

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Print Media Depictions of Women's Involvement in Banditry and Terrorism in Nigeria

Oluwamodupe Eunice Araoye

Department of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria,
Email: araoyeoluwamodupe@yahoo.com, Tel: 08135400031

Oluwakemi Titilola Olayemi

Department of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria,
Email: olayemioou@gmail.com, Tel: 08150763851

Corresponding Author Email: araoyeoluwamodupe@yahoo.com

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijellr.13/vol14n11330>

Published May 10, 2026

Citation: Araoye O.E. and Olayemi O.T. (2026) A Critical Discourse Analysis of Print Media Depictions of Women's Involvement in Banditry and Terrorism in Nigeria, *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 14, (1) 13-30

Abstract: *This study focuses on the critical discourse analysis of the representation of women in banditry and terrorism in the print media in Nigeria. Critical Discourse Analysis was adopted to examine the portrayal of women in terrorism and banditry 25 articles from seven Nigerian newspapers (including online) were analysed. The findings show that women terrorists are portrayed as deviants and active participants rather than victims. It suggests that all terrorists should be treated equally regardless of their gender and the use of female in most of the headlines should be avoided. It also suggests that women terrorists should not be depicted as active participant in terrorism and banditry but as victims.*

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, depiction, banditry, terrorism

INTRODUCTION

Female involvement in terrorism is not a new phenomenon in most places but it is new in Nigeria. The emergence of female terrorists in Nigeria became a household name a few years after the kidnapping of female students in Chibok and who were allegedly later used as suicide bombers in several locations in Nigeria. This prompted many researchers to look into the issue of

female terrorists. This article seeks to explore the representation of women terrorists and bandits in the newspapers. Seven popular Nigerian newspapers are used in this research. Using CDA, this paper discusses the representation of women terrorists and how the representation is shaping the representation of women in terrorism.

Moreover, it has been observed that banditry and terrorism with active participation of the female gender is an issue the Nigeria security forces have been grappling with for some time. Also, some research revealed a connection and co-operation between bandits and terrorists' activities in some areas of the country. Recent trends have shown escalation of banditry particularly in the north western part of the country which resulted to kidnap of school boys and girls for ransom. Women involvement in banditry includes provision of logistic support (petrol, bread and other items) to bandits' camp. They also provide information to terrorists and this has made the fight against terrorism difficult as terrorists can escape before the arrival of security forces. Indeed, Vanguard newspaper of September 15 2021 in one of its sub-headlines reported that 'police nab suspected bandit's wife who came to town for petrol'. In the past two decades, Nigeria has suffered serious terrorist attacks and these are largely carried out by a group popularly known as Boko Haram, which later morphed into Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA) in 2002 with a series of attacks on innocent Nigerians including security forces on their targets like military barracks. The group in 2014 used its first female suicide bombers in the bombing of Gombe military barracks and killed innocent people. However, the group has used more female suicide bombers, mostly teenagers' girls in its recent attacks. (Markovic, 2018). Archibong, (2020) acknowledges the alarming trend of increased participation in suicide mission of women in the insurgence activities and the issue of indoctrination, coercion or voluntary acceptance of the mission. While terrorism in Nigeria started in 2011, it was in 2014 that a new dimension was added with the involvement of teenage female suicide bomber (Bloom & Hillary, 2016). The involvement of women in the insurgency activities with radical ideology in the North Eastern Nigeria is undeniable with the heinous loss of human and property. Researchers like Joseph et al. (2025) and Agara and Subair (2024) contest the victimisation discourse by showing that women are involved in terrorist activities as fighters, recruiters and spies. But other research (Bawa, 2017; Ibezim & Obioma, 2021) focuses on coercion and exploitation, positioning women as tools of violence. This dichotomy is symptomatic of what Oyawale (2025) calls the gendering of terrorism, where societal and media narratives depict women as either victims or exceptions.

Other studies in the field of discourse analysis of print media representation of terrorism and insurgency in Nigeria include, (Ebim, 2017; Araoye, 2021; Dami, 2021; Babatunde, 2020). Other studies that examined women involvement in terrorism in Nigeria overlooked and did not address the print media representation of women involvement in banditry and terrorism (Ottoh-Agede, 2020). McCormick (2022) study only considered the role of media in social construction

of female suicide bombers. This study therefore aims to address this gap by examining the print media representation of women involvement in banditry and terrorism in Nigeria.

