

Press Framing and Counter-framing of Amotekun Security Network in South-west, Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria became a sovereign nation in 1960 from the British Colonialist. Before this historical development, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 brought together various ethnic groups with innumerable tribes. Arguably, Nigeria is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Africa, with 36 federating states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), with over 400 ethnic groups and about 250 languages and 1000 dialects. The three dominant and largest ethnic groups in Nigeria are Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. Ideally, Nigeria's diversity should be part of her strengths, considering the inter-ethnic marriages, co-existence, and cohabitation long before colonization. Ethnicity and ethnic awareness do not constitute any danger to inter-ethnic relations, as evidence abounds globally of people from different ethnic origins cohabiting together peacefully, despite socio-cultural differences. However, what seems to bind the various ethnic groups in Nigeria together has contentiously been the most daring threat. Multiculturalism, socio-cultural differences, religion, politics, and suspicious ethnic dominance are major contributing factors that have divided the various ethnic groups, which have resulted in communal, inter-ethnic, and regional crises. The paper adopted the theoretical postulation of Framing Theory. The paper is a conceptual paper which utilises the existing literature from book, journals, newspapers and online materials. The paper concludes that as Amotekun continues to operate, these narratives influence public perception and shape political discourse on the need for regional versus centralized approaches to security, with implications for other regions considering similar initiatives.

Keywords

Amotekun; Counter-framing; Framing; Network; Press; Security and South-west



I. Introduction

The press is a major critical social influence and mobilisation agent. Sometimes, the press reports issues differently from the angle from which the audience and readers see it. For this obvious reason, scholars have noted that news media set frames within which readers or viewers interpret media content (Oso, 2017). Golding and Elliot in Owens-Ibie and Aondover (2024) have rightly noted news is made, and like any other product, it carries the mark of the technical and organisational structure from which it emerges. This describes how and why the media has been weaponised to foster hate and violent conflict by various power centers.

The power of the press to inform, educate and perform correlation and surveillance functions is critical to the enhancement of peace and security, especially in an ethnically diverse country like Nigeria, where misleading reportage could spark hatred and conflict. A

classic example was the Miss World (2002) riots, which were a series of religiously motivated riots in the Nigerian city of Kaduna in 2002, resulting in the deaths of more than 200 people. The Miss World 2002 beauty pageant, which was to be hosted in Nigeria, became controversial and had to be relocated to London, following bloody clashes between Muslims and Christians, caused by what some Muslims deemed to be a blasphemous article in *ThisDay* Newspaper of 16th November, 2002, written by one Miss Isioma Daniel (Abba et al., 2021).

The role of the press during reportage of conflict situations can be seen as double-sided. Aondover (2018) has demonstrated how the press, through frames, could incite people towards violence or mitigation, and how press coverage affects the way the public forms opinions on issues. According to Demarest et al., in Aondover (2018) the press plays a crucial role in keeping the public informed. But the press does not merely convey information, it also participates in the construction, maintenance, and transmission of particular narratives and discourses. This becomes especially important in terms of conflict, as narratives about the conflict may play a decisive role in influencing how people perceive the conflict, including its causes and consequences, and how policy-makers decide to deal with it (Aondover et al., 2022). As Demarest et al in Aondover (2023) noted, due to the immense societal importance of the way the press reports on violence, it is hardly surprising that a large body of literature has emerged that analyses how political violence, violent conflicts, and terrorist attacks are being represented and framed by the press (Aondover et al., 2021).

As argued by Demarest et al., in Aondover (2023) the dominant paradigm in the study of conflict framing relates to the peace versus war journalism dichotomy. That “peace journalism” focuses on the causes of conflict, the consequences for victims, and win-win conflict resolution. “War journalism”, in contrast, is more violence-, propaganda, elite, and victory-oriented, and treats conflict as an arena where participants are starkly grouped into opposing sides (them vs. us) in a zero-sum game. Continuing, they contended that while peace journalistic frames have shown to positively change audiences’ empathy and understanding, albeit depending on individuals’ prior beliefs and preconceptions, war journalism may negatively contribute to the conflict by focusing on violence, harsh military strategies, and the stark divide between in-and out-groups (Aondover & Phillips, 2020).

