



International Political Rhetoric and Domestic Conflict Narratives: A Qualitative Analysis of Trump's 'Christian Genocide' Speech and Nigerian Media Responses

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Abstract

Religious violence in Nigeria attracts significant international attention, particularly when external actors frame domestic conflicts in moralized or geopolitical terms. Donald Trump's 2025 declaration of a "Christian genocide" in Nigeria intensified global scrutiny and reshaped discourse surrounding local insecurity. Although prior studies examine religion, political rhetoric, and media framing in Nigeria, none have analysed these perspectives through integrated lenses of securitization, globalization, and postcolonial contestation. This study addresses this gap by critically assessing how Nigerian newspapers framed Trump's claims, examining how international media interpreted, reproduced, or contested these assertions, and analysing competing narratives around violence, identity, and religion. An explorative qualitative design was employed, drawing on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and reputable reports, analysed thematically. Securitization theory guided the analysis, illuminating how external rhetoric constructs perceived threats. Key findings reveal that Trump's speech elevated localized violence into a global moral crisis, while Nigerian media actively negotiated, resisted, or reframed these narratives in line with domestic political, social, and religious contexts. The study recommends evidence-based, context-sensitive reporting and improved international engagement strategies. Consequently, this study contributes to conflict studies, international relations, media studies, African studies, and contemporary historical studies. Policy implications include strengthening media regulation, promoting conflict-sensitive journalism, and developing strategies to manage the influence of external political rhetoric. Future research should explore how digital media and transnational networks shape the circulation and impact of international political narratives on African conflict discourses.

Keywords: *Christian Genocide; Conflict; Media-Framing; Nigeria; Political Rhetoric*

1. Introduction

In November 2025, U.S. President Donald Trump reignited global attention on religious violence in Nigeria when he publicly warned of severe consequences if attacks on Christians continued, describing the violence as a form of “genocide” (Al Jazeera, 2025; Reuters, 2025). His statements quickly circulated across international and Nigerian media, sparking debate over the accuracy of the genocide claim and the diplomatic implications of such rhetoric. Nigerian newspapers, including *Premium Times* (2025) and *The Guardian Nigeria* (2025), highlighted both government rejection of the claim and support from Christian advocacy groups such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), while international outlets contextualized the statements within Nigeria’s complex history of religious and communal conflicts (BBC, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2025).

Historically, violence involving religious communities in Nigeria has been shaped by political, economic, and social dynamics. Conflicts between farmers and herders in states such as Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna often arise from competition over land and resources rather than purely religious motivations (International Crisis Group, 2018; Kukah, 2020). Boko Haram’s insurgency has further contributed to perceptions of religiously targeted violence, although these conflicts also reflect broader governance and security challenges (Nyelade, 2025). By framing ongoing violence as a “Christian genocide,” Trump simplified a complex conflict into a moralized, international security issue, making it necessary to examine how Nigerian media mediated and contested this framing.

Nigerian media responses to Trump’s statements were diverse. *The Guardian Nigeria* (2025) and CAN supported the framing as a call for government action, whereas *Vanguard* (2025) and *Punch* (2025) highlighted the diplomatic risks and oversimplification, noting that violence affects both Christians and Muslims. Official statements from the Presidency, reported in *Premium Times* (2025) and Channels TV (2025), framed the killings as linked to complex security challenges and criminal activity rather than targeted religious extermination. These divergent responses illustrate the tension between international rhetoric and domestic interpretations, highlighting the role of media in mediating external narratives.

Securitisation Theory (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998) provides a robust framework for understanding this dynamic. Trump’s rhetoric can be seen as a securitising move, elevating the plight of Nigerian Christians into an international security concern. Nigerian media responses reflect attempts to negotiate, resist, or contextualize this securitisation, asserting interpretive authority over local conflict narratives. Despite extensive research on Nigerian conflicts, media framing, and U.S.–Nigeria relations, few studies systematically analyze how newspapers responded to this specific international intervention. This study addresses that gap by investigating: (1) How Nigerian newspapers framed Trump’s statements on Christian killings; (2) How international media interpreted or contested these claims; and (3) What competing narratives about violence, religion, and identity emerged. The objectives are to examine media framing patterns, analyze interactions between external rhetoric and local discourse, and assess implications for international perceptions of Nigerian conflicts.

2. Methodology

This study employs an exploratory qualitative research design to examine how international political rhetoric shapes domestic conflict narratives. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), exploratory qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to gain a deep understanding of social phenomena, identify patterns, and generate insights in complex contexts. This approach allows the researcher to

investigate perceptions, media interpretations, and discourse practices without imposing predetermined assumptions. Exploratory qualitative research is widely recommended for studies where empirical evidence is limited and detailed contextual understanding is required (Stebbins, 2001).

Data for the study consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, reports, domestic and international media coverage, newspapers, and relevant books. These sources were selected to ensure authenticity, reliability, and comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon under investigation. All collected data were subjected to **rigorous** thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006), which was chosen for its systematic, transparent, and flexible approach to identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This method ensures that findings are grounded in evidence, enhancing the credibility, trustworthiness, and replicability of the study.

Securitization Theory was adopted solely to aid the interpretation and contextualization of findings. By employing an exploratory qualitative design and rigorous thematic analysis, this study ensures methodological robustness while capturing the complexity of how foreign political rhetoric is received, contested, and reframed by domestic audiences, media outlets, and other stakeholders.

