IDEOLOGICAL BIASES IN NIGERIAN ONLINE NEWSPAPERS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM (BaKiR) REPORTS

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ABSTRACT

This study probed the ideological biases rooted in the reportage of Banditry and Kidnapping for Ransom (BaKiR) in selected Nigerian online newspapers. This research adopted van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of Critical Discourse Analysis; the research showed how language and discourse are used to generate reports about insecurity, state actors, and non-state actors. Four online news reports published in 2024 and 2025 were elicited in total: two each from *The Daily Trust* (representing a Northern perspective) and *The Nation* (representing a Southern perspective). The work examined the different levels of discourse, such as lexical choices, sentence structure, characterisation of state and non-state actors, how headlines are outlined, thematic focus and the intertextual allusions. These selected reports were chosen because they were suitable for the thematic consideration, had startling headlines, and focused on the dynamic security situation in Nigeria. The research identified rhetorical patterns that unveiled hidden ideological leanings ranging from state and non-state legitimation to civic critique and emotive appeals. The results showed that reporting of BaKiR is not politically balanced but rather reflects profound editorial opinions, political contexts, and socio-economic worldviews. It concluded that online media platforms function as ideological battlegrounds, framing insecurity in ways that either reinforce or resist dominant narratives of power, responsibility, and governance. The study recommended that interrogating media texts as ideological artefacts is crucial.

Keywords: Nigerian online newspapers, ideological bias, critical discourse analysis, banditry, kidnapping, and ransom

Introduction

There has been a turbulent and persistent rise in ferocious crimes in Nigeria, especially the reported cases of banditry and kidnapping for ransom (BaKiR). These crimes are inhumane and very unsafe for the nation's unity, economy, and public well-being. To say the least, the devastating impact of BaKiR is obviously noticed in rural and urban cities. However, it is most acutely felt in rural communities, where state presence is often limited or absent, thereby creating an environment in which criminal elements thrive unchallenged. The audacity, scale and frequency of these crimes have alarmed both national and international observers, with increasing calls for a reassessment of Nigeria's security architecture and public communication strategies.

Many Nigerians still obtain most of their news from online newspapers, so how these security issues are reported is very crucial for shaping public response, discussion, and policy implementations. These online platforms give instant access to active engagement, making them powerful and robust tools for shaping public opinion and discourse. Given their influence, the way in which online newspapers report on banditry and kidnapping is far from inconsequential; it plays a critical role in influencing public perception, framing social narratives, and guiding policy responses. The media's representations of crime, victims, perpetrators, and state actors can significantly affect and influence the positions of the citizens toward insecurity, governance, and justice.

There has been a lot of research on insecurity that has helped to recognise the patterns and causes of violence. But fewer studies have examined the political framing in media coverage of these events. Sometimes, news reporting is not unbiased; it usually has verified concerns, political prejudice, and a stated agenda behind it. In circumstances of insecurities, the way words are chosen, the make-up story, and the framing of arguments can negligibly make state actors seem more genuine, make the non-state actors seem bad, or make excuses for state failures.

This paper uses both framing theory and van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of CDA to look at how Nigerian online newspapers talk about BaKiR. It looks at how language and rhetorical devices can be used to express political positions and change how people perceive insecurity, state capability, and responsibility. In doing so, the research contributes to an ongoing discourse of how the Nigerian media discourses shape and influence public perception on the burning issue.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to critically discuss the ideological biases in Nigerian online newspapers on BaKiR reports.

The specific objectives are:

1. To identify and analyse the discourse strategies used in online newspaper reports on BaKiR.
2. To examine the ideological perspectives embedded in the linguistic and rhetorical patterns of selected news articles.
3. To investigate how media stories, depict social actors, victims, criminals, and government institutions within an insecure environment.
4. To investigate how online newspapers either endorse or oppose the primary political and institutional ideas.

Literature Review

Banditry and Kidnapping for Ransom (BaKiR) have become atrocious and defining characteristics of Nigeria's security landscape. Scholarly research on these phenomena focused on

their causes, socio-economic and political impacts, and the ways they are perceived in public discourse. This review draws on recent literature that examines these criminal activities from various perspectives, emphasising how their manifestations and consequences are discussed and interpreted within Nigerian society.

