



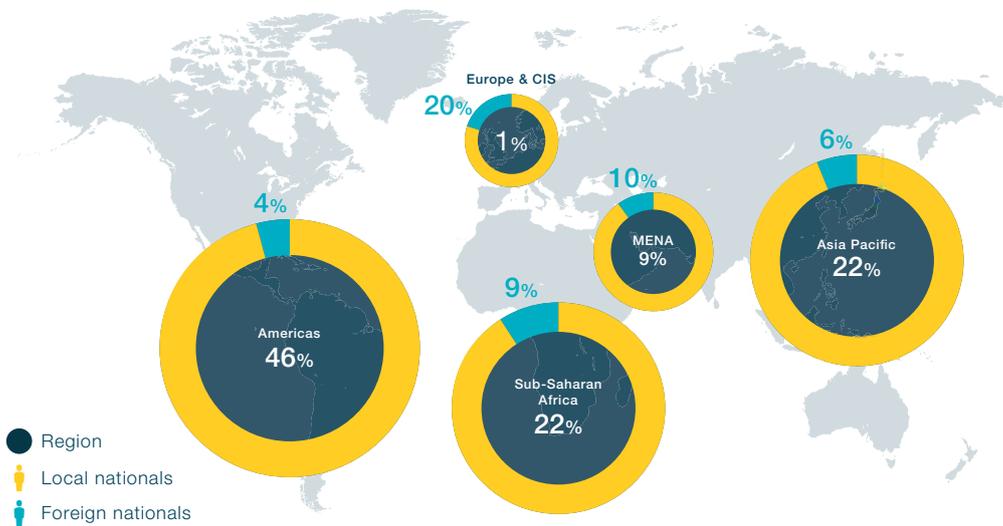
The Special Risks Report

Global Kidnapping Trends

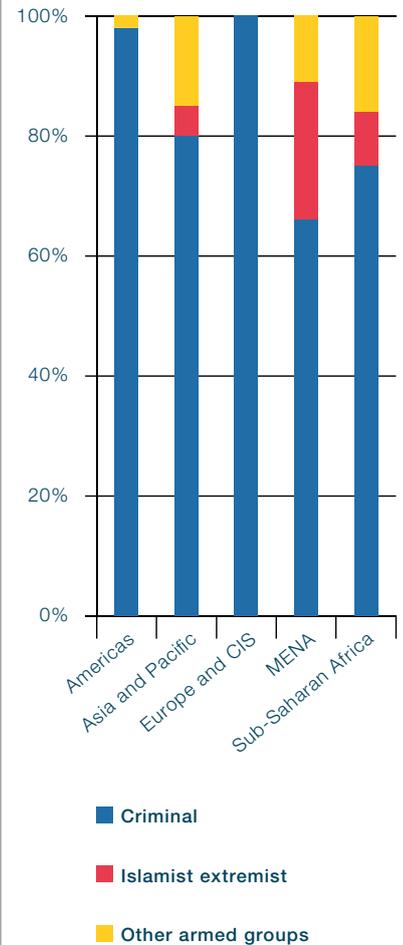
October - December 2017

Key trends: open source

Incidents involving local and foreign nationals



Perpetrator types



48%
of abductions happened in transit

88%
of abductions resolved in less than 7 days

94%
of global victims were local nationals

36
sectors affected

Control Risks maintains a dedicated team of special risks analysts who track kidnap-for-ransom and other extortive crime trends around the world. The five analysts carry out research in multiple languages, including English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Arabic and Hebrew. They maintain a database of cases believed to be the largest commercial database of its kind, currently containing details of more than 53,000 kidnaps for ransom. The team provides analytical support to deployed consultants on live kidnap-for-ransom cases. Using their understanding of local kidnap dynamics they are able to help predict the likely perpetrators of a specific incident, their motivations for carrying out the abduction as well as providing tactical information about the average length of cases and typical concessions required for release. They also write all kidnap analysis on an online platform brought to assureds by Hiscox called Global Risk Data. In addition, the team is able to provide bespoke kidnap consulting analysis tailored to clients' individual exposures.

The Special Risks Report

Africa

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- Kidnapping-for-ransom to remain widespread in Nigeria despite government efforts to secure major transport corridors, pacify north-east
- Presence of Islamist militant group, imminent launch of oil and gas production offshore to raise threat of spike in extortive crime in northern Mozambique
- Kidnapping threat stemming from Islamist militant groups to continue to spread south-west into central Mali in 2018

Nigeria continues to lead the continent in terms of kidnapping rates, despite continued efforts by the government to bring widespread criminality and a persistent Islamist insurgency under control. A large deployment of security forces along the high-risk Abuja-Kaduna expressway, where Control Risks has recorded weekly kidnaps throughout 2017, did not reduce the number of successful abductions by criminal gangs operating along the corridor, and the threat will continue in 2018. In the north-east, Islamist militant group Boko Haram still operates with relative impunity despite the continued deployment of a military task force. The group will continue to carry out attacks on local communities, and present a kidnapping threat throughout the Lake Chad basin, including in parts of **Niger**, **Chad** and **Cameroon**.

