

CHAPTER 10

Framing Techniques in Selected Online Newspapers Reports on Banditry and Kidnapping Activities in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the framing techniques used by online newspapers in reporting banditry and kidnapping activities in Nigeria. The research adopts Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis and Framing Theory as the theoretical framework. The work investigates how language, structure and

representation shape public perception, reinforce ideologies and potentially influence national discourse. The research is anchored on a CDA research design which explores the discursive framing of banditry and kidnapping. Data were purposively sampled from reports of *The Daily Trust* and *Leadership* online newspapers on kidnapping and banditry between 2021 and 2025. Both newspapers are from the Northern part of Nigeria. The findings reveal four recurrent frames: the victim-hero frame, the state-legitimising frame, the moral and spiritual frame, and the collective responsibility frame. These frames collectively depict insecurity as a moral, political and social crisis, legitimising government authority while subtly shifting accountability to citizens. Linguistic strategies such as emotive diction, quantification and moral evaluation are found to reinforce state narratives and normalise insecurity as a recurring national condition. The study concludes that media framing not only mirrors but also sustains ideological structures that influence public perception and policy direction on security. It recommends greater editorial responsibility, critical media literacy and context-sensitive reporting so as to promote balanced and ethical coverage of insecurity in Nigeria

Keywords: Framing techniques, Critical Discourse Analysis, Online newspapers, Banditry, Kidnapping

Introduction

Nigeria has witnessed an alarming rise in the crime of banditry and kidnapping. These crimes have affected the socio-political, economic and humanitarian situations in the nation. These security unrests have impacted various areas of

the country, particularly the North-West and parts of the Middle Belt, leading to untold hardships, inhumane sufferings, loss of lives, cessation of education and psychological trauma in the affected communities. While successive governments have devised various strategies to address the crisis, the general responses to these crimes are significantly shaped by how the media frames them.

Online newspapers, as one of the easiest, most accessible and most immediate sources of information in the 21st century, play a central role in informing the public and constructing social reality around criminal activities. With the growth of internet sensations and smartphone usage in Nigeria, online newspapers have become vital tools for trending and breaking news. Unlike traditional media, online platforms give instant feedback, visibility and shaping of public discourse, making the framing of news stories more impactful and wide-reaching.

Linguistic devices, tone and structure used in reporting such crimes are full of biases. They are often laced with ideological references and editorial leanings that influence public understanding. Media framing is the selection and emphasis of certain aspects of a perceived reality that can subtly form opinions by foregrounding specific actors, causes, consequences or solutions while downplaying others.

This study examines the framing techniques used by selected Nigerian online newspapers in their reporting of banditry and kidnapping activities. The focus of the study is from 2021 to 2025. This period is considered analytically significant as it encapsulates post-COVID economic challenges, increasing

insecurity across Nigeria, a general election (2023) and subsequent shifts in security policy under a new administration. Focusing on how perpetrators, victims and the broader socio-political issues are presented, the study aims to uncover underlying patterns of discourse, ideological positions and possible biases that influence media narratives. Relying on critical discourse analysis, the paper interrogates how linguistic and rhetorical strategies are used to create particular impressions or promote certain agenda.

Given the increasing reliance on and impact of digital news platforms for information, understanding how these narratives are constructed is essential to fostering responsibility, enhancing public awareness and informing national security discourse. This research contributes to existing works by offering insights into the intersection between language, ideology, power and conflict reporting in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to examine how selected Nigerian online newspapers use framing techniques in reporting issues of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

The objectives are to:

1. identify and analyse the dominant framing techniques used by selected Nigerian online newspapers in reporting incidents of banditry and kidnapping.
2. evaluate the potential impact of media framing on public perception and understanding of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Media framing meaningfully influences public perception by shaping narratives around events and issues. Through deliberate selection, the media determines which aspects of reality are stressed or omitted, thereby guiding audience perception and societal response (Entman, 1993). In Nigeria, the framing of banditry and kidnapping has profound socio-political consequences, shaping both public discourse and policy formulation.

