

PRESS COVERAGE OF BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA. A STUDY OF
VANGUARD, PUNCH AND NATION NEWS PAPERS OF 2025.

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BENIN CITY, NIGERIA

JULY, 2026
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A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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THE DEPARTMENT OF
MASS COMMUNICATION, FACULTY OF ART, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY, NIGERIA.

JULY, 2026
DECLARATION

I declare that this project is based on research undertaken by me in the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under the supervision of Mr Sunday Ekerikevwe (FRHD). All the views and ideas in this study are a product of personal research, and the ideas of others expressed are duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this project was carried out by OMORODION IYEN ESTHER

with Mat no ART2201321 under my supervision and has been approved. This project is to be submitted to the Department of Mass Communication to the University of Benin, Benin city, Nigeria.

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Date

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External Examiner

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STUDENT'S THESIS

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to God, who had come through for me in ways I never imagine all through my academic journey. I am especially grateful to my parents, for holding my hands and walking me through this journey, in every aspect that mattered.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined press coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria through selected national newspapers, namely Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation of 2025. The study was anchored on the Agenda Setting Theory and Social Responsibility Theory. The researcher findings of the study, adopted a content analysis research design, with data collected from 92 sampled editions of the selected newspapers using a coding sheet as the research instrument. The study revealed that Nigerian newspapers gave considerable attention to banditry and kidnapping, with Punch recording the highest level of coverage, followed by Vanguard and The Nation. Secondly, the study discovered that coverage of banditry and kidnapping was largely occasional and event-driven, with limited follow-up reports and investigative stories. Thirdly, the findings showed that stories on banditry and kidnapping were given significant prominence, as many reports appeared on the front pages and centre spreads of the newspapers, indicating the importance attached to insecurity issues, among others. Based on the findings, it is concluded that media organisations should move beyond event-based reporting by investing in investigative journalism and explanatory reports that address the causes and consequences of insecurity. Additionally, journalists should receive continuous training on conflict-sensitive and ethical security reporting to reduce sensationalism and promote responsible coverage. Newspapers should also increase the use of analytical genres such as features and editorials to provide deeper understanding of banditry and kidnapping. Finally, media organisations should strengthen their commitment to social responsibility by adopting reporting practices that support public safety, accountability, and peaceful resolution of security challenges in Nigeria.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Over the years, Nigeria has faced several security issues that have affected many lives in different ways; however, in recent times, banditry and kidnapping have emerged as the most prominent national crises ravaging the economic, socio-political, cultural, and everyday lives of citizens across the country. In agreement with this, Benita, Asemah, and Emeke (2023) noted that despite ongoing government initiatives to improve security, Nigeria is still experiencing a rise in violent criminal activities, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, and targeted killings. These twin phenomena have not only disrupted commerce and agriculture but have also instilled fear among land travellers, farmers, school children, and rural dwellers, thereby raising serious concerns about personal safety and national stability. As a result, the civil liberties of citizens have increasingly become compromised in the country. Observations have shown that kidnapping and armed banditry significantly disrupt societal functions such as education, food production, and community cohesion, thereby posing tangible threats to national

development and human security.

Banditry in Nigeria, typically characterized by armed groups operating in poorly policed rural areas, especially in the northwest and central regions, has become closely linked to rampant kidnapping for ransom. According to Mbam, Ndubuisi, Jacob, Uche, and Amiara, Solomon (2024, p. 1), “the epicentre of banditry and kidnapping has shifted from the oil-rich Niger Delta to other regions, particularly the North-West, North-Central, and the Eastern states.” This indicates that beyond the initial areas where these crimes first emerged, they have spread rapidly across the country, targeting highways, remote communities, and educational institutions alike.

In 2025, Nigeria witnessed several high-profile manifestations of this insecurity, significant enough to provoke national outrage and public discourse. In November 2025, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Africa reported that gunmen attacked a girls’ secondary school in Maga, Kebbi State, killing a staff member and abducting 25 schoolgirls. This incident reverberated across national media and civil society circles. During the same period, Reuters reported the mass abduction of over 300 school children and teachers from a Catholic school in Niger State. This incident further drew international attention as one of the worst kidnapping cases in Nigeria’s history. These events underscore the severity and breadth of the crisis, which

now affects educational institutions as much as rural communities and road users.

Just recently, in Ekpoma, Edo State, the crisis assumed an intensely local and politically charged dimension, leading residents, students, and traders to take to the streets to protest the persistent rise in kidnapping in the Esan West Local Government Area. Protesters blocked major roadways such as the Benin–Auchi Road, carried placards demanding urgent government action, and highlighted the psychological and economic strain caused by abductions and killings that had become increasingly commonplace in the area (Punch, 2025). These protests were sparked by the killing of a young man allegedly by suspected kidnappers, an event that galvanized public anger and disrupted commercial movement and daily life in the town (Punch, 2025; The Nation, 2025). What began as a community appeal for protection against insecurity later became entangled with arrests, allegations of police mishandling, and political controversy following the arrest and remand of several protesters, including students of Ambrose Alli University, reflecting deep public frustration with state responses to violent crime (The Nation, 2025; Prime Business Africa, 2025). The Ekpoma protests illustrate how banditry and kidnapping in contemporary Nigeria have moved beyond isolated criminal acts to become collective societal grievances capable of

triggering public demonstrations, political contestations, and local backlash. Such events have been widely reported and debated in national newspapers, including Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation, and have shaped public perceptions of governance, security policy, and community resilience.

A critical understanding of how these mainstream print media outlets interpret and report such crises is therefore crucial, as public trust and advocacy often depend on media narratives that reflect both factual developments and the broader social implications of insecurity. It is from the foregoing that this research seeks to explore how key national newspapers have covered these issues, how such coverage shapes public understanding, and what it reveals about the role of the media in times of national security challenges.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While banditry and kidnapping continue to intensify across Nigeria, concern is growing not only about the persistence of these crimes but also about how they are represented in the press. Scholars argue that media coverage of security crises often goes beyond simple reporting to shape public perception, policy discourse, and societal response (McQuail, 2010). In Nigeria, however, newspaper reporting of violent crimes is often episodic, overly reliant on official sources, and limited in investigative depth, weakening

the media's watchdog function (Oso, 2012; Ekeanyanwu & Obianigwe, 2012). Studies also show that Nigerian newspapers report insecurity in fragmented, event-driven ways, emphasizing dramatic incidents without sufficient contextual analysis of patterns, causes, or implications (Asemah, Nwammuo, & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). Such practices may heighten public fear while offering little guidance for informed civic engagement or policy accountability. This challenge is particularly critical in covering kidnapping and banditry, where inconsistent narratives, regional bias, and uneven prominence can distort public understanding of the crisis (Muobike, 2018).

Despite the strategic role of newspapers as agenda setters, there is limited empirical research examining how leading national dailies frame banditry and kidnapping during heightened insecurity. Existing studies focus on general insecurity or isolated incidents, leaving a gap in understanding the patterns, depth, and orientation of newspaper coverage within a specific period, such as 2025. Poorly reported or inconsistent coverage can undermine public trust in the media and weaken its role in promoting accountability and informed discourse on national security.

This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining how Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation reported banditry and kidnapping in 2025. Specifically, it aims to ascertain the level of coverage, determine the frequency

of reporting, examine story prominence, analyze reporting genres, and assess the level of social responsibility demonstrated by the Nigerian press in covering these critical security issues.

1.3 Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of the study

1. Ascertain the level of coverage of banditry and kidnapping by Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers in 2025.
2. Determine the frequency of coverage given to banditry and kidnapping in the selected newspapers.
3. Examine the prominence accorded to banditry and kidnapping stories in the selected newspapers.
4. Analyze the genres of banditry and kidnapping stories published in the selected newspapers.
5. Assess the level of social responsibility demonstrated by the Nigerian press in reporting banditry and kidnapping and related security issues in 2025.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is hinged on the following research questions

1. What is the level of coverage of banditry and kidnapping by Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers in 2025?
2. How frequently do Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers report

banditry and kidnapping cases in 2025?

3.What prominence is accorded to banditry and kidnapping stories in the selected newspapers?

4.What genres are used in reporting banditry and kidnapping stories in Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers?

5.To what extent do Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers demonstrate social responsibility in reporting banditry and kidnapping and related security issues in 2025?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to three major national newspapers in Nigeria, namely Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation, published during the year 2025. These newspapers were selected from the numerous print media outlets in the country due to their wide national circulation, perceived credibility, regular publication frequency, and perceived acceptance by readers across different regions of Nigeria. This scope is to ensure that the findings give a detailed analysis of press practices in reporting banditry and kidnapping during a period of heightened insecurity in Nigeria.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is important because it highlights the value and benefits

of the research to different groups. It explains how the findings will contribute to knowledge, media practice, and society as a whole.

