

Nigerian newspaper negotiation of victimhood in banditry reports

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Abstract

This study examines how media encode and decode victimhood in reporting the activities of bandits. There are inadequate studies from the discourse–analytical viewpoint revealing victimhood in the discourse; this has prevented an understanding of the role of context in enacting meaning in banditry reports. To this end, this study discusses different discursive strategies newspapers use to negotiate victimhood in banditry discourse and interrogates how newspapers construct Nigeria and Nigerians as victims. This study adopts content-based and qualitative methods of analysis considering their emphasis on the interaction between text and context to enact meaning. The study is anchored by Van Leeuwen's (2008) Representation of Social Actors approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically Role Allocation is adopted because

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/contias.v12i1.2>

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of its relevance in allocating specific roles to social actors and their actions in discourse. Data are sourced from four (4) Nigerian national newspapers, *the Premium Times*, *Guardians*, *Sahara reporters*, and *the Punch*. The newspapers are selected not only because of their wider coverage but also because they give enough space for the coverage of news about banditry and are resourceful in the use of different discursive strategies to negotiate victimhood in the discourse. Five (5) discursive strategies used by the newspapers to negotiate victimhood are identified; Nigerians as helpless/stranded people, Nigerians as losers, Nigerians as captured people, security agents as armless, and Nigerians as innocent people. The study reveals that bandits are activated as active participants in the discourse with different instruments to subdue Nigerians in their locale while Nigerians are represented as passive actors receiving the activities of the bandits.

Keywords: victimhood, bandits, Nigerians, newspapers, negotiation

Résumé

Négociation de la victimisation par les journaux nigériens dans les reportages sur le banditisme

Cette étude examine comment les médias codent et décodent le statut de victime dans leurs reportages sur les activités des bandits. Il n'existe pas suffisamment d'études du point de vue de l'analyse du discours révélant la victimisation dans le discours, ce qui empêche de comprendre le rôle du contexte dans la mise en œuvre de la signification dans les rapports sur le banditisme. À cette fin, cette étude examine les différentes stratégies discursives utilisées par les journaux pour négocier le statut de victime dans le discours sur le banditisme et s'interroge sur la manière

dont les journaux présentent le Nigeria et les Nigériens comme des victimes. Cette étude adopte des méthodes d'analyse qualitatives et basées sur le contenu, mettant l'accent sur l'interaction entre le texte et le contexte pour produire du sens. L'étude est ancrée dans l'approche de la représentation des acteurs sociaux de Van Leeuwen (2008) de l'analyse critique du discours (ACD), en particulier l'attribution des rôles en raison de sa pertinence dans l'attribution de rôles spécifiques aux acteurs sociaux et à leurs actions dans le discours. Les données proviennent de quatre (4) journaux nationaux nigériens, Premium Times, Guardians, Sahara Reporters et le Punch. Ces journaux ont été sélectionnés non seulement en raison de leur couverture plus large, mais aussi parce qu'ils accordent suffisamment d'espace à la couverture des nouvelles sur le banditisme et qu'ils font preuve d'ingéniosité dans l'utilisation de différentes stratégies discursives pour négocier le statut de victime dans le discours. Cinq (5) stratégies discursives utilisées par les journaux pour négocier le statut de victime ont été identifiées: Les Nigériens sont des personnes sans défense, les Nigériens sont des perdants, les Nigériens sont des personnes capturées, les agents de sécurité sont des personnes sans armes et les Nigériens sont des personnes innocentes. L'étude révèle que les bandits ont un caractère activé, étant présentés comme des participants actifs dans le discours avec différents instruments pour soumettre les Nigériens dans leur localité, tandis que les Nigériens sont représentés comme des acteurs passifs recevant les activités des bandits.

Mots-clés: victimisation, bandits, Nigériens, journaux, négociation

Introduction

In recent years, Nigeria has unfortunately been faced with many worrying security challenges ranging from Boko Haram to Niger Delta agitators, herdsman conflict, and banditry. Banditry is organized violent crime carried out by a person or group of persons who are outlawed and proscribed by the constituted authority. As reported by the media, banditry in Nigeria is rampant and higher in states such as Zamfara, Nassarawa, and Kaduna. According to Ololade et al. (2021), banditry is characterized by rape, kidnapping, looting, and organized attacks on villages and communities. These unabated banditry attacks appear to be beyond the capacity of the Nigerian security agents, and their activities have led to the breakdown of the security situation in the country, especially in the rural areas of the concerned states. According to Ibrahim (2014), cited in Olayemi-Kusa and Salihu (2016), scholars have argued that rural banditry persists because of the failure of the state to provide adequate security and basic social amenities to the general public. In the view of Olayemi-Kusa and Salihu, banditry may be said to be motivated by political and economic problems in the country. Attacks on villages and even national transport systems such as trains and airports, have led to further breakdown of the security situation, poor economic management, displacement of people, and loss of lives and properties. The situation grows scarier by the day as all levels of the government seem not to have any appreciable solution to it.

In the midst of this, electronic and print media remain a valid platform where information can be accessed. Media efforts to report the activities of bandits in the affected areas helped Nigerians to assess the activities of bandits. Through choice of words and reporting styles, the media allocate specific roles to different social actors, such as ordinary citizens, constituted authorities and bandits, enabling readers to understand who did what to whom at a particular time. It is important to state here that the media has the power to influence readers' minds

through agenda setting and choice of words and therefore can escalate or deescalate conflict (Ayantayo, 2020). Yoanita et al. (2015) and Chakraborty et al. (2015) explain that invariably, media are strong forces in constructing the social reality of conflicts and selectively represent these realities through the process of news framing. For example, the media form agenda for discourse through their emphasis on any issue of national interest. The present study aims to interrogate different strategies used by the selected newspapers to negotiate victimhood in reporting banditry. Victims refers to the people who suffer loss, either of loved ones or properties, through the activities of bandits. Without firearms or other weapons, they are often helpless when attacked by bandits and unable to defend themselves. It is imperative to interrogate media representation of this category of people to understand the different ideologies newspapers project and to fully appreciate the dimension of the discourse in the media. It also helps to propel state actors to take appreciable steps to tackle the situation, especially when it has to do with human lives and their fundamental rights. Interrogating discourse strategies used by the press in reporting banditry activities in Nigeria will motivate concerned authorities to control the menace.