The purpose of this study is to use discourse analysis of print media depiction to ascertain the tactics used by newspapers to represent women involvement in banditry and terrorism in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Banditry

Banditry is considered as participation of people in armed robbery or atrocities. Banditry is the use of violence, or threat to intimidate an individual or group of individuals to steal their property in terms of material and sentimental belongings. It is the act of armed gang that usually engage in attack to steal and loot innocent and unsuspecting members of the public of their belongings. Such criminal venture is prevalent in our contemporary society (Nigeria Watch, 2011). Banditry is believed to be evolving in the contemporary society in contrast to the meaning of banditry in the 19th century. Warty, (1994) describes a bandit in the 19th century Europe and America as a freedom fighter in Europe and America, who aims at ensuring the freedom of the oppressed from the upper class or oppressive government and colonial masters. In Nigeria, Oyinloye, (2020) classified the banditry into politically, resources, ethno-religious boundary and nomadic free range induced banditry. Shalangwa (2013) defines banditry as the act of the armed gang raiding a community for economic material and political gain. This has indeed played a major role in the insecurity in many regions of the country.

Terrorism

Terrorism is the unlawful use of violence and intimidation against the general public or a segment thereof and for political purposes or ideology (Reitano & Alda, 2020). Sinai, (2008) defined terrorism as premeditated politically motivated violence inflicted on unarmed members of the community by sub national groups or secret agents to affect the audience. Similarly, Ziyanda, (2018) describes terrorism as unlawful use of force or violence against person or property to intimidate or coerce government, the civilian population or any segment thereof in furtherance of political or social objective.

Women in Banditry and Terrorism

The presence of the female terrorist was well acknowledged by the military fighting this scourge in Nigeria (BBC, 2014). These women terrorists and bandits usually supply information and support to their male counterparts who engage in offensive and violent attacks on the government and target communities. Female terrorists and bandits are involved in humanitarian and other activities to the foot soldier terrorists who mostly apply guerilla warfare in their attacks. These innocent women could be found in the community as ordinary members of the community. They are used as spies to gather information. They are used in food and petrol supply. For instance, it was revealed that some of the women bandits were engaged in food and fuel supply to bandit's enclaves and so helping the bandits to operate effectively (Maishanu, 2021). Dunamis, (2021) also reported the activities of these women bandits with the arrest of a mother, daughter and another female bandit for carrying petrol in their bags and heading to bandit camp in the Katsina forest. The suspects who admitted to have committed the crime are all from Malali community in Katsina State capital. This incident, therefore, confirms the suspicion of some women in the community and their engagement in banditry and terrorism.

Engagement of Female Suicide Bombers by Terrorists

The use of suicide bombing in warfare against the state and society started in the 11th century with the Muslim fundamentalists who were militant in spreading their ideology (Zedalis, 2004). This suicide mission is a strong conviction and belief that their death will be a martyrdom for the sake of God. This mode of warfare and attacks has been used in various countries but mostly in the Middle East and some Asian nations such as Israel, Palestine, Indonesia, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. Others include Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Chechnya. But in the past 20 years, these terrorists and suicide bombing have also spread to the African continent such as Nigeria, Chad Republic, Cameroon, Niger Republic e.t.c

Several international terrorist groups that have been using male suicide bombers are now recruiting female suicide bombers and using them in several suicide attacks. Female suicide bombing is considered a new trend (Zedalis 2004). It was reported that the first female suicide bomber was deployed in 1985 by a teenager, Sana'a Mehaidi working for the Syrian Nationalist Army who drove a truck into a convoy of Israeli Defense Force killing herself and two soldiers (Pearson, 2018). This has become a weapon of choice since then and has been deployed by terrorists in Turkey; Sri Lanka; Chechnya; Palestinian (Pearson, 2018).

In Nigeria, the first male suicide bomber was used by Boko Haram in 2011 and the first female in 2014 (Markovic,2019).

Involvement of Female in Suicide Bombing in Nigeria

s/n	Terror group	Date	Loation	Remarks/Comment
1	Boko Haram	2014	Gombe military base, Gombe state	A young girl carried out a suicide bombing that killed herself and a soldier (Markovic, 2018).
2	Boko Haram	2014	Funtua, Katsina State	A ten-year-old female suicide bomber was intercepted before carrying out her attack (Olaniyan, 2017)
3	Boko Haram	2015	Potiskum, Yobe State	Two women launched suicide attacks at a marketplace, resulting in multiple fatalities (Lee, 2016)
4	Boko Haram	2015	Potiskum, Yobe State	An eight-year-old girl triggered a suicide attack in Potiskum (Olaniyan, 2017)
5	Boko Haram	2016	Maiduguri, Borno State	In February, two female suicide bombers targeted an IDP camp and an NNPC fuel station, killing eight people and injuring twenty-four (Olaniyan, 2017)
6	Boko Haram	2016	Madagali, Adamawa State	Around December 2016, two women detonated their explosives at a market in Madagali, causing the deaths of a significant number of community members (Olaniyan, 2017)
7	Boko Haram	2016	Maiduguri, Borno State	On 11 November 2016, three girls on a suicide mission died while carrying out attacks in Maiduguri.
8	Boko Haram	2016	Maiduguri, Borno State	A cattle market in Maiduguri experienced significant destruction and fatalities due to an attack by two young female suicide bombers on 25 December 2016 (Olaniyan, 2017).