3. Related Theoretical Underpinning

This study adopted Securitization Theory to aid the analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. Developed by Ole Wæver, Barry Buzan and Jaap de Wilde within the Copenhagen School, the theory argues that security is not an objective fact but a discursive construction produced through authoritative speech acts (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde, 1998). At its core is the assumption that security is discourse-based rather than objective, meaning an issue becomes a security threat only when framed as existential and accepted by a relevant audience (Stritzel, 2007). The theory further requires a securitizing actor who presents the threat, usually a political leader or institution that performs the speech act elevating an issue beyond ordinary politics (Wæver, 1995). Securitization also depends on constructing an existential threat to a referent object, such as a religious community or national identity depicted as facing possible annihilation (Buzan et al., 1998). Crucially, the process succeeds only through acceptance by a relevant audience, since audiences such as media, publics, elites ultimately decide whether a threat framing is legitimate (Balzacq, 2011). Once accepted, securitization enables extraordinary measures beyond normal political procedures, including emergency laws, intensified policing or even foreign intervention (McDonald, 2008). Finally, the theory assumes security extends beyond traditional military threats, making it applicable to identity, religion, migration and societal issues (Floyd, 2019).

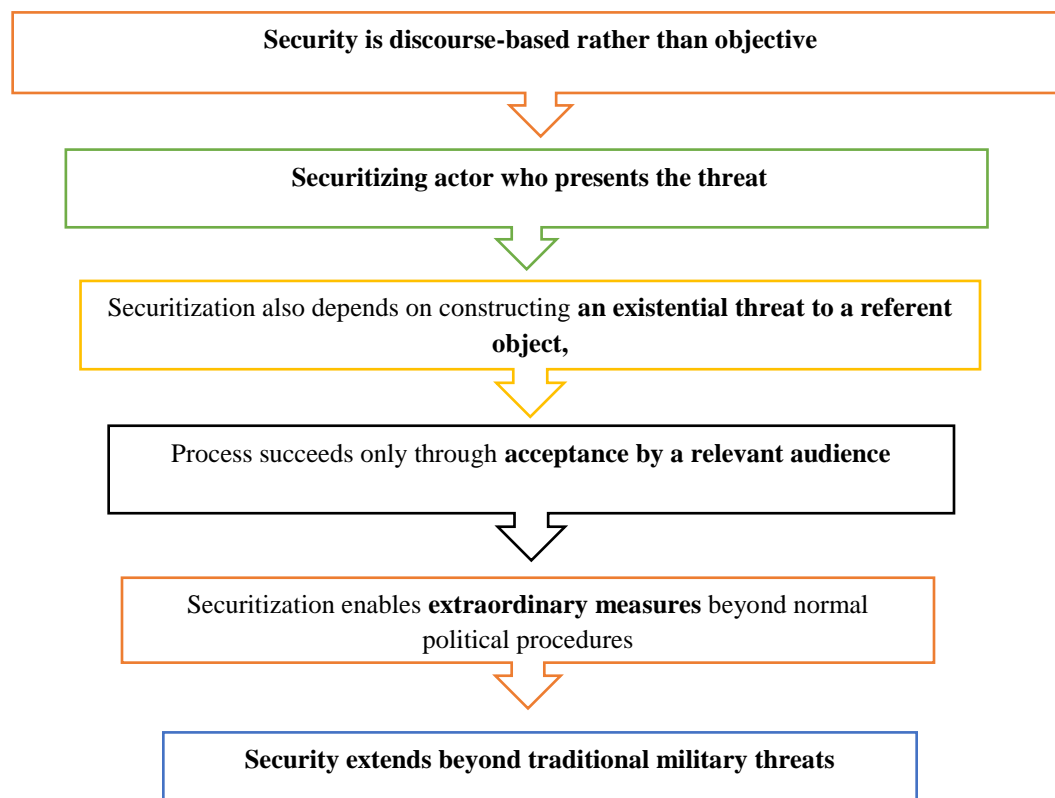
These assumptions directly align with contexts where external political rhetoric attempts to redefine domestic conflicts. When a foreign leader frames violence in Nigeria as “Christian genocide,” the speech act simultaneously constructs a discourse-based threat, positions the foreign leader as the securitizing actor, identifies Christians as the referent object, seeks audience acceptance through Nigerian and global media, and implies extraordinary responses, thereby activating all core assumptions of securitization. Nigerian newspapers, therefore, operate as the critical audience whose reception determines whether the securitization attempt succeeds or fails.

Recent studies demonstrate the relevance of this theoretical approach. Karyotis et al., (2025).) show how European elites securitized migration by framing it as a civilizational threat, legitimising restrictive border regimes. Učakar, (2025) Similarly found that identity and religious dimensions in migration discourse were securitized, legitimizing restrictive policies.

However, Murray, (2024) warns that securitization risks overextension, as scholars may classify too many issues as existential threats without reflecting local perceptions. Another persistent gap concerns audience acceptance: securitizing moves may be resisted or reframed, especially in pluralistic media environments.

These gaps enhance the value of applying Securitization Theory to Nigeria's case. Foreign rhetoric risks stretching what Nigeria considers a security issue, while Nigerian media may reinterpret or reject such framings. Analysing these interactions provides scientific insight into how international discourse shapes or fails to shape domestic security narratives. As explained above, the key assumptions underpinning the theory are illustrated in the diagram below.

