

HOW THE MEDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT PROMOTE BANDITRY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This content analysis reveals how the media and the government promote banditry in Northern Nigeria through newspaper editorials and government activities. Three national newspapers (Leadership, Punch, and ThisDay) were randomly selected, and the last quarter of 2024 was purposively chosen for the study. It was anchored on agenda setting and framing, and mixed methods were adopted to analyze the 22 editorials extracted from the three national dailies. The data were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analyses to determine the frequency of coverage, themes, victims, narrative frames, cause and consequences, and the negative roles of the media and government that promote banditry. The findings reveal that killings and abductions for ransom are the major themes of banditry, while poor governance, porous borders, and unemployment are the most causal factors that fuel banditry in the North. Insecurity (leading to loss of life, fear, and panic) are a major effect of banditry. Villagers and farmers are the major victims. Through their framing language and tone, the three newspapers glamorize banditry. The government collaborates with reporters to promote banditry. The article recommends that the media should set an objective agenda on banditry with a view to discouraging it; it should choose its language carefully to avoid using tones, frames and exaggerations that glamorize bandits and frighten the audience in the process. The government should avoid playing politics with banditry or romancing with bandits.

Introduction

Banditry has practically ravaged communities in Northern Nigeria's social, economic, and political nuclei. The three senatorial zones (North-East, North-West, and North-Central) are endemically under the wanton attacks of

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armed bandits who operate under different names and leadership hegemony, such as Northern bandits, Boko Haram, ISWAP, Lakurawa, Fulani herdsmen, etc.

According to recent studies (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021; Atubi, 2022; the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect, 2024), these bad eggs are behind different degrees of nefarious and violent activities such as cattle rustling, kidnaping for ransom, armed robbery, mass killing, village marauding, rape, and annihilation of crops, livestock, and property. Rosenje et al. (2024) agree that “For more than a decade now, Nigeria’s Northwest region has been besieged by armed bandits, who often attack villages to raid and pillage, kidnap and rustle cattle, and also overwhelm the markets to plunder and maim people” (Jouav, 2024; Kaimba et al., 2011).

Abductions by armed bandits in Northern Nigeria are not restricted to ordinary villagers, citizens, travelers, traders, and farmers. Monarchs (emirs) are also victims. In the past five years, many traditional rulers have been kidnaped and huge ransoms have been paid for their release. Some have also been executed due to delayed ransoms.

In 2021, two Emirs were abducted: Alhassan Adamu, Emir of Kajuru, Kaduna State (Lere, 2021), and Alhaji Hassan Attahiru, Emir of Bungudu, Zamfara State (Isenyi, 2021). In 2024, two Emirs were also kidnaped. The first was Alhaji Muhammed Bunu, Emir of Zurmi, Zamfara State (Salisu, 2024). In July 2024, Alhaji Isa Muhammed, Emir of Gobir, Sokoto State, was abducted and murdered (Ibrahim, 2024).

Banditry in the North is also manifested as ritual killing, murder, arson, armed robbery, home invasion, arms trafficking, banditry financing, rape, “one-chance” commercial transport, vandalism, looting, and brutality against security personnel. Banditry should be investigated and analyzed in relation to triggers such as border porosity and other causal factors. For instance, Nigeria shares porous borders with the Chad Republic in the Northeast and with the Niger Republic in the Northwest.

These porous boundaries and their geostrategic locations and proximity make Nigeria prone to the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) and the illegal movement of bandits in and out of the country. Other causal factors of banditry in the North include, among other factors, poverty, unemployment, corruption, politics, nepotism, and weak governance. These factors prove that the Nigerian government is weak and lacks the ability, capacity, and authority to nip banditry in the bud (Salman et al., 2024).

Banditry in Northern Nigeria, with its trickle-down effect and diffusion tendency, has led to untold hardship across the country. For instance, many natives and farmers in agrarian communities have been displaced, and their crops and livestock have been destroyed. This has resulted in a nagging disruption in agricultural activities, leading to serious food scarcity. The Guardian (2024) revealed that “they have displaced scores of farming and herding communities, disrupting agriculture and threatening food security.” Other economic activities and social life have also disappeared gradually. Among many other consequences, fear, panic, loss of life, and loss of property have been constantly recorded.

In addition to the thematic preoccupation of banditry perpetrated in the north and its triggers and consequences, this study also revealed how the Nigerian government and the media (through framing, gate-keeping, and agenda setting) promote banditry.