Source: Author's Compilation, (2023)

The above statistics showed that the terrorist group that used use of female in suicide attacks in Nigeria is Boko Haram whereas other terrorist groups such as ISWAP and ANSARU have not been reported to have conducted a deadly suicide attack in Nigeria particularly with the use of women.

Media portrayal of women in terrorism and banditry

There are some studies conducted in other countries about the portrayal of women in terrorism and other violent acts in the media. It should be noted that there are different perspectives on the role of women in terrorism and banditry. Some authors believe that women are victims while others believe that they are active members of terrorism and banditry.

A number of authors have attributed reasons for the voluntary participation of women in terrorism. Plaza et al, (2016) opined that individual reasons, revenge for the death of family and friends, social causes, identity etc. are the factors why some women joined terrorism. Archibong (2020) also stated that many women have been coerced and forced to join the group.

The study of media representation of women's involvement in terrorism and other forms of violence by Dutch newspaper articles in 2016 shows that 50% deny women's agency and/or victimize them 33% recognised women as agent 6% represent them as jihadist rides and 11% does not mention women at all (Tervooren, 2016). The media representation also depicts women as the strategic assets of male terrorists and somehow "oppressed and depressed" (Beatrice & Graaf, 2012). They claim that women are mostly oppressed in terrorist groups

In his article, Blossom Shimayam Ottoh-Agede concluded on three major issues about female terrorists. First, he noted that newspaper reporting of female suicide bombers is usually gender-biased as media stories usually focus on the gender of the suicide bomber to come up with sensational headlines. The framing of this puts the female as a negative actor and goes against the views of society that she is innocent or a good person. He also observed that the role of women in terrorism is not necessarily volunteering as he gave the example of the Chibok and Dapchi schoolgirls who were kidnapped and forced to commit terrorism. As well, the constant reference of female actors in news broadcasts depicts them in a negative light, instead of emphasizing their idealistic qualities of innocence, peace or beauty. Ottoh-Agede concluded that no matter how the media repeats on the same note, female suicide bombers must not necessarily be considered as terrorists, misfits, or deviant. He pointed out that media discrimination may unwillingly make them more useful to terrorist groups because these women are used strategically against the society, which they are supposed to be taking care of.

Conversely, Zoe (2018) discovered that the participation of women in terrorism is not a new development. She has tracked the history of female involvement back to the 1800s and has given many examples of women taking part in terrorist actions in history and has made an argument that the involvement of women in such acts is not new, as seen by society and academia. According to Zoe, women have been successful not only in launching attacks but also in enlisting others to become terrorists. Boom (2011) states that girls and women make perfect covers to terrorist activities. Dionne (2016) further noted that women have the ability to smuggle

explosives in the religious clothes when going through the security checkpoints manned by men and are therefore good agents.

Zoe (2018) also elaborated that women are at times used to carry out more inhuman tasks such as giving birth and raising the future of warriors. In a study by the London-based Counter-Extremism think tank published in 2016, more than 31,000 expectant mothers in the so-called Islamic State were being utilized in the production of future fighters (Cowburn, 2016).

Archibong (2020) examined the role of women in the insurgency of Boko Haram, examining their use as perpetrators or victims. He arrived at a conclusion that women are mostly victims, and it is not common that they voluntarily engage in attacks. Archibong emphasized that displaced women have to deal with sexual harassment by Boko Haram militants, and only a minor part of them willingly participate in suicide operations. He warned against the blanket generalization of female participation as a sign of general culpable behavior. Although there are women who have been involved in suicide attacks, they are only a minority. According to BBC, Boko Haram has a wing that is female and the members of this wing have been reported to indoctrinate and recruit other women in their families to join them in suicide missions.

Women and motivation for terrorism

There is no doubt that many women terrorists were abducted and recruited into the insurgency and violence campaign of the fundamentalists to attain their goal. In Nigeria, Boko Haram mostly abducts women in their communities for recruitment for indoctrination and deployment for suicide missions logistic support and for sexual gratification. Osasona2023 said that women in the region are the most affected by banditry because of the rampant sexual violence bandits use against rural communities. He added that bandits use sexual violence as a weapon of coercion. Bandits in one community in Zamfara randomly raped women as a penalty for failing to pay the group's levy. But some women were attracted by the belief in their religious principles and values and join the terror group to achieve martyrdom. For example, it is believed that any suicidal act is an act that guarantees a place in paradise (Bigio & Volgelstein, 2019). Gonzalez-Perez, (2011) affirms that many suicide bombers believe in the promise of reward in the afterlife and therefore get motivated to commit suicide attack on any one who seems to be acting against the principles stated in their holy book. Peer pressure is believed to be a factor in female terrorism. Krieger and Meierrieks, (2011) opines that many terrorist groups have been found to be in contact with close friends and family members who were easily recruited into the terror group.

