

Discourse of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in Newspaper Editorials on Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

The spate of security threats in Nigeria has recently become quite alarming, dominating newspaper headlines and editorials. This article examines the discourse strategies deployed in the representation of ‘self’ and ‘other’ by editorials in two Nigerian newspapers on the security challenges in Nigeria. Drawing insights from Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis, the sampled editorials on insecurity in Nigeria from two e-versions of newspapers from the northern (*Leadership Nigeria*) and southern (*Punch*) parts of Nigeria, published from 2017 to 2020 are subjected to discourse analysis. The paper identified the deployment of eight discourse strategies, motivated by nationalist and humanist ideologies. The newspapers polarise between self and other through positive in-group and negative out-group ideologies on the security challenges bedevilling Nigeria with attendant implications for Africa and the world at large.

Keywords

Insecurity in Nigeria, human security threat, discourse strategies, ideology, Nigerian newspaper editorials

Introduction

Since the September 9, 2011, terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon Building in the United States of America, there has been a need for new thinking on security globally and locally. While it may seem that there is relative security in other parts of the world, the African continent has been worse off. The National Security Strategy policy document (2022) records that Nigeria is one of the African countries with diverse threats. Precisely since 2009, with the Boko Haram menace, the number of violent crimes, such as kidnappings, ritual killings, suicide bombings, religious killings, politically motivated killing and violence, ethnic clashes, armed banditry and others have increasingly become the regular signature that characterises Nigeria. The National Security Strategy policy document (2022: 43–44) reports that ‘enhancing Africa’s peace and prosperity will bolster Africa’s ability to solve regional and global problems . . .’ and ‘we will continue

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to invest in the region's largest states, such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa'. The report confirms Nigeria and other African countries as nations lacking peace due to security threats, and America promises continued support to ensure an end to the threat. The security threat, which is not peculiar to Nigeria, is common to other African countries. A common denominator among selected countries in the African continent is the fact that post-independent Africa has been characterised by a decline of interstate conflict, and an increase in intra-conflicts, as well as civil wars with states becoming increasingly the source of insecurity for its citizens (Palik et al., 2020). The Federal Republic of Nigeria, where a series of security threats have recently bedevilled, has increasingly become a fragile state. This is occasioned by the rising level of insecurity, which has assumed an alarming rate, generating national and global concerns. Yet, one of the fundamental human rights of the people in any given state is the right to security; and this is spelled out in Section 14 (2) (b) of the Nigerian 1999 constitution, 'the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of the government'. Notwithstanding, security threats, as regularly reported by different newspapers, have practically become a daily occurrence. Is the government, therefore, living up to its primary purpose of providing security and welfare?

Security connotes a process of the establishment of measures for the protection of persons, information and property against hostile persons' influences and actions (Kinge and Nwake, 2019). Insecurity – a state of being subject to fear, terror, war, threat, danger, coercion, molestation, intimidation, harassment, extortion and so forth – has been hyped by the activities of bandits, terrorists, kidnappers, herdsmen, robbers, rapists, ritualists, among others. Insecurity has to do with a lack of security – freedom from potential harm or other coercive change(s) caused by the activities or actions of others. The insecurity threat as experienced in Nigeria with its attendant effects on the political, economic and social facets has attracted widespread attention, even from the media within and outside Nigeria. Hence, several discourses have emerged from the Nigerian media via different news genres, including headlines, news reports, editorials, opinions, interviews and so forth. Most of them have claimed to have objectively reported the events or oriented the masses. Contrariwise, media scholars have argued that objective news reporting is impossible because language – the major tool in reporting – is an embodiment of ideology (Beard, 2000; Dellinger, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Olowe, 1993; Reah, 1998). 'News is not a value-free reflection of facts' (Fowler, 1991: 2), because the linguistic structure of 'a news text embodies values and beliefs' (Fowler, 1991: 66). Therefore, the print media word-choice(s) are never neutral; rather, they carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak or write (Fiske, 1994; Taiwo, 2008). In news media, language, including discourse strategy, structure and representation, is often manipulated to represent issues reported even on events surrounding insecurity. Editorial is not an exception to this. It is often reported based on the perceptions of the news medium. Hence, the ambivalent language used in the representations has underlying ideological prejudices, where the in-group is positively presented and the out-group is negatively represented (Van Dijk, 2006).

Discourse strategies are deployed in specific contexts to achieve specific goals. Discourse strategies deal with 'various possible routes in a complete course of action to reach a wanted goal' (Van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983: 11). Reisigl and Wodak (2009) posit that the deployed strategies in discourses are deliberate and are often used to achieve the targets of the users. They are used for different communicative purposes, for representing events, such as security challenges or insecurity actors and their actions or their roles in either a positive or negative light. This study, therefore, examines how 'self' and 'other' discourses are represented through different discourse strategies by the two Nigerian newspaper editorials in orienting readers on the security challenges in Nigeria.

Security (threat) in Nigeria

Security is important to humans. Security is the pillar upon which every meaningful development can be achieved and sustained (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013). From time immemorial, humans have sought ways to address security challenges, especially when confidence vested in major security providers like the state begins to dwindle. Security provides 'a form of protection where a separation is created between the assets and the threat' (Institute for Security and Open Methodologies (ISECOM)). When the citizenry assumes a state of palpitation, resorting to seeking self-help to feel secure, then the government has failed in its duty to protect the lives of the citizenry. Hence, security is fundamental to functionality and governmental existence. Cutting across its six geographical regions, Nigeria currently battles with security challenges. The causes of security challenges in Nigeria vary, comprising unemployment, poverty, rise in ethnic and militia groups, weak leadership, weak judiciary, ineffective security agencies, weak economy, struggle for power and corrupt practices (Ali, 2013; Ezeoha, 2011; Okorie, 2011; Salawu, 2010). Others are bad governance, lack of quality education or training, lack of basic infrastructures, misappropriation of public funds, perceived victimisation, arrant poverty amid affluence, ethnic superiority, religious superiority, domination and exploitation, materialism and the display of wealth with impunity. Chiluya (2017: 332) concludes that 'the Nigerian security situation is complex'.

The display of impunity-ridden corrupt practices on the part of government officials has encouraged recklessness, promoting incapacitation on the part of the government to tackle the issues that threaten man's sanity. Despite the provision of Section 14 (2b) of the Nigerian constitution, as stated earlier, social vices have remained realities to the citizenry. Such vices include ritual killing, militancy, Biafra agitation, oil bunkering, robbery, communal wars, Boko Haram activities, herds-men activities, arms and drug dealing, racketeering, kidnapping, arson and brigandage, assassination, maiming the innocent, acid bathing and among others. News headlines have, therefore, continued to report the security challenges which threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria. Yet, the state is expected to safeguard the lives and property of its citizenry, deploying the security agencies that are constitutionally charged with maintaining law and order for a peaceful co-existence in a sovereign state like Nigeria.