A series of developments in northern **Mozambique** in the fourth quarter of 2017 could see a rise in the kidnapping threat in Cabo Delgado province. The province is the focal point of a rapidly expanding oil and gas exploration and production zone that has seen extensive investment from energy majors. In particular, the provincial capital, Pemba, is poised to transform into a hub for offshore production. Cabo Delgado is also home to a previously little known local Islamist militant group called al-Sunah that carried out a series of attacks against security forces and municipal authorities beginning in October 2017. The group has reportedly not yet been involved in any kidnaps-for-ransom, and has not publicly aligned itself with transnational terrorist networks. However, the group's apparent lack of financial support could see its tactics evolve into extortive crime, and a declaration of allegiance to transnational terrorist networks could yet follow. The influx of large workforces of local and foreign nationals will increase the pool of potential victims, and the parallel emergence of al-Sunah could lead to the emergence of a kidnap market around the industry.

Moreover, the relatively abrupt arrival of major international investment and influx of personnel, jobs, and construction projects could lead to an increase in extortive crime as existing interests attempt to cash in on the boom.

Although the northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal remain the epicentre of the Islamist kidnapping threat in **Mali**, incidents occurred with growing frequency outside these established hotspots in the latter half of 2017. Kidnaps attributed to Islamist militants were recorded in Sikasso, Segou, Mopti and Koulikoro regions, with rates likely to continue to rise in these areas. Kidnaps also increased along the border with Burkina Faso, and extended southwards into areas previously less affected by militant groups. This trend is likely to continue. Despite the efforts of Malian and French troops, militant kidnapping will continue to represent a significant threat throughout central and northern Mali in 2018.

Militants will also continue to carry out kidnaps and attacks in **Niger** and **Burkina Faso**. High-profile victims kidnapped in these countries are invariably transported back into militant safe havens in remote northern areas of neighbouring Mali, where they can be held in captivity for years.



50%
of abductions
happened in
transit



89%
of abductions
resolved in less
than 7 days



19
sectors
affected



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Americas

KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- Abduction of Spanish nationals in Mexico reminder of threat to foreign employees despite kidnappers' preference for local nationals
- Law-enforcement warning highlights spread of virtual kidnapping across US
- Spate of incidents underscores Trinidad's status as a primary Caribbean kidnapping location

A high-profile abduction of two Spanish nationals in **Mexico** on 27 November showed that foreign employees are far from immune from the threat of kidnapping. According to police, the incident in Puebla state was perfectly planned, and the perpetrators had precise information about the profile of the victims and their employer – an automotive parts company. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of MXN 30m (USD 1.6m) before the authorities rescued the victims two days later. One of the three arrested suspects was a former colleague whose employment had been terminated a month earlier.

Although only a small fraction of kidnaps involve foreigners legally residing in the country, the sheer prevalence of the crime means that such cases will continue to occur in Mexico more regularly than in most other countries in the region. As in the case in Puebla, most foreign victims are residents in the country who have established routines that facilitate an abduction. Furthermore, the fact that a victim works for a large company or a multinational may raise the kidnappers' expectations and the size of the ransom that they demand. With official statistics suggesting that 2017 was the most violent year on record, the highly permissive security environment will sustain the threat of kidnapping into 2018.

In the **US**, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) on 16 October issued a new warning about virtual kidnapping, stating that the crime had developed and spread so that US residents anywhere in the country can fall victim to it. The crime – which typically involves an extortionist telephoning an individual and claiming to have abducted one of their loved ones before demanding a ransom for their release – used to be primarily focused around south-western states. However, Control Risks recorded incidents across the country in 2017.

The crime is significantly more common than kidnapping-for-ransom in the US, and is unlikely to subside into 2018. There are almost no impediments to the scam spreading and proliferating other than rising public awareness. Many perpetrators carry out the scam from Mexico, and payments transferred over the border are hard to trace. As such, impunity rates are particularly high. Control Risks is aware of only one federal indictment – from July 2017 – in a virtual kidnapping case in the US.

Following a lull in reported kidnapping activity during most of the 2010s, Control Risks has recorded a spike in incidents in **Trinidad** – a reminder of the sporadic occurrence of the crime on the island. The police on 11 October rescued a Venezuelan national after assailants had kidnapped him from a bar in Curerpe (Tunapuna-Piarco Regional Corporation) four days earlier. The majority of incidents will continue to take place in the west and north-west of the island, but will remain rare on the neighbouring island of Tobago. Cases involving foreign nationals will continue to occur sporadically, but local commercial business owners and their families will remain the most common targets.



53%
of abductions
happened in
transit



88%
of abductions
resolved in less
than 7 days



26
sectors
affected