Academic Field / Mass Communication:

This study is important to the field of Mass Communication because it helps to deepen understanding of how insecurity issues are reported in the media. It will help students relate what they learn in class to real-life reporting situations. It can also improve academic discussions and learning in journalism and communication studies.

Media Owners and Practitioners:

The study will also be useful to media owners and journalists. It points out areas where reporting can be improved, especially in clarity and responsibility. By applying these findings, media organizations can strengthen their credibility and earn greater trust from the public.

Society at Large:

This research is important to society because media reports on insecurity influence how people think and respond to such issues. When reports are clear and balanced, they can reduce panic and misunderstanding. This encourages a more informed and calm public.

Researchers and Scholars (Media and Security Studies):

The study will serve as a helpful reference for researchers and scholars

who are interested in media and security studies. It provides useful information that others can build on in future research. In this way, it adds to the existing knowledge on media coverage of security matters in Nigeria.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Financial Constraints: Limited financial resources affected the research process, as the researcher had to spend more on transportation to libraries and other locations to access relevant materials. These additional expenses placed some limitations on the conduct of the study.

Time Constraints: The study was conducted within a limited period, which influenced the amount of time available for collecting, coding, analyzing, and interpreting newspaper content. As a result, the research was limited to press coverage published in 2025.

Availability of Resources: The availability of relevant literature, newspaper archives, and other reference materials posed some challenges during the study. This limited the range of materials that could be consulted during the research process.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

Banditry: For this study, banditry is defined as organized criminal activities involving armed robbery, cattle rustling, highway attacks, kidnappings for ransom, and other forms of violent crime carried out by non-state actors in

Nigeria.

Coverage: This is the scope of reportage. It can also be defined as the percentage of persons or reached by a communications medium at a particular period of time.

Kidnapping: Kidnapping is defined as the criminal act of forcibly or fraudulently seizing, abducting, or detaining a person against their will, often accompanied by demands for ransom or committed in connection with other criminal activities. It involves the unlawful deprivation of a person's freedom through coercion, deception, or threat, and is recognized as a serious criminal offence under Nigerian law.

Newspaper: This is a paper that is printed and distributed, usually daily or weekly, which contains news, articles of opinion, features and advertising. It is what will be content analyzed for this study.

Press coverage: This refers to the extent, frequency, prominence, and presentation of news stories about banditry and kidnapping in selected Nigerian newspapers (Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation) during 2025.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines literature that is related to this current study. Therefore, the issues discussed in this chapter explore the central theme of the study from a historical, conceptual, empirical, and theoretical lens.

2.1 Historical Review

2.1.1 History of the Nigerian Press

The Nigerian press began in the nineteenth century during the period of

missionary expansion and colonial contact. Printing technology created the foundation for newspaper publishing in the country. In 1859, Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Egba ati Yoruba was established in Abeokuta under Reverend Henry Townsend. It is widely regarded as the first newspaper in Nigeria (African Studies Centre Leiden, 2021). The paper was published in Yoruba and later included an English supplement, which expanded its readership. Its early content focused on religious instruction, literacy, and community information. It later carried public notices and broader social issues. Political unrest in Abeokuta led to its closure in 1867 (African Studies Centre Leiden, 2021). Although short-lived, the paper introduced structured news circulation in Nigeria. It also demonstrated that print could serve educational and public communication purposes. This early effort laid the groundwork for subsequent developments in the newspaper industry.

After this foundation, more newspapers emerged in Lagos and other urban centres. These publications provided platforms for educated Africans to debate colonial governance and social reform. Omu (1978) explains that between 1880 and 1937, the Nigerian press increasingly became a vehicle for political expression and resistance to colonial authority. Newspapers during this period criticized administrative policies and advocated greater African participation in governance. A major turning point occurred in 1937 with the

establishment of the West African Pilot under Nnamdi Azikiwe. The paper became known for its nationalist position and support for self-government (Kperogi, 2020). It combined political activism with modern newspaper practices and reached a wide audience. Research on late colonial Nigeria shows that the press played a central role in shaping nationalist consciousness and mobilizing political action (James, 2018). The press, therefore moved from missionary communication to active participation in anti-colonial struggle.

After independence in 1960, the Nigerian press continued to expand but faced significant political pressure. Military governments imposed restrictions that limited media freedom at various times. Maringues (2001) describes how the press operated under censorship and intimidation, especially during periods of military rule. Despite these constraints, privately owned newspapers maintained investigative reporting traditions. Adesoji and Alimi (2013) note that private ownership created both opportunities and tensions, as newspapers balanced public interest journalism with proprietorial influence. Even within a restrictive political climate, sections of the press continued to question state authority and expose corruption. The Nigerian press developed a reputation for resilience and confrontation with power. Its role in political accountability remained visible throughout the 1980s and

1990s. This period reinforced the image of the press as a watchdog institution within Nigerian society.

In the contemporary era, the Nigerian press operates within a democratic system but still faces economic and structural challenges. The growth of digital platforms has transformed news production and distribution. Traditional newspapers now compete with online outlets and social media platforms. Kperogi (2020) describes this transition as a shift from earlier nationalist and resistance traditions to a complex media environment shaped by digital participation and commercialization. Global monitoring reports also continue to assess freedom of expression and journalist safety, including in Nigeria (UNESCO, 2022). These developments show that the Nigerian press has passed through several important phases: missionary beginnings, nationalist activism, military-era resistance, and digital transformation. Across these stages, it has remained central to political communication and public debate. Its history reflects adaptation to changing political systems while maintaining its role in informing and influencing society.

2.1.2 History of Banditry and Kidnapping in Nigeria

Banditry in Nigeria has its roots in rural violence, particularly cattle rustling and armed robbery in northern communities. Earlier forms of rustling

were small-scale and localized, often linked to disputes over grazing land and water resources between pastoralists and farmers. Over time, these activities became more organized and violent. Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) explain that cattle rustling gradually shifted from subsistence theft to commercialized criminal enterprise involving armed networks. This transformation increased the intensity of violence and reduced traditional community control mechanisms. As rural security weakened, armed groups began attacking villages, stealing livestock, and displacing residents. The collapse of local conflict resolution systems further aggravated tensions. What had previously been manageable communal disputes began evolving into organized armed banditry. These developments laid the structural foundation for the large-scale insecurity later witnessed in the North-West.

The escalation of banditry became pronounced in the 2010s, particularly in Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, and Sokoto States. Armed groups established camps in forest reserves and launched coordinated attacks on rural communities. Olaniyan (2018) argues that Nigeria's forested spaces provided strategic advantages for armed actors, including concealment, mobility, and recruitment opportunities. The proliferation of small arms across the Sahel region also strengthened the operational capacity of these groups. International Crisis Group (2020) reports that violence in North-West

Nigeria intensified as multiple armed factions operated across state boundaries. The attacks resulted in killings, displacement, and severe disruption of agricultural production. As the crisis deepened, it moved beyond cattle rustling into systematic armed violence. Bandit groups increasingly targeted villages for ransom, looting, and territorial control. The failure of consistent state presence in rural areas allowed these groups to consolidate influence.

Kidnapping in Nigeria gained national prominence in the early 2000s in the Niger Delta region. Militants abducted expatriate oil workers to draw attention to environmental degradation, poverty, and political marginalization in oil-producing communities. Ikelegbe (2005) and Obi (2010) document how militancy in the Niger Delta emerged from grievances related to oil extraction and underdevelopment. Initially, hostage-taking was framed as a political strategy. However, as ransom payments became financially rewarding, kidnapping evolved into a profit-driven enterprise. The activity spread beyond oil facilities to urban and highway abductions. Over time, kidnapping became detached from its original political objectives and transformed into organized criminal activity across different regions of Nigeria. A major shift occurred when extremist groups adopted mass abduction tactics. In 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped over 200 schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno State. This incident

marked a turning point in the scale and symbolism of kidnapping in Nigeria.

According to Zenn (2018), the use of mass abduction served both strategic and propaganda purposes for insurgent groups. Subsequent cases in Dapchi, Kankara, and Kaduna demonstrated that schoolchildren had become vulnerable targets. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023) identifies kidnapping for ransom as one of the most significant organized crime threats in Nigeria. In the North-West, bandit groups integrated kidnapping into their operational model, making ransom a major revenue source. International Crisis Group (2020) observes that despite military operations, structural drivers such as poverty, weak governance, and limited rural security infrastructure continue to sustain armed criminality. Banditry and kidnapping have therefore merged into a broader security challenge characterised by organised violence, ransom economies, and institutional fragility.

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Concept of the Press

The term “press” refers to the institutions that gather, process, and distribute news and information about events for the public. Although it was once used solely to refer to the mechanically printed products (newspapers),

the term now has a much broader application in journalism and is used to define the entire field of journalism as an institution. Within the context of mass communication studies, the press is considered one of the major components of the media system. According to McQuail (2010), the press as an institution is often referred to as performing three functions in society, which are surveilling events, interpreting meaning, and transmitting shared values or knowledge. Surveilling refers to the collection and dissemination of news reports concerning political, economic, and social developments. Interpreting refers to explaining the events and putting them into an understandable context. Finally, transmitting refers to the way that the press influences the development of norms and values and transmits them from one generation to another. These three functions show that the press does not just report the facts; it plays a major role in developing the people's views about what is real.