Aleyomi and Olajubu (42-57) provide a recent assessment of kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria, examining its prevalence across diverse social and geographic settings, including homes, schools, and public spaces. They mention causative factors like ineffective policing, widespread availability of small and large weapons, and the economic viability of ransom payments. Their findings suggest that kidnapping has metamorphosed into a lucrative enterprise for perpetrators. The study also details the complexities of ransom negotiations and the burden it places on victims and their families, offering important background for understanding the broader implications of BaKiR. Similarly, Nsirimovu (2-46) proffers a systemic analysis of the socio-political and economic gains that aggravate violent crimes, including kidnapping and banditry. His study draws connections between rising criminality and governance failures, poverty, and institutional neglect. Unlike the present study, which examines media texts, Nsirimovu relies on secondary data and policy analyses to construct a holistic picture of the root causes of violent crimes.

In an attempt to understand the media portrayal of such crimes, Osisanwo (135-156) employs a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach to examine how abduction is constructed in Nigerian newspapers. He identifies obvious patterns in the actions of perpetrators, state responses, victims, and the society at large. Though his interest is not on framing as such, the findings reveal discursive tendencies that enlighten the public on the burning issues.

The connection between low education and crime is articulated by Taiwo (89-105), who argues that poor educational systems and declining national values contribute to the rise in criminal activities such as kidnapping and banditry. While the research is not empirical, the study provides a theoretical foundation for discussing how far-reaching societal issues enable and reinforce criminal tendencies. It indirectly inspires researchers to study how public discourse and media narratives engage with matters of education and morality.

Omolabi (20-29) posits a media-focused perspective by analysing ideological biases in Nigerian newspaper reporting of the crimes. Using van Dijk's socio-cognitive model, the study shows how news platforms adopt subtle biases that streamline how insecurity is crafted. These ideological imports help shape public understanding, especially when newspapers align reporting with their editorial or political orientations. The present work also seeks to unravel the ideological biases of BaKiR. The historical and chronological context of kidnapping in Nigeria is traced by Albert, Danjibo, and Albert (211-226); they outline its evolution from a political tool in the Niger Delta to a commercially motivated practice. Their research provides insight into how economic and political shifts transformed kidnapping over time, laying a foundation for understanding its current manifestations.

From a global perspective, Montalbano (35-49, 201-229) explores ransom and kidnapping in Italy and its evolution into a classified industry powered by criminal groups like the Sicilian Mafia and the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta'. These studies unravel significant similarities with Nigeria, with a focus on how kidnapping has become embedded in informal economies and corporate crime.

The role language plays in media cannot be underestimated. It shapes crime narratives as asserted by Ottoh-Agede (25-306). She dissects the rhetorical and stylistic techniques used by Nigerian newspapers in reporting terrorism. Her findings demonstrate the power of language in constructing social realities and influencing public sentiment around insecurity. In a dense

language study, Ojoo and Ibrahim (12-23) apply the speech act theory to analyse headlines on banditry. They find that such headlines often function to incite fear, assert dominance, or elicit emotional responses. It shows the underlying linguistic strategies used in crime reporting.

Lastly, Torkwembe discusses the ethical and human rights dimensions of banditry (141-154); she emphasises the targeting of weak and helpless residents by kidnappers. She argues that such actions heighten existing security challenges and demand a more humane and strategic state response.

By and large, these studies provide a diverse body of knowledge that guides and informs the present study's inquisitiveness of how Nigerian online newspapers report on BaKiR. The reviewed literature points to complex relationships between criminal activity, societal structure, media representation, and ideological influence.

Ideological Biases

Ideological bias refers to the subtle, and often unconscious, influence of a media organisation's social, political, economic, or cultural orientation on the manner in which information is selected, interpreted, and presented. In news reporting, these nuances show up in the display of words, the structure of the stories, the sources chosen, and the attention and prominence given to some events or people over others. van Dijk (8) and Fairclough (2) note that such biases are intentional. They tend to reinforce the prevailing ideologies of constituted authority, bureaucrats, or media proprietors.

According to van Dijk (728), ideology functions as a structured system of shared beliefs that support and legitimise power relations within society. Within media texts, these ideologies become obvious and foregrounded through discussions that perpetuate setting perspectives. Language choices can make the actions of the state seem more legitimate, make non-state actors look corrupt, or foster common heritage, religious, or dissenting opinions, especially when it comes to daunting national security issues.