Studies have shown that Nigerian newspapers often emphasise the criminal and sensational aspects of insecurity. Bello and Mukhtar (2017) assert that media reports on banditry tend to focus on violence and arrests while overlooking the socio-economic roots of the crisis. Similarly, Apejaye (2014) observes that kidnapping coverage frequently centres on fear and drama, heightening public anxiety. Albert, Danjibo, and Albert (2020) reveal that the media's portrayal of kidnapping in the Niger Delta reflects evolving political and economic motives. These findings suggest that news framing not only mirrors existing social tensions but can also reinforce them.

The framing of insecurity also affects how the public and policymakers respond. Ehigia, Asemah, and Nwaoboli (2023) contend that by consistently highlighting criminality and government inefficiency, the media may prompt reactionary security measures. Maigari, Dantani and Arafat (2021) similarly note that news framing can either heighten or reduce public anxiety depending on whether narratives evoke empathy, fear or outrage. The immediacy of online journalism has further intensified the influence of digital platforms which often prioritise speed over depth, amplifying emotionally charged narratives and shaping national consciousness.

Critical approaches in media studies aim to uncover the ideological and structural forces behind such representations. McKee (2003) argues that critical research moves beyond description to interrogate hidden biases and power relations embedded in texts. Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (1998) similarly concord that media discourse reflects and reinforces social inequalities and ideological beliefs. Consequently, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and framing analysis offer vital frameworks for examining how Nigerian media construct meanings around insecurity, governance and identity.

Banditry in Nigeria is marked by armed attacks, raids and cattle rustling. It has evolved into a multidimensional crisis, particularly in the Northwest and Northcentral regions. Wapmuk (2023) attributes this to weak security institutions, porous borders and expanding illicit arms trade. Rosenje and Adeniyi (2023) add that some bandit groups now act as informal authorities, collecting taxes and enforcing control through fear, reflecting a failure of state power.

Likewise, kidnapping has become one of Nigeria's most profitable criminal enterprises. Defined as the unlawful abduction of individuals for ransom or political leverage, it cuts across all social classes. Ashibi and Akintujoye (2023) describe kidnapping as both a symptom and a consequence of economic breakdown while Nsirimovu (2023) links its persistence to corruption and media sensationalism which amplify public fear and normalise violence.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Anchored in Entman's (1993) Framing Theory and van Dijk's (1998) Socio-Cognitive CDA, this study explores how Nigerian online newspapers construct

ideological meanings around insecurity. A qualitative CDA approach is employed, analysing four purposively selected news reports (two each from *Daily Trust* and *Leadership*, both published in the Northern part of Nigeria (2021–2025). The analysis focuses on lexical choices, headline structures and representational strategies to uncover framing patterns and ideological implications within the media discourse on banditry and kidnapping.

Data Analysis

News Report 1

Headline: *THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FORESTS ‘GOVERNED’ BY BANDITS, BOKO HARAM* (2021) <https://dailytrust.com/topics/news/>

The report constructs a multi-layered discourse that draws heavily on fear, insecurity and national failure. Through lexical and structural framing, *Daily Trust* situates northern Nigeria’s forests as the heart of lawlessness and terror.

Frame Identified	Linguistic / Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
1. Insecurity and State Failure Frame	Uses personification and metaphors such as “governed,” “ungoverned spaces,” Lexical emphasis on lawlessness, absence of	personification territorial ‘Governed’ such as Bandits.” / “Nine where “no-go forests and almost the entire northern part of Nigeria... are framing evidence of	Constructs forests as by zones of state collapse, criminals linking assume symbolic Evokes fear and helplessness, insecurity as state

authority, and territorial by bandits.” failure and loss of
 loss. sovereignty.

2. **Victimisation and Human Suffering Frame**
 Relies on emotive appeals and “They attack our human-interest communities... kill the men and abduct the women and civilians with children.” / “30 violent aggressors villages becoming through binary ‘danger zones’.”
 Elicits public empathy and outrage. Justifies military intervention as moral duty. Reinforces perception of civilians as powerless victims needing state protection.