Diagram 1.1 key Assumption Underpinning Securitization Theory



Source: Data compiled and analyzed by the authors (2025).

4. Literature Review

4.1 International Political Rhetoric and the Construction of Global Conflict Narratives

Political rhetoric by powerful international actors' functions as a vital mechanism for shaping global perceptions and framing conflicts particularly in the Global South, where external statements can carry strong symbolic and political weight. In late 2025, Donald J. Trump publicly characterized the wave of killings of Christians in Nigeria as a "Christian genocide," redesignating Nigeria a "Country of Particular Concern (CPC)" under U.S. religious-freedom policy and warned of possible U.S. military intervention. This episode exemplifies how international rhetoric can act as a discursive intervention,

capable of reordering global attention, influencing diplomatic posture, and reshaping media narratives both domestically and internationally (Daily Post, 2025; Vultee 2023). By using stark, moralizing language, such speeches do not simply report a problem instead they perform political action, reframing complex local insecurity as a moral and religious crisis with global import.

In his statement, Trump declared: *“They’re killing people by the thousands. It’s a genocide... The government’s done nothing... They are killing Christians at will.”* (TheCable, 2025). This kind of moral-crisis framing and securitizing rhetoric uses emotionally charged metaphor and existential vocabulary, transforming localized violence into a global moral emergency. According to framing and securitization theory, such language choices are deliberate: they aim to provoke international outrage, justify foreign intervention or pressure, and mobilize support from diaspora or global Christian communities. Recent theoretical work on media framing and securitization emphasizes how media and political elites manipulate security discourse to influence public perception and justify extraordinary measures (Vultee 2023). These strategies often rely on identity-based narratives, here religious identity, which simplify complex social and political dynamics into binary moral conflicts such as victims vs. perpetrators, good vs. evil.

However, the eventual influence of such foreign rhetoric depends heavily on how it is mediated by domestic media systems and local actors. In Nigeria, responses from newspapers, government officials, religious leaders, and civil society have been varied ranging from outright rejection to conditional acceptance by illustrating a contested discursive terrain. For instance, the Federal Government dismissed the genocide label, arguing that violence in Nigeria affects both Christians and Muslims, and stems from terrorism, banditry, and criminality rather than religious targeting (Vanguard, 2025; Premium Times, 2025; ThisDay, 2025). The Defence Chief publicly refuted systematic persecution claims, stating that the security forces were actively countering terrorist threats and that there was no evidence of religiously motivated mass killings (Vanguard, 2025). Meanwhile, critics in independent media framed the genocide narrative as a “geopolitical instrument masquerading as moral outrage,” warning of foreign interventionism under the guise of faith-based advocacy (TheCable-op-ed, 2025). At the same time, some religious-community voices example, leadership of Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) has affirmed the genocide claims and urged cooperation with international actors to address what they described as existential threats to Christians (Guardian, 2025).

This plurality of responses reflects the role of domestic media as both interpreters and gatekeepers, mediating external rhetoric and adapting it to local contexts. Studies of conflict media framing show that media outlets often reconstruct international or external frames according to national contexts, political alignment, and audience expectation (Afandi & Sholeh, 2024; Vultee 2023). In contexts like Nigeria with deep religious, ethnic, and regional fault lines may cause foreign moralistic framing may provoke nationalist counter-frames, skepticism, or defensive reactions. Indeed, the contrasting responses show that external rhetoric does not automatically dominate local narratives; rather, it is filtered, contested, and reinterpreted, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes undermining its original intent.

From a theoretical standpoint, this case illustrates the interplay between soft power, agenda-setting, and public diplomacy, mediated through rhetorical action. Trump’s speech and CPC designation function as signals not only to global human-rights communities, but also to diasporas, foreign governments, and local political actors are potentially influencing foreign aid, diplomatic pressure, or interventionist demands. Framing violence as “Christian genocide” raises moral stakes and can legitimize international involvement or monitoring. But the ultimate trajectory of these signals depends heavily on domestic reception: if local actors resist or reinterpret them, the impact may be limited or even reversed. In Nigeria’s case, government officials and critical media have pushed back, emphasizing sovereignty,

social complexity, and the risk of external meddling (ThisDay, 2025; Vanguard, 2025; TheCable-op-ed, 2025).

Finally, while theoretical frameworks on framing, securitization, and media narrative analysis (e.g., Vultee 2023; Afandi & Sholeh 2024) provide useful tools, there remain important gaps especially when applying them in Global South contexts. Much of the existing scholarship originates from Western media environments, with fewer robust empirical studies focusing on African media ecosystems, religious pluralism, and complex conflict dynamics. The situation in Nigeria, characterized by overlapping ethnic, religious, and criminal dynamics challenges simplistic binaries often produced by foreign rhetoric. Furthermore, rapidly changing media landscapes (social media, citizen journalism, misinformation) complicate reception and interpretation of foreign discourse. This study, by systematically analyzing Nigerian newspaper responses and contrasting them with international media coverage, seeks to fill this gap by offering a context-sensitive, qualitative approach to understanding how international political rhetoric interacts with domestic conflict narratives. Given the above, the following table summarizes the diverse media framing patterns in response to Trump's 2025 'Christian Genocide' speech, illustrating how domestic and international outlets interpreted and contested the claims.