These ideological preferences are visible in online news reports about BaKiR in Nigeria. Media reports often uphold beliefs that either support the government's decision to provide security in volatile areas or present insurgent and criminal groups as troublingly violent. Omolabi (22) posits that Nigerian news reporting often maintains one-sided views of the media owners. These polarise the discourse in ways that can make large-scale responses appear justified while obscuring the real, unresolved issues.

Also, the representation of actors in the insecurity saga reveals the political stance of the reporters. Some reports may focus on individual ordeals of influential victims while downplaying the suffering of the masses. Some people may overlook problems with the government and see crimes as one-time incidents rather than signs of a failed system. Fowler (121) affirms that these kinds of actions are not acceptable.

Online News Media

Online news media involves digital platforms such as internet-based newspapers, news blogs, and mobile journalism that carry news content through the web. Slow dependence on the traditional print media has made online outlets become the valuable news source for a teeming number of readers, particularly within young and urban populations. While this surge has open up access to information, it has also revealed hidden challenges associated with pressures for journalists to publish quickly, often at the expense of thorough fact-checking leading to

inaccuracies, sensationalism, and the pursuit of virality through provocative headlines (McQuail, 45).

Online news platforms have gained upper hand in charting the discourse on burning issues of insecurity in Nigeria, especially concerning the elements of kidnapping and banditry. The manner in which these criminal issues are narrated through language choices, vivid images, news trustworthiness, and the progression of events, have immense impact on how readers interpret the menace associated with national insecurity.

However, the ideological leanings of Nigerian online media are closely tied to structural factors such as ownership, revenue generation models, and political alliances. These elements often determine strategic vision of the publishers, resulting in their consistency in reports that may challenge or legitimise systemic, visible and hidden power. Consequently, understanding the deeper layer of meaning within online media coverage becomes essential for critically assessing how perceptions of violence and insecurity are constructed and normalised in the public sphere.

Banditry and Kidnapping for Ransom (BaKiR)

BakiR, though distinguishable in their operations, are closely linked as prevailing forms of violent criminality in Nigeria. Banditry often encompasses a spectrum of organised criminal behaviour ranging from armed assaults and highway robbery to cattle rustling and attacks on rural settlements. Kidnapping for ransom involves any individual who, by force, takes away or detains another person against that person's will with the primary intent of monetary compensation or political leverage.

These crimes do not arise in isolation; they are fundamental or core issues that set in motion the entire cause-and-effect reaction that ultimately leads to the crimes. Violence crimes against fellow humans, according to Nsirimovu, have rather created a mockery and distorted view of the essence of religion, customs, and traditions, desecrating sacred African culture and tradition, which frowns at the shedding of innocent blood, rape, and kidnapping (14). The continuous and often sensationalised coverage of criminal acts by media spaces has led to a form of narrative normalisation, which can lead to exaggerated public perception of crime, increase and heighten public anxiety, erode trust in state institutions, and distort understanding of actual crime. Moreover, these portrayals risk framing insecurity as a static reality rather than as a crisis rooted in socio-political failures.

Media representations of BaKiR often treat individuals or communities as less important, less powerful or less worthy in a variety of areas. This selective framing can overshadow the impact of poverty and social inequality on crime rates. As a result, the way online newspapers frame BaKiR as a triggering event or as being likely to cause change in a national crisis holds significant ideological weight. Such framing not only shapes public opinion but also influences policy responses, sometimes putting in place policy measures that reduce or remove impediments to allocation of resources.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves both as a guiding perspective and a methodological tool for understanding how language functions as an instrument of social power. Rooted in interdisciplinary traditions, CDA examines how discourse constructs, maintains, or resists hierarchical relationships within society. Of particular relevance to this study is the work of van Dijk (1998), whose socio-cognitive approach investigates how textual features such as word

choices, actor representations, and narrative structure reinforce dominant ideologies and social inequalities.