In addition, Joseph et al. (2025) observed that the participation of women in the Boko Haram insurgency and banditry in northern Nigeria places the women in a negative position as both victims and perpetrators. Their research showed that, although most women and girls have been

killed, abducted, sexually exploited and otherwise treated inhumanely, other women have been put into operational positions, such as recruiting, logistics, intelligence, and fighting. The reasons, which motivate women, are diverse, and include ideological, economic, and social ones. This subtle acknowledgement of the role of women in Boko Haram and in northern banditry subverts the usual victimhood narrative and emphasizes the importance of a more detailed appreciation of the multiple facets of women in conflict processes and their role and influence.

The role of women in terrorist organization

The role of women extremists in the violence in the society cannot be underestimated. History has shown that women have joined terrorist groups and participate in various suicide bombing of innocent people. They are fighters, providers of logistical support such as finance, arms and ammunition, food and breeding of terrorists. They can be found in various terrorist active countries like Algeria Columbia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria and so on. It was reported that women make up about 40% of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) in their uprising against the government (Bigio & Volgelstein, 2019). Women in Sri Lanka and Algeria were engaged in various violent activities in 1990s and 1950s respectively bombing and attacking soft targets. They are actively engaged in suicide attacks destroying villages and displacing many. Children were made orphans with many innocent women becoming widows and interned in internally displaced camps in the country. These women can also be seen in the recruitment process with the help of social media that can reach a large number of potential female terrorist.

Print Media

Newspapers are a written form of discourse. They have news, articles and other information. They are the most common and accessible print mass media. Newspapers are published periodically and cover current issues of the public. Different newspapers express opinions or provide perspectives in different styles and formats (Henry & Tator, 2002).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views human beings as political in nature, and the politicality in humans is manifested in the selection, utilization and application of language. Hence, one needs to scrutinize the ideological or political meaning of his or her words critically. CDA is a result of works by scholars like Norman Fairclough, Gunter Kress, Roger Fowler, Teun Van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, Sara Mills, and Michael Toolan, among others. It is aimed at moving beyond texts to find concealed meanings, messages, and interpretations the social or political ones and to evaluate their effects on readers (Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2010).

CDA a discourse analysis, which examines the manner in which power, dominance, and social inequality is created, reproduced, and challenged using written and spoken language in the social

and political realms. The point of critical discourse analysts is to explicitly expose, comprehend, and challenge social inequality. They should also be aware of their positioning in the society. Van Dijk (1993) defines CDA as a subdivision of Critical Linguistics, which is different than traditional discourse analysis, and which addresses how language is used to reproduce social and political imbalances, injustices, and power relations. CDA studies the way language manifests the differences in social classes and can be used as an instrument to sustain hierarchical relationships.

CDA is known as an interdisciplinary research movement that has problem-oriented focus, which has various approaches each having its own theoretical frameworks, research methods, and objectives. The common thread is the semiotic aspect of power, inequality, exploitation, and change in society, be it political, economic, or cultural. CDA approaches discourse as a social practice, and this is a dialectical process between a discursive event and the institutions, social structures and contextual conditions around (Fairclough et al. 1997). In this work the Fairclough Dialectical-Relational Approach is used.

The approach by Norman Fairclough is based on two premises: (i) interdisciplinary commitment and (ii) critical commitment. The interdisciplinary dedication places CDA as a resource of exploring changing discursive practices, which contributes to general social science studies of current social and cultural transformation, which is usually associated with a shift in/out of modernity. Critical commitment is interested in the linguistic comprehension of the way in which social formations limit the lives of people, which points out the contingency of practices and possibility of change. According to Fairclough, there are three dimensions of discourse which reflect levels of analysis: text, discourse practices in production, distribution, and reception, and the larger cultural practices in which the text is embedded (Fairclough, 1996, cited in Chiluba, 2011).

According to Fairclough (1996), CDA needs to study the relationship of the text and processes as well as social context. The first dimension, text, spoken or written, involves descriptive study of the formal linguistic properties, such as vocabulary, grammar, and text structures. The second dimension, analysis of discourse practices, deals with the production, distribution, and reception, and it gives an idea of the motivations of linguistic choices. According to Fairclough (1989), textual features can only have social meaning when they are incorporated into social interaction (Lagonisko, 2005). Discourse is the third dimension, which considers discourse as a social practice, integrating both the situational and intertextual context, social and cultural practice, which influence text and discourse.

