidnapping on livelihood of citizens in North-central geopolitical zone?**

Table 4 demonstrates the effects of banditry and kidnapping in North-Central Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. It was discovered that effect of kidnapping on victim psychologically/emotionally is high (13%) in the sample areas, insecurity in north-central 9%, It was also observed that the effect of kidnapping is antidevelopment to efforts of sustainable development goals (SDG) with 18%, financial loss to the victim's family 14%, sadness in the victim's family, 10%, negative image to the country 6%. Banditry/kidnapping also reduces foreign investments, 11%, creates fear in the neighbourhoods and in the county 13%, and increase in the government expenditure on security 6%. This findings shows that banditry and kidnapping threatens and undermines Sustainable Development Goal; goal 2, (food and human security), goal 3 (healthy lives for all ages), 4, (Quality education), 11 (safety and sustainability), 17(peaceful and inclusive sustainable development) from succeeding in North-Central Nigeria. This finding is in consonance with Usman, et.al. (2020) who stated that kidnapping is fast destroying economic good and can destroy the survival of Nigeria as a nation. In some places, factories are closing up, people no longer visit their villages, and social and economic activities are slowly stopping. Uche, et.al (2023) notes that on the individual basis, much money (up to N20 billion) has been spent by the relatives of the victims as ransom to free the victims between 2015 and 2023 in Nigeria. At the governmental level, the economic effects of kidnapping involve the expenditure on security and security agents. For instance, the Lagos State Governments was also reported to have spent three billion naira in two years on security alone. Obi and Uche (2019) found that kidnapping activities have in many ways affected socio-economic life in great measures. First, many lives have been lost. Most victims who tried to resist

abduction or who could not pay the ransom as demanded by the kidnappers or pay on time have been killed.

Figure 3 findings indicate that insecurity poses a significant obstacle to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), leading to various far-reaching consequences, including a notable increase in regional poverty. Here is a summary of the key findings:

1. **Poverty:** Sixty-six percent of respondents agreed that insecurity contributes to increased poverty in the region.
2. **Education:** Sixty-eight percent of respondents believed that the prevalence of banditry would negatively affect literacy and education in the area.
3. **Unemployment:** A substantial majority of respondents, 71 percent, expressed concern that banditry would lead to a higher unemployment rate.
4. **Food Availability:** Nearly seven out of ten respondents (69 percent) believed that banditry would impact the availability of food in the region.
5. **Access to Basic Necessities:** A significant percentage, 81 percent, expressed that the country's security challenges would make it more challenging to access essential services like medical care.
6. **Infrastructure:** Over half (58 percent) of the respondents believed that the prevalence of banditry would affect the state's infrastructure negatively.
7. **Economic Impact:** Similarly, more than half (57 percent) agreed that the Bandit State would have economic repercussions, affecting the state's overall wealth.

These findings underscore the multifaceted challenges and adverse effects that insecurity, such as banditry, can have on various aspects of life and development within the region.

If you have further questions or need additional information, please feel free to ask.

Table 5 underlines the menace of banditry/kidnapping by previous studies on educational and sustainable development goals. The occurrence of attacks targeting students can be attributed to the timeframe of 2014, during which Boko Haram perpetrated the abduction of around 276 Chibok girls in Borno State. From the aforementioned timeframe until September 1, 2021, the Government Day Secondary School experienced the abduction of

its students by bandits of which ransom were paid (refer to Table 4&5). Subsequently, the region has observed several incidents of school attacks, resulting in the unfortunate loss of lives among students or their unaccounted whereabouts.

Additionally, in Ilorin, individuals involved in criminal activities targeted Kwara State University Malete in Moro Local Government Area. In 2021, kidnappers abducted Khadijat Isaiq, a 300-level Mass Communication student, as she was with a companion en route to her off-campus residence. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of N50 million from the university authorities (Punch News, 2021). In a different incident, around 6 o'clock, unidentified assailants kidnapped Professor John Alabi, an academician from Kogi State University, Anyigba. The incident occurred as he was about to enter his residence. The abductors, armed and using a Mercedes-Benz vehicle, took him to an undisclosed location and demanded a ransom of N20 million from his spouse (Daily Post, 2021). These incidents underscore the critical importance of addressing security concerns, particularly in educational institutions, as they have far-reaching implications for students' safety, academic pursuits, and the broader social and economic context of the affected regions.