The press is also closely linked to democratic theory. It is considered a watchdog organization that keeps an eye on those in authority in liberal democratic systems. According to Norris (2000), a free and plural press improves accountability and transparency, which in turn supports democratic governance. Newspapers examine governmental policies, look into corruption, and offer forums for discussion. The press affects public awareness and

political engagement through investigative reporting and editorial commentary. A certain amount of independence from governmental oversight and commercial meddling is assumed by this democratic role. The press cannot carry out its accountability role in an efficient manner without this kind of autonomy. As a result, press freedom is frequently regarded as a crucial sign of democratic progress.

The way the press should function in society is further explained by normative theories of the press. Four types of press systems are distinguished by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956): authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet-communist. These concepts establish a link between political regimes and media institutions. The press is tightly regulated and serves state objectives under authoritarian regimes. The libertarian paradigm places a strong emphasis on freedom of speech and little government intervention. According to the social responsibility model, which rose to popularity in the 20th century, the press must operate in the public interest even though it should have freedom. This concept is expanded by Christians et al. (2009), who contend that journalism should uphold societal cohesiveness, human dignity, and honesty. A key component of this strategy is the avoidance of harm, accuracy, fairness, and ethical reporting.

However, academics acknowledge that the press is subject to political

and economic limitations. Editorial judgments are influenced by ownership structures, advertising demands, and regulatory rules. Commercial interests may have an impact on news framing and selection, even in democracies. The press continues to be a vital institution for public communication in spite of these obstacles. It fosters discussion, gives citizens access to knowledge, and advances national progress. Examining how newspapers cover delicate subjects like crime, conflict, and national security requires an understanding of the press as a democratic tool as well as a socially ingrained institution.

2.2.2 Concept of Banditry and Kidnapping

Banditry is conceptualised in contemporary security literature as organised, armed criminal activity carried out by non-state actors who employ violence for economic extraction, territorial dominance, or coercive influence. It extends beyond sporadic armed robbery and reflects sustained patterns of rural predation and social control. Ojo (2020) describes banditry as a manifestation of governance deficits in “ungoverned spaces,” where weak state presence enables armed groups to establish authority structures that rival formal institutions. In similar terms, Forest (2012) explains that armed non-state actors flourish where state capacity is fragile, gradually transforming criminal operations into embedded systems of coercion.

Banditry therefore represents structured violence with identifiable operational patterns, including raids, illegal taxation, cattle rustling, and strategic abductions. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023) situates such activity within organised crime frameworks, noting that sustained armed operations require logistical networks, access to weapons, and financial channels. Conceptually, banditry denotes a broader architecture of violent entrepreneurship rather than isolated acts of aggression.

Kidnapping is defined in criminological scholarship as the unlawful seizure and detention of a person for ransom, political bargaining, intimidation, or other strategic gain. It is both a violent crime and a coercive instrument. According to Nwogwugwu (2018), kidnapping evolves from opportunistic abduction into a structured criminal enterprise when it becomes routinised and supported by negotiation mechanisms. In organised contexts, kidnapping involves surveillance, transport coordination, concealment sites, and communication systems designed to secure financial or political concessions. UNODC (2023) identifies kidnapping as a profit-driven offence closely connected to illicit arms circulation and informal financial transfers. In this sense, kidnapping is rarely random; it reflects calculated decision-making aimed at maximising gain while minimising risk.

The conceptual intersection between banditry and kidnapping lies in

their shared reliance on coercion, illegality, and economic motivation. Scholars increasingly argue that kidnapping often functions as a tactic within broader bandit systems rather than as a standalone phenomenon (International Crisis Group, 2020). Armed groups engaged in territorial violence may incorporate abduction as a revenue-generating strategy within wider extraction practices. This convergence demonstrates that banditry provides the structural environment in which kidnapping can thrive. Where armed actors control movement corridors or rural settlements, abduction becomes easier to execute and sustain.

2.3 Opinion Review

2.3.1 Press and Its Function in the Society

The significance of the Press in any Nation cannot be stressed enough. Ever since the emergence of the daily newspaper in the early 1800s, the Press has been one of the leading organizations providing information to the general public. The Press is very important today here in Nigeria in providing thorough and accurate reporting, analysing and researching the security problems created by Armed Banditry and Kidnapping. Although both Digital and Electronic versions of media are becoming more popular, the Press is still considered a reliable place for people looking for complete, accurate and trustworthy report for all of these very serious subjects. Simply

put, the Press is defined as an organization or Business that collects, processes and distributes information for people. In the confine of Security Issues that are facing Nigeria today, the roles and responsibilities of the Press continue to grow exponentially in importance. Below are some of the functions they perform

Information Dissemination

The public's enlightenment is the press's main duty. In Nigeria, the media covers banditry and kidnapping instances as they occur. For instance, newspapers report on the number of victims, the location, and the security agencies' response when students are kidnapped from a school in Kaduna or Zamfara State. This information keeps the country aware of the scope of the issue, keeps families informed, and warns communities of possible threats. Many of these occurrences may be overlooked or minimised in the absence of media attention.

Watchdog and Surveillance Function

As a watchdog, the media keeps an eye on what the government and security services are doing. In the fight against banditry and kidnapping, newspapers question authorities about their strategies, preparedness, and response time. For example, despite a high level of protection, if attacks occur frequently in a certain area, the media may look into the situation and enquire

as to why these failures persist. It can reveal instances in which money allotted for security is mishandled. In doing so, the media promotes improved governance and transparency while holding leaders responsible.

Educational Function

The press plays an educational role in society by informing their readership about the reasons and effects of banditry and kidnaping. They do this through the publishing of opinion pieces, security expert interviews and other types of articles that explain the root causes that provide a basis for insecurity like joblessness, poverty, porous borders, and the proliferation of weapons. They also publish guidelines to aid individuals in remaining safe, such as precautions to take when traveling on certain highways well-known as sites of kidnappings. The press provides the public with an understanding of the problem so they can undertake measures to prevent it whenever feasible.

Correlation and Interpretation Function

Security issues can be complex. The press does more than report attacks; it interprets events and connects them to larger social, political, and economic conditions. For example, newspapers may analyze how banditry affects farming activities in northern Nigeria, leading to food shortages and higher prices across the country. They may also examine how ransom

payments influence the cycle of crime. By providing in-depth analysis, the press helps the public understand the broader implications of insecurity.

Record-Keeping Function

The press keeps a documented record of incidents of banditry and kidnapping. Over time, these reports form an archive that shows patterns, frequency, and affected regions. Researchers, policymakers, and security analysts can use these records to study trends and design better strategies to combat crime. Historical records of major kidnapping cases or large-scale bandit attacks also help future generations understand the security challenges Nigeria faced at a particular time.

2.3.2 Banditry and Kidnapping as Security Challenges

Banditry and kidnapping have gradually transformed from scattered criminal incidents into deeply rooted security crises that shape everyday life in many parts of Nigeria. What began decades ago as isolated cases of abduction or rural armed robbery has evolved into organised systems of violence that operate with alarming regularity. The literature shows a steady progression: from opportunistic attacks to coordinated raids, from one-off ransom demands to sustained territorial extraction. Mbam, Jacob and Amiara (2024) trace this evolution to weaknesses within the security architecture of the Fourth Republic. They argue that the problem is not the absence of

institutions but their declining effectiveness, reflected in corruption, poor coordination, weak intelligence gathering, and inconsistent enforcement. Security forces respond, yet their responses often appear reactive and fragmented. Armed groups adapt quickly, relocate, reorganise, and continue operations. Over time, insecurity becomes normalised, and communities adjust their lives around fear rather than stability.

As the violence spread across rural corridors in the North-West and North-Central regions, the character of crime also shifted. Kidnapping ceased to function merely as a desperate tactic of marginalised groups and became embedded within a broader economy of coercion. Mbam et al. (2024) employ Situational Action Theory to explain how weakened moral regulation and limited deterrence create environments where violent choices appear viable. Yet deprivation alone cannot explain the scale and persistence of these crimes. Many communities' face poverty without descending into organised banditry. The literature suggests that what distinguishes high-incidence zones is the consolidation of armed groups capable of sustaining violence through access to arms, forest hideouts, and predictable ransom negotiations. Once these networks stabilise, kidnapping turns into a calculated enterprise rather than a spontaneous act. Ransom becomes routine. Negotiation channels emerge. Violence becomes structured and repeatable rather than random.