Fairclough (1996) provides three levels of CDA: the context of production, discourse practice (the way the text is read and understood), and the text level itself. In CDA, ideology plays a key

role where it influences the process of framing and legitimizing language in communication (Ghaderinezhad, 2015). According to Simpson (1993:5), ideology refers to common assumptions and beliefs and value systems of social groups. Dijk (2006:2) concurs with this claim saying that ideologies are not personal but collective, based on common social standards and upheld by social groups.

METHODOLOGY

This study used Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse the representation of women in terrorism. The study uses 25 articles from seven Nigerian newspapers. The online version of the newspapers is used for this study because it is accessible. The content of the online and the print version of the newspapers are the same. The newspapers used for this study are: *The Nation, The Guardian, This Day, Daily Trust, Vanguard, Premium Times and The Punch*. They are purposively chosen due to time constraint. But they are the most read newspapers in the country and they represent the different political regions.

Thematic Data Analysis

The print media portray women in banditry and terrorism in different ways. This paper has divided the data into the following sections and grouped the data accordingly:

1. Female bombers as others/deviants
2. Female bombers as active participants and not as victims

Female Terrorist as Others/ Deviants

Media are a product of social and historical forces that influence political environment (Ahmad & Avoine, 2016). Ottoh Agede, (2020) notes that West African societies are predominantly patriarchy and warfare is a masculine activity. Women involvement in warfare and violence is seen as unnatural. This has led to many media blurring out women roles in terrorism, they will rather see them as abnormal. This is because the society does not agree or see women with violent acts. Some acts are seen as masculine and when women identify with such acts they are not accepted. We shall be referring to extracts 1-8 for this section.

Extract 1; Two Female Bombers die in Borno Military Market Blast:
The Guardian, June 22, 2018.

Extract 2; 2 Female Bombers, 4 others killed in Kano Market Blast.
Times Premium December 10, 2014

Extract 3; How female suicide bombers killed 18 in Abuja:
Vanguard Oct. 3, 2015.

Extract 4; Soldiers kill two female suicide bombers, arrest another

Punch Feb, 2020

Extract 5: Suicide bomber hits Potiskum market, kills 5, injures 46.

Premium Times Jan 10, 2018

Extract 6: 7-yr-old female suicide bomber kills 5, injures 19 in Yobe

Vanguard Feb. 23, 2015

Extract 7: Female suicide bombers blew herself.

The Nation . Nov 17, 2014.

Extract 8: Female suicide bomber kills 13 in Damaturu

Daily Trust; Feb.4; 2015

In the extracts above the media outlets clearly indicate in the headlines that the suicide bombers are female. This is to make sure that this is not the usual case where the bombers are males. Unless they explicitly state that they are female, people will assume that they are males. So, they need to specify their gender. But when it comes to reporting male terrorists, their gender is not mentioned. They are referred to as bandits or terrorists. This is shown in the extracts below:

Extract 9:

Suicide bomber hits Potiskum market, kills 5, injures 46 (headline)

Suicide Bomber Strikes Potiskum Market (sub-headline)

This Day Feb 23, 2015

Extract10

Troops nab terrorist disguised as woman

(*This Day*, Tuesday, 24 February, 2015)

Extract 11; Terrorists abducts over 53 villagers, kill five

Punch, March 9, 2023

Extract 12 ; Troops intercept terrorist, kill five

Punch July 23 2023

Extract13; Terrorists kill 18, injure30 in Zamfara,

The Guardian May 16, 2023

Extract 14; Terrorists allegedly kidnap over 80 youths in Zanfara

The Guardian April 8, 2023

Extract 15; Terrorists invade Kaduna Community, kill Pastors son, kidnap wife, three others

The Guardian March 11, 2023

Extract16; Again, terrorists kill eight, injure others in Kaduna

The Guardian April 13, 2023

In extracts 9-16, the news papers mention terrorists without mentioning their gender and they assumed that readers will know that they are normal terrorists because they are men but when they are women as in extracts 1-8. They are referred to as female so that readers can see them as

deviant or abnormal in male dominated acts. From the above analysis it is clear that women are seen as deviant or abnormal when they do terrorist acts which are assumed to be heroic acts of men. The portrayal is to re-classify women who are naturally perceived as gentle, kind and humane as the opposite. By highlighting their gender, the media may be contributing to stereotypes and the notion that women are not only violent but also engage in terrorism. This could add to the discourse that sees women as victims or passive participants in conflict. This is ironical to the core of feminism that women should not be associated with as inferior beings, that women are equal to the task of doing what men can do. Can it then be read that women are equal to the task of being violent like men? This interpretation of the headline presents an ideology that is ironical to feminism. It is a negative representation of feminism.