3. **Militarisation and Rescue Frame**
 Dominated by assertive action verbs “The government militarisation as the (“comb,” “remove,” should comb only credible response “dislodge”) and those places... to insecurity. Glorifies authoritative voices throw all the military power and (security experts, military men repositions the armed DSS). Structurally there and remove forces as moral foregrounds calls for them by force.” saviours of the nation. armed response.

4. **Environmental and Spatial Frame** Spatially links insecurity to northern metaphorical “These forests geography, subtly constructions of have been reinforcing regional space, describing allowed to stereotypes of disorder. forests as “*havens*,” become lodges Transforms natural “*dens*,” “*dead for criminals*.” landscapes into *zones*.” ideological markers of chaos.

News Report 2

Headline: 2021: BANDITS KILL ‘1,192, KIDNAP 3,348’ IN KADUNA (2022)
<https://dailytrust.com/topics/news/>

The article constructs a quantitative, fear-based, and government-centred frame, where insecurity is represented as a crisis of numbers, control, and governance failure. It utilises framing devices such as statistics, official sourcing, Victimisation and Gender/Age Differentiation and Comparative and Coordination frame.

Frame Identified	Linguistic / Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
1. Quantification and Crisis Magnitude	Frequent use of numerical data and no statistical quantifiers	“Bandits killed 1,192 people and to and abducted	Quantification amplifies public fear and constructs insecurity as a

Frame dramatise the extent 3,348 others measurable, systemic of violence and across Kaduna crisis. It converts evoke urgency. The State between human suffering into structure January and statistical spectacle, foregrounds December heightening a sense of numbers before 2021.” national emergency. narrative.

2. State Failure and Militarised Response Frame Incorporates official government statements urging on the federal expanded military government to intervention. Lexical create a theatre items such as command to “confront,” “theatre confront the command,” insurgency in “insurgency” evoke affected states.” Portrays the state as under siege but responsive. Legitimises militarisation as a rational and necessary solution. Reinforces faith in federal authority and centralised command structures as pathways to security.

3. Victimisation and Gender/Age Differentiation Frame Disaggregates “Those Humanises the crisis through victims by killed are gender and age distinctions, category (men, 1,038 men, evoking empathy and moral outrage. Positions civilians— women, minors), 104 especially women and human-interest and 50 children—as innocent

angle amid minors.” casualties of state insecurity. statistics.

4. **Comparative and Coordination Frame**

Comparative references to previous years’ data (“255 more than those killed in 2020”) and mentions of multi-agency synergy.

“The number was 255 more than those killed in 2020 despite efforts to fight crimes.” / “...enable a holistic approach to counter-insurgent operations across the six affected states.”

Establishes a narrative of policy inefficacy and deteriorating security while promoting the ideology of centralised, coordinated military response. Reinforces state-centric problem-solving and marginalises non-military or community-driven alternatives.

News Report 3

Headline: RESURGENCE OF KIDNAPPINGS AND BANDITRY (2023).
<https://leadership.ng/nigeria-news/>

The *Leadership* article uses multi-layered frames that merge factual reportage with opinion-based political commentary. The piece situates insecurity within a political-economic context, connecting it to election cycles, monetary policy and governance. Four dominant frames emerge: resurgence frame, economic-policy frame, political-solution frame and shared-responsibility frame.