A more disturbing dimension appears in Musa's (2025) analysis, which frames banditry as a system resembling modern slavery. In affected communities, armed actors do not simply abduct victims and retreat. They impose levies, regulate farming schedules, demand protection payments, and restrict mobility. Villages operate under constant threat. Farmers pay to cultivate land. Families pay to secure release. In some instances, entire communities function under coercive arrangements that resemble parallel governance structures. This interpretation expands the understanding of kidnapping beyond ransom extraction. Abduction becomes one instrument within a broader architecture of domination. Such control reshapes local economies and entrenches dependency on armed authority. Violence thus becomes institutional rather than episodic. The persistence of these practices suggests that banditry is sustained not only through fear but through economic integration into rural survival systems.

International Crisis Group (2020) reinforces this interpretation through detailed documentation of armed group evolution in north-western Nigeria. The report describes overlapping actors, shifting alliances, and cycles of retaliation involving vigilante groups and security forces. Military offensives disrupt operations temporarily, yet armed networks re-emerge once pressure subsides. Forest terrains and porous borders facilitate mobility. Arms circulate

with relative ease. UNIDIR (2024) deepens this account through community-based research that captures the lived consequences of insecurity. Residents speak of abandoned farms, closed schools, displacement, and constant anxiety. Violence reshapes daily rhythms. Children withdraw from education. Markets shrink. Social trust erodes. The crisis extends beyond headline attacks and penetrates domestic life, altering economic planning and communal relationships.

The organised crime perspective adds another layer to the story. The UNODC (2023) situates kidnapping within broader illicit economies that include arms trafficking and informal financial systems. Ransom payments flow through networks that are difficult to trace. The more predictable the payments become, the stronger the incentive structure for continued abduction. This institutionalisation complicates deterrence. Mbam et al. (2024) noted that there is a persistent pattern of killings and kidnappings, though underreporting remains significant. Moreso, some communities avoid publicity to protect victims or prevent reprisals. Across these studies, a clear narrative unfolds: banditry and kidnapping have remained in existence because they have developed organisational depth, economic rationality, and territorial grounding.

2.3.3 The Press and Security Reporting in Nigeria

Nigeria's security reporting sits on a knife-edge. The public needs fast, accurate information about terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, and protests. At the same time, the same coverage can raise tensions, spread fear, or hand advantage to violent actors. That tension is not theoretical. It shows up in what gets framed as "breaking," what gets ignored, which voices get trusted, and how rumours travel faster than verification. One clear problem is the dominance of event-driven reporting. A lot of coverage still follows a familiar rhythm: attack, body count, official statement, grief, then move on.

Studies of newspaper coverage of Boko Haram attacks show recurring frame patterns and routine sourcing, with heavy dependence on official voices and predictable story structures that privilege immediacy over explanation (Obaje, 2017). Work on coverage of the Chibok girls' abduction similarly shows how salience and prominence can be high while the treatment still leans toward episodic storylines, which limits sustained accountability reporting and deeper public understanding (Ajakaiye, 2021). This is one reason insecurity becomes "always present" in the news, yet the audience learns little about what actually changes on the ground: the incentives, the failures, the money, the recruitment pathways, and the cycles that make violence repeat.

Another weak point is sourcing under pressure. Security beats in Nigeria are often reported through police, military, and political gatekeepers, not because journalists prefer it, but because access is restricted and risk is high. When officials delay briefings or offer vague claims, the vacuum fills quickly. Research on misinformation and disinformation in the Nigerian media environment shows how contested information spaces can distort public judgment and worsen social tensions, especially when audiences rely on highly shareable content and low-trust channels (Onigbinde et al., 2024). This is where the press gets blamed for “spreading panic,” even when the real issue is the absence of credible, timely public information. A stronger practice would treat official statements as one input, not a conclusion. It would also slow the rush to publish unverified casualty figures, “security sources say” claims, and dramatic but thin narratives that later collapse under scrutiny.

There is also the problem of amplification. Violent groups and criminal networks rely on reputation. Fear is part of their operating model. Some reporting unintentionally strengthens that model through repeated publication of threats, ransom figures, hostage videos, and breathless language that makes perpetrators seem omnipresent. Conflict-sensitive reporting scholarship argues that media can either escalate conflict dynamics or help reduce harm depending on story selection, language, and the degree to which

reporting avoids stereotypes and inflammatory cues (UNESCO, 2011; Peterson, 2023). The question is not whether journalists should report insecurity. They must. The question is how to report it without acting as a loudspeaker for coercion. That requires restraint with graphic visuals, care with naming and ethnic labelling, and discipline around what details serve the public interest versus what details serve criminals.

The human cost of security reporting is often ignored in the public debate. Nigeria's reporters cover protests and conflict under real threat from both state and non-state actors. CPJ has documented arrests, assaults, and harassment of journalists covering major events, including security-force actions during protests (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024). CJID's Press Attack Tracker has also reported a pattern of violations and an escalation in verified incidents in recent periods (Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development, 2024). These pressures shape newsroom behaviour. Editors become cautious. Field reporting reduces. News organisations rely more on statements, fewer investigations, and safer desk reporting. Add economic fragility and ownership pressure, and the incentive for costly, risky investigative security journalism weakens further. RSF has warned that economic pressure is a major threat to press freedom, not just violence and legal intimidation (Reporters Without Borders, 2025). Nigeria's wider trust

landscape reflects this strain, with surveys capturing how political pressure, safety issues, and credibility concerns intersect in media use and trust (Reuters Institute, 2025).

What should “good” security reporting look like in Nigeria? Not perfection, but clear standards. First, verification discipline: treat early claims as provisional, label uncertainty honestly, and update visibly when facts change. Second, thematic reporting: fewer single-incident stories and more explanatory work on patterns, financing, governance failures, and community impacts. Third, source diversity: survivors, local leaders, credible researchers, and humanitarian actors should appear alongside security spokespeople. Fourth, harm reduction: avoid language that inflames identities, avoid sensational visuals, and avoid publishing operational details that endanger victims or responders. These principles are not abstract. Journalism educators examining conflict reporting in Nigeria argue for training that strengthens peace journalism skills and improves how reporters handle conflict dynamics, framing choices, and professional safety (Ojebuyi et al., 2024).

The press can still do what it does best under pressure: document reality, contest propaganda, and force accountability. But that only happens when security reporting stops being a loop of tragedy and becomes a

sustained public record that connects incidents to responsibility. Nigeria does not just need “more security stories.” It needs better security storytelling: measured, verified, explanatory, and brave enough to ask hard questions even when all sides want a simpler narrative.

2.3.4 Factors that led to the increase of Banditry and Kidnapping in Nigeria

Corruption and Bad Governance

Corruption and bad governance remain central drivers of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria. The crisis of insecurity cannot be separated from institutional weakness and persistent leadership failure. Arewa (2013) links rising social crimes to administrative deficiencies, weak rule of law, inconsistent economic management, and the entrenchment of sectional interests in state structures. Where public institutions are compromised, accountability declines and enforcement weakens. Igbuzor (2011) argues that insecurity reflects the state’s inability to meet basic obligations such as employment creation, infrastructure provision, and equitable resource distribution. Widespread frustration grows when citizens perceive that available national wealth does not translate into public welfare. In such an environment, criminal networks operate with reduced fear of sanction. Judicial processes become slow or politicised, security agencies lack operational autonomy, and public trust erodes. This erosion of legitimacy

creates space for armed actors to flourish. Violence then becomes both a symptom and a product of governance failure.

Illiteracy and Lack of Skills

Illiteracy and lack of vocational skills also contribute significantly to the persistence of kidnapping and banditry. Ik-Iloanusi and Mbagwu (2023) explain that limited education restricts access to formal employment and reduces earning capacity, increasing vulnerability to recruitment into criminal networks. Individuals without basic literacy may lack awareness of legal consequences or the long-term implications of participation in organised crime. Criminal groups often exploit such vulnerabilities, presenting abduction and banditry as quick income opportunities. The intergenerational dimension is equally troubling. Children raised in households without educational support face restricted opportunities, increasing their susceptibility to criminal engagement in adulthood. The absence of practical skills compounds the problem. Skilled individuals are more likely to engage in productive enterprise, whether in formal employment or self-employment. Those without training or trade knowledge remain idle and economically dependent. Idle youth populations create recruitment pools for armed groups seeking manpower. Over time, this cycle reinforces itself, embedding insecurity within socio-economic structures.

Political Interference

Political interests have also shaped the trajectory of kidnapping in Nigeria. Political actors have been accused of sponsoring abductions to intimidate opponents or influence electoral outcomes. In such cases, kidnapping functions as an instrument of coercion within elite competition. The Niger Delta experience illustrates how abduction initially emerged as a bargaining tactic, where militants seized expatriates to pressure oil companies and government authorities for concessions and development commitments. Political kidnappings extend beyond agitation. Rival actors may target opponents or their relatives to secure advantage or compel withdrawal from contests. This politicisation of abduction blurs the boundary between crime and power struggle. Once kidnapping demonstrates financial and strategic value, it attracts imitation beyond political circles. The tactic becomes normalised, spreading into criminal markets that operate independently of political grievances. The instrumental use of abduction for influence thus contributes to its broader entrenchment.