Statement of the problem

The media owes society the responsibility of setting an objective agenda on the activities of bandits, their modus operandi, their structure, source of finance, financiers, the triggers of banditry, and its causes and consequences. Everyone (the government and the governed) relies on the media for accurate information to guide their decisions and actions. Although the media performs this role to the best of its ability, it has been widely criticized for its conspiracy in certain cases, unethical corroboration, underreporting banditry or over-blowing its reports out of proportion.

In addition, the media, especially the print, has been dismissed for publishing unverified stories on banditry, thereby promoting subjectivity and falsehood to the detriment of objectivity and truth.

Another problem is that the media glamorizes banditry and bandits through agenda setting, framing, diction, and narrative tone. For instance, “Lakurawa: A new monster is born” (Punch, 2024, November 21) is metaphorically hyperbolic. Consequently, the northern society may nurse the intimidating fear that they are actually besieged by or living with real monsters. Through this hyperbole, the media has attributed so much power and terror to the bandits. The terrorist group may feel flattered or swear to act as the monsters they have been labeled.

Critical observers and readers have noticed that the government’s efforts to eradicate banditry are also marred by its weakness, incompetence, politicking, compromise with bandits, sponsorship allegations, and lip service (Byman, 2008; Musa, 2022; Punch, 2024, September 21).

Having seen what constitutes the problem that leads to the study, the study therefore investigates how the media and the government promote armed banditry in Northern Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The aims of the study were to:

1. Discover the frequency of editorial coverage of armed banditry.
2. Examine the major themes and forms of armed banditry in the editorials
3. Investigate the major causal factors of armed banditry in Nigeria.
4. Explore the most targeted victims of armed banditry in Northern Nigeria
5. Discuss the consequences of banditry in Northern Nigeria.
6. Discuss how the media and the government promote banditry in the northern part of Nigeria.

Literature Review

Banditry: This is a criminal act perpetrated by bandits. Banditry includes activities such as village marauding, kidnaping, massacre, rape, cattle rustling, and illegal possession of light weapons (Ojewale, 2024; Ojewale, 2024). Aruah and Idowu (2023) described banditry as the “occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crimes ... which involves the use of force or the threat of it by a person/s to intimate another person with the intent to damage property, rob, rape, and/or kill.”

Northern Nigeria: Northern Nigeria is in Nigeria’s northern region comprising the northeast, northwest, and central. There are 19 states in Northern Nigeria: **northeast** (Adamawa, Bauchi, Bornu, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe); **northwest** (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara); **and central** (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Plateau, and Niger). This study covers the perpetration of banditry in all regions of the north, although it is more prevalent in the north-west.

Empirical Review

Comparing the Quality of Banditry Coverage in Nigerian Media

In their research on “journalism and reportage of insecurity: newspaper and television coverage of banditry activities in Northern Nigeria,” Ugwu et al. (2022) adopted a content analysis method and anchored their study on agenda setting and framing theories. Two newspapers (The Nation and The Punch) and two television stations (Channels and NTA) were investigated for “the frequency of coverage, the volume of coverage, the type of stories used, and critical issues in stories related to banditry in Nigeria.”

The findings revealed that the media did not set enough agenda on banditry in Northern Nigeria, leading to low frequency, volume of stories, and lack of detailed stories. Newspapers perform better than TV stations.

This study is related to the present one in terms of its theoretical framework, methodology, and findings. However, two gaps were discovered in the study: first, the study did not demonstrate the roles of the media and government

toward banditry. Second, the work lacked obvious themes of banditry. The present study addressed these vacuums.

Newspaper Role in Banditry

Musa et al. (2024) studied “The role of newspapers in fighting insecurity in Nigeria: a systematic literature review”. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework and method were adopted in the review. 21 studies on violent crimes were selected and reviewed.

The results showed that Nigerian print media scholars studying insecurity usually concentrate more on farmer-herder conflicts and the Boko Haram insurgency. However, “armed banditry, which had become deadlier in recent times, received little attention from scholars.” This finding is related to the one made in the present study. The point of deviation, though handled in this present research, was on the role of the media and the government in fueling banditry in Northern Nigeria.

Major Victims and Banditry Consequences

Rosenje et al. (2024) pinned their study, “an exploration of banditry and the emergent new social formation in Nigeria’s Northwest,” on three theories: Collective Violence, The Queer Ladder, and Third Party Intervention. Scholars found that the major victims of banditry in the Northeast were pastoralists, farmers, travelers, and traders. They also discovered the major negative consequences of banditry, such as fear and trauma, kidnapping for ransom, poor supply of basic amenities, school closure and reduction in the scholar population, sexual violence, displacement, and poor economic activities.