Corroborating the above, Oso (2017), states that journalists use various strategies in framing a news story, such as words or phrases, pictures, giving certain examples, figures of speech, etc. However, such issue frames used by journalists and the media tend to be both constructive and destructive. Since the establishment of Amotekun in January, 2020, various studies, such as have attempted to study the operations of the *Amotekun* security outfit. Ezinnwa and Plangsat's (2020), study focuses on the role of *Amotekun* in the southwest states. The study's main focus is on the perceived roles and benefits of operation *Amotekun* security outfit in fighting crimes, particularly those that are conceived as kidnapping, killings, and farmers-herders clashes in the contemporary Southwest region of Nigeria (Garba & Msughter, 2023a; Garba & Msughter, 2023b).

Further scholarly works on *Amotekun* placed emphasis on factors that threatened *Amotekun's* existence in the Southwest region, with specific attention on survival strategies in the face of economic realities, noting that the security outfit may not exist longer than expected, should Southwest governors fail or decline to commit substantial funding, equipment, and support to the regional security network. The strategy workshops typically involve an initial explanation of the strategies to be learned, followed by extensive practice sessions (Gadour, 2013). Just as Obado-Joel (2020), was concerned about the challenges

facing *Amotekun*, especially the lack of policy framework on accountability mechanisms and the design of a transition programme that is required to support the success of *Amotekun* in responding to security threats in the Southwest region.

While the study by Yahaya and Musa (2020), questioned the constitutional legality and operational commands of *Amotekun*, that of the European Asylum Support Office (2021), detailed the security situation in the Thirty-six (36) states of Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), which might have contributed to the establishment of *Amotekun*.

Other studies done on the *Amotekun* issue question the legality and constitutionality of such sub-national security outfits. Other studies insist on right of sub-national governments to self-help and group protection, in the face of failure of Federal Government to protect its citizens. While other studies examine the implications of the proliferation of such security outfit for the rising security challenges, as well as the unity of the country (Iwuamadi et al., 2021). Regrettably, limited studies have been done on press representations of the *Amotekun* issue in Nigeria. Such studies examined the role of the media in the establishment of sub-national security outfits, in terms of media representation, newspapers coverage and reportage and online social reactions. They failed to capture how media framed, counter-framed or slanted news or reports on *Amotekun*, despite repeated mention of the activities of the security outfit in the six Southwest states.

A critical review of existing works therefore indicates that most academic studies on *Amotekun* focused on the operation, constitutional legitimacy, challenges, strengths, and threats that strengthened or weakened the security architecture of *Amotekun* in Southwest, Nigeria. This shows that there is a paucity of studies on how the press framed and counter-framed the establishment, functions, operations, and legality of *Amotekun*, despite stiff resistance by the Federal Government and some northern powerful blocs. Within this context, this paper examines media power, the role of media in public sphere and conflict reporting by Nigerian press.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 Media Power

While not denying the fact that the media, like the state, are sites of power, they are invariably also agents of power and political control (Hile et al., 2023). Such that those who control political power and authority are always conscious of the fact that information management and control are central to the capturing, retention, and exercise of political power. While discussing the power of the mass media in shaping politics, Street in Idris and Msughter (2022) suggest that the power of the media derives from their role in the circulation of particular ideas and images, and in so far as these shape thoughts and actions, the mass media are thought to wield discursive or ideological power.

The power of the media manifests in the interplay of media and politics. Downing in Maikaba and Msughter (2019) argue that the underground press played a part in the weakening of the former Soviet Union and countries behind the Iron Curtain. Majaa-Pearce (1995) linked the demise of absolutist party states in Africa, in the late 1980s, to the proliferation of the independent media in Africa. Studies by Campbell (1995), and Ihonvbere (1996), indicated that the press played an important role in the transition to democracy in Nigeria. The foregoing examples suggest a prominent, pivotal role for the mass media in politics. They also raise the question of media and power processes in society, Downing in Mojaye and Aondover (2022) stressed that the media are structures of power in any society. The media mediate; they do not stand independent of a given social

system, but they instead provide channels of communication between elements within it. To varying degrees, this has meant that they are instrumental to dominant institutions and interests within the society.

Looking at power from the point of view of information power, Castells (2009), approaches power as being primarily exercised by the construction of meaning in the human mind, through processes of communication, enacted in global/local multimedia networks of mass communication, including mass self-communication. He argues further that though, theories of power and historical observation point to the decisive importance of the state's monopoly of violence as a source of social power, the actual ability to successfully engage in violence or intimidation requires the framing of individual and collective minds. Habermas in Msugther (2017) on his part identified four categories of power to include: political power, social power, economic power, and media power.