Table 1: Summary of Media Framing Patterns in Reaction to Trump's 2025 "Christian Genocide" Speech

Media / Actor	Stance on Trump's Genocide Claim	Key Narrative / Frames Employed
Federal Government / Defence Forces	Rejects genocide framing	Emphasis on terrorism, banditry; stress on pluralism and national security (Vanguard, 2025; ThisDay, 2025)
Government-aligned media	Skeptical / Defensive	Denial of religious targeting; portrayal of external accusations as misinformed or politically motivated (Premium Times, 2025; Vanguard, 2025)
Independent / Critical media outlets	Critical towards external rhetoric	Warn of "geopolitical instrument disguised as moral outrage"; caution against foreign interference (TheCable-op-ed, 2025)
Religious-community voices (e.g. PFN)	Affirmative — "Christian genocide is real"	Moral-crisis framing, victimization narrative, call for external support (Guardian, 2025)
International media (selected Western outlets)	Often reproduce genocide frame / human-rights frame	Emphasis on religious persecution, human-rights violations, possibility of intervention (e.g. international press coverage)
International media (non-Western / global south)	Mixed / contextualized coverage	Focus on complexity: terrorism, banditry, socio-economic roots; caution against reductive religious framing (e.g. Al Jazeera Africa coverage) (Al Jazeera, 2025)

Source: Data compiled and analyzed by the authors (2025).

4.2 Historical Background: Religion, Conflict, and Identity in Nigeria

Understanding media reactions to Trump's speech requires situating the discourse within Nigeria's historical religious landscape, which is characterized by a longstanding north-south religious divide. Nigeria's population is roughly divided between a Muslim-majority north and a Christian-majority south, a configuration rooted in pre-colonial regional settlements but significantly shaped by colonial policies that reinforced religious and ethnic hierarchies (Falola, 1998; Kukah, 2020). The colonial administration's indirect rule strategy, which granted authority to local rulers and religious leaders, institutionalized divisions and created competition over political and economic resources along religious lines. Post-independence political arrangements, including federalism and the winner-takes-all electoral system, further exacerbated religious polarization, often intertwining faith with regional identity in ways that persist today (Suberu, 2010).

Historical episodes of religious conflict provide critical context for understanding contemporary narratives. The Maitatsine uprisings of the 1980s, in which a radical Islamic sect led violent attacks in Kano and Kaduna states, revealed the volatility of religiously mobilized dissent (Last, 1985). Similarly, inter-communal clashes in Plateau State in the 2000s highlighted how land disputes and local governance issues could become entangled with religious identities, creating enduring cycles of mistrust and violence (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2018). Boko Haram's insurgency, beginning in 2009, introduced a transnational dimension to religious violence, combining militant Islamism with broader socio-political grievances in the north (Onuoha, 2014). These conflicts, though often rooted in political marginalization, poverty, and governance failures, have been widely interpreted through a religious lens, reinforcing stereotypes about Nigeria as a religiously volatile state.

The recent escalation of farmer-herder violence illustrates the continued intersection of religion, ethnicity, and economic struggle. This conflict, largely occurring in central Nigeria, has been driven by competition over land, climate change-induced environmental pressures, and migration patterns, yet it is frequently framed in both domestic and international discourse as religious persecution (International Crisis Group, 2021). Such framing simplifies multidimensional socio-economic conflicts into binary narratives of Muslims versus Christians. Scholars argue that these narratives risk obscuring the structural drivers of violence, misrepresenting the causes, and potentially legitimizing external interventions that are detached from local realities (Onapajo, 2012; Okereke, 2023).

The simplification of historical conflicts in international discourse parallels how Trump's 2025 "Christian genocide" claim reduces Nigeria's multifaceted crises to a single religious dimension. By emphasizing victimization of Christians while largely ignoring socio-economic, ethnic, and environmental determinants, the statement reflects a broader pattern of external misinterpretation (Adebanjo & Ngugi, 2025). International media often reproduce similar simplifications, portraying Nigeria's conflicts as primarily religious while downplaying local complexities. Such representations can reinforce stereotypes, shape global perceptions, and pressure Nigerian authorities to respond to externally imposed moral frames rather than to structural challenges (Vultee, 2023).

Domestic scholarship highlights the risks of these reductive narratives. Nigerian academics emphasize that flattening complex conflicts into religious binaries can deepen societal divisions, reinforce inter-ethnic prejudices, and undermine conflict-resolution efforts (Onapajo, 2012; Kukah, 2020). Studies of media framing within Nigeria indicate that even domestic outlets may sometimes echo these binaries, especially in politically polarized contexts or when covering religiously affiliated groups, demonstrating the difficulty of maintaining nuanced coverage in highly sensitive environments (Afandi & Sholeh, 2024).

This underscores the importance of context-sensitive media analysis to understand how local audiences interpret foreign interventions and moralized claims, such as Trump's speech.

Despite extensive research on Nigeria's historical religious conflicts and contemporary socio-political dynamics, few studies systematically examine how external actors reinterpret these conflicts, particularly through high-profile statements by international leaders. There is a notable gap in understanding how these interventions interact with domestic media, civil society, and political discourse to create contested narratives around violence, identity, and religion. By examining Nigerian newspaper responses and contrasting them with international reporting on Trump's 2025 statements, this study seeks to address this gap, offering insights into the historical, religious, and socio-political foundations that shape how domestic and global audiences construct and negotiate interpretations of conflict (International Crisis Group, 2021; Onuoha, 2014; Adebajo & Ngugi, 2025).