Although the researchers adopted different frameworks, they still arrived at the same results. However, the scholars were silent on the issue of the media and government’s alleged promotion of banditry through their framing language and alleged unhealthy collaboration with bandits. The present work addressed this vacuum.

Literature Gap

Gaps are discovered in the aforementioned works. They study only the themes, victims, and other dehumanizing activities of bandits without looking at media coverage and reportage as well as government contribution toward the tragedies.

In addition, none took interest only in the editorials of Nigerian newspapers, rather than all the news genres, to discover the real direction of opinion, slant, and stand of the newspapers and the government on banditry. This work fills these vacuums.

Theoretical Review

The theories of framing and agenda setting guided the study. Framing and agenda setting are media effects theories. Wogu (2008, p. 93) stated that media effect theories are used “to explain the impact of the media of mass communication on the audience.” Every medium of mass communication influences the audience and makes them behave or react in a certain way, as may be prescribed or persuasively suggested by the media (McQuail, 1994, p.327; Gamson & Modigliano, 1987 quoted in Scheufele, 1999).

Framing is the act of selecting certain aspects of perceived reality in a text (such as a newspaper editorial) and making them more saliently pronounced. It is purely the reporter’s decision, not that of the reader or audience (Anyantayo & Ogunsola, 2022, p. 202). This is exactly what we found in our newspaper samples on their banditry narratives.

There are positive and negative frames. War, conflict, fear, horror, anxiety, denial, abuse, blame, and uncertainty are some of the negative frames. Peace, optimism, praise, hope, unity, boldness, and solution are some examples

of positive frames (Syeda, 2022). There are also cause and effect, consequence, conflict of opinion, morality, economic, and political frames.

Framing has its limitations. First, it is a tool to manipulate and control the audience “to the extent that it tends to alter the process of the opinion formation in the audience” (Syeda, 2022). Second, framing does not have a universal language and approach because a given story can be framed in different ways. Third, framing does not represent or express a general thought other than that of the reporter. It is full of subjective reasoning, personal choices, narrative biases, communicative styles, and personal intentions. For instance, the three newspapers randomly selected for this study frame similar stories on banditry in different ways.

Agenda setting is a mass communication theory propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Lewis Shaw in a study on the 1968 presidential election of the United States of America (Rösler, 2017). The framework selects salient events in society and makes them public issues. By doing so, it determines what should be reported and hidden from the public. Simply put, agenda setting shapes the problems that attract attention from the public, society, the government, and international organizations (Blanton & Kegley, 2017, p. 507).

Agenda-setting theory is based on the assumptions that the media controls reality by shaping and filtering it before presenting it to the public. Second, the media attaches salience to events. This is what we discovered in the editorials of Leadership, Punch, and ThisDay.

Methods

Mixed methods were used in this study. Many scholars (Burke & Johnson, 2004; Creswell & Plano, 2006; Anderson, 2010; Castro et al., 2022) support that the mixed methods are usually necessary due to the researchers’ objectives, the nature of the project, and the type of data available for the study. In the study, the mixed methods comprised a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The qualitative method was used thematically, whereas the quantitative analysis was used to present data on tables using simple percentages.

The last quarter of 2024 was purposively selected. Three national newspapers (Leadership, Punch, and ThisDay) were randomly selected from a plethora of the newspapers available in the country during the period of the study. 22 editorials were pulled from the samples, and the code-sheet was used as the instrument for data collection. The code-sheet guided the researchers in classifying the variables in predetermined spaces or columns. Obanyi et al. (2016, p. 110) advised that for a researcher to create and use a good instrument, he should “always look for the variables that your study intends to resolve.”

The coding sheet was assigned numerical values in the units of analysis and content categories to facilitate coding. A coding guide was comprehensively designed to accompany the coding sheet for instruction and direction purposes. Many scholars (Nice, 2019; Codacy, 2023; Bose, 2023) agree that coding guides are rules and conditions that developers follow when writing codes.