There are no nations without security challenges. However, the difference is in the approach used in curtailing such challenges. Historically, the major threat to Nigerian security was the outbreak of the civil war, which was attributed to different factors, mainly corruption. Insecurity as an offshoot of bad governance or Nigerian politics has birthed ethnic rivalry and religious bigotry. The 'do-or-die' ambition of Nigerian politicians due to 'money-politics' has further heightened the gap between the haves and the haves-nots. The failure of the Federal government to secure Nigerians led to the emergence of the geo-political vigilante groups, including Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the South, Oodua People's Congress (OPC) in the West, Arewa People's Congress (APC) in the North, Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the South East, Bakassi Boys, the Egbesu Boys, Tiv and other Militias and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). The activities of the groups have assumed a dysfunctional dimension and threatened the objectives of peaceful coexistence in Nigeria (Agbaje, 2002).

The general belief has been that with the arrival of democracy, things will get better on all sides. Unfortunately, especially since 2009, and more importantly since 2017, the spate of insecurity has increased in Nigeria. This is confirmed by Akinwumi (2005) that the return to democracy in 1999 encouraged the sporadic emergence of ethnic militia and other separatist groups who were used by politicians to advance their personal or sectional interests. Rather than provide jobs for the jobless youths, the youths were enrolled in the militia groups, chiefly to protect the politicians' vested interest. This is also corroborated by Akinboye (2001) that the return to democracy has encouraged

the proliferation of ethnic militias, with attendant crises from the activities; the proliferation and increased activities are not unconnected with the relatively liberal environment created by democracy. One of the earliest clashes since the return to democracy was the Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri militias violent clash in Warri Town, Delta State on 31 May 1999. On 17 July 1999, there was an ethnic clash involving members of the OPC and members of the Hausa Community in Shagamu, Ogun State, sequel to the death of a Hausa woman who was said to have flouted the order restricting women from coming out of their homes during specific hours of the night during the annual Oro Festival; it led to the death of about 50 people. Meanwhile, reprisal attacks in Kano on 22 July 1999 claimed over 100 lives (*The News*, 31 January 2000).

From the activities of the militias, there was the birth of other self-help methods that heightened the insecurity situation, such that, cases of different types of crimes and threats to life and property abound in Nigeria today. Chiefly, insecurity in Nigeria has been heightened by the activities of Boko Haram terrorists. The activities of Boko Haram terrorists became very pronounced in Nigeria in 2009, and within a couple of years, the group had killed over 10,000 civilians and security personnel, bombed the United Nations office in Abuja, churches, mosques, army barracks, police headquarters, motor parks and other public places (Osisanwo, 2016). It also kidnapped numerous students of Chibok in Borno State (276 girls in April 2014); Dapchi in Yobe State (111 girls in 2018); Kankara in Katsina State (300+ in December 2020); Jangebe/Dengebe in Zamfara State (279 girls in February 2021); Kagara in Niger State (42 in February 2021) and so forth. Other activities that have amplified insecurity in Nigeria include ransacking and burning of villages, wanton killing in places like worship centres, abducting of passengers on highways, raping of women and girls across communities, and human and drug trafficking. Others are Fulani herdsmen activities, ethnic militias, militancy (Niger Delta and others), pipeline vandalism, armed robberies, hostage taking, political violence and ethno-religious conflicts. The life-threatening activities frustrate socio-economic and technological transformation.

News, (discourse) analysis and insecurity

The media depend on language and linguistic choices to report different societal issues, including issues bothering security threats. Such choices, which are often ideological, are deployed to orient the readers and citizenry alike to guide them towards opinion formation. Therefore, linguistic choices in newspapers are often manipulated to influence readers' opinions and worldviews. Previous research on print media representations which have shown instances of bias in the choice of language by the media have focussed on different societal issues across the world. Some such studies have been conducted on protest-induced security challenges and threats in general (Cottle, 2008; Fang, 2001; Hart, 2015; Lee and Craig, 1992; Newlands, 2009) and these studies have examined both the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the discourse. Others have examined how crime, especially heinous crimes, such as insurgency and terrorism are represented in the media (Chiluwa and Odebunmi, 2016; Osisanwo, 2016, 2019); some have examined issues of conflict and protest (Igwebuikwe, 2020; Osisanwo and Iyoha, 2020). Others have also focussed on other Nigeria-based issues, especially issues that threaten the security and peace of the country. Among these studies are Ayoola (2011), Osisanwo (2024) and Odebunmi and Oloyede (2016). However, despite the significance of discourse strategies in editorials in tracking newspapers' subjectivity, and the significant impact of national insecurity on the Nigerian state, relatively few studies have focussed on the thematic concept of insecurity in the representations by the media. Yet, the role of the media in curtailing, containing or managing security threats is noteworthy. This is where our interest lies in this study. How have the media represented insecurity in Nigeria? What discourse strategies have been deployed to convince Nigerians and readers in general? What ideologies have

evolved from their reportage? How have they framed 'self' and 'other' in the construction of issues and news surrounding the security challenges in Nigeria? Using insights from Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive model of critical discourse analysis (CDA), therefore, this paper analyses the discourse strategies deployed in the representation of 'self' and 'other' by the selected newspaper editorials on insecurity in Nigeria.

Van Dijk's socio-cognitive model

Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive model of CDA is preferred in this paper. Van Dijk (2006) emphasises the cognitive interface that exists between discourse structures and social structures and goes further to examine how discourse strategies are 'manipulated' to polarise between in-group and out-group representations, as well as unearth the ideological dissimilarities in the representations of issues and participants involved. CDA is an innovative, multidisciplinary approach that tackles many important social issues and seeks to make clear the opaque connections between discourse practices, social practices and social structures. Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive approach is biased towards a cognitive view of discourse. According to Van Dijk (2000: 353), CDA is 'a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context'. In other words, it considers how issues are manifested through language, and studies the way texts and talks are used in enacting, reproducing and resisting social power abuse, dominance and inequality. In his 2006 revision, van Dijk offers a framework for the categorisation of people in the media to reflect the basic ideological strategy of 'negative other-representation' and 'positive self-representation'. According to him, semantic macro-ideological strategies are deployed as discursive ways to categorise participants as 'good' and 'bad' to either enhance or mitigate 'our'/'their' bad characteristics. The 'good' and 'bad' can further imply 'superior' and 'inferior', 'us' and 'them'. While the 'good'/'superior'/'us' participants are accorded positive self-representation or in-group favouritism, the 'bad'/'inferior'/'them' participants are accorded negative other-representation or out-group derogation, with the goal marking discourse ideologically. The discourse strategies identified by Van Dijk have proved useful in media-related studies and other genres to construct social inequality, subjectivity and polarisation. They are also found to be relevant to security discourse, as carried out by Chiluba (2017), Odeunmi and Oloyede (2016), Osisanwo (2016) and Igwebuikwe (2018, 2020), which dwell on studies related to security threats, emphasising terrorism in Nigeria, communal clashes and so forth. Of the many categories raised in the CDA approach, eight are very useful for this article; the eight are negative label, evidentiality, victimisation, number game, hyperbolicism, illustration, lexicalisation and generalisation/depersonalisation. Labelling involves the use of specific labels to organise people into different groups, using specific identifiers that can be negative or positive. The choice of negative or positive is often determined by their social attitudes. Evidentiality involves the use of 'some evidence or proof to support one's knowledge or opinion' (Van Dijk, 2006: 736), so that, a claim or viewpoint can be perceived as more reliable or credible. Victimisation strategy projects victimhood, where the 'self' is projected as the recipient of the 'bad' deeds meted out by 'other'. Number game involves the use of 'numbers and statistics to appear credible' (Van Dijk, 2006: 736), since numerical descriptions of victims and victors show credibility and believability. Hyperbolicism is 'a semantic rhetorical device used for enhancing meaning' (Van Dijk, 2006: 736). Illustration involves the use of examples to illustrate or make a point more credible. Lexicalisation involves the use of specific lexical items to express clues to concepts. Generalisation or depersonalisation strategy involves the use of generalisations rather than the use of concrete stories. For this paper, therefore, the discourse strategies will be deployed to track the representation of 'self' and 'other' ideologies in the editorials on security threats.