### **Research Question Three: What is the impact kidnapping as it concerns human security in North-central geopolitical zone in with 17 goals of SDG**

Figure 4 presents findings on the implication of kidnapping as it concerns human security. Findings reveal that majority of the respondents 136(36%) representing 54% agree that kidnapping affects human security by affecting promotion of developmental stride and human security. Furthermore, 118 respondents representing 31% indicates that kidnapping leads to bridge of national security and obstruct political dividends from reaching the masses, 72(18%) death and displacement, while 65 respondents representing 17% indicates that kidnapping in relation to human security lead to human capital flight from North-Central Geopolitical Zone due to lack of security of life and properties.

**Research Question Four: What are the suggestive measures needed in line with SGD 17 goals by government to put an end to kidnapping in North-central geopolitical zone?**

The information presented in table 6 outlines the measures the government has implemented in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to combat abductions in the North Central Geopolitical Zone. According to Table 6, where 18% of respondents perceive extensive youth empowerment programmes as a solution to kidnapping in the North Central Geopolitical Zone, this indicates that addressing the issue can be resolved by empowering the youth with various opportunities and resources. In addition, the information shows that nine percent of respondents think that reliable security services that are provided over the entirety of the North Central Geopolitical Zone have the ability to assist in finding a solution to the problem of kidnappings. Another 12% of respondents view religion education as a potential solution to the problem. This indicates that some respondents feel that moral and religious advice can play a role in addressing the situation. In addition, eight percent of respondents are aware of the dangers that come along with being kidnapped.

In addition, the analysis suggests that putting an end to armed organisations and the illegal holding of firearms would address just 10% of the problem of abduction. To put more focus on the socioeconomic components of the problem, around 17% of respondents feel that alleviating poverty would be a big step towards finding a solution to the issue. A further 10% of respondents emphasised how important it was for individuals to refrain from being greedy as a solution, while 16% of the participants felt that the government should promote physical employment as a means to solve the issue. The data lend credence to the assertion made by Obi (2017) that the registration of SIM cards is part of an effort to cut down on the number of kidnappings that occur in Nigeria. In addition, the findings of this study provide credence to Osaghea's (2011) contention that in order to effectively confront criminals who are armed, police officers need to get training in infantry tactics, the proper handling of weapons, and anti-terrorist techniques. Convicts frequently have information of other criminals who conduct crimes outside of jail, and Osaghea recommends that prison guards should be involved in attempts to prevent abductions because of this. Cultivating

virtue in individuals and imparting moral values can play a crucial role in putting an end to kidnapping activities in Nigeria.

**Research Question Five: What are the challenges of tackle banditry/kidnapping in relation to human security and sustainable development in North-central geopolitical zone?**

Figure 5 shed light on the challenges faced in combating abductions while maintaining human security in the North-Central geopolitical zone. The findings reveal the following key aspects: **Problems with Law Enforcement:** Approximately 54% of the respondents identified issues with law enforcement as a significant challenge in addressing the problem of abductions. **The effect of hard drugs:** The majority of respondents, who constituted 58% of the study participants, indicated that hard drugs have negative effect in contributing to kidnapping/banditry or hostage taking. **Political interference:** An overwhelming majority of respondents, 83%, identified political interference in the activities of the security sector in the North-Central geopolitical zone as a significant factor contributing to the problem of abductions. This exemplifies the harm that results from political meddling in issues pertaining to security. A Lack of Political will and assistance from the Government, the respondents acknowledged that a lack of political will and assistance from the government was a significant obstacle to lowering the occurrence of kidnappings in the region that was the focus of the inquiry. According to the findings of the survey, 58% of respondents stated that a lack of commitment was hindering attempts to prevent abduction.