CDA does not merely focus on the explicit content of texts but seeks to expose how language is used to construct and perpetuate social inequalities and power structures. It goes beyond surface intention to expose the hidden assumptions, values, and ideologies embedded within texts, revealing how they maintain or challenge dominance and social justice. CDA analyses both explicit content and implicit meanings within spoken and written communication to understand the broader social and political contexts that shape it. In the context of media coverage on banditry and kidnapping, CDA helps interrogate how online news platforms portray different actors. Perpetrators may be depicted as nameless villains or as politically motivated insurgents; victims can sometimes be associated with the broader victim mentality where an individual consistently perceives themselves as wronged and powerless or victim generally refers to someone who feels they are unfairly disadvantaged or harmed by societal structures, systems or norms. The term often implies a feeling of powerlessness.

van Dijk's socio-cognitive model is especially critical to this analysis, as it bridges discourse structures with cognitive processes exploring how journalists, editors, and audiences construct meaning through connections between sentences (text as product view), and examine how discourse develops through interaction (discourse as process view). This framework emphasises that language is not neutral but operates within broader contexts of ideology, identity, and institutional power. Similarly, Fairclough (98) stresses that discourse analysis must consider not only the textual features but also the socio-historical conditions under which texts are produced and interpreted.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is firmly rooted in CDA, with van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive approach. It focuses on the interplay between discourse, cognition and society, emphasizing the cognitive mechanism underpinning discourse processes. In this framework, discourse is viewed not merely as text but as a form of social practice that mediates between language, thought, and power. According to van Dijk, discourse is used to exercise power and maintain dominance in society. Power is not only exerted through overt means but also through control over discourse. Ideology, from this viewpoint, involves shared beliefs about group relations, often structured around binary oppositions such as "us" versus "them." van Dijk identifies obvious features in the text that are used to decode and interpret the ideology conveyed through grammar in the discourse. This indicates the relationship between text, power and culture.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, grounded in the principles of CDA to investigate ideological framing and media representation of insecurity in Nigerian online newspapers.

The data for this analysis comprise selected news articles focused on issues of banditry, kidnapping, and ransom. These articles were drawn from two purposively selected Nigerian online newspapers: *Daily Trust* (representing a Northern perspective) and *The Nation* (representing a Southern viewpoint). The online newspapers were chosen based on their national circulation, consistent reportage on security-related matters, and their active presence on digital platforms. A total of four news reports, two from each outlet were sampled, all published between 2024 and

2025. These reports were selected based on thematic relevance, the prominence of headlines, and their focus on the evolving insecurity landscape in Nigeria.

This study employed van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model of Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate how language in media texts reflects and shapes societal ideologies. The analysis focused on multiple discursive levels such as word choice, sentence structure, framing, and actor representation to reveal the underlying ideological meanings. These linguistic elements were examined to determine how they support, question, or reframe dominant narratives and influence readers' perceptions.

Data Analysis and Discussions
Datum 1:
Despite N10m Ransom, Bandits Kill Wife, Hold Husband Hostage
News Source: Daily Trust
Headline: Bandits have released Yakubu Dada, who was abducted alongside his youngest wife, Lami, along Kontagora Road in Niger State on October 31, 2024 (Published: Tue, 3 Jun 2025, 10:05:27 WAT)

van Dijk (1998) explains that discourse strategies reveal the speaker's or writer's ideological stance. In this report, the dominant strategy is personalisation and emotional appeal:

The data excerpt is drawn from *Daily Trust*'s coverage of the kidnapping of a retired civil servant, Mr. Yakubu Dada. The article narrates the ordeal from abduction, ransom demands, to the tragic killing of his wife and his eventual release.

1.1. "*Dada was reportedly freed on Monday, June 2, 2025, after his family paid an additional N20 million ransom, bringing the total amount paid to N30 million.*"
Survivalist Ideology:
The emphasis on the financial burden borne by the family highlights the privatisation of security and justice in the Nigerian context. The state is notably absent from the resolution of the crisis. This means that state failure is the growth of criminal violence. As state institutions weakens and fails in protecting citizens, survivalist ideology kicks in where individuals must rely on personal resources. van Dijk (1998) explains that discourse strategies reveal the speaker's or writer's ideological stance. In this report, the dominant strategy is personalisation and emotional appeal.

1.2. "*The kidnappers had initially collected N10 million in November 2024 but later demanded an additional N20 million and four Bajaj motorcycles, threatening to kill Dada if their demands were not met.*"
Insurgent Legitimation Ideology:
The abductors are portrayed using activated agency through verbs such as *"demanded," "threatening," and "collected."* This construction gives full agency and power to non-state actors that hold formal political authority within a nation state and operate through formal and organised structure. This stark contrast with the passivity or invisibility of state authorities reinforces a discursive frame of state impotence and insurgent dominance.