Data and methods

In gathering data for this study, the e-versions of two newspapers from the northern (*Leadership Nigeria*) and southern (*Punch*) parts of Nigeria were purposively selected. The newspapers were selected because they were national newspapers that are widely read and circulated across Nigeria. Editorials on security challenges that Nigeria is facing were sampled from the newspapers between 2017 and 2020 – the season of numerous security challenges, which go beyond insurgency to communal clashes, banditry and so forth. Of about 2000 editorials by each of the newspapers within the selected period, only 102 editions (*Punch* – 65; *Leadership Nigeria* – 37) were purposively selected on the subject matter of security challenges. The period was also a period in which the media produced many editorials on the security threat bedeviling Nigeria. The data were subjected to CDA, guided by Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model to unearth how the deployed discourse strategies projected the challenges. In both newspapers, 85 instances of the deployment of discursive strategies – 40 from *Punch*, and 25 from *Leadership Nigeria* – were extracted and numbered Excerpts 1 – 85 for analysis. Nevertheless, due to space limitations, only a few representative text samples were analysed in this article. From the 27 main and other hundreds of possible discursive strategies that Van Dijk identified in his theoretical approach, only eight are found relevant for the present study, because the data source of this paper is restricted to editorials. Of the different features of newspapers, editorials play a vital and central role in reflecting the ideological stance of the media’s institutional and organisational contexts. *Punch* and *Leadership Nigeria* are independent Nigerian daily newspapers; hence, the state does not determine the content of the newspapers.

Analysis and findings

Eight discourse strategies deployed in the construction of ‘self’ and ‘other’ by the selected newspapers on the security challenges Nigeria is facing are negative label, evidentiality, victimisation, number game, hyperbolism, illustration, lexicalisation and generalisation/depersonalisation. The strategies are used to project nationalist and humanist ideologies. Nationalist ideology manifests in the newspapers’ positive representation of ‘self’ and the negative representation of ‘other’. Similarly, humanist ideology manifests through disapproval of killings, canvassing the need for peace and bloodlessness.

Negative label strategy

Labelling, like the categorisation strategy, is a discursive strategy used in organising people into different groups or identifying and describing a person or group of people with specific identifiers. Persons or groups are assigned to different categories, using specific labels depending on the perceived social attitudes they exhibit and are associated with. Such labels can be positive or negative. Positive labels show approval of a group’s activities and actions, while negative labels show condemnation of such activities and actions. Both *Punch* and *Leadership Nigeria* editorials deploy more negative labels than positive ones about insecurity as exemplified in texts 1–3:

Text 1

Although the country had been under the assault of Boko Haram, an Islamist group, before Buhari mounted the saddle in 2015, the threat of insecurity has been further worsened by **activities of bandits** spread across the northern states and **pervasive nature of kidnapping**. Hardly does a day pass without reports of **mass murder of innocent Nigerians**. For instance, it was reported last week that **bandits shot** and killed

16 people in Kanoma village in the Maru Local Government Area of Zamfara State. In the same week, reports had it that no fewer than 50 people were killed when **bandits** attacked five Sokoto villages in Rabah and Isa local government areas . . . **Killer Fulani herdsmen** who have been wreaking havoc across the country, described by the Global Terrorism Index as **the fourth deadliest terror group in the world**, appear to have unofficial freedom to roam the country. They are neither arrested, nor are they prosecuted when police manage to round up a few. How then would **the mindless killings and sacking of villages** not continue? . . . But, fast becoming **the most lethal of them all are the herdsmen**, whose sphere of influence extends to the southern parts of the country. Because of their activities, which includes kidnapping for ransom, it has become very difficult for people to move freely in Ondo, Ekiti and Osun states. (*Punch*, June 20, 2019)

In Text 1, actors involved in the insecurity experienced in Nigeria are negatively labelled by *Punch* as ‘bandits’, ‘kidnappers’, ‘murderers’, ‘killers’, ‘deadliest terror group’, ‘village sackers’ and ‘lethal’ men (Text 1). The negative labels in the editorial lexicalise the attributes of those causing insecurity, implicating dangerous and possibly irreversible damage to lives and property. The description of Nigeria as a country ‘worsened by activities of bandits spread across the northern states and pervasive nature of kidnapping’ underscores the ineffectiveness of the government and security personnel in getting Nigerians the much-anticipated secured locale. The representation further incriminates the actors engaged in banditry – criminal activities – as criminals whose activities have taken a toll on Nigeria as a country, and more particularly, on the northern states in Nigeria.

The expression, ‘Killer Fulani herdsmen who have been wreaking havoc across the country’, negatively labels Fulani herdsmen as men not only involved and interested in herding but also as killers, who have successfully wreaked havoc across the Nigerian state. A killer is somebody who terminates another person’s life. The emphasis of the *Punch* editorial in the construction of Fulani herdsmen as killers becomes motivated for meaning, implicating the kinsmen of the president as a major stakeholder and player in the unwarranted killing of innocent Nigerians. Furthermore, the description, ‘described by the Global Terrorism Index as the fourth deadliest terror group in the world’, further implicates Fulani herdsmen as terrorists. The lexis ‘terror’ is used to denote the act of using violence to achieve one’s aim. The editorial, using the Global Terrorism Index as the authority, therefore, labels Fulani herdsmen as out-group and terrorists who combat, terrorise and kill the in-group – Nigerians. This underscores the ideological polarisation between ‘them’ – Fulani herdsmen – a group of people who are united and associated in their resolve against ‘us’ – the government and the people of Nigeria. Finally, the use of the lexis ‘lethal’, which implies something that is causing or able to cause death, as used in the expression ‘the most lethal of them all are the herdsmen’ superlatively denotes the Fulani herdsmen as the new most dreaded group causing insecurity in Nigeria. In the text, the deployment of a negative label strategy is further supported by the *Punch* editorial through the projection of an evidentiality strategy for purposes of credibility by citing the Global Terrorism Index.