Findings and Discussions

Table 1: Frequency of Editorial Coverage of Armed Banditry

NEWSPAPER	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTAL
ThisDay		18 th		11th, 17th	3
Punch	12th, 24th, 27th	17th, 23rd, 29th	21st, 28th	22nd	9
Leadership	6th, 18th, and 27th	4th, 27 th	11th, 16th, 17th, and 22nd	18th	10
TOTAL	6	6	6	4	22

Editorials in Leadership Newspapers

- (1). Community Action Against Bandits (6/9/24)
- (2). Mafa Killings (18/9/24)
- (3). Arresting 1000 Bandit Informants (27/9/24)
- (4). 2 m Security personnel not enough (4/10/24)
- (5). Bandits and Government Arms (22/10/24)
- (6). Crush Lakuwara Terrorist Groups Now (11/11/24)
- (7). Breaking the Cycle of Violent Crimes and Deaths (16/11/24)
- (8). End Vandalization of Transmission Towers (17/11/24)
- (9). Rising Insecurity in Abuja (22/11/24)
- (10). Government Gaps Fuel Violent Extremism, Says Gaskia (18/12/24)

Editorials in the Punch Newspaper

- 1). Mass killings and abductions endured under Tinubu (18/9/24)
- (2). The new center must win the arms war (24/9/24)
- (3). Terrorism allegations demand scrutiny (27/9/24)
- (4). Fix the Porous Borders (17/10/24)
- (5). Banditry still runs deep (23/10/24)
- (6). Tackling arms proliferation (29/10/24)
- (7). Lakurawa: A new monster is born (21/11/24)
- (8). Kidnapers' trillion naira paradise (22/12/24)
- (9). FG, intensify the fight against insecurity (28/11/24)

Editorials in This Day Newspaper

- (1). Tackling Banditry in the Northeast (18/10/24)
- (2). Wave of ritual killings (11/12/24)
- (3). Violence Against Police Personnel (17/12/24)

The data presented above show that 22 editorials on armed banditry were published during the last quarter of 2024. ThisDay publishes only 3 editorials, Punch 9 and Leadership 10. For monthly publications, the three newspapers released only 6 editorials each in September, October, and November. Only four editorials were published in December.

Discussions

The 22 editorials published in the last quarter of 2024 imply that the media failed to set an adequate agenda on armed banditry perpetrated in the North. The worst was ThisDay with only 3 editorials on armed banditry in 4 months!

Publishing only 22 editorials in 122 days was lamentably low. Through underreporting, the three national dailies kept the audience, the Northern society, and the entire Nigerian population in the dark concerning banditry activities in Northern Nigeria. Ugwu et al. (2022) also found this insufficiency in their study when they revealed that the media did not set enough agenda on banditry in Northern Nigeria, leading to low coverage of stories, low volume, and lack of details. This is a way reporters promote armed banditry.

Table 2: Themes and forms of armed banditry

THEMES AND FORMS	THISDAY	PUNCH	LEADERSHIP	TOTAL	Percentage
Abductions	2	6	8	16	26.6 %
Killings	3	7	5	15	25.0 %
Cattle rustling	1	1	2	4	6.7 %
Arson		2		2	3.3 %
Armed robbery		1	1	2	3.3 %
Attack on security Personnel			1	1	1.7 %
One-chance			1	1	1.7 %
Vandalism			1	1	1.7 %
Assaults			1	1	1.7 %
Village marauding		3	1	4	6.7 %
Extortions		1	1	2	3.3 %
Banditry financing		1		1	1.7 %
Arms trafficking	3	2	2	7	11.7 %
Rape		1	1	2	3.3 %
Looting			1	1	1.7 %
TOTAL	9	25	26	60	100.0 %

Table 2 reveals that the five most frequently occurring motifs of banditry in Northern Nigeria are abductions (16, 27%), killings (15, 25%), arms trafficking (7, 12%), cattle rustling (4, 6.7%), and village marauding (4, 6.7%). We obtained these figures by placing a cut-off percentage mark from 5%. Therefore, using this benchmark, abductions, killings, arms trafficking, cattle rustling, and village marauding are selected.

Discussions

It is clear that, among other acts of armed banditry, killings, kidnaping, cattle rustling, and village marauding, will not be carried out without arms. This is the interconnectedness that exists among our five most violent crimes of banditry in the North. According to Kostakos and Arsovska (2008), “Arms trafficking or gunrunning is the illicit trade of contraband small arms, explosives, and ammunition, which constitutes part of a broad range of illegal activities often associated with transnational criminal organizations” such as Boko Haram, Lakurawa, Fulani herdsmen, and other bandit groups in Northern Nigeria.

There is a high level of transnational exchange and movement, not only of humans but also of illicit small arms, in Nigeria's northern borders with the Niger Republic (Northwest) and the Chad Republic (Northeast). The findings of this study indicated that the five most common acts of banditry in the North are abductions, killings, arms trafficking, cattle-rustling, and village marauding.

The above result establishes that serious banditry activities are perpetrated in the North of Nigeria, and yet the media either keeps silent or under-reports them. This conspiracy of silence and irresponsibility is the reversal of the media's agenda-setting function. This worsens the tragedy. The results of many studies on the themes of banditry in the North of Nigeria agreed with this present finding (Atubi, 2022; Ojo et al., 2023; Okoli et al., 2024; Aina & Onuoha, 2024).