4.3 Media Framing, Representation, and Conflict Communication

Media framing is a central mechanism through which public understanding of social, political, and conflict events is shaped. Framing theory posits that media outlets select particular aspects of reality and make them more salient, thereby influencing audience interpretation (Entman, 1993). In conflict contexts, framing determines which actors are portrayed as victims, perpetrators, or legitimate stakeholders, and which narratives gain public traction (Godefroidt, 2022). In the African context, scholars note that media do not operate in a vacuum; they negotiate between state influence, political elites, cultural narratives, and transnational pressures, creating a complex, often contested communicative environment (Nyabola, 2018). This interplay is particularly relevant for Nigeria, where newspapers play a dual role: informing the public and shaping perceptions of identity, security, and moral legitimacy.

In Nigeria, newspapers operate within a highly politicized and competitive media environment, reflecting both national and local pressures. Representations of conflict frequently navigate tensions between promoting national unity, acknowledging ethno-religious diversity, and aligning with political interests. For instance, Olabulo (2019) finds that media coverage of inter-communal and religious violence oscillates between emphasizing religious persecution, ethnic marginalization, or state governance failures. This oscillation demonstrates that framing is not merely about factual reporting but is actively involved in constructing social meaning and guiding public interpretation. The Nigerian press, therefore, functions as a mediator of contested realities, often selectively amplifying narratives depending on perceived audience expectation and political alignment.

Media framing becomes especially consequential when external actors engage in moral or political rhetoric, as seen in Trump's 2025 "Christian genocide" statement regarding Nigeria. While local newspapers maintain professional and political priorities, international claims introduce new dimensions of narrative legitimacy. External framing may pressure domestic outlets to respond, potentially reinforcing, contesting, or contextualizing foreign narratives. This process highlights the interconnectedness of global and local communication, where media act both as transmitters and interpreters of international political discourse (Vultee, 2023). It also reveals that framing is not neutral; it embodies strategic choices that reflect power, ideology, and normative assumptions.

Scholars examining African media note the dual pressures on journalistic institutions. Domestic media must simultaneously protect national interests, uphold journalistic norms, and respond to transnational actors. Nyabola (2018) emphasizes that Kenyan and Nigerian outlets often filter international narratives through a local lens, emphasizing sovereignty, socio-political complexity, or ethical considerations. Similarly, Godefroidt (2022) highlights that media coverage of conflict in West Africa is often entangled with moral evaluations, identity politics, and international expectations, meaning

that audiences receive not just information, but normative judgments about legitimacy and morality. These observations underscore the importance of critically evaluating how local news media negotiate between external pressures and domestic socio-political realities.

Empirical studies in Nigeria suggest that framing practices reflect both continuity and adaptation. Yusuf, (2025) and Ogunkunle et al., (2025) demonstrate that religious and ethnic identities remain salient in coverage of communal violence, yet outlets adjust emphasis based on political context, audience demographics, and emerging international narratives. This implies that responses to Trump's statements would likely be multifaceted: some newspapers might reproduce moral-crisis frames emphasizing Christian victimization, while others contextualize the claims within broader socio-economic, political, or security dynamics. Such nuanced framing demonstrates the critical role of media as both gatekeepers and interpreters, capable of shaping domestic perceptions while mediating global narratives.

Despite extensive research on media framing in Nigeria, there remains a significant research gap regarding reactions to international political rhetoric. Few studies have systematically examined how newspapers reconcile external moralized claims with domestic priorities, such as maintaining political legitimacy, national cohesion, or journalistic ethics. By analyzing Nigerian newspaper responses to Trump's 2025 genocide claim, this study aims to fill this gap, offering insights into the strategies employed by domestic media to negotiate competing narratives. It also contributes to a broader understanding of how international political rhetoric is received, contested, and domesticated in contexts with complex historical, religious, and political dynamics (Afandi & Sholeh, 2024; Vultee, 2023).

4.4 Globalisation of Nigerian Conflicts

The contemporary trajectory of Nigerian conflicts is increasingly shaped by globalisation, which has amplified the visibility, transnational implications, and international dimensions of domestic crises. Globalisation, defined as the intensification of transnational flows of information, capital, people, and norms, enables local conflicts to acquire international significance rapidly (Castells, 2011; Adekoya, 2023). In Nigeria, violence with local roots such as farmer–herder clashes, Boko Haram insurgency, and inter-communal disputes has been increasingly mediated through digital platforms, international news coverage, and foreign policy pronouncements, creating a feedback loop in which local events influence and are influenced by global actors. The framing of such conflicts in foreign political discourse exemplifies this phenomenon, particularly when statements by global leaders amplify specific narratives of victimhood or moral urgency.

A key feature of conflict globalisation is the external moralization of domestic crises; whereby foreign actors apply ethical or humanitarian frameworks to interpret local violence. Trump's 2025 designation of Nigeria as a "Country of Particular Concern" over alleged Christian killings exemplifies this dynamic. By labeling violence as "Christian genocide," Trump reframed a complex socio-political and ethno-economic conflict into a global moral crisis, thereby internationalising Nigeria's internal security challenges (Vultee, 2023). Such moral framing often intersects with foreign policy objectives, as international attention can influence aid allocation, diplomatic pressure, or even interventionist strategies. Comparative studies in conflict-affected regions show that international moralization can simultaneously mobilize global support and heighten local sensitivities, producing contested interpretations within domestic media and political discourse (Robinson, 2022).