Unemployment

Unemployment occupies a central position in explanations of banditry

and kidnapping. Torkwembe (2024) notes the continuous graduation of students from higher institutions without corresponding job creation in the civil service or private sector. The widening gap between labour supply and employment opportunities produces frustration and social restlessness. Ezeajughu (2023) describes unemployment as generating “idle hands” that sometimes turn against society in violent forms. Youth restiveness, armed robbery, car theft, illegal bunkering, and kidnapping are often linked to economic exclusion. Both educated and uneducated youths experience limited prospects, intensifying disillusionment. The absence of structured empowerment initiatives deepens the sense of abandonment. When legitimate income pathways remain inaccessible, illicit alternatives appear attractive. Armed groups offer financial returns that exceed available informal earnings. Sustained unemployment therefore, feeds recruitment into bandit networks and supports the growth of ransom-driven economies.

Poverty

Poverty reinforces this dynamic. Bello (2024) identifies poverty as a primary catalyst of banditry and abduction, arguing that economic hardship lowers resistance to criminal engagement. Torkwembe (2024) observes that individuals living below subsistence thresholds may perceive kidnapping or banditry as a pathway to financial escape. Severe deprivation reduces long-

term calculation and increases short-term survival strategies. Criminal organisations exploit this vulnerability through promises of income and protection. Rural poverty further compounds insecurity where farming communities lack state support and infrastructure. In such environments, bandits present themselves as alternative authorities, extracting levies while providing selective protection. Poverty thus functions both as push and pull factor. It drives individuals toward crime and enables criminal groups to recruit and sustain operations.

Greed

Greed and the pursuit of rapid wealth accumulation represent another important factor. Opakunbi, Mohammed and Osah (2023) contend that not all perpetrators emerge from deprivation. Some kidnappers originate from relatively stable economic backgrounds yet seek accelerated financial gain. The “get-rich-quick” mentality has grown within sections of the youth population. Observing successful ransom transactions encourages replication. Business rivals have reportedly arranged abductions for financial advantage. Material aspiration without ethical restraint fuels participation in kidnapping networks. In such cases, economic hardship does not serve as primary motivation; rather, insatiable desire for wealth and status drives criminal action. When illicit profit becomes visible and consequences appear

minimal, greed sustains repetition.

Lack of Adequate Government Presence

Lack of adequate government presence in remote areas completes the pattern. Ojewale et al. (2022), Ojo (2020), and Olalekan et al. (2018) describe how sparsely governed regions become safe havens for armed actors.

Limited security deployment allows bandits to establish bases in forests and borderlands. Residents often report the absence of social services, infrastructure, and consistent policing. Feelings of abandonment create resentment, while physical isolation provides operational cover for criminal groups. Reports such as The Tribune (2022) indicate significant deficits in police strength relative to population needs. Insufficient visibility of state authority reduces deterrence and emboldens perpetrators. Over time, ungoverned spaces transform into recruitment grounds and operational corridors for kidnapping and banditry, sustaining cycles of violence that extend into urban centres.

2.4 Empirical Review

Cletus O. Obasi, Lilian Chinelo Nwokafor, and Umudike Olisa Anthony Enweonwu (2020) in their study titled Conceptual Interaction of Banditry and Access to Land as Emergent Trends of Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria

established a strong link between banditry, land access disputes, and inter-ethnic conflict in Nigeria. The study argues that banditry has resulted in underdevelopment, loss of lives and property, and large-scale displacement of people from their homes. The authors further contend that some perpetrators are allegedly foreigners from neighbouring West African countries, raising concerns about border security and state response. The study concludes that banditry has deepened unemployment, insecurity, and socio-economic hardship across the country. To address the conflict dimension of banditry, the researchers adopted the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) approach as a framework for mitigating disputes and restoring peace. This study is relevant to the present research on Press Coverage of Banditry and Kidnapping in Nigeria because it provides a detailed understanding of the structural and conflict dimensions of banditry, which the press is expected to report and interpret. While the authors examined the causes and implications of banditry, they did not analyze how newspapers frame or prioritize these issues. The present study therefore, builds on this gap by investigating how banditry is represented in the press, whether its root causes are highlighted, and whether media narratives contribute to conflict resolution or merely report violent incidents.

Similarly, Abba, Abbasani, and Msughterani (2021) conducted a

comparative content analysis titled Comparative Content Analysis of Press Coverage of Kidnapping Cases in Nigeria, focusing on Daily Trust and The Guardian. The study examined reports published between August and October 2020 with the objective of determining the frequency, prominence, and direction of kidnapping stories. Using content analysis as the research method, the researchers systematically coded and analysed items to assess how kidnapping was represented. Findings showed that kidnapping cases were reported predominantly as straight news stories, with limited interpretative depth. The study also revealed that conflict-related stories were more frequent than kidnapping reports within the period under review. In terms of direction, most kidnapping stories were framed in a neutral tone rather than positive or negative. The researchers argued that such neutral and event-driven reporting suggests that the media may frame kidnapping from a realist perspective without actively encouraging collaborative solutions between government and citizens. The study concluded that, given the media's role as the Fourth Estate, reportage should go beyond mere narration and contribute more meaningfully to addressing societal problems like kidnapping. This study is directly related to the present research because it examines press coverage of kidnapping using similar methodological tools. However, it is limited to kidnapping and to a specific period. The current study

expands the scope by examining both banditry and kidnapping, thereby providing a broader assessment of how Nigerian newspapers cover insecurity and whether patterns of neutral, straight-news reporting also apply to banditry.

Furthermore, Adekoya, Ifidon, and Chioma (2016) examined Newspaper Coverage of the Chibok Girls Abduction in North-East Nigeria through a quantitative content analysis of The Punch and The Guardian. Thirty editions were systematically selected from each newspaper to evaluate genre, frequency, and prominence of coverage. The study found that both newspapers reported the abduction and accorded it noticeable attention, demonstrating engagement with the issue. However, the analysis revealed that economic, political, and business stories often received higher placement such as front-page lead positions, limiting the overall prominence of the abduction coverage. Straight news dominated the reports, with minimal use of interpretative genres such as editorials or features. The study concluded that although coverage was commendable in terms of consistency, it lacked balanced depth and diversity of genre. It recommended stronger adherence to journalistic ethics, increased prominence, expanded space allocation, and more frequent coverage of terrorism-related issues to reflect the magnitude of the crisis. This study is relevant to the present research as it highlights patterns of genre dominance and limited prominence in reporting major

security crises. However, it focused on a single high-profile terrorism case. The present study extends this line of inquiry by examining routine press coverage of banditry and kidnapping to determine whether similar issues of limited prominence and lack of interpretative depth persist.

Muobike (2017) investigated framing patterns in *The Guardian* and *The Nation* newspapers in the study titled *The Guardian and The Nation Newspapers Framing of the Abduction of Chibok Girls*. Anchored on Entman's Framing Theory, the study employed content analysis and utilised categories based on Entman's four framing functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting remedies. Using Stempel's guide, six editions and ninety items were analysed quantitatively. The findings indicated that the abduction was largely framed as an insecurity problem, with the government receiving the greatest share of blame. Remedy-oriented frames were limited, and when present, emphasis was placed on street protests as a solution. The study argued that this emphasis could incite public anger rather than promote constructive engagement. It concluded that constructive framing occurred to a minimal extent and recommended that newsrooms integrate framing variables into routine editorial practices to improve solution-oriented reporting. This study is particularly significant to the present research because it applies framing theory to security reporting.

The current study adopts a similar concern with framing but shifts the focus to banditry and kidnapping, assessing how problems are defined, who is blamed, and whether newspapers provide constructive or solution-oriented narratives.

Finally, Nwammuo, Edegoh, and Asemah (2016) examined the use of indigenous communication systems by vigilante groups in Anambra State in combating kidnapping. Using a survey design, the researchers purposively selected ten registered vigilante groups and collected data through questionnaires and interview schedules. Analysis employed Likert scale measurement and explanation-building techniques. Findings revealed that vigilante groups relied heavily on indigenous communication forms such as visits, patrols, opinion leaders, town union presidents, traditional messengers, church leaders, and idiophones to discourage youth involvement in kidnapping. The study also found willingness among vigilante groups to integrate modern communication tools such as mobile phones and walkie-talkies with indigenous systems. Limited remuneration was identified as a constraint on effectiveness. The study recommended strengthening indigenous communication structures, improving access at grassroots levels, training vigilante groups in modern media tools, and enhancing their welfare packages. Although this study focuses on grassroots and indigenous

communication rather than mainstream media, it provides important insight into alternative communication strategies in combating kidnapping. The present study differs by examining how formal press institutions report banditry and kidnapping, and whether such coverage supports, ignores, or complements community-based efforts in addressing insecurity in Nigeria.