Table 3: Causal factors of armed banditry in the North

CAUSAL FACTORS	THISDAY	PUNCH	LEADERSHIP	TOTAL	Percentage
Ignorance	3	3	3	9	8.9 %
Porous Border	3	7	5	15	14.8 %
Poverty	1	2	8	11	10.8 %
Unemployment	3	4	9	16	15.8 %
Poor Governance	4	6	10	20	19.8 %
Marginalization	1		3	4	3.9 %
Social Disorder	1	2	2	5	4.9 %
Politicking	2	2	4	8	7.9 %
Corruption	2	2	4	8	7.9 %
Nepotism	1	3	2	6	5.9 %
TOTAL	20	31	50	101	100.0 %

Table 3 presents the 10 possible triggers of armed banditry in Northern Nigeria as reported in the editorials. To obtain the five most causal factors, we placed our cut-off mark at 10%. The results were as follows: poverty, 11 (10.8%); porous borders, 15 (14.8%); unemployment, 16 (15.8%); and poor governance, 20 (19.8%).

Discussions

According to our findings, poor governance is the most common cause of armed banditry in the North. Government fuels banditry through poor governance. Bad governance results from the inability of government at all levels to fight corruption, exhibit high levels of transparency, maintain accountability, make favorable policies, and provide basic social amenities and security for the citizens.

Okoi and Iwara (2021) argue that "the failure of governance in Nigeria manifests in the declining capacity of political leaders to recognize systemic risks such as election fraud, terrorist attacks, herder-farmer conflict, armed banditry, and police brutality and put in place the necessary measures to navigate these challenges".

Certain causal factors of banditry (unemployment, porous borders, and poverty) are factors of poor governance. What is the link between this and the proliferation of arms and increasing banditry activities? Porous borders are gateways to free entry and exit routes for both foreign and local bandits. Unemployment causes poverty, which lures many youths into banditry.

Recruitment into bandit groups such as Lakurawa is free and lucrative because "Lakurawa offers Nigerian youths in Sokoto incentives of N1 million." Moreover, the application is free" (Are, 2024; Igbera TV, 2024). Ironically, the incentives, good opportunities, and employment that the government fails to offer the northern youths are what bandit groups offer them free of charge, and this nectar attracts the butterflies to the flower.

Table 4: Target victims of armed banditry

TARGET VICTIMS	THISDAY	PUNCH	LEADERSHIP	TOTAL	Percentage
Infrastructure			1	1	1.5 %
Livestock	1	2	3	6	8.9 %
Herders	1	2	3	6	8.9 %
Crop Farmers	2	7	7	16	23.9 %
Villagers (Natives)	2	9	9	20	29.9 %
Students		2		2	3.0 %
Worshippers	1	2	2	5	7.5 %
Politicians				0	0.0 %
Monarchs	1			1	1.5 %
Travelers			1	1	1.5 %
Traders	1	2	3	6	8.9 %
Security personnel	1	1	1	3	4.5 %
TOTAL	10	27	30	67	100.0 %

Table 4 shows the five worst victims of banditry. Placing our percentage cut-off at 7% and above, villagers (20, 29.9%) became the worst hit. Others were crop farmers (16, 23.9%), livestock (6, 8.9%), herders (6, 8.9%), and (5, 7.5%).

Discussions

There were four major victims discovered during coding, and these victims are interwoven in the sense that the herders, crop farmers, worshipers are among the marauded villagers. Livestock such as cattle are rustled while natives were abducted, maimed, or killed. Women are raped, and some are uprooted from their homes and forced into marriage.

Usman, Bala Ribah, and Ardo (nd) witness that "women were displaced, raped, molested, and subjected to degrading treatment by the bandits." This has led to psychological trauma and social, physical, and economic effects". Bandits chase crop farmers out of their farms, leaving their crops abandoned and damaged. On many occasions, crop farmers and herders are also kidnaped, or killed. The resultant effects include food crisis and untold hardship in the region.

Nwankpa (2024) summarized all the problems the victims suffer in the face of banditry such as "loss of income and economic opportunities, displacement and migration of the rural population, reduced productivity, and infrastructural degradation." These factors lead to food shortages, hikes in food prices, malnutrition, and increased poverty levels in Nigeria." Worshipers are frequently attacked, kidnaped, or killed in the church or mosque (BusinessDay, February 29, 2024). Bandits set many worship centers in the affected areas ablaze, and those places are also deserted.