**Limited financing;** it is interesting to note that the majority of respondents, 58%, did not consider limited financing to be a concern when it came to solving kidnapping in the research domain. This hints that, in their opinion, financing might not be the major concern when it comes to preventing kidnappings. Residents' lack of confidence in security personnel, this is a huge obstacle since the majority of residents, 61%, are concerned about the fact that some security personnel are corrupt. The issue of residents' lack of confidence in security personnel is a serious problem. **Internal corruption in the security industry;** An overwhelming majority of respondents (75%) said that internal corruption in the security

industry is a significant concern. The efficiency of security initiatives may be hampered as a result of corruption inside the organisation. **Inadequate staff:** A considerable percentage of respondents (72%) reported that the lack of enough staff is one of the contributing factors to the difficulties that come with tackling abduction in the studied locations. Because there is a dearth of staff, the capacity to successfully combat kidnappings may be hindered. This suggests that the difficulties involved with preventing kidnappings in the North-Central geopolitical zone may be broken down into a variety of subcategories. They include problems with law enforcement, the impact of hard narcotics, political meddling in security affairs, a lack of political will and aid from the government, questions about the trustworthiness of security officers, internal corruption within the security sector, and an inadequate number of security personnel. It is essential to have an understanding of and work to overcome these difficulties in order to improve human security and bring the number of kidnappings in the region down.

### **Hypothesis**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Banditry/kidnapping does not significantly affect sustainable development in North-central geopolitical zone

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Banditry/kidnapping does significantly affect sustainable development in North-central geopolitical zone

### **Hypotheses Testing**



### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.892 <sup>a</sup>	.796	.793	.20007

a. Predictors, p. (Constant), Insecurity features are the major influencer of destruction of life and property, Banditry/kidnapping, socioeconomic meltdown and lack of sustainable development approach implementation.

### ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.225	34	10.408	260.029	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	8.005	349	.040		
	Total	39.230	383			

a. Insecurity features are the major influencer of destruction of life and property, banditry/kidnapping socioeconomic meltdown and lack of sustainable development approach implementation.

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.892 <sup>a</sup>	.796	.793	.20007

b. Dependent Variable. Sustainable Development

### Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

	Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Pearson's R	.709	.024	14.308	.000 <sup>c</sup>
Interval				
Ordinal by Spearman	.722	.032	14.850	.000 <sup>c</sup>
Ordinal Correlation				
N of Valid Cases	383			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

The R-square value is 0.796, which means that security in the study area determines about 79.6% of the safety of life and property as a factor in socioeconomic growth and sustainable development. When this answer is compared to the calculation error, it still shows a 79.3% difference. And the fact that the ANOVA result is 31.225 (0.00) means that the total regression result is important. This is more proof that banditry/kidnapping factors have an effect on human security and sustainable development in the study area that cannot be

ignored. The coefficient shows that there is a strong positive relationship (70.9%) between security challenges such as banditry/kidnapping and sustainable development in the study area. This relationship has a statistical significance of 14.308 and is 0.000. In addition, this shows that a rise in banditry/kidnappings (insecurity) will cause a rise breakdown of sustainable development and human security problems. There is a significant (0.000) and good (0.722) link between the things (Bad governance, Poverty/Unemployment) that lead to banditry/kidnapping that threatens sustainable development in the study area.

## **Conclusion**

Kidnapping/Banditry, which includes armed theft, is very bad for implementing SDG goals, human security and Nigeria's economy development. In its study on the economic benefits of peace, the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) found that Nigeria's lack of safety would cost the country 8% of its GDP in 2021, or \$132.59 billion. Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022) also says that activities related to agriculture have harmed 26.95% of the country's GDP. This amounts to a big chunk of the country's total economic output. In the same way, the Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria (MAN) reported that the price of local raw materials dropped by 56.5% in the first half of 2020 compared to 64% in the first half of 2019, which means that prices dropped by 7.5% overall. In the first half of 2019, 64% of people said the same thing. Unfortunately, this is the case because doing business is very dangerous and risky right now. Prices of goods and services are going up because of inflation, and more and more people are losing their jobs. Because of these challenges, it has become harder to help millions of people in Nigeria get out of poverty and improve their standard of living.

The persistent occurrence of banditry/kidnapping poses significant challenges to society, leading to adverse consequences in the realms of politics, social dynamics, cultural fabric, and economic stability. The objective of this research is to gain insights into the phenomenon of security challenges towards sustainable development and explore strategies for its prevention, applicable to individuals of varying social statuses. There is a

consensus among scholars that banditry/kidnapping is a pervasive issue on a global scale, representing a multifaceted phenomenon deeply embedded within contemporary society. This criminal act has evolved into a strategic tool employed by organised crime groups for diverse objectives. The incidence of kidnappings has had significant and rapid growth, characterised by a geometric progression. During the period from 2014 to 2017, a substantial number of individuals, including young Chibok girls, government officials, politicians, and royalty, were subjected to the act of kidnapping, surpassing a total of 2000 victims.