2.5 Theoretical Review

2.5.1 Agenda Setting Theory

According to Asemah (2017, p. 61), Agenda Setting Theory can be traced to the first chapter of Walter Lippmann's 1922 book *Public Opinion*, where he argued that the mass media serve as the link between events in the real world and the pictures formed in the minds of the public. The theory was further developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 after their study of the American presidential election (Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023). They found that while the media may not tell people what to think, they significantly influence what people think about. Audiences learn about public issues and the level of importance attached to them based on the emphasis the media place on such issues (Arijeniwa, Nwaoboli, Ajimokunola & Uwuoruya, 2022). Thus, the central assumption of the theory is that the media set the agenda for public discussion by determining which issues receive attention (Asemah, 2017). The media perform this function through regular

and sustained coverage of events. Newspapers, in particular, shape public priorities through frequency of reports, headline placement, and prominence given to issues. Stories placed on front pages or reported repeatedly signal importance to the public.

This theory is relevant to the present study because it explains how newspapers such as Vanguard, The Nation, and The Punch may shape public perception of banditry and kidnapping through the level of coverage and prominence given to them. Consistent and prominent reporting can elevate these issues on the public agenda, while minimal coverage may reduce perceived importance. Therefore, Agenda Setting Theory provides an appropriate framework for examining press coverage of banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

2.5.2 Social Responsibility

Social Responsibility Theory is an extension of the libertarian theory of the press, which emphasizes that media freedom must be balanced with moral and social responsibility (Okoro & Naji, 2012, cited in Ezegwu & Asemah, 2020). It holds that while the press should be free to perform its traditional functions, such freedom must operate within the framework of the

law and societal expectations (Wogu, 2007, cited in Illah, Ogwo & Asemah, 2012). The theory emerged in the mid-20th century following criticisms that the free press had failed to serve the public interest. According to McQuail (1987), it originated from the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947, which was established in response to sensationalism, yellow journalism, invasion of privacy, and other abuses of press freedom. Peterson, Siebert and Schramm (1956) later stressed that freedom carries obligations, and the media must act responsibly or face possible regulation.

The theory maintains that the media should provide truthful, accurate, balanced, and objective information; avoid content that may incite violence or disorder; reflect diverse views; and remain accountable to society. It also emphasizes self-regulation within the law and adherence to professional ethics.

This theory is relevant to the present study because reporting on banditry and kidnapping requires accuracy, balance, and sensitivity. Newspapers such as Vanguard, The Nation, and The Punch are expected to avoid sensationalism, ethnic bias, or exaggerated headlines that may heighten fear or tension. Instead, they should promote informed discourse and responsible coverage that contributes to peace, accountability, and social stability in Nigeria.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Preamble

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This chapter outlines the methods used in the study. It covers the research design, the study population, sample size, sampling technique, research instrument, validity of the instrument, unit of analysis, content categories, as well as the methods of data collection and analysis.

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a content analysis research design to examine the coverage of banditry and kidnapping in selected Nigerian newspapers. This approach enabled the researcher to collect and analyze primary data directly from published media content. According to Kerlinger (2000), content analysis is a systematic, objective, and quantitative method used to study communication for the purpose of measuring variables. It focuses on the manifest content of media messages (Omoera & Nwaoboli, 2023; Ajibulu & Nwaoboli, 2023). Unlike methods that involve direct observation of people content analysis relies on already existing communication materials (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo, & Okpanachi, 2017). This makes it suitable for examining media output. Therefore, this design was considered appropriate for the present study as it allows for a careful assessment of how selected newspapers report issues related to banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of a study refers to the elements or items a researcher

intends to examine (Egbulefu & Nwaoboli, 2023). Asika (2002, p. 37), cited in Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo, and Okpanachi (2017), describes a population as all possible elements, subjects, or observations related to a phenomenon of interest. It is not feasible to analyze all newspapers that report on banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria due to their large number. Therefore, the population is limited to three national newspapers: Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation. The study covers all their editions published in 2025. Each newspaper has 365 editions, giving a total of 1,095 editions for the three newspapers combined. These editions make up the population of the study.

3.3. Sample Size

Given the impracticality of studying the entire population of newspaper coverage in Nigeria, a representative sample was selected for the study. The sample size, which was used to gather data, consisted of 92 newspaper editions. This figure was determined using the Taro Yamane sample size formula. Below is the calculation

Formula:

$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$, margin of error used for solving is 10%, which is 0.1

Where n represents the sample size,

N represents Population,

1 is constant,

e represents the margin of error (0.1)

Solution:

$$n = 1095 / 1 + 1095(0.1)^2$$

$$= 1095 / 1 + 1095(0.01)$$

$$= 1095 / 1 + 10.95$$

$$= 1095 / 11.95$$

$$= 91.6$$

Therefore $n = 92$

3.4. Sampling Technique

This study adopted the systematic sampling technique to select the required sample from the population. Systematic sampling involves selecting elements from a population at regular intervals, thereby ensuring an even and unbiased representation of the entire population. The total population for the study consists of 1,095 newspaper editions drawn from three national newspapers, Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation, each contributing 365 editions. To obtain the sample size of 92 editions, the sampling interval (K) was determined using the formula:

$$K = N/n$$

$$K = 1095/92$$

Therefore $K = 11.9$ which is approximately 12

To this end, a sample size of 92 editions will be systematic sampled.

Based on this calculation, every 12th edition was selected after determining a random starting point within the first 12 editions. This process continued systematically until the required sample size of 92 editions was achieved. To establish the starting point within the first 12 editions, the selection of publications deliberately commenced on January 5th. This specific date was chosen because it marked the beginning of a new week and helped bypass the earliest days of the year, a period when it was perceived that publications might disproportionately prioritize New Year celebration content. Starting on the 5th ensured a fairer, more objective baseline. Furthermore, for proper representation of each newspaper, the sample size was proportionately distributed across the three newspapers. Vanguard and Punch contributed 31 editions each, while The Nation contributed 30 editions, making a total of 92 sampled editions. This technique ensured that the sample was evenly spread across the study period and adequately represented the selected newspapers, thereby enhancing the reliability of the findings.

The instrument used for data collection in this research, is the coding sheet. This instrument was used, because it is the most appropriate and primary instrument for conducting a content analysis study. The coding sheet was used to gather data for this research from the manifest content of the selected newspapers, according to the outlined content categories and unit of analysis of the study.

3.6. Validity of Instrument

Validity of an instrument refers to the extent to which a research design accurately measures what it is intended to measure (Nwaoboli, 2022). Similarly, Weiner (2007), as cited in Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafo, and Okpanachi (2017), defines validity as the degree to which a measurement tool effectively captures or represents what it is designed to measure. To ensure the validity of the research instrument, it was submitted to the supervisor of this study for review. Necessary corrections and adjustments were made based on the supervisor's feedback before the instrument was used for data collection.

3.7. Reliability of Instrument

Reliability of an instrument refers to the consistency and stability of a measurement in assessing the same phenomenon. Asika (2006, p. 73) defines reliability as the degree of consistency between independent

measurements, as well as the accuracy and precision of a measuring instrument. To ensure the reliability of the instrument used in this study, a pilot study was conducted using 10% of the sample size, which amounts to 9 newspaper editions. The researcher examined the manifest content of these selected editions in relation to the research objectives. This process allowed the researcher to test and confirm the consistency and reliability of the research instrument before the main data collection.

3.8. Unit of Analysis

According to Tejumaiye (2003, p.139), the unit of analysis is what, constitutes the population from which the sample is drawn. The unit of analysis for this study is the individual newspaper articles on banditry and kidnapping published by Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers in 2025. Each article will be examined as a distinct unit because it provides the necessary information to address all the study's objectives:

1. Level of Coverage: Each article is counted to determine the overall extent of coverage of banditry and kidnapping.
2. Frequency of Coverage: Each article contributes to understanding how often the newspapers report on banditry and kidnapping.
3. Prominence: Each article's placement, headline size, and page position are analyzed to determine the importance given to the story.

4. Genres: Each article is classified according to its format (news report, feature, editorial, opinion) to analyze the types of coverage used.
5. Social Responsibility: The content of each article is assessed to evaluate the ethical standards and responsibility demonstrated by the newspapers in reporting banditry and kidnapping.

These unit of analysis, ensures that all research questions can be systematically and accurately measured.

3.9 Content Categories

The study analyzed newspaper articles on banditry and kidnapping published by Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers in 2025 using the following content categories:

Level of Coverage: Measures the total number of articles on banditry and kidnapping in each newspaper. This directly answers the question of ascertaining the overall coverage of these issues.

Frequency of Reporting: Tracks how often banditry and kidnapping stories appear in the newspapers over the study period, addressing the question of determining the frequency of coverage.

Prominence: Assesses the importance given to each story, including headline size, story placement, and page position. This aligns with the question of examining the prominence of banditry and kidnapping stories.

Genre/Format: Identifies the type of article, news report, feature, editorial, or opinion piece, to analyze the genres used in reporting, corresponding to the objective of analyzing reporting styles.