Not enough attention has been paid to banditry discourse in Nigeria, especially from a linguistic perspective. Previous studies have only commented on and reviewed isolated occurrences of banditry in Nigeria. Those that have engaged the discourse from the linguistic perspective include: Chilwa and Odebunmi (2016), Chilwa and Chilwa (2020), Igwubuike (2021) and Osisanwo (2016). Others, such as Innocent, Mohammed, and Eikojonwa (2021), Oluyemi-Kusa and Salihu (2016), Okoli and Okpaleke (2014), Burcar and Akerstrom (2009), have engaged conflict related discourse from other perspectives. In other related discourse, Olomjobi (2017) and Ellah and Okoro (2018) have discussed media presentation of herdsmen and Boko Haram. These studies did not engage media negotiation of victimhood in banditry discourse or examine how

media code and decode victimhood in reporting the activities of bandits. This lack of studies from the discourse-analytical viewpoint to reveal victimhood in the discourse has prevented an understanding of the role of context in enacting meaning in banditry reports. Furthermore, it has also undermined the discursive practices involved in newspaper presentation of the discourse. From the linguistic perspective, this dearth has prevented an understanding of how actors in the banditry discourse are allocated specific roles, limiting insights into who did what and to whom.

The use of discursive strategies by newspapers to achieve certain ideological points of view is outstanding. Consequently, this study attempts a discourse analysis of banditry discourse with the intention of describing how discourse tools of the media are used to negotiate victimhood. To this end, this study hopes to achieve the following objectives: to identify different discursive strategies used by newspapers to negotiate victimhood in banditry discourse and to discuss how roles are allocated to social actors to achieve victimhood in the discourse. To achieve these objectives, the study adopts the role allocation layer of the Van Leeuwen's representation of social actors' approach to critical discourse analysis. The study will identify the discursive strategies used, group the collected data according to the identified strategies, and deploy the tenets of the adopted theory to reveal how social actors in the discourse are constructed.

Understanding who did what to whom: Applying role allocation theory to banditry discourse

The adopted theory for this study is the Role allocation theory of Van Leeuwen's representation of social actors' approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA). Role allocation is one of the layers of Van Leeuwen (2008)'s representation of social actors. The sub-theory explains how different roles are given to social actors and their action in text. The theory helps to answer

questions related to actors' role in discourse. We are therefore able to respond to such questions as who did what, to whom, and in what circumstances. Van Leeuwen (2008) states that there need not be congruence between the roles of social actors in social practices and the grammatical roles given to them in texts. This implies that representation of social actors in discourse can reallocate roles to social actors in texts. Authors may give social actors in discourse active or passive roles in texts. According to Van Leeuwen (2008), activation (active role) occurs when social actors are represented as active and dynamic participants in their activities while social actors may be represented as passive through passivation. Passivation occurs when social actors are represented as undergoing the activity or being at the receiving end of the activity. Activation and passivation role allocation align with Halliday (1985)'s transitivity theory of role allocation where actors are coded as actor in material processes, behavior in behaviour processes, sayer in mental processes, sayers in verbal processes or assigners in relational processes. Actor may also be realized by participation where social actors participate in an activity. Van Leeuwen (2008) explains that action can also be realized through circumstantiation, that is by prepositional circumstantials with the use of 'by' or 'from' e.g. by bandits, from unknown gunmen, etc. Premodification and postmodification of nominalization can also be used to realize activation. This can be achieved in the use of possessive pronouns such as 'ours', 'my' to activate social actors. Process can be transformed to activate into 'thing'. Passivation can also be used where social actors are either subjected or beneficialised. Subjected social actors are treated as objects in representation while social actor can be beneficialised when social actors form a third party which positively or negatively benefits from the activity. Van Leeuwen explains further that subjection can be realized in various ways: it can be realized by participation when a passivated social actor is a grammatical goal in a material process, phenomenon

in a mental process, or carrier in an effective attributive process. Adjective premodification can also passivate social actors; for example, the word racial in racial tolerance.

Analysing text using role allocation puts focus on the doer, the action performed and the recipients of the action. Therefore, we will be able to identify who did what to whom. The model is a useful linguistic tool in identifying the role of actors in communicative events. This is deployed to the analysis of media reports of banditry activities in Nigeria. It helps to allocate appropriate roles and functions performed by different participants in discourse. This becomes relevant to this work as it helps to identify the role assigned to bandits and other social actors in the banditry reports in selected Nigerian newspapers which aids the formation of different beliefs and assumptions.

Review of extant literature

Chiluwa and Odebunmi (2016) interrogate representation of Boko Haram insurgents on the nairaland forum (www.nairaland.com) to reveal how the conversation on nairaland helps to exhibit the stance held by participants about the insurgents. Being a platform for Nigerians at home and abroad, the researchers hold that the platform has a broader coverage and has potential to create more awareness about Boko Haram. Data were collected from nairaland with special attention paid to conversations related to Boko Haram activities in Nigeria. The study argues that the frequent negative evaluations of Boko Haram and their attribution to Islam is capable of aggravating the insurgent group. The study also opines that construction of northern Nigerians as 'violent people' because of the insurgents, and Islam as 'evil', also has a way of fuelling attacks. This is a good guide to the present study because it reveals the influence of representation in discourse. However, the study is limited to Boko Haram discourse on nairaland. It differs from this study in terms of scope and subject matter.

The present study takes data from Nigerian newspapers and focuses on banditry. The theory also differs significantly. This study is designed to reveal how media representation of social actors is capable of revealing victims and offenders.

Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2020) reviews the activities of Boko Haram and herdsmen with the sedentary farmers in north central and southern Nigeria. This study conducted a comparative analysis on the representations of the social actors and the conflict in western media and Nigerian media, interrogating the ideological background and implications of the representations. It also interrogated the implications of the representation for peace and security in Nigeria. The study revealed that Nigerian press are highly sensational in their representation of the social actor and the conflict in comparison to the western press. The study opines that the western media appears to be more objective and construct the herdsmen conflict as ‘deadlier’ than Boko Haram. Media reports of the conflict construct social actors as more dangerous than the actions. The study submits that the media construct the social actors and the attacks are reported in ways that would be more appealing to foreign audiences.