The research findings in this paper shows that the threat of kidnapping/banditry is growing because of high unemployment, a weak security system, poverty, the fact that Nigeria's borders are open to smugglers, the easy availability of guns, and the large number of poorly controlled areas where bandits can hide. This is because of the high rate of kidnapping and banditry, which has caused a lot of theft and violence, making the area unsafe in every way. It is common for families of victims to talk about how hard it was for them to find peace while knowing that a family member was away from home and constantly sick and miserable. There are family members of the victim who become addicted to drugs and alcohol, have suicidal thoughts, cannot function normally, feel helpless, and think that their loved one is dead for good. Over the past few years, there has been a wave of student kidnappings and demands for ransom in the north-central region of Nigeria. This has caused a lot of confusion among parents, security staff, and federal and state government officials. In fact, it's become such an existential threat that national dailies can make money by writing story after story about this terrible threat that is both interesting and sad. The kidnapping of students and the demand for ransom money are just the next steps in the ideology's development.

The HDI reports that ongoing banditry/kidnapping in Nigeria has worsened the already dire human development condition. Despite claims that HDI is just a wide measure of life quality limited to evaluations of economic standards of living, the effect of kidnapping/banditry and insecurity on the wellbeing of the population is quite important. The current circumstances provide a perilous position that jeopardises the prospects of

children, who are commonly seen as both the specific future leaders of the nation and the future leaders of the nation as a whole. This indicates a pressing necessity for all relevant parties to promptly undertake measures to halt the negative trajectory.

### **Declaration of Interests**

We declare that the authors have no conflict of interest of whatsoever and that we have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper

### **Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge all the respondents across the 30 council wards, 15 LGA and five States in North central geopolitical zone.

### **Funding**

The authors received no funding for this research work.

### **Limitation of Study**

The study did not also evaluate the policy model of SDG implementation in Nigeria. Our focus was on examination of security challenges to sustainable development in North-central Nigeria. This is due to the fact there they were limited work in these areas. Also to ascertain people knowledge and awareness of the negative impact of insecurity on human security and social welfare program like SDG. Additionally, the scope of the study was restricted to few areas selected across the sample state which may not be applicable to other parts of the country as its concerns impact of security challenge in the implementation of SDGs.