Table 5: Consequences of Armed Banditry

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ARMED BANDITRY	THISDAY	PUNCH	LEADERSHIP	TOTAL	Percentage
Loss of money	1	4	5	10	9.7 %
Loss of property	2	4	4	10	9.7 %
Loss of life	3	6	6	15	14.6 %
Socioeconomic setback	1	5	5	11	10.7 %
Power outage (blackout)			2	2	1.9 %
Fear and panic	3	4	8	15	14.6 %
Insecurity	2	5	10	17	16.5 %
Collapse of the social order	1	2	4	7	6.8 %
Acute food shortages	3	4	4	11	10.7 %
Displacement of the villagers	1	2	2	5	4.9 %
TOTAL	17	36	50	103	100.0 %

Discussions

Table 5 presents the ten major consequences of armed banditry in the North. To obtain our first five most striking consequences, we set our cut-off value at 10% and above. Therefore, insecurity takes the top position. Fear, panic, and loss of life followed. Other consequences include socioeconomic setbacks and acute food shortages. Leadership Newspaper reports the highest frame of consequence (50). Punch followed with 36, while ThisDay had the lowest (17).

The implication of the above consequences is that leadership covers the story with the highest consequence frames to alert the government and society about the damaging effects of armed banditry with a view to discouraging the tragic occurrence. ThisDay's editorial coverage is lamentably very low, thereby suggesting a conspiracy of silence, lack of social responsibility, and poor agenda setting.

RQ-6: How the Media and the Government Promote Banditry in Northern Nigeria

Discussion and Analysis of Findings on How the Media Promotes Banditry

The media sets an agenda on armed banditry in Northern Nigeria, but the frequency of media coverage is lamentably low. This low coverage of banditry does not fully cover the nitty gritty of the tragedy, make it a public issue, expose the modus operandi of banditry, and reveal the cause and effects of banditry to discourage it. The inability of the media to fully cover and report armed banditry renders the media socially irresponsible.

Publishing only 22 editorials in 122 days is discouraging. With this, we can conclude that the media, through underreporting and poor agenda-setting, keeps the audience, Northern society, and the entire Nigerian populace in the dark concerning banditry activities.

Ugwu et al. (2022) also discovered this editorial insufficiency when they revealed that the media does not set enough agenda on banditry in Northern Nigeria, leading to low coverage of stories, low volume of stories, and lack of details. This is a way reporters promote armed banditry in the North. Therefore, by turning out very low editorials, the reporters have failed to perform their agenda-setting function concerning banditry actors, actions, sponsors, modus operandi or operational procedures, safety and security measures, causal factors, and consequences of banditry. With the foregoing, the audience is dragged into partial exposure and total ignorance. Another way Nigerian reporters promote banditry in Northern Nigeria is through the publication of fake news and their inability to counter lies and speculation concerning banditry. Newman and Fletcher (2017) found that "some media outlets are seen as taking sides, encouraging an increasingly polarized set of opinions." Others are criticized for not calling out lies, keeping information back or creating a false equivalence of partisan opinions that are obscuring facts and understanding".

Probuscka (2018) opined that media lies have now been replaced with "ambiguous, euphemistic statements". Another funny argument is that journalists no longer lie but simply "depart from the truth" (Probuscka, 2018). Some funny appellations that have replaced media lies are exaggeration, misspeaking, making erroneous judgments, and selectively presenting information (Probuscka, 2018). Let us consider the following headlines:

Arrest of 1000 bandit informants (Leadership, 2024, September 27): The above headline exaggerates and departs from the truth. First, all that the federal government of Nigeria can boast of is the arrest of "bandit informants," not the real bandits themselves. Second, the claim lacks photo evidence for authentication. Terrorists are influencing and defeating the government, not the other way around. The claim made on this headline in support of the government is an exaggerated departure from the truth. Our follow-up investigation never revealed further punitive or corrective measures taken by the government against the so-called "1000 bandits' informants."

New center must win the arms war (Punch, 2024, September 24): This headline presents yet another lie, overstatement, unrealistic claim and false hope. The reporter claims that the National Center for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons "must win the arms war." The question is who supplies the major arms with which the bandits operate and who is involved in the fight against bandits? There is a huge situational irony here.

The government and its agents (police, army, etc.) have been accused of supplying weapons, food, vehicles, and money to the bandits. The government has also been accused of negotiating with bandits for ransoms instead of executing them (Attah, 2019). The same government claims to have set up a body to wage war against the bandits. The reporters, tilting toward the government, believe that they can cleverly hoodwink the audience and society. Traditionally, editorials are built around the newspaper's personal opinion. This is not really a problem. Problems arise only when the personal opinion of the organization is overloaded with bias and imbalance. Newman and Fletcher (2017) recommend that "journalists and news publications should be far more open about their biases and clearer about distinguishing news from opinion and news."