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
1. Resurgence and Crisis Continuity Frame	<p>The headline foregrounds the evaluative term “<i>resurgence</i>”, implying relapse into crisis after a brief calm. Narrative sequencing across multiple states constructs a recurring insecurity cycle. Lexical items such as “<i>kidnapped</i>,” “<i>attacked</i>,” and “<i>killed</i>” evoke urgency and fear.</p>	<p>“No fewer than 80 persons who went to the bush to pick firewood were kidnapped by gunmen in Zamfara State.” / “Some gunmen reportedly attacked an IDP camp in Agan in Benue with many killed.”</p>	<p>Frames of insecurity as an enduring national affliction. Reinforces perceptions of governmental inefficacy while normalising violence as a permanent national condition. Encourages a fatalistic acceptance of recurring crises.</p>
2. Economic-Policy (CBN) Frame	<p>Uses causal and explanatory discourse linking monetary policy to crime reduction. The about by the CBN than</p>	<p>“Since there was a cash strap economically brought rational rather than morally</p>	<p>Recasts crime as economically rational rather than morally</p>

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
<p data-bbox="122 313 264 403"></p> <p data-bbox="122 421 264 582">3. Political- Solution and Leadership Frame</p>	<p data-bbox="332 313 628 403">phrase “<i>cash strap challenge</i>”</p> <p data-bbox="332 421 628 510">economic determinism. access to huge monetary policy</p> <p data-bbox="332 528 628 618">Passive syntax such as amounts of cash. as an unintended</p> <p data-bbox="332 636 628 725">“<i>kidnappers had to halt their trade</i>”</p> <p data-bbox="332 743 628 833">replaces kidnappers had to legitimising moral judgement with halt their trade.”</p> <p data-bbox="332 851 628 940">technocratic rationalised economic governance and elite control over both economic and security domains.</p> <p data-bbox="332 958 628 1048">Employs high-modality verbs (“<i>will,</i>” “<i>plans to</i>”) and militarised Ahmed Tinubu via optimism and diction (“<i>anti-terrorist squad,</i>” “<i>tactical communications gear</i>”) provisions to convey authority and mitigate the Tinubu as a certainty. The narrative security saviour figure structure shifts from challenge... capable of reporting to prescribing establish a highly restoring order,</p>	<p data-bbox="671 313 825 403">policy, many deviant. Positions</p> <p data-bbox="671 421 825 510">signals people couldn’t get huge monetary policy</p> <p data-bbox="671 528 825 618">Hence the security tool,</p> <p data-bbox="671 636 825 725">kidnappers had to legitimising</p> <p data-bbox="671 743 825 833">with halt their trade.” technocratic</p> <p data-bbox="671 851 825 940">governance and elite control over both economic and security domains.</p> <p data-bbox="671 958 825 1048">“The President- Constructs</p> <p data-bbox="671 1066 825 1155">Elect Asiwaju Bola political</p> <p data-bbox="671 1173 825 1263">Ahmed Tinubu via optimism and</p> <p data-bbox="671 1281 825 1370">“<i>anti-terrorist ‘Hope Renewed’ faith in</i></p> <p data-bbox="671 1388 825 1478">made several leadership</p> <p data-bbox="671 1496 825 1566">to renewal. Frames the Tinubu as a saviour figure capable of establishing a highly restoring order,</p>	<p data-bbox="928 313 1106 403">many deviant. Positions</p> <p data-bbox="928 421 1106 510">huge monetary policy</p> <p data-bbox="928 528 1106 618">the security tool,</p> <p data-bbox="928 636 1106 725">technocratic</p> <p data-bbox="928 743 1106 833">governance and elite control over both economic and security domains.</p> <p data-bbox="928 958 1106 1048">Constructs</p> <p data-bbox="928 1066 1106 1155">political</p> <p data-bbox="928 1173 1106 1263">and</p> <p data-bbox="928 1281 1106 1370">leadership</p> <p data-bbox="928 1388 1106 1478">Frames the Tinubu as a saviour figure</p> <p data-bbox="928 1496 1106 1566">capable of establishing a highly restoring order,</p>

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
	<p>solutions.</p> <p>Adopts moralistic tone and collective pronouns (“we,” “everybody”) to invoke civic duty. Imperative syntax (“<i>Vigilance is key</i>”) moralises security responsibility.</p>	<p>trained and thus disciplined terrorist squad... equip military units with tactical communications gear...”</p> <p>“As they say, the burden of security is everybody’s responsibility. Vigilance is key as well as assisting security personnel and holding those entrusted with safeguarding accountable.”</p>	<p>and thus legitimising anti-political authority through securitisation and elite-driven reform narratives.</p> <p>Individualises state of national security, decentralising state accountability. Promotes moral compliance and citizen participation while normalising limited state</p>
<p>4. Shared Responsibility and Moral Engagement Frame</p>			

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
			capacity. Aligns with neoliberal logic where citizens co-produce security.