Igwebuike (2021) interrogates how Nigerian media use three metaphors of natural disasters, removal of dirt and hunting exercise to conceptualise herdsmen conflict with farmers in Nigeria. The study depicts herding in Nigeria as an invasion and identifies three salient metaphors that are used to describe invasion in Nigeria media. These are: invasion as overrunning water, invasion as cleansing and invasion as hunting. The study further reveals that while herdsmen are described as natural disasters such as flood, storm, surge, wipe out, etc., farmers are described as prey being hunted, ambushed and trapped by hunters. While Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2020) do a comparative study of western media and Nigerian media presentation of Boko Haram and herdsmen, Igwebuike focuses on the use of metaphor to represent herdsmen’s conflict. These two studies show how conflict and terrorism are reported in the

media. They are considerably different from the present study which considers the use of discursive strategies through role allocation to reveal victims in the discourse. This is lacking in the present studies as victims and offenders are not revealed to understand the ideologies of the media outlets and social actors in the discourse.

Osisanwo (2016) interrogates newspaper representations of Boko Haram and other social actors. Data was gathered from four Nigerian newspapers' headline and overline stories. The study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to interrogate data collected from four Nigerian national newspapers. The study identified 13 representational strategies using 15 tools from van Leeuwen's categorisations of social actors. The study submits that newspapers deployed discourse strategies to manage the voice of social actors in the discourse. The study also identified and specified the social actors and their actions. It submits that the mediated reports on Boko Haram helps to sensitise Nigerians about the insurgency. Ugwu et al. (2022) interrogates how newspapers and televisions report banditry in Nigeria. Data was collected from selected newspaper and television news related to banditry attacks. The study is anchored on agenda setting theory to explore how the two media outlets report the news. The study shows that the two media underreport the news related to banditry, thereby making it difficult for them to set agenda on the problem of banditry in Nigeria. However, the study noted that newspapers report the news better than television. Osisanwo's study is relevant to the present study in that it reveals how social actors are represented in conflict and terrorism discourse. The study, however, focuses on Boko Haram discourse and reveal media representation of social actors and how media manage their voices. The study does not specifically focus on role allocation which is the thrust of the present study. This will help to understand how media allocate roles to social actors and their

actions, thus projecting different beliefs about bandits and Nigerians.

Ogbonne (2019) engages the economic impact of Niger Delta military on host communities. The attention was on the economy of the communities. The study conducted a survey using descriptive survey and sample of 384 respondents in some selected Niger Delta states. The study reports that militancy in the area has led to job loss, decline in income, poor wages and loss of potential investors. The study submits that the government has the responsibility of saving human lives, environment, economy and combating corruption. The study develops new measures for evaluating the impact of military activities on the economic life of host communities. The study concludes that Niger Delta militancy has negative impact on the economy of the country. Ogbonne (2019) does not consider the roles of social actors as allocated by the media participants. It has therefore prevented an understanding of specific roles allocated to social actors to understand who did what to whom. This is the focus of the present study.

Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013) interrogate the role of the mass media in tackling the crime surge, which has aggravated insecurity in the country. The intersection between the media and insecurity in the country is appraised using a qualitative approach. The study reveals that journalists are not well-equipped to report terrorism and conflicts. The study concludes that the press should be trained regularly on how to report on terrorism and conflict, and to update their reporting skills and make them conform to modern techniques that ensure effective usage of techniques to tackle insecurity. Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) consider the relationship between banditry and public safety in Nigeria. The study is anchored on the exegesis of relevant secondary sources. Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) argue that banditry is a serious threat to public and national safety. The study, therefore, suggests that there should be public-private partnership to combat the increasing insecurity caused by banditry in the country. Innocent,

Mohammed, and Eikojonwa (2021) discuss media construction of banditry with the aim of deconstructing media stories and representation of actors. The study interrogates the one-sidedness of the media approach to banditry report, which created north/south groups in the country. Using a qualitative approach, the study reveals media reports banditry in diverse locations with different sentiments. The study submits that crime in the north is negatively reported as banditry, while it is only reported derogatorily when it occurs in the east. The study suggests that the media should maintain balance in reports. These studies considerably differs from the present study as they do not reveal different roles allocated to actors in the discourse thereby preventing an understanding of media presentation of specific social actors that project and acquire sympathy for some actors and hatred towards other actors. This is believed to promote hatred and aggravate the attacks.

Burcar and Åkerström (2009) examine how young men are presented as victims of violent crimes. The study relies on interviews to source data. It reveals that men struggle with the contextual belief that youthfulness is associated with power and strength and victim is associated with weakness and impotence. The young men, therefore, portray themselves as victims of violence construction in the society. The study concludes that young men negotiate their identity as “victim-worthy”, with associations to a “hegemonic manliness” during the interview. Ngwama (2014) observes that the menace of kidnapping and other related crimes are worrisome and scary to foreign investors who are now relocating to other countries from Nigeria. To this end, the study critically interrogates the new trends of insecurity in the country to understand the causes and effects of the menace. The study argues that the new waves of insecurity has led to unemployment, job loss, and has given birth to hostile environment. It submits that the level of unemployment should be reduced to ameliorate and curb insecurity in the country. This study is directed towards kidnapping and its negative influence in the country. The study

significantly differs from this in term of scope and subject. The scope of the present study is limited to newspaper report of banditry and focus on the specific roles of social actors thereby revealing the contribution of each actor and their actions as it affects the society.

Olomojobi (2017) examines the way media patterns herdsmen farmers' news report. The study adopts textual analysis using agenda setting, framing and social responsibility as anchor and shows that news framing constitute a major influence to the understanding of news and enact different ideologies among readers. The focus of Ellah and Ekoru (2018) is on the subjective stance-taking and pragmatic strategies in newspapers editorials of herdsmen-farmers' conflict with the aim to establish the editors' view on local crises within the country. Two newspaper editorials on January 2018 herdsmen's attacks in Benue State are used in the study, one each from *The Punch* and *ThisDay* newspapers. Stance theory and multimodal discourse analysis are used as the theoretical anchors. The study reveals epistemic, evaluative, evidential, and affective stances in the discourse. Eight pragmatic strategies were used to project the stance as revealed by the study: indirect condemnation, blunt condemnation, strategic use of numbers, appeal to emotions, evocation of antecedent, revelation of facts, visual representation, and quoting authority. The study concludes that a combined study of stance-taking and pragmatic strategies in newspaper editorials on herdsmen and farmers' crises would contribute to a better understanding of newspapers' opinions on national issues, and provide insights into how the conflicts can be resolved. Olomojobi and Ellah and Ekoru provide relevant insight into the present study as they discuss media presentation of conflicts in newspapers. These helps to understand newspapers' perspectives to the study. The studies reveal the dimensions conflict can take in media discourse. These are however different from the present study because the present study focuses on banditry reports in selected Nigerian newspapers and shows specific roles

allocated to social actors and their actions which will help to understand specific roles of individual actors in the discourse and reveal the implication of such roles for conflict management.