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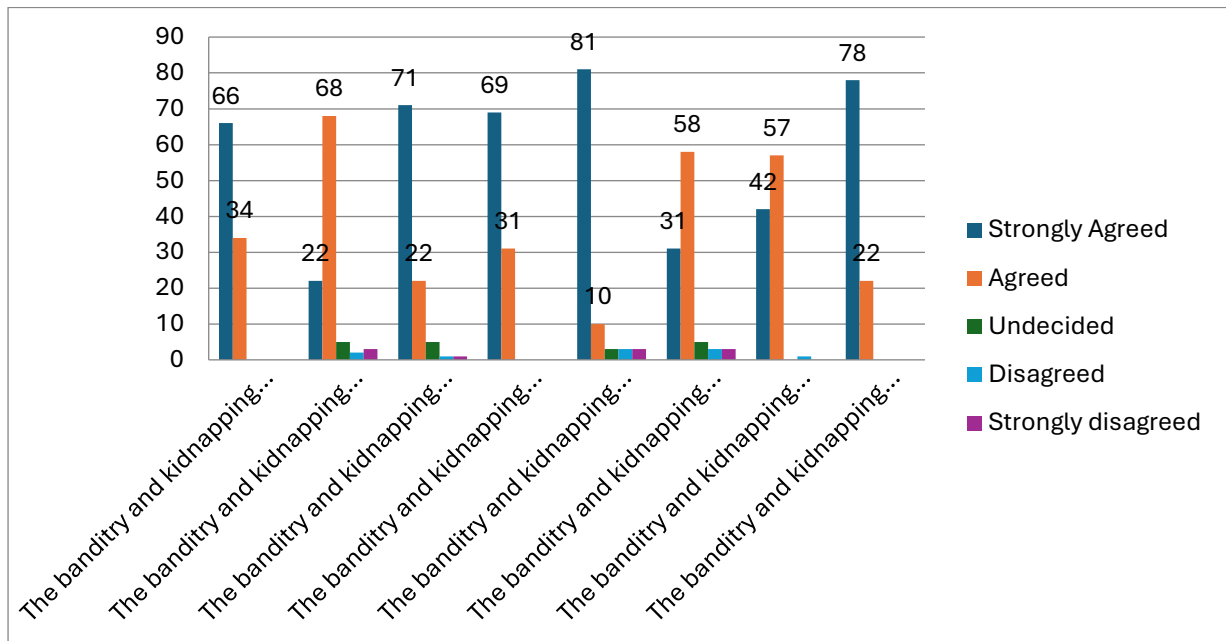
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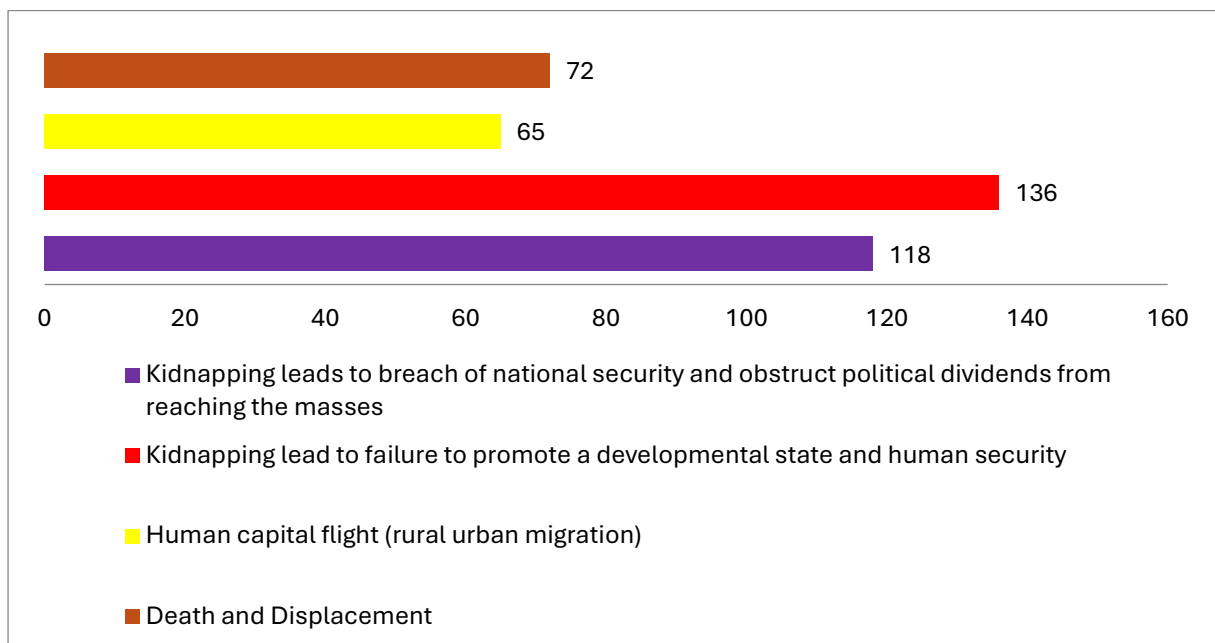
## APPENDIX (es)