News Report 4

Headline: BANDITS FED US ONCE A WEEK, USED US AS SHIELD AGAINST AIRSTRIKES’, EX-NYSC DG RECOUNTS ORDEAL IN CAPTIVITY (2025). <https://leadership.ng/nigeria-news/>

The *Leadership* article constructs its narrative through personalisation, heroic framing and moral reinforcement, presenting the ordeal of Brig.-Gen. Maharazu Isma’ila Tsiga (rtd) not merely as a victim’s account but as a symbolic national story of endurance, faith and patriotism. Four dominant frames emerge: victim-hero frame, moral-spiritual frame, state-legitimising frame, and collective-responsibility frame.

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
1. Victim–Hero Frame	Narrative focuses on Brig.-Gen. Tsiga’s personal ordeal	“The former director-general and of the NYSC... through	Personalises national insecurity through a

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
	<p>endurance. emotive, verbs (“fed,” “used as shield,” and descriptive imagery to evoke empathy and admiration.</p>	<p>Uses recounted experiential ordeal in bandits’ “recounted”) said they were fed once a week... and used as story of human shield when military aircraft hovered above.”</p>	<p>his prestigious victim. The human-interest framing transforms collective insecurity into a moral admiration. shield courage and survival. Tsiga becomes a hero embodying resilience and patriotism, inviting emotional solidarity from the public.</p>
<p>2. Moral and Spiritual Frame</p>	<p>Employs religious diction and contrasts (“merciful,” “don’t fear God”).</p>	<p>religious “But you know God is merciful. The good ones will continue to live.” / “They</p>	<p>Establishes a moral hierarchy that sanctifies the victim and demonises the</p>

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
	moral dualism between pious victims and ungodly perpetrators.	don't fear God, bandit. They fear divine aircraft." and but they fear divine aircraft."	Through framing, insecurity is interpreted as a test of faith and morality, legitimising state countermeasures as righteous and divinely supported. This aligns with Entman's (1993) <i>moral evaluation</i> function of framing.

3. State- Legitimising and Leadership Confidence Frame - Highlights presence of senior officials (NSA, CDS) and institutional involvement in reunion ceremony. Uses formal register and attribution (NSA),

was... Positions the government as compassionate and responsive, reinforcing faith in Nuhu leadership. The

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
	verbs (“reunited,” “encouraged”) foreground state action.	<p>“Ribadu, at a brief symbolic event in Abuja.” / of state action. “We are being encouraged by ideological calling us here, reassurance that the NSA, the authority remains CDS... to make capable and sure that we humane. This believe in strategic political ourselves.”</p>	<p>presence of state actors serves as ideological framing sustains trust in the Tinubu administration and normalises elite-controlled crisis management.</p>

4. **Collective Responsibility and Civic Engagement Frame** Concludes with moral imperative and inclusive pronouns (“we,” “ourselves”) to call for citizen responsibility... We must do it portraying security as a shared moral accountability from the state to citizens, and responsibility...

Frame Identified	Linguistic/Structural Features	Illustrative Excerpts	Ideological Implications
	participation in national security.		duty rather than a political failure. This rhetorical move decentralises responsibility and dilutes critique of state inadequacy. It aligns with <i>solution attribution</i> framing (Entman, 1993) and reinforces hegemonic discourse of cooperative citizenship.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the four selected online news reports from *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* reveals a patterned and ideologically charged framing of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. Across the reports, linguistic and structural strategies such as quantification, personification, moral appeals and militarised discourse are recurrently employed to construct insecurity as both a moral crisis and a threat to national survival.