Methods

This study adopts content-based and qualitative methods of analysis, considering their emphasis on the interaction between text and context to enact meaning. Data were sourced from four Nigerian national newspapers, *the Premium Times*, *Sahara Reporters*, *Guardian*, and *the Punch*. The newspapers are selected not only because of their wider coverage (regional and national spread) but also because they give enough space for the coverage of news about banditry and are resourceful in the use of different discursive strategies through role allocation to negotiate victimhood in the discourse. Data were sourced from the online version of the two print newspapers selected (*Guardian* and *Punch*) and from the website of the two online newspapers (*Premium Times* and *Sahara Reporters*). Additionally, the online versions were used because they have wider coverage and easier accessibility than the print version of the newspapers; thus, the news and the representations would spread more. The data were retrieved using search engines like Google with captions such as: *Bandit attack villages in Kaduna*, *Bandits attack military base*, *bandits attack Kaduna bound train*, etc. Data were also sourced from the newspapers' apps. Fifty news report related to the subject of this study were retrieved from each of the newspapers, making a total of 200 news reports, covering a period between March 2021 and April 2022. This period is selected because the period witnessed a surge in attacks believed to be banditry attacks in Nigeria and also attracted the attention of media locally and internationally. Data were retrieved and kept on a laptop for further usage. The data were grouped according to different discursive strategies identified in the discourse. Text were analysed in relation to

their context to reveal how social actors are allocated different roles to reveal their identity using role allocation of Van Leeuwen's approach in CDA.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this section, relevant data are presented and analysed to reveal how victimhood is negotiated in the discourse. Three major social actors are identified in the discourse, namely the bandits, Nigerian citizens and the government and its agents.

Nigerians as helpless/stranded people

One of the major social actors identified in the banditry discourse in Nigerian newspapers were Nigerian citizens. These are non-state actors who do not possess weapons but are affected by the activities of the bandits. Here, bandits are described as a person or group of persons who illegally carry weapons to terrorise innocent people. In the newspaper representation of the activities of the bandits, the newspaper represents some of the social actors as victim using different discursive strategies through role allocation. *The Guardian*, in the following excerpt, described Nigerians in Zamfara state as helpless to construct them as victims in the discourse.

1. Yet many in Zamfara and the wider region are in despair after years of continuous attacks by **armed groups**, exploiting a lack of rural security. <https://guardian.ng/news/At-least-200-villagers-killed-by-bandits-in-north-west-Nigeria/>

The Guardian reported that no less than 200 people were killed in Zamfara state of Nigeria. In the report, the newspaper lamented the activities of bandits in the state and by extension Nigeria and the loss of lives and properties. The author, however, allocated different roles to the social actors involved. In the excerpt, two social actors are identified; the Zamfara citizens (Nigerians) and '**armed groups**' (bandits). The

reporter activated the ‘**armed groups**’ to assign active role of agent through the use of circumstantialisation. The activation was achieved with the use of what Van Leeuwen described as **by prepositional circumstantials in by armed groups**. This is seen in the excerpt as “**continuous attack by armed groups**”; one can infer from this that the armed groups were operating without caution because there was nobody to curb them. This informs why **many in Zamfara and the wider region are in despair**. Being in despair implies that the people are helpless. The construction as helpless is a calculated attempt to present them as the victim of the bandits. The report states further that the **armed groups** are **exploiting a lack of rural security**. This also described the villagers as helpless. The security are meant to be available to protect citizens so as to prevent exploitation in the rural communities. The reverse is the case in the affected communities in Zamfara. One can therefore conclude that the communities are helpless and by extension, Nigerians are helpless. This is obvious as the reporter stated that the state of despair is not limited to Zamfara but the **wider region**. The word despair explains the state of helplessness of the citizens. In the same manner, the *Premium Times* describes citizens as helpless to achieve the victimhood construction.

2. Despite the efforts of security personnel to arrest rising security [si]) in the state, bandits and other similar violent criminals are still killing, maiming and abducting people with reckless abandon.
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/484365-nine-killed-as-bandits-attack-community.html>

In the above excerpt, *Premium Times* reports on activities of bandits in Kaduna state of Nigeria. The newspaper reports that the group killed nine people during their attack on a community. Three social actors are identified, the bandits, Nigerians and the security agents. In the report, the newspaper activate **bandits and other similar violent criminals** as agents

who carried out the attack on the community. The verb **are** is used to allocate the role of agent to the bandits as the killers of citizens in the communities. The reporter reports that they have been **killing, maiming and abducting people with reckless abandon**. Citizens are presented as victims who undergo the activities of bandits. This also presents the villagers as the victim of the attacks. The victimhood is enhanced with the phrase **people with reckless abandon**. One can infer from the phrase that the citizens are helpless because they are **abandoned**. Considering the setting (Kaduna state) which is reported to be one of the focal point of the bandits, the choice of words helps to interpret the representation and present citizens in the environment as victims of the attacks. It is reported that the security personnel tried, but their efforts were not enough. The clause in the excerpts, **despite the efforts of security personnel**, shows that the security agents are doing their best; however, the best seems not to be enough. To this end, one can infer that the citizens are stranded because those that are expected to protect them are incapable. *The Guardian* corroborates this viewpoint in the following excerpt:

3. The **problem** remains that **Nigerian security personnel** are **outnumbered** and **outgunned** by the **assailants**, according to Oluwole Ojewale, of the Africa-focused Institute for Security Studies. “We don’t have adequate security in Zamfara state, but [in] some areas, we don’t have security at all,” said Yusuf Ibrahim in Gusau, the state capital.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jan/07/scores-people-killed-northern-nigeria#:~:text=The%20heavily%20armedthe%20state%20capital>