**Figure 3: Multiple response to the Impact on Socio-Economic Development of North-Central Geopolitical Zone**



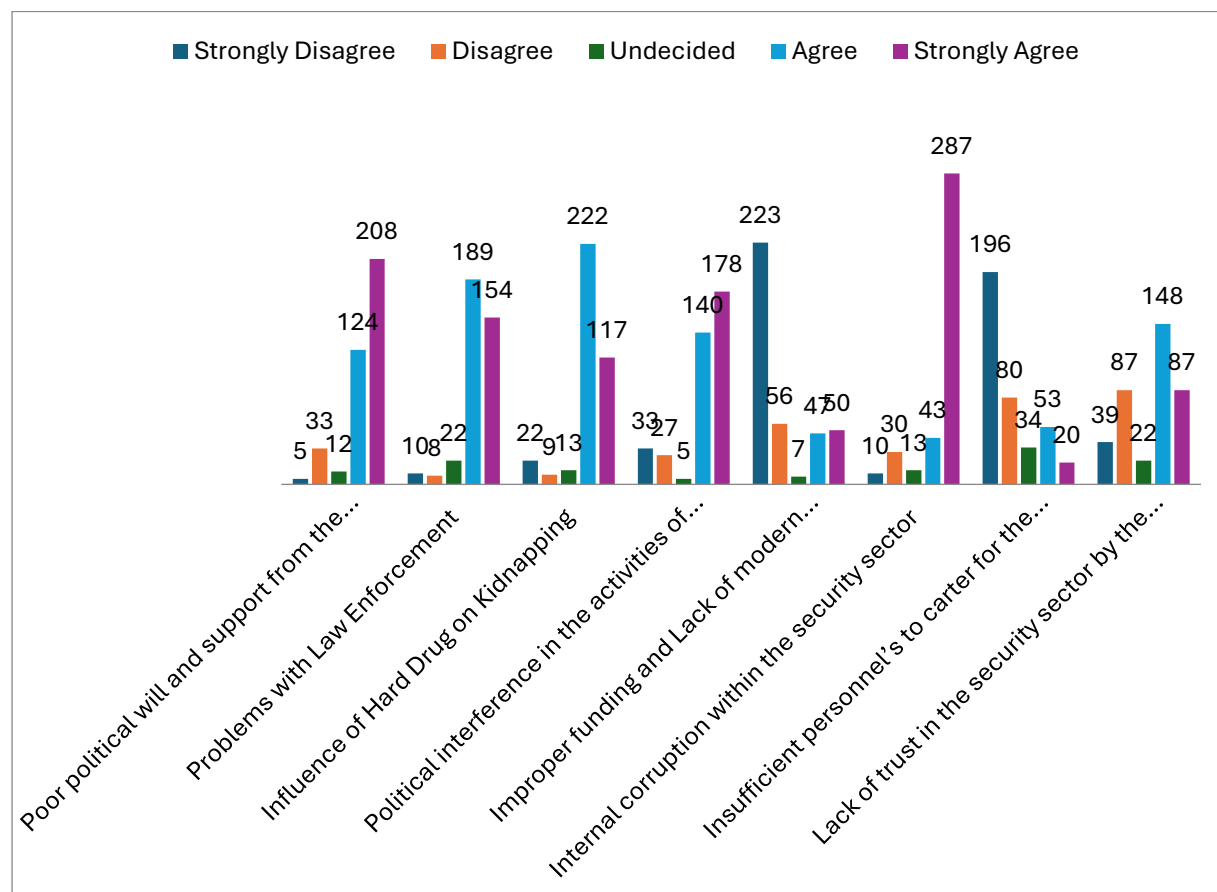
(Source: Field survey, 2023)

**Figure 4: Implication of kidnapping as it concerns human security in North-central geopolitical zone**



(Source: Field Survey, 2023)

**Figure 5: Challenges of tackle banditry/kidnapping in relation to human security and sustainable development in North-central geopolitical zone.**



(Source: Field Survey, 2023)

**Table 1: Research Question One: What are the underlying factors responsible for kidnapping in North-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria?**

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Total
1	Bad Governance (poor leadership and Corruption)	119	31%
2	Poverty	146	38%

3	Insecurity	28	7%
4	Illiteracy	5	2%
5	Unemployment	85	22%
6	Quest to get rich quickly	-	0%
7	Political Thuggery	-	0%
	Total	383	(100.0%)

(Source: Field Survey, 2023)

**Table 2: Selected Published Cases of Ransom Paid to Kidnapping across North Central Geopolitical Zone.**

S/N	Year	Month	States	Ransom
1	2008	May	North-central states	One Million Five Hundred Thousand Naira (₦1.5m )
		October	North-central states	
2	2009	January	Benue	Three Million Naira (₦3,000,000.)
		September		
3	2010	March	Jos	One Million Five Hundred Thousand Naira (₦1.5m )
		September	Jos	Two Million Naira(₦ 2,000,000)
4	2011	June	Nasarawa	
5	2012	January	Nasarawa	Five million naira (₦ 5,000,000)
		September	Niger	Three Million Naira (₦ 3,000,000.)
6	2013	January	Niger	
		May	Niger	
		October	Niger	Two Million Naira (₦ 2,000,000)
7	2014	March	North-central states	Six Hundred Thousands Naira (₦ 600,000)
		August	Benue	Two Million Naira (₦ 2,000,000)