A dominant finding is the prevalence of crisis and insecurity framing, evident in lexical choices like “*ungoverned spaces*,” “*resurgence*” and “*killings*.” These terms depict banditry and kidnapping as cyclical, uncontrollable phenomena, thereby reinforcing a sense of perpetual instability and public fear. Through quantification as in “*1,192 killed and 3,348 kidnapped*”, insecurity is rendered measurable and monumental, transforming human suffering into numerical evidence of state fragility. This aligns with van Dijk’s (1998) notion of discursive reproduction of fear and power, where language constructs both dominance and dependency.

Equally salient is the militarisation and state-legitimising frame which cuts across all reports. Government and security officials dominate the discursive space, prescribing armed intervention and surveillance as rational responses. The repeated use of militarised verbs such as “*confront*,” “*dislodge*” and “*rout*” reflects an ideological alignment with state power, legitimising coercive solutions while marginalising structural or socio-economic explanations for insecurity. This framing thus reinforces the hegemony of state authority and sustains public consent for militarised governance.

A third recurrent pattern is the moral and human-interest framing, particularly in *Leadership*’s coverage of Brig.-Gen. Tsigas’s ordeal. The use of emotive and religious expressions “*God is merciful*,” “*security is a collective responsibility*” moralises insecurity, transforming it from a political problem into a test of faith and patriotism. This framing individualises responsibility, echoing neoliberal logic by shifting accountability from the state to citizens while promoting civic compliance.

Finally, the regional and environmental framing in *Daily Trust* subtly associates insecurity with the northern landscape through metaphors such as “*forests governed by bandits*” and “*no-go areas.*” This spatial framing reproduces regional stereotypes, constructing the North as a naturalised zone of disorder. Ideologically, such representations risk deepening regional stigmatisation and legitimising spatially targeted security interventions.

Overall, the findings indicate that Nigerian online newspapers frame banditry and kidnapping through narratives that intertwine fear, morality and state legitimacy. These frames not only shape public perception of insecurity but also reproduce dominant ideologies that normalise militarisation, rationalise government control and depoliticise structural inequalities underpinning violence.

Ethical Considerations

This study complied with established ethical standards for qualitative and discourse-analytic research. All data were obtained from publicly accessible online newspaper publications, ensuring no breach of confidentiality or privacy. The analysis focused solely on textual and linguistic content, with no human participation involved. To maintain integrity and fairness, the researcher applied reflexivity and objectivity in interpreting ideological meanings, avoiding bias or exaggeration in comparative analysis. All materials were duly cited in accordance with APA (6th edition) conventions. Moreover, reports involving deaths and kidnappings were treated sensitively to prevent sensationalism or victim-blaming, upholding ethical principles of respect, accuracy and responsible representation.

Limitations and Recommendations

The analysis of this study is limited to four reports from two English-language online newspapers which constrains the generalisability of findings and excludes perspectives from indigenous-language media. The focus on a specific timeframe (2021–2025) and reliance on interpretive analysis may also reflect contextual and subjective limitations. Future studies should expand the dataset across diverse media outlets, regions and time periods, incorporating audience reception studies to assess how news framing influences public perception. Researchers are also encouraged to include indigenous-language and alternative media to capture broader ideological and cultural nuances in Nigeria's insecurity discourse.

Conclusion

This research has critically looked at how Nigerian online newspapers frame and represent outcomes of banditry and kidnapping, revealing that news discourse is shaped by underlying ideological and socio-political interests. Through the integration of Framing Theory and Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive CDA, the analysis identified recurrent frames that personalise insecurity, legitimise state authority and moralise public responsibility. These framing patterns construct insecurity not merely as a social problem but as a site of ideological struggle where narratives of heroism, morality and governance are strategically reinforced. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that media representations play a powerful role in shaping public perception and sustaining hegemonic notions of state competence and national unity in the face of persistent insecurity.

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