Furthermore, the media fuels and worsens banditry in the North by underreporting, underestimating, or overblowing facts and figures. For instance, in every fatal act of banditry attack against security personnel, the media and the government usually release significantly opposing casualty figures. For example, "on November 16, a major attack was launched at the military camp by ISIS fighters that were armed with various weapons. While media reports put the number of killed soldiers at 20, the Defense Hqtrs put the number at 5" (Punch, 2024, December 28). The question is: Who tells the truth and who tells a lie? In summary, both the media and the government conspire to promote banditry in Northern Nigeria.

Security personnel use the media, especially social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok, and Youtube) to combat banditry. At the same time, bandits also use social media for communication, training, meetings, ransom negotiations, abduction strategies, and escape (Chukwuere & Onyebukwa, 2018). In addition to the foregoing, the audience uses social media for fake news about banditry. Although some fake news items are negative, others are framed to eulogize bandits, exaggerate their strategies and tactics, and make them appear unconquerable and illusive to security personnel. This not only encourages bandits but also fuels banditry activities in Northern Nigeria.

What are the implications of publishing lies, exaggerations, and unverified stories on banditry? Two things are involved: first, the media loses public trust, and "releasing unverified information to the public would jeopardize the fight against banditry and kidnaping in the state" (PMNews, 2021, September 4). Governor Bello Matawalle of Zamfara State pours out his wrath on journalists, cautioning them to stop "reeling out unverified figures and sensitive information, capable of fueling the already tense situation in the state." This is because releasing unverified information to the public would jeopardize the fight against banditry and kidnaping in the state" (PMNews, 2021, September 4).

Second, another way the media fuels and worsens banditry in the North is by exaggerating and screaming headlines on banditry activities. For instance, "Lakurawa: A new monster is born" (Punch, 2024, November 21) is metaphorically overstated and glamorizes the terrorist group. Through this hyperbolic screaming headline, the media attributes so much power and terror to the bandits. The terrorist group may feel either flattered or insulted. If the latter, they may therefore swear to act as the labeled "monster." Consequently, the audience and northern society may nurse the intimidating fear that they are living with real monsters.

Finally, through narrative irony and unconsciously, the newspapers instill fear and panic in their audience and the entire society in a bid to set an agenda on banditry. Narrative irony is a situation in which the reporter says one thing while the audience understands another. It is also a situation in which the reporter assumes that the audience understands his message but does not comprehend it. Furthermore, in this study, narrative irony is construed as a situation in a tragic news presentation where the reporter succeeds in scaring his audience through his careless choice of words while being ignorant of the damage he has caused.

Examples of scary headlines are as follows:

(i). **Lakurawa: A new monster is born** (Punch, November 21, 2024). This is oxymoronically scaring because the natives may begin to imagine living with a “monster,” a destructive, frightening being. However, the situation is not always reported.

(ii). **Mass killings and abductions endured under Tinubu** (Punch, 2024, September 18). This is a present tense and habitual action depicted by the verb “endure.” The implication of this is that the reporter threatens the reader with the reality that “killings” and “abductions” in the Tinubu administration happen daily without hindrance.

(iii). **Rising insecurity in Abuja** (Leadership, November 22, 2024). This reminds the audience that insecurity is growing daily in Abuja. Visitors will be scared of visiting Abuja, and those in Abuja will be afraid of living there.

(iv). **Banditry still runs deep** (Punch, October 23, 2024). See ii above.

The gerundial phrase headline (i.e., iii) and the sentential headline (i.e., iv) give the impression that insecurity and banditry increase daily in Abuja. This does not only scare an ordinary person who lives in Abuja but also deters visitors and investors from visiting and residing in Nigeria’s FCT.

On the contrary, Igoe (2010) strongly disagrees that the media causes fear/panic in society. He claims that the media does not exaggerate, reel out untrue stories, and glamorize banditry. He corrects that the media does not hype insurgency, but that banditry is “an important public policy issue and deserves substantial coverage from the media.” He asserts that “the norms of professional journalism, including objectivity and balance, limit the willingness of media outlets to exploit insurgencies to increase their audience share and lead them to devote substantial attention to the views of governments when covering episodes of ... violence.”