Text 2

There are still reasons to be optimistic if only the security challenges are confronted as issues that are related to the excesses of **some miscreants** intent on drawing attention to themselves and not opportunity for **inordinately ambitious politicians** to throw straws into a raging fire. The situation will be better managed if politicians strip themselves of the tendency to drag their partisan inclinations into it so as to gain some undeserved leverage. It is trite to state that this year will be politically charged but that is no reason to trivialise an issue as serious as the security situation in the polity which is already claiming innocent lives. (*Leadership*, January 18, 2018)

Text 3

Security experts have consistently canvassed the view that the clashes between herdsmen and farmers are not just what they seem. There is a strong assumption that some of the so called **herdsmen are, indeed, criminals on rampage, rogue elements from crisis-torn regions** across Nigeria's borders out to cause **mischief** in the country and possibly destabilise her. These various pockets of **attacks at seemingly random areas may be the harbinger, a deep breath before the plunge, waiting to undermine the country**. If strong security measures are not taken to man these vulnerable areas, then there is a chance that the nation will leave open **a vacuum that could be instantly filled with vices**. (*Leadership*, April 15, 2019)

Similarly, in texts 2–3, the *Leadership* editorial lexicalises the negative labels of Fulani herdsmen and others involved in challenging the security situation in Nigeria, using lexical items like ‘miscreants’, ‘criminals’, ‘rogue elements’ and ‘attackers’ to ideologically polarise between ‘them’ – actors on insecurity and ‘us’ – the government and people of Nigeria. The label ‘criminal’, which denotes a person who tends to commit crimes, and ‘rogue’, which denotes a dangerous person, explicitly associate the herdsmen with crime and danger in ‘herdsmen are, indeed, criminals on the rampage, rogue elements from crisis-torn regions across Nigeria's borders out to cause mischief in the country and possibly destabilise her’ to destabilise the country. The lexis ‘attack’ as used in ‘These various pockets of attacks at seemingly random areas may be the harbinger, a deep breath before the plunge, waiting to undermine the country’ qualifies the violent actions with a prediction of possibly throwing the country into chaos if not quickly checked. Beyond the labelling of herdsmen and other challengers of the security outfit, the *Leadership* editorial re-polarises between the in-group and out-group to caution on the need to be wary of others – not only herdsmen – who are enemies of Nigerians. It identifies some politicians as common enemies of Nigeria too. Hence, the lexical expression, ‘inordinately ambitious politicians to throw straws into a raging fire’ implicates some unidentified politicians as deploying the situation in the country to score political points to the detriment of human lives.

Evidentiality strategy

Evidentiality is a discursive strategy that deploys ‘some evidence or proof to support one's knowledge or opinion’ (Van Dijk, 2006: 736), thereby making a claim or viewpoint more reliable or credible in editorials, as a case in use. The mental models of news consumers are easily influenced when text producers or newspaper editors provide evidence that gives credibility to claims (Van Dijk, 2006) and persuades them to believe the account as true. This discourse strategy is deployed to authenticate the in-group's good actions and the out-group's bad actions. The evidentiality strategy provides evidence from eyewitnesses or by quoting specific authorities who have insider knowledge on the issue at hand, as evident in our data:

Text 4

Indeed, there is real fear of danger across the board, regardless of the ad hoc arrangements citizens make to protect themselves. **All the police and the government offer the public are lame excuses. And, viewed from Section 14 (2b) of the 1999 Constitution, which says: ‘The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government’**, the pervasive security breaches expose Nigeria as a failing state. (*Punch*, August 6, 2017)

Text 5

While the government of President Muhammadu Buhari has done a lot in the last four years to drastically curtail the activities of the Boko Haram in the North East, it appears that the insurgents have morphed into

bandits, cattle rustlers, and kidnappers and spread its activities across North Central and North West. . . This has gotten to the point where it appears as if government is not doing enough. One of the major stakeholders who believe that the government is not doing enough to tackle insecurity is the Supreme Council for Shari'ah in Nigeria (SCSN). **Recently the SCSN said that it is unhappy with the federal government over poor efforts in tackling insecurity in the country.** The group in a communique which was signed and read by the SCSN Secretary General, Nafiu Baba Ahmad, emphasised on the need for federal government to change tactics in dealing with security challenges. **They particularly noted that government's effort in checkmating insecurity in North Eastern States and in Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina, Taraba and Benue States, 'is grossly inadequate'.** (*Leadership, April 23, 2019*)

Text 6

In Zamfara State, Babban Rafi villagers are in grief following last month's killing of 31 persons by bandits in two separate attacks. These atrocities came in the wake of the so-called amnesty the Governor, Bello Mattawale, had granted the bandits. **The Commissioner of Police in the state, Usman Nagoggo, on January 8 said no fewer than 6,319 people were killed by bandits in the state in 2019 alone.** In Katsina State, the General's home state, begging bandits for peace, instead of routing them, has become an awkward attribute of governance. (*Punch, February 4, 2020*)

Evidentiality as a discursive strategy is deployed in texts 4–6 to portray facts and observations on the insecurity issues in Nigeria. The use of evidence in reports or accounts brings reality closer to readers. First, text 4 negatively portrays the incompetence of the Nigerian government by citing what is contained in 'Section 14 (2b) of the 1999 Constitution, which says: "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government"'. The reference to this fact is ideologically motivated to remind the government and Nigerians of the civic duties of the government and how it is failing to deliver; hence, it opines that 'pervasive security breaches expose Nigeria as a failing state'. Similarly, in text 5, the *Leadership* editorial deploys the voice of the Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Shari'ah in Nigeria (SCSN), Nafiu Baba Ahmad, to express the unhappiness of Nigerians with the government in curbing insecurity, noting that 'government's effort in checkmating insecurity in North . . . is grossly inadequate'. The condemnation of the efforts of the government through the evidentiality strategy creates a mental model in the minds of Nigerians and readers alike. The reference to victims in text 6 – 'no fewer than 6,319 people were killed by bandits in the state in 2019 alone' – provides strong evidence through the voice of the Commissioner of Police that Nigeria has become a country prone to serious security challenges, where both the led and the leaders seem handicapped. The mental model created with the last sentence in text 6 – 'In Katsina State, the General's home state, begging bandits for peace, instead of routing them, has become an awkward attribute of governance' sufficiently summarises the fact that the citizenry should not depend on the government for security since issues have worsened to the point that the government of Katsina – the president's home state – goes cap in hand appealing to bandits to sheath their sword. This, therefore, projects the resistance to the perceived incompetence of the Nigerian government through text.