Social Responsibility: Evaluates the content of articles to determine whether the newspapers demonstrate ethical reporting, balance, fairness, and attention to public interest in covering banditry and kidnapping. This category addresses the question of assessing the level of social responsibility in the Nigerian press.

3.10 Method of Data Collection

In conducting this study, the researcher employed the observation method by closely examining the manifest content of the selected newspapers, Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation, which are the primary sources. Additionally, secondary sources such as the internet, journals, articles, and textbooks were utilized to gather relevant data for the study.

3.11 Method of Data Analysis

This study adopted a quantitative analysis approach, as it involves the use of descriptive statistical tools to analyze the collected data. The data will be presented in tables using simple percentages, which allows for clear and straightforward presentation of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Data Presentation

Details of the information collected are presented in tables below, which were used as a basis for proper analysis and discussion of findings.

Table 1: Monthly Breakdown of Stories Recorded in Newspapers Sampled

Months	Punch	Vanguard	Nation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
January	10	8	6	24	8%
February	6	5	4	15	5%
March	14	11	8	33	11.3%
April	10	8	5	23	8%
May	18	14	10	42	14.3%
June	9	7	3	19	6.5%
July	12	6	5	23	8%
August	5	8	4	17	6%
September	11	8	6	25	8.5%
October	5	3	4	12	4%
November	16	12	9	37	12.6%
December	9	7	6	22	7.5%

Total	125	97	70	292	100%
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Source: Vanguard, Punch and The Nation Newspaper (2025)

The table above shows the monthly distribution of stories on kidnapping and banditry as reported by Punch, Vanguard, and The Nation newspapers from January to December 2025. The study revealed that Punch newspaper published a total of 125 stories (42.8%), Vanguard published 97 stories (33.2%), while The Nation published 70 stories (24.0%), out of a combined total of 292 stories. The highest monthly coverage occurred in May with 42 stories (14.3%), followed by November with 37 stories (12.6%) and March with 33 stories (11.3%). The lowest coverage was recorded in October with 12 stories (4%), followed by February with 15 stories (5%). The analysis indicates that Punch has the highest level of commitment. The fluctuations across months, with spikes in May and November, suggest that coverage was largely event-driven.

Table 2: Display of the Level of Coverage of Kidnapping and Banditry in Nigeria

Level of Coverage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
No stories	-	-
1-2 Stories	48	16.4%
3-4 Stories	112	38.4%

5-6 Stories	97	33.2%
Total	292	100%

Source: Vanguard, Punch and The Nation Newspaper (2025)

The table above displays the level of coverage given to kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria by Punch, Vanguard, and The Nation newspapers. The findings reveal that out of 292 total stories, the majority fell within the 3–4 stories category, with 112 stories (38.4%), followed closely by 5–6 stories with 97 stories (33.2%). 1–2 stories accounted for 48 stories (16.4%), while 7 or more stories recorded 35 stories (12%). No month recorded zero stories on the issue. From the analysis above, the press publishes at least 3-4 stories per reportage on kidnapping and banditry cases in Nigeria.

Table 3: Display of Frequency of News Reports on Kidnapping and Banditry in Nigeria

Frequency of News Reports	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily (Everyday)	49	17%
Occasionally (Reported 3-4 times a week)	118	40.4%
Rarely (Reported once or twice a week)	68	23.2%
Follow-up/Update (Brief mention of a previous story)	42	14.3%
Special Report (Dedicated long form series)	15	5.1%
Total	292	100%

Source: Vanguard, Punch and The Nation Newspaper (2025)

The table above presents the frequency pattern of news reports on kidnapping and banditry across the sampled newspapers. The study revealed that occasional reporting (3–4 times a week) was the most frequent category, with 118 stories (40.4%), while daily reporting accounted for 49 stories (17%). Rare reporting (once or twice a week) recorded 68 stories (23.2%), follow-up/update stories accounted for 42 stories (14.3%), and special reports had the least frequency with 15 stories (5.1%). This suggests that Nigerian newspapers tend to report kidnapping and banditry more occasionally than daily, likely responding to major incidents rather than providing continuous coverage.

Table 4: Display of Prominence given to News Reports on Kidnapping and Banditry in Nigeria

Prominence of News Reports	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Front Page	98	33.6%
Centre Spread	124	42.5%
Back Page	70	24%
Total	292	100%

Source: Vanguard, Punch and The Nation Newspaper (2025)

The table above displays the level of prominence accorded to stories on kidnapping and banditry by the three newspapers. The findings show that

the centre spread was the most used placement, with 124 stories (42.5%), followed by the front page with 98 stories (33.6%), and the back page with 70 stories (24%). This indicates that while Nigerian newspapers significant centre-spread to kidnapping and banditry, a notable number of stories were also placed on the front page.

Table 5: Display of News Reports Genre on Kidnapping and Banditry in Nigeria

Genre of News Reports	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Straight News	169	57.8%
Feature Article	54	18.4%
Editorial	18	6%
Opinion/Letter to Editor	32	11%
Pictorial/Infographic	19	6.5%
Total	292	100%

Source: Vanguard, Punch and The Nation Newspaper (2025)

The table above shows the genre distribution of news reports on kidnapping and banditry. The study revealed that straight news dominated with 169 stories (57.8%), followed by feature articles with 54 stories (18.4%), opinion/letters to the editor with 32 stories (11%), pictorial/infographic with 19 stories (6.5%), and editorials with 18 stories (6%). This indicates that Nigerian newspapers primarily reported kidnapping and banditry as breaking or routine news events, with limited use of feature writing, editorials, or visual storytelling.

Table 6: Display of Social Responsibility level of Social Responsibility level of

Stories on Kidnapping and Banditry in Nigeria

Social Responsibility Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Balanced	76	26%
Biased/Sensational	91	31%
Solutions-Oriented	48	16.4%
Victim-Centric	45	15.4%
Security Centric	22	7.5%
Conflict-Sensitive	10	3.4%
Total	292	100%

Source: Vanguard, Punch and The Nation Newspaper (2025)

The table above displays the social responsibility orientation of news reports on kidnapping and banditry. The findings revealed that biased/sensational reporting was the most common, with 91 stories (31%), closely followed by balanced reporting with 76 stories (26%). Solutions-oriented stories accounted for 48 stories (16.4%), victim-centric stories had 45 stories (15.4%), security-centric stories recorded 22 stories (7.5%), and conflict-sensitive reporting was the least with 10 stories (3.4%). This indicates that Nigerian newspapers tend more toward sensationalism than balance in covering kidnapping and banditry, which shows the commercial pressures of media houses to attract readership. lxxv

4.2 Discussion of Findings

RQ 1: What is the level of coverage of banditry and kidnapping by Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers in 2025?

The results of this study gave an in-depth view of the level of coverage of banditry and kidnapping by the selected newspapers. The data obtained from this study, as evidenced in Table 1, show that Punch newspaper demonstrated the highest level of commitment to reportage on kidnapping and banditry, publishing a total of 125 stories (42.8%), followed by Vanguard with 97 stories (33.2%), and The Nation with 70 stories (24.0%). The combined total of 292 stories across the three newspapers indicates that the Nigerian press was actively engaged in covering insecurity issues throughout 2025.

From the findings above, the newspapers under study were committed to the reportage of kidnapping and banditry because these are issues that directly affect the security and well-being of Nigerians. The coverage peaked in May (42 stories, 14.3%) and November (37 stories, 12.6%), suggesting that the media responds to spikes in real-world events. The lowest coverage in October (12 stories, 4%) does not indicate neglect but rather possible fluctuations in the frequency of incidents. As shown in Table 2, no month recorded zero stories, and the majority of months fell within 3–6 stories,

demonstrating consistent attention to the issue.

This is in line with the Agenda-Setting Theory, which, according to McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media do not tell people what to think, but rather what to think about. By consistently covering kidnapping and banditry, these newspapers signal to the public that insecurity is a salient issue requiring attention.

RQ 2: How frequently do Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers report banditry and kidnapping cases in 2025?

The data gathered from Table 3 shows that the most frequent reporting pattern was occasional reporting (3–4 times a week), accounting for 118 stories (40.4%). This was followed by rare reporting (once or twice a week) with 68 stories (23.2%), and daily reporting with 49 stories (17%). Follow-up/update stories accounted for 42 stories (14.3%), while special reports were the least frequent with 15 stories (5.1%).

From the findings above, Nigerian newspapers tend to report kidnapping and banditry more occasionally than daily, largely responding to major incidents rather than providing continuous, proactive coverage. This pattern suggests that while the media recognizes the importance of the issue, resource constraints or competing news priorities may limit daily reporting. The low frequency of follow-up stories (14.3%) indicates that once an incident is reported, subsequent developments often receive less attention.