In the above, *The Guardian* reports on an attack believed to be perpetrated by bandits which killed scores of people in the northern part of the country. Again, three social actors are identified, Zamfara people, security agents and bandits

(assailants). In the report, the newspaper presents security personnel and Nigerian citizens as victims and the bandits as offenders (perpetrator). To achieve this, the newspaper allocates different roles to the social actors in the area. The role of agent is allocated to the **assailants** (bandits) with the use of circumstantialisation. This is achieved with the use of the preposition **by** in **by the assailants**. Security agents are allocated the role of victim by stating that they are **outnumbered and outgunned**. One can infer from this that they are victims. Passivation is used to achieve this by presenting the security personnel as the one undergoing the activities of the ‘**assailants**’. The witness lamented lack of enough security personnel. This implies they are stranded citizens who need help. The citizens are also passivated in the report by describing them as undergoing the activities of the bandits. This is inferred in the complaint of the witness. This further portrays the citizens as victims of the bandits.

Citizens as losers

Citizens are also described as losers in this discourse based on the quantity of materials and properties they lost during a banditry attack. The media painstakingly itemised the number of properties that were lost in the course of attack believed to be perpetrated by bandits. This is evident in all the newspaper sampled. The following excerpt is culled from the *Punch*.

4. Aruwan, who was not specific on when the attack took place, also said several houses, vehicles, and other valuables estimated in millions of naira were destroyed by the hoodlums during the attacks. Houses, trucks, and cars were also burnt, along with agricultural produce at various farms.
<https://www.google.com/amp/s/punchng.com/Banditry-attack-kaduna-villages-kill-20-raze-houses-vehicles/%3famp>

In the excerpt above, the *Punch* reports an attack that occurred in Kaduna state of Nigeria. In the report, the eyewitness itemized properties that were lost. The report constructs the citizens as losers in order to present them as the victim of the action believed to have been perpetrated by bandits. To achieve this, the newspaper activated the bandits (hoodlums) as active agent in the discourse using circumstantialisation with the use of the preposition **by** to describe the **hoodlums** as the agent that destroyed properties **estimated in millions**. The **by preposition** allocates the agent role to hoodlums. The report itemized properties such as **houses, trucks, and cars were also burnt, along with agricultural produce at various farms**. With this, citizens are passivated as the actor undergoing the activities of the bandits. It suggests that citizens suffer the action of the bandit. To this end, one can infer that citizens are the victims of their actions. Although the reporter tried to background the actor by not fronting it like the usual subject, readers are still able to identify the agent of the sentence through the use of the preposition **by** to present bandits as the perpetrator. The participants' mention of **hoodlums** and **citizens** helps to understand the subject of the discourse. Destroying vehicles and other properties present the owners of the properties as victims of bandits' attacks. To win the sympathy of readers, the damaged properties are itemised. In another instance from *The Guardian*, citizens are also projected as losers.

5. In addition to the despair at the killings, the destruction of property and displacement of more than 10,000 people, many of whom are reliant on their farmland to make ends meet will exacerbate poverty by bandits, Anka said.

<https://guardian.ng/news/At-least-200-villagers-killed-by-bandits-in-north-west-Nigeria/>

The Guardian reports that 200 villagers were killed by bandits in the North Western part of Nigeria, condemns the

killing of innocent people in the region and calls upon constituted authority to proffer relevant solution to the problem. In the report, bandits are allocated the role of agent while the citizens are described as victims. To achieve this description, the newspaper described citizens as losers to project them as victims of bandits' activities in the region, and reports that the bandits caused poverty in the region by destroying the properties of citizens and also terminated productive lives. To achieve this, the bandits are activated as active agents and the role of agent is allocated through circumstantialisation with the use the preposition **by** in **by bandits** as can be seen in the excerpt above. The reporter uses evidentiality by providing more evidence to present citizens as losers in **the destruction of property and displacement of more than 10,000 people, many of whom are reliant on their farmland**. This evidence implies that citizens have lost their properties. Readers can infer from the choice of words such as **destruction** and **displacement** that citizens have suffered from the activities of the bandits. Citizens are passivated considering the collocation of the words which provided the linguistic context through which readers can easily understand the intention of the reporter to project citizens as losers of their properties. With the projection as losers, one can easily infer that citizens are the victims of the activities of the bandits. In the following excerpt, *Sahara Reporters* also aligns with this presentation of citizens as losers.

6. According to an eye-witness account, the attackers numbered no less than 300 as they **invaded** the town on 100 motorcycles, each carrying three bandits. It was gathered that the **bandits attacked** the village around 2 pm on Wednesday **setting ablaze two patrol** vehicles belonging to the police and army.
<https://saharareporters.com/2021/07/16/300-bandits-attack-sokoto-community-kill-nigerian-soldiers-abduct->

[residents#:~:text=According%20to%20an,kidnapped%20many%20residents](#)

Sahara Reporters had reported the attack believed to have been carried out by bandits in Sokoto state. The newspaper uses what Ayantayo (2019) described as lexical replacement by dropping the word bandits and replacing it with attackers to label the bandits as actor, thus activating them as the active agent that attacked the state. The report also narrated the mode of their activities to create a mental picture of their activities to label them as perpetrators. The time of their activities is also stated to show that they are ‘offenders’. The mutual contextual belief of readers and the reporter is that ‘good’ people would not move around in day time and set peoples’ properties on fire. To distinguish the bandits who operated during day from those that have legitimate assignments to carry out, the reporter selected registers that will label the bandits as evil. Such registers include **invade, attack, set ablaze**. This activated the bandits as active agents that perpetrated evil and thereby projected bandits as ‘offenders’. To project Nigerians (citizens) as victim, the reporter passivated them as the sufferer of the activities of the bandits. The reporter revealed that citizens’ belongings were **set ablaze**. One can infer from this that they are losers to the activities of the bandits. The time of the event (2pm), the participants involved (bandits and citizens) and the registers used, help readers to infer that the bandits are offenders while citizens are victims. *Premium Times* also corroborates this construction of citizens as seen in the following excerpt.