Victimisation strategy

This is a discourse strategy that projects victimhood. The strategy polarises between 'self' and 'other', by representing the negative behaviour of 'other' as directed to inflict harm or threat to 'self' – the victim. The victimhood expressions are used to project the 'self' as the recipient of the 'bad' deeds meted out by 'other' and create the preferred mental model of 'self' as the victim in the given accounts. Instances are as discussed from the data:

Text 7

Because of government's insensitivity to the high rate of crime, **travellers on the expressways like Benin–Sagamu and Akure–Ilesa, are in a permanent state of fear**. The Kaduna–Abuja Expressway, a major link between the North-West and the Federal Capital Territory, is a den of bandits in spite of the heavy deployment of police officers. In June, bandits **abducted 20 persons in one operation**. Also, robbers raided a bank in Owerri, Imo State in February and **killed police officers**. In June, Osogbo, Osun State, witnessed a daylight bank robbery **in which three police officers died**. (*Punch*, August 6, 2017)

Text 8

There is no denying the fact that **Nigeria, as a nation, is facing daunting challenges presently in matters relating to security of lives and properties**. To say that it is disturbing is to say the least in the mildest way. Coming particularly at a time many were already in a celebratory mood that the end of year festivities, but for the contrived fuel scarcity, went well without reports of bombings by terrorists, the crisis leaves a sour taste in the mouth. Nigerians are, justifiably, **worried that the convivial atmosphere was polluted by clashes between farming communities and herdsmen, which led to killings and destruction of properties**. Without doubt, those reports emanating from Rivers, Benue, Nasarawa and Adamawa States **dampened the joyous spirit of Nigerians** who had hoped that the new year will bring with it events that will give them reasons to be optimistic. (*Leadership*, January 8, 2018)

Text 9

The rampant stories of the treacherous activities of herdsmen began two years ago with kidnapping and extortion, and in some cases, **outright assassination of the captives**, if the demanded ransoms were not forth coming. Those rescued from these dangerous gangs, operating in Kogi, Kaduna, Niger, Kano, and Plateau states told bizarre, unbelievable tales of the types of weapons acquired and operated by these lawless hooligans; directly or indirectly assisted by some section of Nigeria's political elite . . . At a point, **anyone travelling between Abuja and Kaduna was a possible target for abduction**. It took the belated action of the Nigerian police force to temporarily quell the frequency of attacks, but the situation is still potent. (*Leadership*, March 24, 2018)

Text 10

The result? 'Mere anarchy' is let loose. Niger, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Benue, Plateau, Kaduna and Taraba states in the North-West and North-Central zones have become a haven for bandits, forcing the President to periodically deploy the military in these areas without the desired result. Last Thursday, the people of Kwatas in Bokkos Local Government Area of Plateau State **buried 20 of their own massacred early January by Fulani herdsmen. Their village was invaded** by herders wielding AK 47 rifles. Benue State had in January 2018 **similarly buried 73 people slaughtered by the herders**. The same year, in April, **two Catholic priests and 17 others were murdered inside the church in an early morning raid**. More than **100,000 persons have been killed by Boko Haram since its murderous campaign began in 2009**, according to the former Borno State Governor, Kashia Shettima. Nigeria's northern land borders with Chad, Niger and Cameroon are major suspected routes of the inflow of illicit arms and ammunition into the country, which fuel this orgy of bloodbath. (*Punch*, February 4, 2020)

The victims in texts 7–10 are in-group members – Nigerians – who lost their lives and property to the out-group – insecurity actors. Through the victimisation strategy, Nigerians, including civilians and security personnel are portrayed as victims whose lives are often subjected to loss by the 'bad' behaviour of the out-group. The constructed mental model is one in which both the citizenry and the security forces have become victims of the dastardly actions of the out-group, the herdsmen

and other actors. The citizenry who are the victims in question include ‘travellers’, ‘police officers’, ‘Nigeria’, ‘Nigerians’, ‘persons’ and ‘Catholic priests’, are often being thrown into a state of ‘fear’, being ‘abducted’, ‘killed’, ‘robbed’, facing ‘assassination’ and target for ‘abduction’ by the herdsmen and others. *Punch* and *Leadership* editorials deploy the victimisation strategy to depict Nigerians as victims to give a mental model that represents helplessness in the face of insecurity. Text 7 implicates the Nigerian government as insensitive. The description of the ‘Kaduna–Abuja Expressway’ as ‘a den of bandits despite the heavy deployment of police officers’ is an invitation to caution and extra care on the part of the travellers, who have consistently become prey to ‘bandits’. The description of the killing of police officers in Imo State and Osun State depicts the vulnerability of security officers. Thus, the mental model created in texts 7–10 portrays the out-group as the actors behind the victimisation, while the in-group members are the victims of the actions. Thus, through this strategy, Nigerians of different classes and cadres have been represented as victims by the Nigerian newspaper editorials. In text 7, ‘travellers on the expressways like Benin–Sagamu and Akure–Ilesa’, are the victims who are ‘in a permanent state of fear’. In addition, bandits and robbers are the actors who victimised others by abducting ‘20 persons in one operation’, killing ‘police officers’ and so on.

In text 8, the nation, Nigeria, is the victim of ‘daunting challenges . . . in matters relating to the security of lives and properties’; while Nigerians are the victims of a ‘convivial atmosphere . . . polluted by clashes between farming communities and herdsmen, which led to killings and destruction of properties’. In text 9, herdsmen are activated as the perpetrators of ‘kidnapping and extortion, and in some cases, outright assassination of the captives’. In text 10, ‘the people of Kwatas in Bokkos Local Government Area of Plateau State’ and ‘Benue State’ are portrayed as the victims of the massacre caused by ‘Fulani herdsmen’. Other victims are ‘two Catholic priests and 17 others who were murdered inside the church’, and ‘more than 100,000 persons . . . killed by Boko Haram since . . . 2009’. This strategy is mainly accompanied by a number-game strategy to give an account of the victims if available.

Number game strategy

Number game is a discourse strategy which deploys ‘numbers and statistics to appear credible’ (Van Dijk, 2006: 736). Credibility and believability are central requirements to convince readers and other news consumers. Numerical descriptions of the victims and victors in the discussed issues in news reports and editorials, therefore, are deployed to enhance exactitude and reliability. The use of numbers to signal credibility abounds in the editorials, as discussed.

Text 11

The herdsmen have, of recent, become onerous, dangerous, and potentially deadly to the internal security of Nigeria. From January this year to date, **nearly 1000 Nigerians have died from the irrational conflicts, act of violence** created by those who see nothing wrong with a herdsman man carrying an assault rifle to kill innocent natives. (*Leadership*, March 24, 2018)

Text 12

The NST report named Borno State, **with 9,303 killed, as by far the worst hit, followed by Zamfara, Benue and Adamawa with 1,963, 1,642 and 1,529 deaths respectively. When the 1,488 killed in Kaduna; 771 in Plateau; 649 in Taraba; 467 in Cross River; 301 in Ogun and 252 in Niger are added,** it becomes clear why the Nigerian landscape has sometimes been described as a killing field and why investors are giving it a wide berth. (*Punch*, June 20, 2019)

Text 13

Changing this horrific situation was one of the three campaign issues of the President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), in 2015, for which Nigerians trusted and voted him to office, given his military background. But it beggars belief that he seems to now be all at sea. According to the Nigeria Security Tracker, **25,794 people were killed during the General's first term**. This helplessness was shown in his recent retort that the level of insecurity was surprising to him. (*Punch*, February 4, 2020)

In the representation of victims of insecurity in Nigeria, *Punch* and *Leadership* editorials use numbers and figures to appear credible and believable. The figures in 'nearly 1000 Nigerians have died' (text 11), 'with 9,303 killed', 'Zamfara, Benue and Adamawa with 1,963, 1,642 and 1,529 deaths respectively', '1,488 killed in Kaduna', '771 in Plateau', '649 in Taraba', '467 in Cross River', '301 in Ogun' and '252 in Niger are added' (text 12) and '25,794 people were killed during the General's first term' (text 13), are used to show the large figures of Nigerians who had lost their lives to the insecurity in the country. While the *Punch* editorial seems to give the actual figure in many of the situations, the *Leadership* editorial deploys the adverb 'nearly' to hype the number. Some other adverbs used in our data are 'over', 'more than', 'above' and 'about' to create a mental model representation of the dastardly acts of the insecurity actors. The large numbers and figures show the effect of the violent activities of the out-group members on the in-group – Nigerians who are at the receiving end.