Discussion and Analysis of Findings on the Government’s Promotion of Banditry in Northern Nigeria

This study revealed that the poor governance quality offered by successive political leaders in Nigeria is the major cause of banditry in Northern Nigeria. Government fuels banditry through poor governance. Poor or bad governance results from the inability of government at all levels to fight corruption, exhibit high levels of transparency, maintain accountability, make favorable policies, and provide basic social amenities and security of life and property for the citizens.

Okoi and Iwara (2021) argued that “the failure of governance in Nigeria manifests in the declining capacity of political leaders to recognize systemic risks such as election fraud, terrorist attacks, herder-farmer conflict, armed banditry, and police brutality and put in place the necessary measures to navigate these challenges”. It should be noted that other causal factors of poor governance as discovered in our research, for example, unemployment, porous borders, and poverty, are also characteristic features of poor governance.

What is the link between poor governance and the proliferation of arms and increasing banditry activities? Porous borders are gateways to free entry and exit routes for both foreign and local bandits. Unemployment causes idleness and poverty, which finally lures many youths with weak and gullible minds into banditry.

Furthermore, ardent observers of Nigeria’s security landscape blame the return of the **Lakurawa** group on the failure of the country’s military, intelligence, and security agencies to nip the internal security threats in the bud. In addition, it is ironic and surprising that a rapport has been established between bandits’ warlords and some traditional rulers in the North. For instance, in Punch’s “Bandits’ levies, obstacle to food security,” “bandits impose taxes on farmers to gain access to their farmland”, “Farmers must pay sums ranging from N100,000 to N300,000 to cultivate their land or harvest crops” (July 3, 2024). Is this imposition not due to the rapport between the bandits and the local chiefs?

There is also a rapport between bandits and the same government officials who claim to be fighting against insecurity. Agents called conflict entrepreneurs exist (for example, Tukur Mamu and Sheikh Ahmad Gumi). These people pose as truce brokers between bandits and the relatives of abductees. These so-called peace makers are also ransom negotiators between the government and the bandits. Sheikh Ahmad Gumi is responsible for the

release of 27 students abducted from a forestry college in Kaduna after huge ransoms (Ochieng & Kiriungi, 2021). Many Nigerians (including Fasan, 2021) who perceive his mediatory role of appeasement as openly pacifying and accommodating the outlawed activities of the bandits.

The government makes it impossible for banditry to be a thing of the past because it prefers negotiations (usually unfruitful) to the outright execution of bandits who have been apprehended (if really apprehended as claimed). It rather brands them as “repentant.” The government also promotes banditry by allowing the bandits’ warlords to engage in ransom negotiations. Is the negotiation table not a better place to apprehend the warlords if the government wishes to work with honesty and transparency?

It should be mentioned that the amount of money accruing from banditry is enormous, and this fuels banditry and encourages bandits more than any other factor. The government is highly indicted here. John Campbell of the Council on Foreign Relations reveals that Nigerian federal and state authorities always deny paying ransoms to bandits, yet the government often pays to rescue captives. The revelation of the schoolboys involved in the Kankara abduction contradicts official ransom denials. Reports reveal that the “Katsina State government paid N30 million ... to recover the schoolboys” (Campbell, 2021).

Summary and Conclusions

This paper is a content analysis of three national dailies (Leadership, ThisDay, and Punch). It reveals how the media and the government fuel and worsen banditry in Northern Nigeria. In addition, the study discovers that the three newspapers have poor editorial coverage; the major themes running through the editorials are abduction for ransom, killing, arms trafficking, cattle-rustling, and village marauding.

Other findings indicate that the major victims of banditry in Northern Nigeria are villagers, farmers, worshipers, and herders; the causal factors of banditry are poor governance, unemployment, porous borders, and poverty; and the consequences of banditry are insecurity, fear/panic, socioeconomic setback, and acute food shortages. The findings also indict the media and the government for their involvement in fueling and worsening armed banditry in Northern Nigeria.

Recommendations

Having seen the findings of the study, the authors recommend the following:

- 1). Nigerian reporters should always set a serious and comprehensive agenda on serious national issues, such as banditry and other insecurity issues.
- 2). Nigerian reporters should adopt an objective approach to reporting banditry rather than injecting bloated personal opinions.
- 3). Reporters should use moderate language during the framing of banditry stories with the aim of discouraging and not promoting the tragedy through narrative irony.
- 4). The Northern states and the federal government should avoid playing politics with banditry, or romancing with bandits. Instead, they should apprehend and bring bandits to book.
- 5). Good governance, transparent leadership, and good policies are the only panacea that the Nigerian government should adopt, not lip-service policies that end up achieving nothing in the fight against insecurity.

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