7. Mr Sheme said he was already receiving complaints from members of the association over their losses as a result of the restriction of trading in cattle. He said some of them took loans to buy cattle and other domestic animals. A trader in Jibia, who asked not to be named for security reasons, said the shutdown of

the Gurbin Bore-Jibia road has affected trading activities in the Jibia central market in Katsina State.
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/484365-banditry-residents-of-north-west-states-reluctantly-embrace-stringent-measures-as-governors-unite.html>

Premium Times narrated the efforts of the northwest states of Nigeria in curbing the menace of the bandits. The newspaper also condemned the activities of the bandits which included killing and destruction of properties. The reporter described citizens as losers through evidentiality. The report gives evidence of citizens' loss and lexicalized the report with words such as **complaints, losses, restrictions, and took loans**. These words suggest that citizens are suffering from the activities of the bandits. The preposition **from** as used in excerpt (7) above is used to activate citizens as the active sufferers of the actions of bandits. In the phrase **from members**, the preposition **from** is used to allocate active role of complainant to **members of the association**. This is used to project members of the association as losers who have lost their animals, especially with the **restriction** caused by the activities of bandits in the region. The reporter suppressed the actors but readers can infer considering the choice of words in the excerpt. The setting, participants, and the registers help to understand the actor. Words such as **security, cattle, shutdown, and restriction** help to understand that the actor is bandit. The setting which include north western Nigeria helps readers to understand the actor. It is well known to Nigerians that the bandits constitute a major security threat in the region. The contextual variables are used to reveal the actors in the discourse but we are able to identify the loser through role allocation.

Nigerians as the Captured

In the banditry discourse, some Nigerians are described as being under the possession of the bandits. They are taken against

their will by the bandits. This presentation of Nigerians construct them as victims of the bandits. In the following excerpt from the *Premium Times*, Nigerians are described as being abducted by the bandits.

8. Over 50 people were killed in an attack by bandits in Zamfara state...They have also abducted many more in what is shaping to become one of the worst kidnap-for-ransom syndicates in the country's history.
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/484365-bandits-kill-over-50-in-fresh-zamfara-attack.html>

Premium Times reports that bandits terminated lives of over 50 people in Zamfara state. In the report, the newspaper reports also that some others (citizens) were abducted and taken hostage. The report describes citizens as victims of the bandits. To achieve this description, the newspaper allocate the role of agent to bandits. The bandits are activated with circumstantialisation using the **by** preposition to activate the bandits as active agents. The material process **killed** allocated the role of killer to bandits while the citizens are passivated and allocated the role of sufferer. This is achieved with the passive verb **were killed**. In the same paragraph, the bandits are activated using pronominalisation, as the active agent that captured Nigerians. The pronoun **they** is used to refer back to bandits as the antecedent. The pronoun is used to avoid monotony but readers will be able to interpret because of the linguistic environment, such as **kidnap, ransom, syndicates**. The exact number of abductees is not stated. However, the use of the phrase **many more** is a calculated attempt to escalate the activities of bandits and to show that countless number of people are captured and are victims of bandits. Lexicalization of the report with words such as **kidnap, ransom, syndicates, attack**, etc. allocates the role of offender to the bandits. The bandits can be described as **kidnappers, attackers**, etc. while the citizens can be described as their (bandits') victims. This

will motivate readers to sympathise with citizens as the victim of the bandits. The role of sufferer allocated to citizens indicates that they are undergoing the activities of the bandits in the affected areas. This may cause panic in the country as other citizens are scared of the activities of the bandits. The following excerpt from the *Punch* supports the above claim.

9. For now, no one is sure whether it is the Nigerian state or bandits who are in power in the North-West. Since December, bandits have turned to raiding schools. In Katsina State, bandits kidnapped over 300 pupils in Kankara; about 279, aged 10 to 17 in Jangebe, Zamfara State; 39 at the Federal Forestry College, Kaduna and 27 pupils and teachers in Kagara, Niger State. Bandits murdered Abba Haki, an aide of a former Sokoto State governor, AliyuWamakko, two days after his abduction in Durbawa, Kware LGA. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/punchng.com/nigeria-failing-under-crippling-effects-of-banditry/%3famp>

The Punch also reports the activities of bandits and condemn it. The newspaper also laments that the Nigerian government is unable to curb the activities of the bandits, therefore throwing the country into panic. The report presents Nigerians as the captured to construct them as the victims of the bandits. To achieve the presentation, the newspaper expresses doubt in the ability of the constituted authority to ensure security of lives and properties. In the clause **no one is sure whether it is the Nigerian state or bandits who are in power in the North-West**, readers can infer that Nigerians are not safe. This presupposes that there is a constituted authority that should be in charge of the country. It also presupposes that there is another group competing with the constituted authority. This therefore implies that citizens cannot enjoy their fundamental human

right of freedom of movement. It can therefore be inferred that citizens are captured (held against their will). The verb **have** allocates the role of active agent to bandits in **bandits have**. Again, the material process **kidnapped** in the phrase **bandits kidnapped** activated the bandits as active agents in the discourse. The role of agent presents bandits as the agent that perpetrated the action of kidnapping. This therefore passivates citizens as people undergoing the actions of the bandits. This allocates the role of sufferer to citizens in the discourse. To this end, one can infer that citizens are victims to the bandits. The attempt is to win sympathy for citizens and motivate constituted authority to rescue them. Sahara reporters also align with this presentation in its report as presented below.

10. Farming and herding communities in the state have long been **terrorised** by gangs who raid villages, **stealing** cattle and **kidnapping** residents for **ransom**. The latest **attack** happened on Sunday morning at about 8:30 am when the **gunmen stormed** the community and started **shooting sporadically**, killing 20 persons including the village head.

<https://saharareporters.com/2021/08/11/bandits-ambush-nigerian-policemen-zamfara-kill/>

Sahara Reporter reports that bandits ambushed Nigerian police and killed Nigerians. The report explained that the activities of bandits include terrorism, stealing, kidnapping, attacking and killing. Identified participants in this report include citizens and the bandits. The bandits are activated as active agents in the discourse. The activation is enabled through circumstantialisation with the use of **by** preposition. The activation projects the bandits as perpetrator of **killing**, **terrorizing** and **stealing**. This present citizens as the captured. The farmers and herders (citizens) are passivated as undergoing the activities of the bandits. In the expression, **farming and herding communities in the state have long been terrorized**, one

can infer that herders and farmers are the victims because they undergo the activities of the bandits. The discourse is lexicalized with registers that reflect bondage. Words such as **stealing, kidnapping, ransom, attack, shooting, sporadically, and killing**. These words imply that some people are in bondage. Role allocation helps to identify the victim and the perpetrator. While the bandits are presented as the perpetrators, citizens are presented as victims because they are presented as being under the bondage of the bandits.