Hyperbolism

Hyperbolism as a discourse strategy is 'a semantic rhetorical device used for enhancing meaning' (Van Dijk, 2006: 736). Such enhancements could be positive or negative in the representation of 'self' and 'other'. The hyperbolic expressions are used to exaggerate potential 'bad' in 'other' and 'good' in self, such that, the preferred mental model of self and other is created in the given accounts. Instances are as discussed from the data:

Text 14

The **rampant stories of the treacherous activities** of herdsmen began two years ago with kidnapping and extortion, and in some cases, **outright assassination of the captives**, if the demanded ransoms were not forth coming . . . From the **lingering Boko Haram insurgencies** in the North Eastern states – to **the interminable herdsmen's wanton destructions** of lives and properties in the Middle-Belt region (Taraba, Plateau, Benue & Kogi states), the diagnosis portrays a weak security system, with direct supports from those entrusted to safeguard Nigeria's sovereignty . . . **The growing maladministration in a restive, massive population**, could only culminate to **rising, unhindered crime waves**. It is useless to explain to our leaders that the demographic of Nigeria's population shows that 65 per cent of Nigerians are below the age of 40. These youngsters are unemployed after graduating from schools; they will strive to survive through legal or illegal means. (*Leadership*, March 24, 2018)

Text 15

The high incidence of killings is quite disappointing for an administration that identified tackling insecurity as its cardinal objective, alongside fighting corruption and boosting the economy. If **this number of casualties** can be recorded while contending against bandits, one then wonders what would happen if Nigeria is in a full-scale war against external aggressors (*Punch*, June 20, 2019)

Text 16

This newspaper also observes that **incidences of ‘one chance’**, the fearsome practice of criminals operating as taxi drivers and trapping and robbing unsuspecting passengers, are on the upward swing. These sadness-inducing trends have increased exponentially in Abuja, which prompted the killing of three of such criminals by a mob in a fit of righteous anger in the Dutse Alhaji area of the city last month. Regrettably, another worrisome insecurity challenge in FCT is **the increasing incidences** of car theft. (*Leadership*, October 19, 2019)

Hyperbolic elements ‘rampant’ ‘outright’, ‘lingering’, ‘interminable’, ‘growing’, ‘rising’ (text 14), ‘high’, ‘number’ (text 15), ‘increasing’ ‘incidences’ are deployed to accentuate the negative effects of the acts of insecurity actors on Nigeria and Nigerians. The *Leadership* newspaper editorial accentuates the regularity of the ‘stories of the treacherous activities of herdsmen’. The word ‘lingering’ in ‘the lingering Boko Haram insurgencies’, and the word ‘interminable’ in ‘the interminable herdsmen’s wanton destructions of lives and properties’ are both deployed to represent how difficult it seems to have an end in sight to the wanton destruction of human lives and belonging. Similarly, words like ‘growing’ in ‘the growing maladministration in a restive, massive population’ and ‘rising’ in ‘rising, unhindered crime waves’ underscore and depict hopelessness about how soon the atrocities will end since the insecurity escalates and keeps increasing. In texts 15–16, both the *Leadership* and *Punch* newspaper editorials deploy ‘high incidence’, ‘this number’ and ‘the increasing incidences’ as hyperbolic elements to accentuate, respectively, the rate of killings, frequency of casualties and robbery cases, in the country. The deployment of the hyperbolic strategy represents the in-group members – Nigerians – as sufferers in the hands of the out-group.

Illustration strategy

Example/illustration as a discourse strategy deploys ‘concrete examples in form of short stories to illustrate or make a general point more credible’ (Van Dijk, 2006: 736). Credibility is required to convince readers and other news consumers; therefore, illustrating, and using similar or previous experiences related to the issue at hand creates a mental model of solution-hood to the readers. Instances are as discussed from the data:

Text 17

Experiences elsewhere suggest that more scientific and modern border management strategies that would require the application of up- to- date technology is a possible way out. Aerial patrols can come in as part of the arrangement targeted at protecting Nigerians who are beginning to be exposed to the risks of having a porous border. To make the borders safe, we recommend effective border patrol, staffing, constructing new infrastructure and fencing, introducing the use of advanced technology, which include, sensors, radar, and aerial assets able to make modern the ports of entry; and stronger partnerships and information sharing with agencies from neighbouring countries. (*Leadership*, April 15, 2019)

Text 18

Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), had been a haven of peace and quiet, at least in the last four year. The city, within that period, was a reference point in the account of recorded successes by the government in its resolve to ensure that Nigerians slept with their two eyes closed. But all that seem to be ebbing as kidnappers and other social undesirables extend their nefarious activities to the territory. In recent weeks, no day passes without one or more reports of kidnappings, robberies and related crimes in Abuja. **For instance, two weeks ago, gunmen were reported to have abducted no fewer than eight**

persons in Pegi village in Kuje Area Council of the FCT The gunmen, said to have dressed in military camouflage, fired shots at two vehicles, a Toyota and Nissan Frontier and got their victims to submission. Also, less than a week after, gunmen suspected to be kidnappers killed a man, Ayuba, and abducted his two children at Yebu community in Kwali Area Council of FCT. (*Leadership*, October 19, 2019)

Text 19

The Federal Government should mount a serious campaign against the proliferation of arms and ammunition. Where non-state actors are in possession of weapons superior to what the police and other security agencies have, the reign of terror will not abate. This is why Nigerians feel petrified of travelling on the highways. **Because of kidnappers, the Abuja–Kaduna Highway has largely been abandoned.** Passengers are now hauled through the new Abuja–Kaduna railway transport, whose passengers recently came under bandit attack, just as there are always ambushes on the Damaturu–Maiduguri Highway. **A post-graduate student of the University of Maiduguri, returning to school, was beheaded by Islamists. Terrorists blew up the Gamboru–Ngala Bridge in Borno State; this left 30 persons dead on January 5. The Emir of Potiskum, Yobe State, Umaru Bubaram, escaped by a whisker when his convoy was attacked on the Kaduna–Zaria Highway** but six people were killed including his security details. (*Punch*, February 4, 2020)

Text 20

Nigeria should go back to its security drawing board. It is clear that the scorched-earth military approach alone is not enough to defeat jihadists anywhere in the world. It took five years of being ahead of them in strategy, intelligence and equipment for the United States-backed Syria Democratic Front to announce in March 2019 that ISIS had been ousted from Iraq and Syria. The then United Kingdom Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, was spot on with the response that ‘. . . we cannot be complacent. They’ve dispersed, and they’ll continue to pose a threat . . . and that is why we will always remain vigilant’. About 5,200 US soldiers are still in Iraq as part of the agreement to maintain the peace or keep ISIS in check. (*Punch*, February 12, 2020)