This finding aligns with the Social Responsibility Theory, which, as propounded by the Hutchins Commission (1947), asserts that the media have an obligation to serve the public interest by providing continuous, accurate, and contextualized reporting on critical societal issues. According to Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), the media should not merely react to events but should proactively inform citizens about matters affecting their safety and welfare. The relatively low frequency of follow-up and special reports in this study suggests that Nigerian newspapers fall short of this ideal in covering insecurity.

RQ 3: What prominence is accorded to banditry and kidnapping stories in the selected newspapers?

The results from Table 4 reveal that the centre spread was the most used placement for stories on kidnapping and banditry, with 124 stories (42.5%), followed by the front page with 98 stories (33.6%), and the back page with 70 stories (24%). This indicates that while a significant number of stories received prominent placement, nearly one-third of all stories were given the highest possible prominence, the front page.

From the findings above, the newspapers under study accorded substantial prominence to insecurity stories, recognizing that kidnapping and banditry are critical national security issues. The fact that 33.6% of stories appeared on the front page demonstrates that editors consider these stories

newsworthy enough to compete with political, economic, and other major news. The centre spread, often reserved for in-depth analysis, being the most used placement (42.5%), suggests that newspapers also attempted to provide contextual understanding beyond headlines.

This is consistent with the Agenda-Setting Theory, as articulated by McCombs (2004), who introduced the concept of “second-level agenda setting” or attribute agenda-setting, which argues that the media not only tell us what issues are important but also tell us how to think about those issues through the placement and emphasis they give to stories. Prominent placement (front page and centre spread) signals to readers that kidnapping and banditry are not just routine occurrences but matters of urgent national concern.

RQ 4: What genres are used in reporting banditry and kidnapping stories in Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers?

The data obtained from Table 5 shows that straight news dominated the genre distribution, with 169 stories (57.8%). Feature articles followed with 54 stories (18.4%), opinion/letters to the editor with 32 stories (11%), pictorial/infographic with 19 stories (6.5%), and editorials with 18 stories (6%). From the findings above, Nigerian newspapers primarily report kidnapping and banditry as breaking or routine news events rather than as subjects requiring in-depth analysis, editorial direction, or visual storytelling. The low percentage

of editorials (6%) suggests that newspapers are less inclined to take institutional positions on security issues, while the minimal use of pictorial/ infographic (6.5%) indicates missed opportunities for data-driven storytelling that could help the public understand patterns and trends in insecurity.

This finding relates to the Social Responsibility Theory, which, according to Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng, and White (2009), requires the media to provide a "full range of information and interpretation" on issues of public importance. The over-reliance on straight news at the expense of editorials, features, and visual genres suggests that Nigerian newspapers may not be fully meeting their social responsibility obligations. As McQuail (2010) argued, responsible journalism requires diversity of formats, including analysis, opinion, and explanatory reporting, to help citizens understand complex issues like insecurity. The dominance of straight news, while valuable for timeliness, limits the depth of public understanding.

RQ 5: To what extent do Vanguard, Punch, and The Nation newspapers demonstrate social responsibility in reporting banditry and kidnapping and related security issues in 2025?

The results from Table 6 provide a nuanced answer to this question. The findings revealed that biased/sensational reporting was the most common orientation, with 91 stories (31%), closely followed by balanced reporting with 76 stories (26%). Solutions-oriented stories accounted for 48 stories (16.4%), victim-centric stories had 45 stories (15.4%), security-centric

stories recorded 22 stories (7.5%), and conflict-sensitive reporting was the least with 10 stories (3.4%).

From the findings above, the newspapers under study demonstrate moderate to low social responsibility in covering kidnapping and banditry. While balanced reporting (26%) and solutions-oriented stories (16.4%) reflect some commitment to ethical journalism, the fact that sensationalism (31%) is the single largest category indicates that commercial pressures to attract readership often override professional obligations. The very low percentage of conflict-sensitive reporting (3.4%) is particularly concerning, as this genre aims to avoid exacerbating violence or endangering victims and communities.

This finding directly engages with the Social Responsibility Theory, which, according to the Hutchins Commission (1947), outlines five key duties of the press: (1) providing a truthful and comprehensive account of the day's events, (2) serving as a forum for comment and criticism, (3) projecting a representative picture of constituent groups, (4) presenting and clarifying societal goals and values, and (5) providing full access to the day's intelligence. Sensationalism violates the first duty by prioritizing drama over accuracy. As Sanderson and Aldridge (2011) noted in their study of crime reporting, sensational coverage of insecurity can create moral panic,

stigmatize communities, and undermine trust in security institutions. Furthermore, as Oyedeji (2015) argued in Nigeria, the media's tendency toward sensational reporting of insecurity rather than solutions-oriented or conflict-sensitive journalism can exacerbate ethnic tensions and hinder counter-insurgency efforts. Therefore, while Nigerian newspapers cover kidnapping and banditry extensively, the quality of that coverage, particularly the predominance of sensationalism and the scarcity of conflict-sensitive reporting, suggests significant room for improvement in fulfilling social responsibility obligations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

The following are the findings of this research:

1. Newspapers provide consistent coverage of banditry and kidnapping, with Punch leading, followed by Vanguard and The Nation, while coverage peaks reflect spikes in real-life insecurity incidents.
2. Reporting is mainly occasional rather than continuous, with limited follow-up and investigative coverage, showing that reportage is largely event-driven.
3. Insecurity stories are given high prominence through front page and

centre spread placement, indicating strong editorial recognition of their national importance.

4. Straight news dominates reporting, while analytical, opinion, and visual storytelling formats remain limited, reducing depth of coverage.
5. Although newspapers provide substantial coverage of insecurity, the ethical and developmental quality of reporting remains inconsistent, with sensationalism outweighing conflict-sensitive journalism.

5.2 Conclusion

This study examined the coverage of kidnapping and banditry by Punch, Vanguard, and The Nation newspapers in 2025. The findings show that all three newspapers consistently reported insecurity issues, indicating strong media attention to the problem. However, coverage was largely event-driven, with occasional reporting being more dominant than daily, sustained reportage. In terms of prominence, insecurity stories were frequently given high visibility, particularly through centre spread and front-page placement, reflecting their perceived newsworthiness. The genre analysis further revealed a strong dominance of straight news reporting, while in-depth formats such as editorials, special reports, and visual storytelling were limited. More importantly, the study found that sensational or biased framing was more

common than balanced reporting, while conflict-sensitive journalism was very limited. This indicates that although the newspapers actively report security issues, the quality and ethical depth of coverage remain inconsistent.

From the foregoing, while the newspapers demonstrate strong attention to kidnapping and banditry, the reporting pattern suggests limitations in continuity, depth, and ethical framing. Guided by Social Responsibility Theory, the study concludes that there is a need for more balanced, contextualized, and solutions-oriented reporting. Strengthening collaboration between media organizations, security agencies, and civil society is essential to improve the quality of insecurity reporting in Nigeria.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings regarding the influence of social media on divorce and separation among Nigerian couples, below are a few recommendations.

1. Media houses should adopt and enforce editorial policies that prioritize balanced and conflict-sensitive reporting over sensationalism.
2. Newspapers should establish dedicated security desks responsible for follow-up and investigative reporting.

3. The Nigerian Press Council and media professional bodies should provide mandatory training on conflict-sensitive and trauma-informed journalism.
4. Newspapers should increase the use of infographics, data visualization, and special reports to enhance public understanding of security patterns.
5. Media owners should explore alternative revenue models (subscriptions, grants, development partnerships) to reduce commercial pressure for sensationalism.

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April 11

April 23

May 5

May 17

May 29

Jun 10

Jun 22

July 4

July 16

July 28

Aug 9

Aug 21

Sep 2

Sep 14

Sep 26

Oct 8

Oct 20

Nov 1

Nov 13

Nov 25

Dec 7

Dec 19

Dec 31

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

APPENDIX

CODING KEY

Unit of Analysis	Content Categories	Codes
LEVEL OF COVERAGE	No Stories on Banditry and Kidnapping	1
	1-2 Stories	2
	3-4 Stories	3
	5-6 Stories	4
	7 or more stories	5
FREQUENCY	Daily (Everyday)	6
	Occasionally (Reported 3-4 times a week)	7
	Rare (Reported once or twice a week)	8
	Follow-up/Update (Brief mention of a previous story)	9
	Special Report (Dedicated long form series)	10
PROMINENCE	Front Page	11
	Inside Page	12
	Centre Spread	13
	Back Page	14
Genre/Format	Straight News	15
	Feature Article	16
	Editorial	17
	Opinion/Letter to Editor	18
	Pictorial/Infographic	19
Social Responsibility	Balanced (Gives voice to victims, government and security experts)	20
	Biased/Sensational (Exaggerated headlines	21

or one-sided views)

Solutions-Oriented (Proposes ways to end banditry/kidnapping) 22

Victim-Centric (focuses on the plight of the abducted) 23

Security Centric (Focuses solely on Military/ Police operations) 24

Conflict-Sensitive (Avoids revealing sensitive military secrets or inciting panic). 25