Security agents as armless/endangered

In newspaper reports of banditry activities, it is also clear that the security agents are underequipped. This contributes to their inability to protect and rescue citizens in Nigeria. Security agents are expected to be armed to protect citizens. It is obvious that security agents are helpless as well. This is evident in their response to the attack believed to be carried out by bandits. The following paragraphs present evidence from the selected newspapers to support this claim. In excerpt 11, the *Punch* present security agents as armless.

11. In the two weeks to March 21, gunmen invaded four police stations there, the latest being the attack on the Mgbakwu station in Awka North LGA. Apart from carting away arms and ammunition from these stations, the hoodlums also slaughtered four Nigerian Navy officers, six police officers, two prison warders and civilians. In nearby Imo State, an officer lost his life during bombardment by gunmen on the Isiala Mbano Divisional Police Headquarters on March 20. This is disquieting.
<https://www.punchng.com/nigeria-failing-under-crippling-effects-of-banditry/%3famp>

The Punch reports the effects of banditry activities in Nigeria. The newspaper laments the ugly experience of

Nigerians in the hand of bandits. It submits that the activities of bandits is crippling Nigeria. In the report, the newspaper described Nigeria police as victim of the banditry activities. To achieve this, the newspaper allocates agent role to the gunmen. The material process, **invaded** allocates the agent role to the bandits to show that they perpetrated the action of invasion. They can be referred to as invaders. The same material process allocates the role of sufferer to **police station** in the affected area. The report is lexicalized with words such as **invaded**, **attack** and **carting away**. The lexicalization allocate the role of agent to gunmen (bandits) as they can be seen as the perpetrator. It presents gunmen as the active agent in the discourse as the material process (invade) allocates the role of invader to them. This implies that the police stations are the sufferer. One can infer from this that the stations are the victim of the gunmen activities. It is obvious from the presentation that the police (security agent) lack the required arm and ammunition to combat the gunmen. This exposes them to attack and invasion by the gunmen.

In the same report, the newspaper narrates how the Nigerian Navy was slaughtered. The hoodlums (bandits) are also activated as the active agents in the discourse to show that they carried out the action of slaughtering members of the security agencies. The report itemised the number of security agents affected -- **four Nigerian Navy officers, six police officers, two prison warders** -- and revealed that the security agents are without ammunition to protect themselves or citizens. The intention behind itemising and stating the number involved is to show that the security agents are powerless. It also reveals precision and truthfulness of the report (van Dijk, 1996). Presentation of the security agents as armless shows that they cannot protect the country. One can infer that citizens and the security agents are victims in the attack. Another instance from *Sahara Reporters* aligns with this, as seen in the following excerpt.

12. They came from the Tilibale axis and **opened fire** on the soldiers that were manning a checkpoint along Sokoto-Sabon Birni road. “**The soldiers also responded but they were overpowered.**” Three operational vehicles reportedly left Sabon Birni town with re-enforcement but were ambushed along the way and two soldiers were shot dead while seven others sustained various degrees of injuries.
<https://saharareporters.com/2021/07/16/300-bandits-attack-sokoto-community-kill-nigerian-soldiers-abduct-residents#:~:text=According%20to%20an,kidnapped%20many%20residents.>

The newspaper reports that bandits attacked communities in Sokoto state of Nigeria. According to *Sahara Reporters*, Nigerian soldiers were killed in the attack. The newspaper also reported that the bandits kidnapped residents of the communities. The report presents the Nigeria Army as armless and thereby a victim of bandits in the report. To achieve this, the newspaper activated the bandits as active agent who **opened fire** on the soldiers. The pronoun **they** refers back to the bandits that has been mentioned in the previous sentence. The verb **open** allocates the role of agent to the bandits in the sentence while the role of sufferer is allocated to the soldiers who undergo the activities of the bandits. One can infer from this that the Nigerian army were without enough ammunition which gave the bandits opportunities to attack them freely. To further show that the army were armless, the newspaper states further that, **the soldiers also responded but they were overpowered**. This implies that the soldiers attempted to resist the attack but they were overpowered by the bandits. One can infer from this that the bandits had more ammunition than the soldiers. Although soldiers were trained to resist such attacks and are expected to be fully armed, in this case the reverse was true and they fell victims to the bandits.

Considering the Nigerian army's reputation in Africa, one would have expected that they should be able to overpower the bandits; yet, due to a lack of ammunition, they were powerless and were victims to bandits. *The Guardian* and all the other sampled newspapers aligned with this view by presenting the Nigerian army as armless, powerless for lack of ammunitions and thereby becoming victims to bandits.

Nigerians as innocent

Nigeria citizens are believed to be suffering from the activities of bandits for no just reason. They are described as innocent in the banditry discourse. This is premised on the fact that they do not offend their attackers (bandits). The following excerpts from the newspapers support the claim. *The Punch*, in the following excerpt, allocates the role of innocent to citizens.

13. But despite the alarming number of **innocent** lives killed **by bloodthirsty** bandits and marauders ravaging the northern part of the country and **kidnappers ubiquitous** in both the north and the south, Mohammed said the President achieved some feats in the insecurity war.

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/punchng.com/despite-3125-killed-by-bandits-in-2021-lai-mohammed-says-buhari-made-tremendous-progress/%3famp>

The Punch reports the opinion of the immediate past Nigeria Minister of Information on the security situation. The minister had praised the federal government of Nigeria on the security situation. The newspaper disagreed with the minister and provided evidence of the activities of the bandits in the country. The newspaper reports that bandits have terminated thousands of lives in the country, yet the minister is praising the government. The newspaper

described Nigerians as innocent. To achieve this, the newspaper uses adjectival premodification to describe citizens' lives in the attacked area. The word **innocent** is used to passivate citizens so as to present them as victims because it shows they undergo the activities of bandits. Meanwhile, the bandits are activated as active agents in the discourse through circumstantialisation. The **by** preposition in **by bloodthirsty bandits**, is used to present bandits as the agent that **killed**. The material process **killed** allocates the role of agent to the subject, **bloodthirsty bandits**. Bandits are also premodified with the adjective **bloodthirsty** to present them as the agent that suck innocent blood. One can therefore infer that the bandits are the agent that terminates lives. The report is lexicalised with registers such as **bloodthirsty, bandits, marauders, ravaging, kidnappers** to project the horrible situation occasioned by the activities of bandits in the country. Bandits are allocated the role of agent to show the level of dangers portend by their activities in the country. The lexicalization helps to allocate appropriate role and reveals the activities of the social actors. One can therefore infer that Nigerians are innocent in the attack occasioned by the activities of bandits. The following excerpt is culled from *Premium Times* newspaper to buttress this claim.