Illustration strategy can either create a historical solution to a prevailing problem or enumerative escapades about the issue at hand. In our data, texts 17 and 20 relate to antecedent historical solutions to what is currently being experienced in Nigeria. Precisely, the *Leadership* editorial in text 17 recounts the success of border control and up-to-date technology as possible solutions to free the in-group from the deeds of the out-group. Likewise in text 20, the *Punch* editorial recounts how it took the United States 5 years before ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) could be ‘ousted from Iraq and Syria’, while the United Kingdom remains vigilant to neutralise whatever threat is coming from ISIS. These illustrative strategies are suggestive to the Nigerian government on the available strategies to win the battle against the out-group. In texts 18–19, both the *Leadership* and *Punch* newspaper editorial deploy enumerative illustration strategy to particularise some of the effects of the ‘bad’ deeds of the out-group, including ‘abducted eight persons in Pegi village in Kuje Area Council of the FCT’, ‘fired shots at two vehicles, a Toyota and Nissan Frontier’, ‘killed a man, Ayuba and abducted his two children at Yebu community in Kwali Area Council of FCT’, ‘A post-graduate student of the University of Maiduguri . . . was beheaded by Islamists’, ‘terrorists blew up the Gamboru–Ngala Bridge in Borno State’, ‘The Emir of Potiskum, Yobe State, Umaru Bubaram, . . . was attacked on the Kaduna–Zaria Highway’ and so forth. The descriptive enumeration of the dastardly acts of the out-group portends believability and credibility in news editorials, thereby creating a mental model of reality and caution in the minds of readers.

Lexicalisation strategy

Lexicalisation is a discourse strategy that deploys ‘specific lexical items to express underlying concepts and beliefs’ (Van Dijk, 2006: 736). ‘Lexicalisation, otherwise termed ‘wording’ by Fairclough (1992: 190) has to do with the use of lexical items from different register fields . . . to overtly or covertly give clues to the ideology of the text producer’ (Oyeleye and Osisanwo, 2013: 3). The wording or lexicalisation of a domain with collocational properties polarises ‘self’ and ‘other’ and allows the text producer to lexicalise the bad behaviour of ‘other’ and the good deeds of ‘self’. The lexicalised expressions are used to create the preferred mental model of ‘self’ and ‘other’ as given in the editorials. Instances of the use of lexicalisation to express underlying concepts of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the editorials are discussed.

Text 21

The herdsmen have, of recent, become onerous, dangerous, and potentially deadly to the internal security of Nigeria. (*Leadership*, March 24, 2018)

Text 22

A defeated Boko Haram cannot routinely attack military fortresses or invade villages to slaughter defenceless citizens the way it did July last year when it **murdered** 65 people during a funeral ceremony in the Nganza district, near the Borno State capital, Maiduguri. Just last Sunday, the jihadists **killed** 30 travellers, **abducted** others and **burnt** vehicles in Auno village close to a military checkpoint, on the Maiduguri-Damaturu Highway. (*Punch*, February 12, 2020)

In text 21, the *Leadership* editorial lexicalises the out-group – herdsmen as an ‘onerous, dangerous, and potentially deadly’ group. Similarly, in text 22, the *Punch* editorial lexicalises another out-group – Boko Haram – and associates the group with ‘bad’ deeds, using lexical items like ‘murdered’, ‘killed’, ‘abducted’ and ‘burnt’ to portray the actions and activities. Thus, the lexicalised description of the activities of the out-group against the in-group members who were the victims of the deeds creates a mental negative representation of the out-group as terrible people. Hence, the immediate in-group members who suffered from their activities were the ‘murdered 65 people’, ‘killed 30 travellers’, ‘abducted others’ and ‘burnt vehicles’. The mental model created by the remote in-group here is the need to be careful and possibly join forces with others to immediately end insecurity in Nigeria. Consequently, it gives the readers and all a lexicalised description of the condition that the self is prone to due to the perceived incompetence of the government in combating insecurity.

Generalisation/depersonalisation strategy

This is a discourse strategy that deemphasises personalisation and identification of specific individuals involved in specific actions. Generalisation or depersonalisation involves using generalisations instead of giving concrete stories’. In the account, there is no explicit inclusion or actual mention of the doers or speakers of a particular discursive action, thereby suppressing the doer, yet their opinions or actions are reported. Such reportage in editorials is used to create a mental representation of the action rather than the performer in the minds of news consumers. Instances of generalisation/depersonalisation strategy in the editorials are discussed.

Text 23

Nigerians are, justifiably, worried that the convivial atmosphere was polluted by clashes between farming communities and herdsmen, which led to killings and destruction of properties. Without doubt, those reports emanating from Rivers, Benue, Nasarawa and Adamawa States dampened **the joyous spirit of Nigerians** who had hoped that the new year will bring with it events that will give them reasons to be optimistic . . . We are of the considered opinion that those weapons are beyond the means of the fabled Fulani herdsman. Even if he decides to acquire the weapon, how did he learn to use it? These are questions that are bothering **the minds of Nigerians** and which the Police are interested in unravelling. (*Leadership*, January 8, 2018)

Text 24

. . . **experts have consistently canvassed** the view that the clashes between herdsmen and farmers are not just what they seem. There is **a strong assumption** that some of the so called herdsmen are, indeed, criminals on rampage, rogue elements from crisis-torn regions across Nigeria's borders out to cause mischief in the country and possibly destabilise her. (*Leadership*, April 15, 2019)

Text 25

The gunmen, said to have dressed in military camouflage, fired shots at two vehicles, a Toyota and Nissan Frontier and got their victims to submission. Also, less than a week after, gunmen suspected to be kidnappers killed a man, Ayuba, and abducted his two children at Yebu community in Kwali Area Council of FCT. (*Leadership*, October 19, 2019)

Text 26

For many families in Northern Nigeria, a disturbing outbreak of violent crimes has become the stark reality of life. From Adamawa to Benue, Yobe to Taraba, Plateau to Sokoto and Zamfara to Kaduna, the North, once a haven of peaceful coexistence, has transformed rapidly to a region of bloodletting. In the first 10 weeks of 2018, there were 591 violent deaths in the North-East; 270 similar casualties were recorded in the North-Central and 193 in the North-West, **a national newspaper said**. Of greater disquiet is Nigeria's weak security system, which, as currently constituted, is incapable of securing the citizens. It is certain that prospects of bridging the gap between the North and the South will be extremely difficult if the region is not rescued from itself. (*Punch*, July 20, 2018)

The newspaper editorials deployed different strategies to generalise the opinions of an individual or a group to a larger group or that of the whole country. Therefore, the use of words, such as 'Nigerians', 'experts' and 'said' were deployed as generalisation strategies to veil the real actors. The mental model created via this strategy varies from one text to the other. In text 23, the *Leadership* editorial depersonalised the worry consequent upon the killings by herdsmen, saying 'Nigerians are, justifiably, worried that the convivial atmosphere was polluted by clashes between farming communities and herdsmen, which led to killings and destruction of properties'. The editorial further hinges on the effects of the bad behaviour on Nigerians, using other constructions like 'dampened the joyous spirit of Nigerians' and 'questions that are bothering the minds of Nigerians'. The generalisation of the worry, dampening and bother to all Nigerians constructs a mental model that underscores the victimhood of the average Nigerian reader. The editor intends for the readers to concentrate on the effect of the killings in general. In some of the other excerpts, the supposed agents of the process of 'saying' are veiled; hence, they are faceless. For instance, in 'experts have

consistently canvassed the view that the clashes between herdsmen . . . ', who are the experts? In addition, whose assumption is held that 'there is a strong assumption that some of the so-called herdsmen are, indeed, criminals on rampage' (text 24)? Also, in 'the gunmen, said to have dressed in military camouflage, fired shots at two vehicles' (text 23), the question emanating here is who said so? Likewise, which national newspaper is the referent: 'there were 591 violent deaths in the North-East; 270 similar casualties were recorded in the North-Central and 193 in the North-West, a national newspaper said' (text 26).