(Source: (i) Police Report, 2022 (ii) Compiled by the Authors 2023)

**Table 3: The Nigeria Police Summary of selected Published Report N=1,547 Banditry and Kidnapping Cases.**

Years under Review	Kogi State	Benue State	Niger State	Nasarawa State	Jos
	Number of reported cases	Number of person arrested	Number of reported cases	Number of person arrested	Number of reported cases
2015	23	42	33	38	21
2016	55	63	41	33	24
2017	72	91	22	10	24
2018	43	73	20	12	45
2019	88	33	3	10	34
2020	2	8	2	5	8
2021	34	71	17	18	64
2022	34	91	15	22	23
2023	64	33	23	16	44
Total	415 (27%)	505(33%)	176(11%)	164(10%).	287 (19%),

(Source: Summary of Published Police Report 2015-2023)

**Table 4: Research Question Two: What are the underlying effects of banditry/kidnapping on livelihood of citizens in North-central geopolitical zone?**

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Total
		N=383	
1	Psychologically/emotionally imbalance to the victims	50	13%
2	Insecurity in North Central	34	9%
3	Antidevelopment efforts of SDG goals	67	18%

4	Financial loss to the victim's family	55	14%
5	Sadness in the victim's family	40	10%
6	Negative image on the country	23	6%
7	Reduces foreign investments	43	11%
8	It creates fear in the neighborhoods and in the country	50	13%
9	Increase in the government expenditure on security	21	6%
	Total	383	100%

(Source: Field survey, 2023)

**Table 5: Some Selected Cases of Kidnaped Students in Nigeria.**

S/N	Date	Location	School	Figure	Abductors
1	April 14, 2014	Chibok, Borno State	Chibok Girls Secondary School	276	Boko Haram
2	February 19, 2018	Dapchi, Yobe State	Government Girls' Science and Technical College	110	Boko Haram
3	December 11, 2020	Kankara, Katsina State	Government Boys Science Secondary School	Over 300	Bandits
4	December 19, 2020	Dandume, Katsina State	Islamic School Students	Over 80	Bandits
5	February 17, 2021	Kagara, Niger State	Government Science School	41	Bandits
6	February 26, 2021	Jangebe, Zamfara State	Government Girls Secondary School	317	Bandits
7	March, 11, 2021	Afaka, Kaduna State	Federal College of Forestry Mechanization	39	Bandits
8	April 20, 2021	Kaduna, Kaduna State	Greenfield University	20	Bandits
9	May 30, 2021	Regina, Niger State	Salihu Tanko Islamic School	About 150	Bandits
10	June 17, 2021	Birnin-Yauri, Kebbi State	Federal Government College	102	Bandits

10	July 5, 2021	Kaduna	Baptist High School	121	Bandits
11	August 16, 2021	Bakura, Zamfara State	College of Agriculture and Animal Science	15	Bandits
12	September 1, 2021	Kaya, Zamfara State	Government Day Secondary School	73	Bandits

(Adapted from Okoye, & Nwaka-Nwandu, 2024, Effect of Banditry and Kidnapping on The Development of Selected Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria).

**Table 6: Research Question Four: What are the suggestive measures needed in line with SGD 17 goals by government to put an end to kidnapping in North-central geopolitical zone?**

S/N	Variables	Frequency N=383	Total
1	Massive youth empowerment scheme	68	18%
2	Adequate security services all over the north-central geopolitical zone	34	9%
3	Religious teaching	46	12%
4	Awareness the dangers of kidnapping	29	8%
5	Wipe out arms groups and illegal possession of weapons	39	10%
6	Poverty alleviation programmes	66	17%
7	Embrace hard work spirit	60	16%
8	People should shun greediness	41	10%
Total		383	100%

(Source: Field Survey, 2023)