14. Hayab, who's also the Vice Chairman of the association in the North, added, "These bandits have toyed with the joy and peace of Kaduna people enough and should not be given any space again to torment innocent citizens this new year.
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/can-hails-kaduna-police-over-arrest-of-two-bandits/%3famp>

The newspaper reports the response of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to the efforts of Nigeria's police in curbing the activities of bandits in Nigeria. In excerpt 14

above, bandits are activated as the active agents where the verb **have** allocated the role of agent to them. The bandits are described as the ones who have destroyed the joy and peace of citizens. This is evident in the expression **these bandits have toyed with the joy and peace**. This suggests that they negatively impact on the lives of citizens in Kaduna. Possessivation is used to ascribe the ownership of **joy** and **peace** to the Kaduna people. The intention is to present citizens as the sufferer of the actions of bandits. The peace and joy that belongs to Kaduna people are being tampered with by bandits. This presents the Kaduna people as victims of the activities of bandits. In another attempt to present **Kaduna people** as victims, the newspaper uses adjectival premodification, **innocent**, to qualify citizens. This is an attempt to further describe citizens as victims. The report is further lexicalized with expressions such as **toyed with the joy and peace** and **register** such as **torment** to allocate the role of agent to bandits and victim to citizens. The expression and choice of words in the report reveal the ugly experience of Nigerians in the activities of bandits. Such words and expressions present negative experience. The following excerpt from *The Guardian* also agreed with this assertion when the newspaper presented Nigerians as innocent in bandits' attacks.

15. The latest attacks on **innocent people** by the bandits is an act of desperation by mass murderers, now under relentless pressure from our military forces, Buhari said, calling for communities to be patient.
<https://guardian.ng/news/At-least-200-villagers-killed-by-bandits-in-north-west-Nigeria/>

The newspaper presents Nigerians as victims by describing them as **innocent** of the attack believed to be carried out by bandits. To achieve this, the newspaper premodifies Nigerians with the word **innocent** to label them as innocent and win sympathy for ordinary citizens from

readers. The premodification helps to identify Nigerians as victim. This is effective considering other words in the same environment. The bandits are activated as active agents who perpetrated the attack through the use of circumstantialisation using the preposition **by** to ascribe the attack bandits. The **by** phrase, in **by the bandits** helps readers to understand the agent of the sentence. The newspaper adopts this to reveal the actor that carried out the activities and show the actor that undergoes the activities. One can therefore infer that the bandits are the agent while Nigerians are the victim of their actions. It is also reported that the president appealed to Nigerians to be patient. This presupposes that there is a situation that needs urgent attention by the constituted authorities. The president, considering his position in the country, realized this, hence his apologies to Nigerians. The reporter manages his voice by quoting him directly and used the verb **said** to attach importance to the statement. This also suggests that the president knows that Nigerians are suffering from the actions of the bandits.

Conclusion

This study interrogates how Nigerian newspaper create victimhood in media report of bandits' activities in Nigeria. The study shows that there are three major social actors in the discourse, namely bandits, Nigerians and government agents (such as soldiers, police, etc.). Five different discursive strategies that are used to present Nigerians and the security agents as victims are identified. They are: Nigerians as helpless/stranded people, Nigerians as losers, Nigerians as captured people, security agents as armless, and Nigerians as innocent people. Role allocation is used to create offenders (perpetrator of the attacks) and victims in the discourse. The study shows that agent role is allocated to bandits to activate them as active agent that attack Nigerians and the security

agents. The role allocation is mostly achieved through circumstantialisation with the use of **by-phrase**, adjectival premodification, pronominalisation, passivation and activation. Nigerians and the security agents are presented as victims through role allocation. Material process such as **kill, kidnap, invade, and attack** allocate the role of victims to Nigerians and the security agents. Nigerians were possessivated as ownership of peace and joy which was destroyed by bandits. The study confirms the argument of Van Leeuwen that social actors may be presented in different ways through the roles they performed in discourse.

This study aligns with Burcar and Åkerström (2009) conclusion that victims are associated with weakness. The claim that victims are weak is evident in this study as Nigerians are presented as helpless, innocent, and captured people. This study also agrees with Chakraborty et al. (2015) who explain that invariably, media are strong forces in constructing the social reality of conflicts and selectively represent these realities through the process of news framing. While Chakraborty et al. (2015) uses framing to reveal how the media construct victims, the present study uses role allocation theory to present victimhood in media report of banditry activities in Nigeria. This study shows that Nigerians are presented as victims while bandits are the perpetrators. The representation of social actors has shown that banditry is negatively affecting the peace and harmony of the country. The economic and national development of the country are also being affected. Lives are being lost in great numbers as seen in the reports, further demonstrating the negative effect of banditry. This aligned with Ogbonne (2019) who states that Niger Delta crisis negatively affected the Nigerian economy as jobs were lost and income declined, as well as Ngwama (2014) and Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) whose studies concluded that kidnapping and banditry have caused unemployment, job loss and an hostile environment. Truly, the banditry situation in the country is now very worrisome and scary, especially considering the number of

lives that are being lost every day, with people living in panic. The representation in newspapers promote the hostile situation and endanger the fragile peace in the country as it creates fears in the mind of readers. Obviously, banditry is a negative enterprise that must be discouraged at all costs. Consequently, this study suggests that researchers must also engage banditry activities and report their negativity to policy makers to make them take relevant actions against the menace. Finally, the government at all levels must make deliberate efforts to fight banditry to reduce unemployment, loss of lives and promote a peaceful society devoid of fears of being killed or kidnapped.

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