Bombers as active participants and not as victims:

The portrayal of women and girls in most of the headlines portray them as active participants in terrorism and banditry. The following extracts 1-9 are examples of how women are viewed as active participants and not as victims of terrorism and banditry. From the Literature review in this paper, many authors thought that women are victims of terrorism. According to the analysis of Archibong (2020) Women are forced into terrorism and as such are victims. For example, Chibok. Most of the girls were made to carry explosives and blow themselves up with others. Some of them were indoctrinated to believe that they were doing the work of God by killing other people while some of them were virtually minors and could not comprehend what they were doing. For instance, in

Extract 6: - A seven-year-old girl, yesterday, killed herself and five others in a suicide bombing in Potiskum, Yobe State

We see a 7-year-old killing others. This is one of many underage girls who were abducted and forced to carry bomb without knowing what they were doing. The phrase "female suicide bomber" emphasises the gender of the perpetrator, which reinforces gender stereotypes and biases. It implies that women's participation in violence is rare, promoting a certain narrative. The emphasis on the suicide bomber "blowing herself" highlights the individual's agency in the act, while ignoring other contextual issues such as political, social or the effects of war on the individual. This approach contributes to a simplistic view of the problem of suicide bombing.

Lexicalization / Foregrounding

Lexicalization is the use of words that convey meanings. Many contemporary approaches to the study of ideology in discourse and social representations equate it with language use so as to explain how ideologies are communicated and reproduced in society. For example, concealment, legitimation, manipulation and other related concepts that are considered the main function of ideologies in society are achieved through discursive social practice. (VanDijk 1998). One of the

ways of presenting ideology is the writers' choice of words from a large vocabulary to construct and describe certain individuals as positive or negative agents.

The journalists in the newspapers select words from a range of words to describe and portray women as terrorists rather than victims. They were often seen as suicide bombers, terrorists, attackers etc. The newspapers also chose words that depict their actions as inhumane by using words that reflect their horrific acts. These include; exploded, killed, ripping off, causalities, deafening voices, evacuate, injured, explosion, blast etc. In most of the news, the actions of the bombers were portrayed using the words above and showing the deadly scenes as in some of the extracts below:

Extract 17

On Wednesday, the police have said that two suicide bombers and four others have been killed in a bombing of a textile market at Kano. The assault comes less than two weeks following a row of explosions at the Kano Central Mosque which claimed the lives of more than 100 individuals and injured hundreds.

Extract 18

On December 12, 2012, an explosion had occurred at the same market, injuring three people - Premium Times October 12,2014

Extract 19

.... a suspected female terrorist who had an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) concealed in her long veil, but who nonetheless went to the motor park yesterday in Yobe State, caused the deaths of 16 others. This attack was only 48 hours after a female suicide bomber blew herself up by her Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in her veil and killed herself and five others in the same state in the Potiskum Global System of Mobil Communication (GSM) market.

Extract 20

The Guardian, Wednesday, February 25, (2015).
Two suicide bombers yesterday hit the gates of the Borno State General Hospital, Molai, Maiduguri, killing themselves and injuring two people (*Daily Trust*; February 16, 2015)

Extract 21

Azare, Bauchi State's second largest town, was bombed again yesterday by a woman suspected to be Boko Haram agent. Sources said no fewer than 30 people were killed in the explosion which took place at about 5:20pm at Kasuwar Jagwal, a popular area in the town.... The female suicide bomber blew herself, witness said... (The Nation, November 17, 2014).

The use of strong lexical items such as killed, hit, bomb etc emphasises the violence of the "female bombers". The headline articles draw attention to their acts rather than the victims' suffering. It is important to examine how media accounts construct certain people or groups as perpetrators, while ignoring their victimhood as well. The headline's use of attention-seeking words, such as "bombers" and "killed" is sensationalist. The media has a significant influence on public perceptions and interpretations. It is important to consider whether the language is used to inform, frighten or to promote a particular agenda, and how it might influence public opinion. Media lexical choice is important to the purpose of the media.

The use of Active and Passive constructions

The use of active and passive sentences prevents the reporting of the events in an objective manner because "such choices, which the language system both enables and forces us to make in every utterance, are precisely the points at which the operation of ideology can and does occur". Sibat Sogul (2018). In most of the articles, the authors use the use of active sentences to report the actions of the female bombers. For instance in the following quotations:

Extract 22

Female suicide bombers blew herself - The Nation Nov 17 2015
Woman suicide bomber kills 30 in Bauchi - Daily Sun July 2 2015

Extract 23

Female suicide bomber kills 13in Damaturu - Daily Trust 2015 Feb.16

The writers want the society to view female bombers as an exception to the societal view of women. The verbs blew, kill, injures in the newspapers indicate the women's intention. The authors want the society to see women as deliberate terrorists rather than the society's view of women as gentle, kind and weak. The use of these verbs make women terrorists as outcast from the normal women of the society, thus, they are no longer seen as victims of terrorism but as terrorists. It is important to note that when describing male terrorists same verbs are used but their gender is not mentioned in extracts 11-16 verbs such as kills, abducts, kidnap were used to describe the terrorists but their gender is not mentioned. This shows the patriarchal nature of the society which considers certain things as normal for men and not for women.