1.3. "*In early May, the bandits killed his wife, Lami, to pressure the family.*"
Ideology of Coercion of Victims:
This excerpt portrays the use of violence and intense force as a communicative strategy by bandits. It also constructs a moral hierarchy in which the perpetrators are positioned as inhumane and brutal, while the victims are innocent and virtuous. According to van Dijk's ideological square (1998), this reflects the cognitive structure of emphasising self and de-emphasising other, aligning public sentiment against the bandits.

1.4. *"The family sold almost all their belongings—including their house, two cars, beds, televisions, and other valuables—to raise the initial N10 million ransom."*

Ideology of Helplessness of Victims

The dramatic listing (*enumeration*) of assets lost by the family reflects a discourse of social decay. The language choice evokes empathy and outrage, but it also reaffirms the ideological notion that citizens are left to fend for themselves in the face of rising criminality, reinforcing a crisis of governance narrative.

1.5. *"The payment was reportedly delivered by Dada's younger brother in a forest in Kebbi State."*

Erasure Ideology:

The setting ("*a forest*") and the manner of ransom delivery allude to the existence of alternative territorial authority where bandits operate parallel systems of power and negotiation. The absence of state oversight in this process symbolises a loss of state monopoly over violence, a key indicator of weakened state.

Ideological Biases

The analysis reveals several critical ideological patterns embedded in the reporting:

Construction of Victims and Perpetrators

The victims are consistently portrayed as passive, submissive and unresisting, reinforcing their vulnerability and moral legitimacy, while the perpetrators are represented with active, intentional language. This contrast creates a discursive polarisation (van Dijk, 2006), presenting an ethical binary between "innocent citizens" and "morally depraved criminals."

Erasure of the State

One of the most notable ideological moves in the report is the total absence of state actors. There is no reference to police, military, or government officials. This omission is ideologically charged. It delegitimises the state by implying its irrelevance or incapacity in resolving security crises. The media present a picture of a narrative of state failure, which is a recurring motif in insecurity reportage in Nigeria.

Normalisation of the Ransom Economy

The detailed discussion of ransom negotiations, itemised payments, and the family's sacrifices constructs kidnapping as a normalised transaction within Nigeria's security landscape. This reflects a discourse of economic criminality, where monetary value is embedded into human life—a condition enabled by systemic failures and structural violence.

Through van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA framework, the article's ideological undertones are unravelled. The report, while appearing or claiming to be factual, subtly critiques the state, humanises the victims, and demonises the criminals. These linguistic and rhetorical choices are not neutral. They serve to shape public cognition about who is responsible for insecurity and what the social roles of various actors are.

This case study thus contributes to understanding how media texts are not just informative, but ideological artefacts that reflect and reproduce dominant narratives about governance, justice, and insecurity in Nigeria.

Datum 2:
Headline: Bandit Attacks: Assessing the Validity of Nuhu Ribadu's Claims
Date: April 30, 2024
Source: [Daily Trust]

The text serves as a discursive vehicle for validating state narratives about security progress under the current administration. Key ideological markers and rhetorical moves are identified below:

2.1. "*Continuous assessment and timely advisory to the handlers of a nation's security architecture greatly assist them in sustaining the hard-won achievements and improving in areas of weakness.*"

Ideological Legitimation of State Actors

This opening sentence establishes a positive evaluative tone and frames security operatives as strategic and competent actors. The phrase *"handlers of a nation's security architecture"* presents the government in technical, professionalised terms, creating an ideological position that legitimises state authority.

2.2. "*Malam Nuhu highlighted that organised terrorist attacks have been curtailed… highways such as Abuja-Kaduna and Zaria-Kano [are now] secure for travellers at any time of the day.*"

Ideology of State Achievements

Here, the state is portrayed as proactive and successful, reinforcing a discourse of progress and stability. The emphasis on day-time security for travel normalises a lowered expectation of safety, as night-time security is notably absent, revealing a subtle ideological redefinition of success in minimal terms.

2.3. *"He mentioned that security agencies have successfully deprived miscreants of access to weapons…"*

Ideology of State Legitimacy

The word *"miscreants"* is a loaded ideological label. It dehumanises the perpetrators, reducing them to nameless, faceless enemies. Such linguistic choices support the state's legitimacy as the sole actor entitled to violence, a key aspect of van Dijk's ideological square: "Us" (the state) = good and law-abiding; "Them" (the criminals) = bad and unlawful.