The role of international media in the globalisation of Nigerian conflicts is particularly salient. Outlets such as the BBC, Al Jazeera, and CNN routinely report on Boko Haram, farmer–herder violence, and ethno-religious clashes, framing these crises through lenses of terrorism, humanitarian emergency, or religious persecution (ICG, 2021; Onuoha, 2014). While these frames draw attention to Nigerian suffering

and attract global interventionist interest, they can also oversimplify local realities. International media often foreground religious identity as a primary driver of violence, neglecting the complex interplay of economic scarcity, political marginalization, and climate-induced resource pressures. This creates a narrative tension, in which local actors contest externally imposed interpretations while domestic media navigate pressures to engage global audiences and maintain legitimacy.

Globalisation also amplifies the impact of digital and social media on conflict representation. Nigerian conflicts are increasingly reported, shared, and debated on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, facilitating real-time transnational engagement. Diaspora communities, foreign NGOs, and international policymakers consume these narratives, which can accelerate the spread of moralized interpretations or misinformation (Adebanjo & Ngugi, 2025). Studies in African digital communication highlight the capacity of online networks to reshape perceptions of local violence, allowing global audiences to participate in discourse formation, advocacy campaigns, and pressure strategies. Yet, the speed and reach of these platforms also risk amplifying selective or exaggerated frames, particularly when tied to political rhetoric from powerful international actors.

Critical scholarship warns that the globalisation of Nigerian conflicts can produce unintended consequences. By internationalizing disputes, foreign actors can inadvertently exacerbate local tensions, fuel nationalist backlashes, or legitimize partisan agendas under the guise of humanitarian concern (Suberu, 2010; Nyabola, 2018). In the case of Trump's 2025 statement, domestic responses illustrate these dynamics: Nigerian government officials and critical media outlets emphasized sovereignty, contested the genocide framing, and highlighted local socio-political complexity, thereby resisting external moralization. This interplay underscores the negotiated nature of globalisation, where local actors are not passive recipients of international narratives but actively shape, contest, and reinterpret global frames to suit domestic political and cultural contexts.

Despite extensive literature on transnational influences in conflict, there is a research gap in examining the interplay between international political rhetoric, domestic media, and the globalisation of local conflicts in Nigeria. Few studies analyze how newspapers, religious organizations, and political actors simultaneously mediate foreign moralized claims, manage public perception, and navigate domestic political realities. By systematically analyzing Nigerian newspaper responses to Trump's 2025 speech and contrasting them with international coverage, this study addresses this gap, offering insights into the mechanisms through which local conflicts become globalized, contested, and mediated in a digitally interconnected and politically complex environment (ICG, 2021; Adebanjo & Ngugi, 2025; Vultee, 2023).

4.5 African Responses to External Discourses: A Postcolonial Perspective

Postcolonial theory provides a crucial lens for understanding how African states and media respond to foreign political rhetoric, highlighting the enduring legacies of colonial hierarchies in the production of knowledge about Africa (Mbembe, 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Western narratives often depict African societies as inherently fragile, conflict-prone, or morally deficient, reinforcing the perception of dependency on external guidance or intervention. Trump's 2025 characterization of killings of Christians in Nigeria as a "Christian genocide" exemplifies this pattern, as it frames Nigeria through a moralized, externally imposed lens that overlooks the complex interplay of ethnicity, religion, politics, and economics shaping local conflicts. This framing mirrors historical tendencies in which African crises are interpreted primarily through Western moral and security discourses, often sidelining indigenous voices and epistemologies (Mudimbe, 1988; Adebanjo & Ngugi, 2025).

African responses to such external discourses are shaped by historical consciousness, concerns about sovereignty, and the desire to assert agency in international debates. Nigerian media outlets, for example, often mediate between international narratives and domestic realities, either contesting, reframing, or contextualizing foreign claims to suit national priorities (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2024). In the case of Trump's speech, Nigerian newspapers highlighted domestic security measures, emphasized multi-religious victimhood, and questioned the evidentiary basis of genocide allegations (Vanguard, 2025; ThisDay, 2025). These responses reflect an awareness of the potential reputational, diplomatic, and political consequences of externally imposed moral frames, demonstrating that African media are not passive conduits but active agents in contesting global narratives.

This discursive "push back" can be understood as a form of postcolonial resistance. Scholars argue that African media and state actors strategically reassert narrative control when confronted with external interventions, framing conflicts in ways that highlight local complexities and structural drivers rather than simplifying them into moral binaries (Adebajo, 2010; Nwankwo, 2023). For instance, Nigerian government statements during the 2025 episode emphasized that violence affects multiple religious communities, stemmed from terrorism, banditry, and criminality, and was not targeted solely at Christians (Premium Times, 2025; Guardian, 2025). By doing so, domestic actors resist the imposition of external moral categories and assert epistemic sovereignty, reinforcing postcolonial arguments about African agency in international discourse.

However, African responses are not uniform; they are mediated by political alignment, audience expectations, and historical experiences with foreign intervention. Research shows that African elites may selectively engage with or challenge foreign rhetoric depending on how it aligns with domestic interests (Adebanjo, 2010; Olorunnisola & Martin, 2024). In Nigeria, independent media outlets sometimes amplified elements of Trump's claims to draw attention to security failures or mobilize public opinion, while simultaneously critiquing the oversimplification of religious identity as the primary lens for interpreting violence (TheCable-op-ed, 2025). This nuanced interplay demonstrates that African media responses are complex negotiations between resistance, strategic accommodation, and domestic political considerations.