Authority/Evidentially/Examples

In the depiction of women in terrorism, the authors cited various authorities to support their argument of women's involvement in terrorism. There are instances of senior police officers and army officers who described or backed up the involvement of women who are active terrorists. For instance, in extract 23- 25, various authorities were quoted.

Extract 23

The Borno State Police Commissioner, Damian Chukwu, reported yesterday that two female suicide bombers were killed while trying to infiltrate the 333 Artillery Military Mammy Market on Wednesday night in Maiduguri. - (Guardian, June 2018)

Extract 24

Two suspected female suicide bombers were neutralized on Tuesday morning by soldiers in Gamboru-Ngala village, Borno State, averting a potential tragedy. The women had explosives strapped to their bodies and were attempting to infiltrate the village, the army confirmed.

A third teenage girl, who appears to have abandoned the suicide mission, was later apprehended after she removed and discarded her bomb belt.

The arrested teenager informed the army that she and the two deceased had departed on their mission at 3:30 a.m., following instructions from their Boko Haram commanders to carry out an attack in Gamboru village.

Extract 25

The Kano Police Commissioner, Aderale Shinaba, told reporters at the blast site that two female suicide bombers had entered the market posing as textile buyers. He stated that upon reaching the market, the women went behind Access Bank and requested water to use one of the market latrines. When they were denied, Mr. Shinaba said the two women engaged in a dispute with vendors, which drew a crowd before they detonated their explosives. - This DayJan.,10 2018

The police spokesman added that the explosion caused panic, with people running in all directions to seek safety. - Premium Times December,12 2014

Citing such authority with their names also helps to further reinforce the argument that women are not only victims of terrorism but also perpetrators. But in all the cases mentioned in all the articles used in this paper, there is not a single mention of the names of the suspected women terrorists that were either killed or arrested by the police or the army. This makes it seem like their womanhood is more relevant than their names.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the female terrorist in Nigeria has become a sensation due to the society's view of women. Women are seen as the weaker sex and mothers. The society believes that women are not violent. So, the portrayal of women as terrorists will most likely shock and surprise the readers. The media's attempt to include female bombers, female terrorists is an attempt to grab the attention of the readers and encourage them to purchase the newspaper. This is because negative headlines are more likely to be read than the positive ones. Also, the fact that women are involved in terrorism is also unheard of and will definitely capture the attention of the readers

than if the headline read terrorists or bombers. The inclusion of female or women in headlines also help to demonise such women terrorists. This is because women are not seen as violent. Sadly, this act may be a means of helping terrorists to play on their wickedness. Because terrorism is not seen as women's act. Such women terrorists are not considered as perpetrators but as outsiders. This will not help the society to view such women in a rational way. We have come to a world where women do things that were once considered as men things. Women are involved in all professions. So why is it different in terrorism? One can only assume that it is because of our patriarchal society where women are stereotyped into certain roles as women. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that in our analysis, most of the women terrorists are represented by newspapers as perpetrators. Some authors have argued that most of the women terrorists were abducted and brainwashed or coerced to perpetrate the terrorism. As we have seen in the analysis above most of the women who were labelled terrorists in most of the media did not voluntarily commit the terrorist acts. For instance, the Dapchi and Chibok girls who were abducted and used as terrorists in the northern part of Nigeria. Most of the women are not willing participants, they were forced, blackmailed or indoctrinated.

Recommendations.

From the findings of this study that women can perform any act including violent ones, it is recommended that women should be treated as human regardless of her roles. She can do anything that a man can do. The media should not mention the gender of women terrorists or bombers. They should be treated like their male counterpart. Secondly, it should not be assumed that all women terrorists are active terrorists and some are not. So, it will not be right to treat them all equally. Thirdly, when women are labelled as terrorists, they will be viewed as violent rather than just being gentle and caring people that they have been known for.

REFERENCES

- Agara, T., & Subair, A. (2024). Women's involvement in terrorism: A critical look at their roles in selected terrorist organisations. *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 14(7). Retrieved from: <https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/AJSBS/article/view/2898>
- Akogwu, C. J., Ezeh, K. D., Sunday, A., Muoneke, C. V., & Onwuasoigwe, C. A. (2025). Victims or vanguards? Exploring the females' role in Boko Haram insurgency and banditry in Northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*. Retrieved from: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90500058>
- Araoye, O. E. (2019). The editorial analysis of recurrent themes in the report on radical movement in Nigeria. *International Journal of English & Communication Studies*, 5(6), 26-39.