2.4. *"Have Nuhu Ribadu and his teams made visible and appreciable progress in the fight against bandits and criminals? This question is best answered using a reductionistic method..."*
Ideological of State Power

This rhetorical question followed by the appeal to a "reductionistic method" signals an attempt to rationalise state claims. The reference to methodological objectivity masks a value-laden, ideological endorsement of state efforts. It also discourages critical engagement or contestation.

2.5. *"The commendable improvement in the security situation in the Southeast has not only restored public trust and confidence but also instilled a sense of security among the populace..."*
Erasure of Victims Ideology

Such declarative assertions signal boosterism—language meant to enhance the public image of the government. The narrative ignores dissenting or contradictory experiences of citizens in the Southeast, thus engaging in selective reporting that reinforces hegemonic state ideologies.

2.6. "*The northwest region is frequently in the news due to bandits carrying out attacks to attract attention and acquire foodstuffs...*"
Erasure Ideology

Framing banditry as a survival mechanism ("*to acquire foodstuffs*") introduces a form of soft rationalisation of crime. However, this is not accompanied by systemic critique of economic

deprivation or governance failure. The blame remains on "*bandits*" rather than root causes, allowing the state to be distanced from socio-economic responsibility.

Ideological Biases

This analysis reveals a complex web of ideological constructions in the text as follows:

Legitimation of State Power

The article employs evaluative language and expert quotes to cast state actors—particularly Nuhu Ribadu and his team—as efficient, successful, and visionary. Such portrayals support the ideological reproduction of state hegemony, in line with van Dijk's emphasis on discourse as a tool for reproducing elite power

Erasure of Victim Agency

There is scant mention of victims or their lived experiences in the narrative. This absence indicates a top-down narrative orientation, where government voices dominate and public suffering is abstracted or silenced—a key feature of ideologically slanted reporting.

Reframing of Security Achievements

Security progress is presented in relative rather than absolute terms (e.g., "*now safer to travel in the day"*). This redefines success downward, normalising insecurity while promoting governmental efficiency within lowered expectations—a discursive strategy of ideological mitigation.

The discourse analysed reflects a clear pro-government ideological bias, using van Dijk's socio-cognitive structures such as semantic macrostructures (overall themes), lexical choices, and rhetorical strategies to legitimise state narratives, downplay failures, and silence public dissent. These linguistic patterns serve not only to inform but to shape public cognition in ways that align with ruling ideologies.

Datum 3
Headline: Army Will Wipe Out Banditry Soon, COAS Vows
Date: February 20, 2025
Source: [The Nation](#)
3.1. "*The Army will wipe out banditry and all other terrorist groups operating in Nigeria especially in Katsina State.*"
Militaristic Ideology:
The metaphor *"wipe out"* constructs banditry as an absolute enemy deserving of total annihilation. This dehumanising rhetoric aligns with militaristic ideology, where state violence is justified as a moral necessity. This frames the military as the ultimate agent of social purification, using force-based nationalism as ideological backing.
3.2. "*...to appraise the operational activities of the 17 Brigade, look at their challenges and see how fast I can address them...*"
Ideological Institutional Self-Legitimation:
The COAS positions himself as a responsive, proactive leader, reinforcing a positive in-group identity for the military. This framing shifts attention away from criticisms of past failures by reconstructing a narrative of efficiency and duty, consistent with institutional self-legitimation (van Dijk, 1998).
3.3. "*...urge them and charge them to do more so that we can eliminate all these bandits from the State and for us to have a safer State to live in.*"

Ideological Erasure of Root Causes:

Use of inclusive pronouns (*"we," "us"*) builds a collective 'us vs them' dichotomy between law-abiding citizens and bandits. This strategy appeals to national unity, casting the military as both protector and redeemer. It reinforces binary ideologies (good vs evil, security vs terror) without acknowledging root causes such as poverty, governance failure, or land disputes.

3.4. *"...this is a very simple responsibility that lies within our core responsibility as soldiers..."*

Ideology of Militarisation:

This statement normalises military intervention as the primary solution to internal insecurity. It reinforces an ideology of militarised citizenship, where development and peace are contingent upon armed force rather than structural reforms.