The editorials have made a strong attempt to control the readers' mental model into believing that the assumptions held, and the sayings belong to Nigerians collectively. The discourse tactically persuades the readers to accept the views. Common to Nigerian newspapers, then, is the attribution of personal opinion, a reporter's opinion, or the entire media house's opinion to the views held by all Nigerians, using depersonalisation and other strategies.

Discourse strategies, ideological structure and implications for peace and security in Nigeria

The editorials have made a strong attempt to control the readers' mental model into believing that the assumptions held in the reports belong to Nigerians collectively. The discourse tactically persuades the readers to accept the views. Common to Nigerian newspapers, therefore, is the attribution of (media) opinion to the views held by all Nigerians, using depersonalisation and other strategies. In the deployment of negative labels, the newspapers negatively portray the non-state actors – insecurity actors – as out-group members, representing them as bandits, killers, terrorists, miscreants, criminals and rogue elements, among others. This negative tagging has ideological implications. Precisely, the Nigerian press, through the selected newspapers and the deployed discourse strategies, assigns meaning and practices to the non-state actors. They impacted the escalating scale of human security by demonising and criminalising the non-state actors to raise full awareness, create consciousness of caution and sensitivity in Nigeria and challenge the state actors to live up to their civic duty of protecting Nigerians. Nonetheless, the reports fail to distinctly identify the identities of insecurity perpetrators in most cases. The grouping of all insecurity actors under similar negative labels may not be helpful. For instance, who are bandits?

Another major ideological orientation that evolved from the editorials is the polarisation between WE and THEM. Most of the strategies foreground the ideological construct of polarised identities between the US and THEM, indicating that the in-group members or the Nigerian masses – 'us' are at the receiving end of the untamed insecurity. The newspapers associated themselves with the 'we' in-group, while it portrayed mainly the insecurity actors as the out-group and associated the government alongside its security apparatus with the 'them' out-group. The editorials contend that in-group members are the Nigerian masses, young and old, who do not have access to the state resources to protect themselves, yet they are the same set of people whose voting power the political class demands to emerge political officeholders. The same we-in-group members are those that the Nigerian State has refused to shield from insecurity actors, thus exposing them to kidnap, death, terror, rape and dehumanisation. The newspapers challenge the 'they-out-group' members and hold them responsible for the troubles that had bedevilled 'us', thus, challenging polarisation, inequality, marginalisation and social class differences. The reports, therefore, dared the ideological social stratification that exposed the masses or the led to danger, while the Nigerian leaders believe they and their family members are fully protected by the state resources. The contest identifies that a (wide) class gap exists between the leaders and the led.

The identified eight discourse strategies, namely, negative label, evidentiality, victimisation, number game, hyperbolism, illustration, lexicalisation and generalisation/depersonalisation project nationalist and humanist ideologies. Ideologies are often enacted through specific discursive structures and strategies. Texts and talk in the social and political contexts contest how inequalities are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted (Van Dijk, 2003). The editorials on insecurity in both newspapers unveil the perceived legitimisation of viciousness within the Nigerian state, especially in the northern part. The newspapers resisted dehumanisation, condemned man's inhumanity to man and challenged the state over docility, ineffectiveness and failure. The editorials queried human rights abuses under the watch of the Nigerian government. It queried the government for not nipping in the bud the security threat that has festered in the country; interrogated the government for ignoring the Nigerian masses from its protection and challenged the government for marginalising between the elected political class and the masses.

The discourse strategies and the dichotomisation between SELF and OTHER draw the attention of the government to the intensification of insecurity-induced deaths across the nation. Consequently, the Nigerian policymakers and the international community responded to the newspaper publications, decrying the spate of insecurity in Nigeria. The Nigerian lawmakers, led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives held a special summit on national security in Abuja on 25 May 2021, where major stakeholders dissected the security challenges of the country and came up with seven recommendations for legislative actions and 19 recommendations for executive actions. The government of President Muhammadu Buhari also had to procure different equipment and gadgets, including Air Force platforms, to combat the non-state actors. International communities waded in to show support and solidarity towards ending the insecurity spate in Nigeria. While the newspaper reports and their discourse strategies tended to unsettle non-state actors in some contexts, they assisted in festering the spate of kidnapping in other contexts. For instance, in cases of kidnapping for ransom, more kidnapers seemed to emerge during the period since ransoms were being received. Some of the non-state actors ventured into kidnapping as a business, following their inability to be gainfully employed. Some of them who were arrested by the security operatives confessed that they were graduates who could not be employed. This suggests to the Nigerian government that one of the viable ways to end insecurity is to reduce or eradicate joblessness. This tasks the Nigerian leaders on the need to fend for the led.

Conclusion

This paper has significantly examined the thematic concept of insecurity in the representations by the media, deviating from the foci of extant studies. The overarching intention is to uncover discourse strategies deployed in the representation of 'self' and 'other' in insecurity in Nigeria and identify the underlying ideologies that have evolved from the reportage. It identified the deployment and manipulation of eight discourse strategies, which project nationalist and humanist ideologies. Both *Punch* and *Leadership* employ the eight strategies; however, they differ in their preponderance of usage. Some aspects of the editorials ideologically re-polarise between the in-group and out-group to tag some politicians as common enemies of Nigeria because of their inordinate ambition at the detriment of human lives. The newspaper editorials portray insecurity in Nigeria, implicitly drawing readers into their viewpoints using different discourses and persuasive strategies to impress their views on them. Like the view of Osisanwo (2016) that newspapers often converge to condemn social vices in their news report, the current study also discovered the editorials of both newspapers converge to condemn insecurity, thereby showing immense loyalty to the nation and the citizenry. Nationalism manifests in the newspapers' positive presentations of 'self'

– Nigerians and the victims, and the negative representation of ‘other’ – the actors involved in the security challenges in the country. Similarly, humanity manifests through disapproval of the killings of Nigerians in general; thus, canvassing the need for peace and bloodlessness. The positive in-group and negative out-group ideologies are commonplace in both newspapers’ editorials on the security challenges bedevilling Nigeria with attendant implications for Africa and the world at large. The editorials orient readers on the need to reduce insecurity in Nigeria as an urgent task. Subtly, the editorials project the incompetence of the state in combating security threats, thereby creating awareness and advancing the need for more competent leaders to combat security threats.


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