- Archibong, J. E. (2022). Female suicide bombers in Boko Haram insurgency: Victims or perpetrators? *International Journal of World Policy and Development Studies*, 6(2), 11-18.
- Bawa, A. B. (2017). Women as victims of insurgency: A study of female suicide bombers in Nigeria. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6(2), 81-90. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.18533/journal.v6i2.1096>
- BBC. (2014). *Boko Haram crisis: Nigeria arrests female recruiters*. Retrieved from: <https://www.com/news/world/africa>
- Bigio, J., & Vogelstein, R. (2019). *Women and terrorism: Hidden threats, forgotten partners*. Council on Foreign Relations.
- Bloom, M., & Hilary, M. (2016). Women as symbols and swords in Boko Haram. *Terror Prism*, 6(1), 105-121.
- Dami, C. D. (2011). Impact of terrorism, banditry and kidnapping on human security in Nigeria. *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(8), 299-305.
- De Graaf, B. (2012). Perspective on terrorism. *Perspective on Terrorism*, 6(2). Routledge.
- Dunamis, O. (2021). *Katsina police arrest three women concealing petrol in bags for bandits*. Retrieved from: www.dailypost.ng.com
- Ebim, M. A. (2017). *A critical discourse analysis of print media depictions of insurgent activities in Nigeria* [PhD thesis, University of Lagos].
- Gonzalez-Perez, M. (2011). The false Islamization of female suicide bombers. *Gender Issues*, 28(1-2). Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-011-9097-0>
- Krieger, T., & Meierrieks, D. (2011). What causes terrorism? *Public Choice*, 3-27.
- Lee, W. (2016). *Experts: Number of women in global terrorism rising*. VOA News. Retrieved from: <https://www.voanews.com/usa/>
- Maishanu, A. A. (2021). *Police arrest women allegedly selling fuel to bandits in Katsina*. Premium Times. Retrieved from: www.premiumtimes.ng.com
- Markovic, V. (2019). Suicide squad: Boko Haram's use of the female suicide bomber. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 29(4-5), 283-302.
- McCormick, C. (2022). *Media representation of suicide bombers: The role of media in the social construction of female suicide bombers* [Research paper, George Mason University].
- Nigeria Watch. (2011). *Herders against farmers: Nigeria's expanding deadly conflict*. Retrieved from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/252-herders-against-farmers-nigerias-expanding-deadly-conflict>
- Olaniyan, A. (2017). Feminism of terror: Boko Haram and female suicide bombers in Nigeria. In *IAFOR*.
- Osasona, T. (2023). The question of definition: Armed banditry in Nigeria's North-West in the context of international humanitarian law. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 105(923), 735-749. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383122000455>

- Ottoh-Agede, B. S. (2020). A feminist-stylistic perspective of selected Nigerian newspaper reports on Boko Haram terrorist activities. *CAERT*, 11(1), 1-22. Retrieved from: <https://www.caert.org.dz>
- Oyawale, A. (2025). The state, Boko Haram and vernacular security: Gendering terrorism and counter-terrorism in Nigeria. *Security Dialogue*, 56(5). Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106251351869>
- Oyinloye, O. B. (2020). The Nigerian army and rural banditry: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy*, 4(11), 500-515.
- Pearson, E. G. (2018). *Boko Haram beyond the headlines: Analyses of Africa's enduring insurgency*.
- Reitano, T. C., & Adal, L. (2020). *Nexus between organized crime and terrorism*. Retrieved from: www.unodc.org
- Shalangwa, M. W. (2013). *The nature and consequences of armed banditry in border communities of Adamawa State, Nigeria* [Master's thesis, Ahmadu Bello University].
- Terroven, K. (2016). *Representing terrorist violence: Feminist interrogation of female agency in the gendered discourse of the public* [Master's thesis, Universiteit Utrecht].
- Warto, P. A. (1994). The social banditry in the rural areas of Rembang by the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. *International Journal for History Studies*, 3(1).
- Zedalis, D. (2004). *Female suicide bombers*. Carlisle Papers in Security Strategy.
- Zenn, J., & Pearson, E. (2014). Women, gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram. *Journal of Terrorism Research*, 5(1), 46-57.
- Ziyanda, S. (2019). *Terrorism in state politics*. E-International Relations, 1-9. Retrieved from: www.e-ir-info/2019/terrorism-as-ontroversy-the-shifting-definition-of-terrorism-in-state-politics