3.5. *"...so that government can have a space to development and Nigerians will be happy for it."*

Ideological Erasure of Institutions:

Here, the military is not just protecting citizens, but clearing space for governance and national development. This casts bandits as obstacles to progress, implicitly denying state complicity or failure in breeding conditions for violence. It aligns with top-down ideological constructions that absolve state institutions and shifts focus to criminal 'others.'

Ideological Biases

Militarisation of Public Space and Security Discourse

The COAS's speech reflects a dominant state ideology where national security is equated with militarised control. The repetition of elimination discourse ("*wipe out*," "*eliminate all bandits*") exemplifies authoritarian language which justifies violence in the name of national order.

Institutional Legitimacy and Heroic Militarism

The military is portrayed as disciplined, efficient, and moral, serving national interests. This strategic self-representation echoes van Dijk's concept of the ideological square (emphasising our good vs. their bad). The press report uncritically echoes this framing, reinforcing state narratives without interrogating civil rights, collateral damage, or policy gaps.

Erasure of Root Causes and Civilian Agency

Notably absent from the discourse is any recognition of socio-economic, political, or structural causes of banditry. There is no mention of unemployment, climate change, ethnic conflict, or rural marginalisation. By omitting these, the discourse depicts bandits as irrational actors, thus invalidating potential non-military solutions.

The COAS's speech, as reported in the news article, functions ideologically to legitimise military dominance, portray banditry as a purely criminal threat, and construct the Army as moral defenders of progress and peace. The ideological framing relies heavily on us-vs-them polarities, decontextualising insecurity while centering militaristic nationalism as the path to development. Such discourses may contribute to public consent for increased militarisation, while silencing critical engagement with systemic root causes.

Datum 4
Headline: Still on the Kidnapping Menace
Date: September 3, 2024
Source: The Nation

4.1. *"Ten years ago, I wrote about the scourge of kidnapping in Nigeria, warning that the country was on the verge of becoming the kidnap capital of the world. Unfortunately, my prophecy has come to pass."*

Ideological of Emotive Personalisation:

This opening construct the author as a prophetic, authoritative voice. The metaphor *"kidnap capital of the world"* is hyperbolic and intended to invoke fear and legitimise the speaker's foresight. The personalisation ("*my prophecy*") reinforces individual epistemic authority, situating the author as ideologically opposed to the complacency of the state and society.

4.2. *"Today, kidnapping for ransom has become the new oil well for bandits..."*

Ideology of Dependency:

The phrase *"new oil well"* is a metaphor of commodification, suggesting that kidnapping is now a lucrative economic sector. This creates a strong ideological linkage between criminality and Nigeria's rentier capitalist structure especially its dependency on extractive economies. It symbolises how illegality has become institutionalised due to state failure.

4.3. *"Over N10 billion was paid to kidnappers as ransom... The kidnapping business is booming."*

Ideological Legitimisation of Economic Activity:

Use of economic terminology (*"booming"*, *"ransom"*, *"business"*) transforms kidnapping into a legitimised economic activity, not merely a criminal offence. This naturalises the abnormal, aligning with van Dijk's view that ideologies often become implicit in representations of "normalcy".

4.4. *"We've lost our sense of feelings... We're not truly sad, we can't feel sad... We're too comfortable in our own lives."*

Moral Ideology:

This segment employs a collective pronoun "*we*" to invoke social complicity. The piece shifts ideological blame from the state to society at large, constructing a shared moral failure. The emotional appeal (*"not truly sad"*) functions as a discursive strategy of shaming, thereby creating an *ideological "us"* who are both perpetrators and passive observers.

4.5. *"We need to come together, as a society... support the victims... give them hope..."*

Ideological Targets:

This is an appeal to collective agency, but it also reflects an ideological retreat from state accountability. The discourse subtly normalises the inadequacy of government by focusing on what "*we*" should do instead—an example of shifting agency from the state to the people, often found in neoliberal discourses.

4.6. *"The kidnapping scourge is a symptom of a larger problem – a problem of inequality, of injustice, of corruption."*

Ideological Structural Problems:

This final excerpt provides a structuralist diagnosis, linking kidnapping to broader systemic injustices. It is ideologically potent, as it deconstructs the state's tendency to frame criminality as isolated, instead embedding it within social and institutional failure. This aligns with van Dijk's principle of *"macro discourse structures reflecting societal beliefs and power systems."*

Ideological Biases

Emotive Personalisation and Moral Framing

The article consistently employs emotionally charged, personal language to frame kidnapping not just as crime but as a national tragedy and moral failing. The first-person narrative and collective guilt rhetoric foster reader identification, compelling the audience to internalise responsibility.