Postcolonial critiques further emphasize the epistemological dimensions of these interactions. By asserting interpretive authority, African actors challenge the assumption that Western governments or media hold privileged knowledge about African conflicts (Mbembe, 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The Nigerian case illustrates that local discourses can contest global perceptions, prevent the uncritical reproduction of moralized narratives, and introduce context-specific analyses that foreground governance, socio-economic inequities, and ethnic diversity as explanatory factors. Such interventions complicate the international moral framing and highlight the potential for African perspectives to reshape global understandings of conflict.

Despite this, there are gaps in empirical research regarding the systematic study of African media responses to high-profile foreign political rhetoric. While postcolonial theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding resistance, few studies combine qualitative analysis of media texts with attention to contemporary international interventions like Trump's 2025 speech. This study addresses that gap by examining how Nigerian newspapers mediate, contest, and reinterpret externally imposed narratives, providing insights into the negotiation of sovereignty, voice, and representation in contemporary African international relations (Adebanjo & Ngugi, 2025; Olorunnisola & Martin, 2024). By situating these responses within postcolonial debates, the study contributes to understanding the agency of African actors in shaping conflict narratives in the Global South.

5. Discussion and Findings

5.1 Political Rhetoric and the Construction of Religious Threats in Nigeria

This study found that Donald Trump's characterization of violence against Christians in Nigeria as a "Christian genocide" significantly shaped both international and domestic discourse. Evidence demonstrates that his rhetoric performed a political function, reframing localized violence as a global moral crisis with potential security implications, and mobilizing international attention through morally charged language. The discussion reveals that such speech acts simplified complex social and political dynamics into binary moral categories of victims and perpetrators, influencing media framing and public perception. TheCable 2025 and Vultee 2023 provide empirical support for how political leaders strategically use language to construct threats and justify potential intervention.

Findings confirm that Nigerian media responses were heterogeneous. Domestic newspapers, government officials, and civil society actors contested, reframed, or resisted the genocide narrative. The Federal Government emphasized multi-dimensional causes of violence, including terrorism, banditry, and criminality, while independent media highlighted the potential geopolitical motives behind foreign assertions. Evidence demonstrates that the reception of external rhetoric is mediated by local political, social, and religious contexts, showing that international statements do not automatically dominate domestic narratives. Vanguard 2025, Premium Times 2025, and Guardian 2025 illustrate this diversity of framing.

The research confirms that these findings align with the Securitization Theory assumption that security is discourse-based rather than objective. Trump acted as a securitizing actor, constructing the violence as an existential threat through discourse. Nigerian media and the public constituted the relevant audience whose acceptance or rejection determined the effectiveness of this securitizing move. The analysis demonstrates how external rhetoric can influence domestic conflict narratives, while local contexts critically mediate its impact.

5.2 Religion, Conflict, and Identity in Nigeria

The research highlights that Nigeria's historical religious landscape continues to shape contemporary conflict narratives. Findings of the study illustrate that colonial and post-independence political structures entrenched religious hierarchies, fostering competition over resources and identities. Evidence demonstrates that historical conflicts, such as the Maitatsine uprisings, established enduring patterns of religiously framed violence, which are reproduced in media coverage. This aligns with Falola (1998), who shows how colonial governance institutionalized divisions along religious and regional lines, influencing contemporary societal tensions.

The study reports that recent farmer–herder violence, although driven by land scarcity, environmental pressures, and economic competition, is frequently framed as religious persecution. The analysis confirms that external interventions, including Trump's 2025 "Christian genocide" claim, simplify complex socio-economic conflicts into Muslim–Christian binaries, reinforcing stereotypes and shaping local and global perceptions. This finding aligns with Onapajo (2012) and Okereke (2023), who emphasize that reductive narratives obscure structural causes of conflict and can legitimize externally imposed interventions, affecting identity perceptions.

The analysis is guided by securitization theory, particularly the assumption that a securitizing actor presents an existential threat to a referent object. Findings establish that Trump's speech constructed Nigerian Christians as under imminent threat, exemplifying how political rhetoric can elevate localized

socio-political conflicts into global security concerns. This framing demonstrates the power of discourse in transforming complex conflicts into perceived urgent threats, legitimizing extraordinary measures, and influencing policy responses, including implications for **identity** and group positioning (Adebanjo & Ngugi, 2025).

5.3 Media Framing, Representation, and Conflict Communication

The research highlights that media framing in Nigeria significantly shapes public understanding of conflict, identity, and security. Findings of the study illustrate that newspapers negotiate between local political pressures, audience expectations, and international narratives. Evidence demonstrates that domestic coverage of inter-communal and religious violence frequently emphasizes either religious persecution, ethnic marginalization, or governance failures, reflecting the dual role of Nigerian media as informers and mediators of contested realities, as argued by Yusuf, (2025) and Ogunkunle et al., (2025)

The analysis confirms that external interventions, such as Trump's 2025 "Christian genocide" statement, introduce new dimensions of narrative legitimacy, influencing domestic framing practices. Findings suggest strongly that some outlets reproduce moral-crisis frames emphasizing Christian victimization, while others contextualize the claims within socio-political and security dynamics. This aligns with Vultee (2023) and Afandi & Sholeh (2024), who argue that media strategically filter international claims through local lenses, balancing professional norms, political alignment, and ethical considerations.