Dual Ideological Targets: The State and Society

The piece critiques both governmental inaction and social apathy. This dual ideological focus shifts some of the discursive weight away from blaming the state alone, suggesting a shared civic guilt, which may reduce pressure for policy accountability while increasing communal burden.

Structural Problematisation

Unlike state-driven narratives that isolate kidnapping as terrorism or banditry, this article reframes the crisis as symptomatic of inequality, injustice, and corruption. Thus, aligning with critical ideological discourse that seeks to expose the deep structures underpinning surface-level violence. This editorial-style news article functions as a discursive instrument for social critique, deploying emotionally resonant language, collective pronouns, and economic metaphors to foreground kidnapping as a symbol of state failure and societal moral decay. While appearing neutral or concerned, the piece subtly de-centres state responsibility, shifting ideological agency to citizens under a moral reformist attention. This blend of structural diagnosis and social moralism reflects a layered ideological positioning consistent with van Dijk's socio-cognitive CDA.

Summary of Findings

The four analyses revealed consistent patterns of ideological framing across Nigerian online news reports on BaKiR. Drawing from van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of CDA, the following discursive and ideological tendencies were identified:

Victim-Centric Appeals and Emotional Economies: In the Dada kidnapping case (*Daily Trust*), language choices highlighted extreme victim suffering, including property loss and family trauma. The portrayal of helplessness was used to criticise the inefficiency of state response, subtly evoking public sympathy while constructing the state as passive. These linguistic strategies functioned to humanise victims and elicit outrage, yet stopped short of interrogating structural failures or government accountability.

Legitimation of State Narratives and Institutional Success: In the report on Nuhu Ribadu's security assessment, the newspaper reproduced state claims of success uncritically. Ideologically, the text used military progress as evidence of state competence, while minimising ongoing insecurity. Discourse strategies included positive self-representation of state actors, selective use of statistics, and comparative framing (e.g., referencing Southeast and Niger Delta peace as success stories), reinforcing the narrative that the government is on the right path.

Civic Critique and Moral Reawakening: In the opinion article titled "Still on the Kidnapping Menace", the writer adopted a moralist and accusatory tone, criticising not only government failure but also societal indifference. The ideological positioning urged collective responsibility, framing kidnapping as a symptom of broader systemic decay, including inequality and desensitisation. The discursive emphasis on loss of empathy, moral decline, and passive citizenship reflects a civil society ideology seeking grassroots mobilisation.

Militaristic Nationalism and Authoritarian Discourse: In the Army Chief's declaration to 'wipe out bandits', the analysis found strong militaristic rhetoric and binary ideological

framing. Bandits were dehumanised ("eliminate," "wipe out"), while the army was portrayed as heroic defenders of peace and development. There was no engagement with structural causes of banditry, and the militarisation of public security was normalised through patriotic appeals. This reflects a dominant ideology of state control through force, consistent with authoritarian discourse.

Conclusion

The analysis across the four datasets reveals that Nigerian online newspapers, far from being neutral chroniclers of events, operate as ideological actors engaged in constructing, legitimising, and contesting competing narratives of insecurity. Using van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis, this study identified recurrent patterns of ideological positioning embedded in linguistic choices, narrative structures, and actor representations. Across all articles, four dominant ideological tendencies emerged: Legitimation of State Narratives: Through selective emphasis and positive framing, especially in official reports, state actors—military, government, and security institutions—are portrayed as competent, well-intentioned, and proactive, even when public outcomes contradict such portrayals. Emotive Framing of Victims: Victims of banditry and kidnapping are often personalised, with emphasis on suffering and loss, which fosters empathy but also distracts from critical examination of state failure or systemic causality. Militarisation of Insecurity Discourse: The recurrence of war metaphors and nationalistic rhetoric privileges violence as the primary tool for resolving conflict, sidelining developmental, social, or economic approaches. Moralisation of Civil Society: Especially in opinion pieces, insecurity is often framed as a reflection of moral decay or societal indifference. This deflects attention from institutional accountability, shifting responsibility onto the public through collective guilt and civic appeals.

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