The study highlights that this framing process can be interpreted through securitization theory, particularly the assumption of a securitizing actor presenting an existential threat. Findings establish that Trump's speech positioned Nigerian Christians as imperiled, illustrating how external rhetoric elevates local socio-political tensions into perceived security threats and legitimizes extraordinary measures in discourse, consistent with the theoretical expectation of securitization (Vultee, 2023).

5.4 Globalisation and Nigerian Conflict Narratives

The study suggests that globalisation has intensified the visibility and transnational significance of Nigerian conflicts. Findings establish that local crises, including farmer–herder clashes and Boko Haram insurgency, are increasingly mediated through digital platforms and international news coverage, creating feedback loops where local and global actors influence each other. This analysis is aligned with Castells (2011) and Adekoya (2023), who highlight the capacity of transnational information flows to transform local events into global concerns.

The research confirms that external moralization of domestic violence reshapes interpretations of conflict. Findings suggest strongly that Trump's 2025 designation of Nigeria as a "Country of Particular Concern" reframed a complex socio-political crisis into a moralized global emergency. This aligns with Vultee (2023) and Robinson (2022), who argue that international moral framing can mobilize global support while producing contested interpretations within domestic media and political discourse.

The study reveals that international media amplify these dynamics by foregrounding religious identities over structural causes, such as political marginalization, economic scarcity, and environmental pressures. The analysis demonstrates that social media platforms further accelerate the spread of moralized narratives, enabling diaspora communities, foreign NGOs, and policymakers to engage in discourse formation and advocacy, consistent with Adebanjo & Ngugi (2025).

Findings establish that this globalisation process can be interpreted through securitization theory. The analysis is guided by the assumption of a securitizing actor presenting a threat, with Trump's speech

portraying Nigerian Christians as imperiled. This illustrates how political rhetoric transforms local socio-political issues into perceived security threats, legitimizing extraordinary measures and shaping both domestic and international discourse.

5.5 African Responses to International Conflict Narratives

The study suggests that African actors actively contest external moralized interpretations of domestic conflicts. Findings highlight that Trump's 2025 characterization of killings of Christians in Nigeria as a "Christian genocide" exemplifies the imposition of Western moral frames, which oversimplify complex local dynamics involving ethnicity, religion, politics, and economics. This aligns with Mbembe (2001) and Adebajo & Ngugi (2025), who argue that Western narratives often reinforce dependency and marginalize indigenous perspectives.

The research uncovers that Nigerian media mediate between international claims and domestic realities. Findings indicate that newspapers contextualized Trump's statement by emphasizing multi-religious victimhood, questioning evidentiary bases, and highlighting structural drivers of violence such as terrorism and banditry. This is consistent with Olorunnisola & Martin (2024) and Premium Times (2025), who emphasize that domestic outlets act as active agents rather than passive conduits in shaping public understanding.

The analysis demonstrates that such responses represent postcolonial resistance. Findings suggest that Nigerian state and media actors strategically reassert narrative control, framing conflicts to foreground local complexities and governance, socio-economic, and ethnic factors, rather than moral binaries, as argued by Nwankwo (2023) and Guardian (2025).

The findings of the study identify that this contestation can be interpreted through securitization theory. The analysis is guided by the assumption that security is discourse-based rather than objective. Trump's speech constructed Nigerian Christians as imperiled, illustrating how political rhetoric can define what constitutes a threat and influence perceptions of urgency, legitimizing both domestic and international policy responses.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of how international political rhetoric, historical contexts, media framing, globalization, and African responses interact to shape conflict narratives in Nigeria. The first part covers the analysis of Donald Trump's 2025 characterization of violence against Christians as a "Christian genocide," illustrating how political rhetoric can transform localized violence into a global moral crisis. Evidence demonstrates that such discourse simplifies complex socio-political dynamics into binary moral categories, influencing international and domestic media narratives, public perception, and potential intervention, supported by findings from articles and news reports.

The second part delves into Nigeria's historical religious and political landscape, showing how colonial and post-independence structures entrenched religious hierarchies and patterns of conflict. Findings illustrate that past events, such as the Maitatsine uprisings, Boko-harams and other inter-communal clashes, continue to shape contemporary interpretations of violence. Books and scholarly literature highlight that external interventions, including Trump's statements, often reduce multi-dimensional socio-economic conflicts to religious binaries, reinforcing stereotypes and shaping local and global perceptions.

The third and fourth parts examine media framing and the globalization of conflict. Findings establish that Nigerian newspapers negotiate between local political pressures, audience expectations, and international narratives, mediating, contesting, or contextualizing foreign claims. Globalization amplifies these dynamics, as digital platforms and international coverage accelerate moralized interpretations while allowing local actors to reinterpret or resist external frames. Empirical evidence from journal articles and reports shows that African media and state institutions strategically assert narrative control, foregrounding structural, socio-economic, and governance factors over externally imposed moral binaries, demonstrating postcolonial resistance.

The study employed an explorative qualitative design, using thematic analysis to extract key patterns. Securitization theory was adopted solely as an analytical lens to understand how discourse constructs perceived threats. This research contributes to academic fields including, conflict studies, international studies, media studies, African studies, and history, while offering policy insights for media regulation, conflict management, and international relations, providing a context-sensitive understanding of the interplay between rhetoric, history, and media in shaping conflict narratives.

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