Emphasizing the power of the media, Habermas in Msugther (2017) posited that media power is based on the technology of mass communication. Those who work in the politically relevant sectors of the media system (i.e., reporters, columnists, editors, directors, producers, and publishers) cannot but exert power, because they select and process politically relevant content and thus intervene in both the formation of public opinions and the distribution of influential interests. The use of media power manifests itself in the choice of information, in the shape and style of programs, and the effects of its diffusion in agenda setting, or the priming and framing of issues.

2.2 Role of Media in Public Sphere

Focusing on the role of political communication in the public sphere and its contribution to a deliberative process of legitimization in the political system, Habermas (2006), notes at the periphery of this political system, lies the public sphere which is deeply rooted in networks for heavy flows of messages-news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images, shows, and movies with an informative, polemical, educational, or entertaining content. These published opinions (messages) originate from various types of actors-politicians and political parties, lobbyists and pressure groups, or actors of civil society. These messages are selected and shaped by mass media professionals and received by broad and overlapping audiences, camps, subcultures, and so on.

Therefore, the power of the mass media is, most likely, expressed through the discursive engagement of media professionals with various issues in society. Habermas (2006), notes that there are two important actors- without which no political public sphere could be put to work - professionals of the media system-especially journalists who edit news, reports, and commentaries, and politicians who occupy the center of the political system and are both the co-authors and addressees of public opinion (Obasi & Aondover, 2023).

The public sphere is dependent on the quantity of involvement and the quality (merits) of the discourse for its democratic relevance. It needs institutional bases such as the media that enables people to be informed (Lunat, 2008). Here lies the fact that Habermas (1962), contention in his seminal work, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is steeped in the Kantian formulation, which articulates the use of reason and criticism in public debate. The characterisation of the media as a conduit for critical rationality, objectivity, informed opinion, and widened space as well as an apparatus for governmental checks and balances makes it the fourth estate of the realm, as intimated by Edmund Burke.

As one of the institutions of democracy and the public sphere, the media could aid in shaping the public sphere, a major source of public opinion needed to 'legitimate

authority in any functioning democracy. Consequent upon this, among the institutions that contribute to the make-up of a public sphere in society, the media perhaps perform the most critical function. In the transaction in the public sphere, the media are not neutral participants or impassioned chroniclers; instead, they are both legitimizers of the status quo or innovators of the existing social equilibrium.

The public sphere exists as a means of public discourse and as a veritable aspect of transiting democracy such as Nigeria is evolving. It presumes an open state in which people are allowed to participate in opinion molding and opinion formation, resulting in participation in political decision-making and advocacy of ideology and diversity of points of view. There is no doubt that the country has enjoyed one of the most virile and dynamic media in Africa and thus, one of the most dynamic public spheres. Therefore, the use of the public sphere by social commentators in this country is significant as a contribution to knowledge and as an extension of frontiers of research in public discourse and political communication (Oreoluwa et al., 2024).

Much commentary on media about the public sphere over recent years portrays an almost linear process of the erosion of the public sphere and the media's role in creating it. This was already identified by Habermas (1962), as summarized by Habermas in Vitalis et al., (2023), hence, Habermas describes a transition from the liberal public sphere which originated in the Enlightenment and the American and French Revolution to a media-dominated public sphere in the current era of what he calls "welfare state capitalism and mass democracy". Nadirsyah (2002) has noted the role of the press in a democratic system thus the role of the press in a democratic society cannot be understated. The press is on the frontline of the battle to maintain democracy. It is the function of the press to ferret out corruption, dishonesty, and graft wherever it may occur and to expose the perpetrators. The press must reveal dishonest mal and inept administration. It must also contribute to the exchange of ideas. It must advance communication between the governed and those who govern. The press must act as the watchdog of the governed.

Media in a democracy are expected to give voice to public opinion so that the government will know where majorities and minorities stand. The view that the media frame the news to reflect the opinion of various publics or the opinions of the majority is another myth that has little relation to political realities. Nonetheless, it has major consequences because political observers often equate the thrust of media coverage with a single, unanimous public opinion, when there is no such unanimity. Therefore an "understanding of the mass media's role in shaping beliefs and behaviors, especially prejudiced beliefs and behaviours" - is central to conflict resolution and management (Msughter & Aondover, 2023). In 1935, Gordon Allport, the father of modern psychological prejudice research, published a treatise entitled *The Psychology of Radio*. This piece of research unveiled how people respond to prejudice, stereotypes, and propaganda while listening to the radio – and other mediums. In contemporary Nigeria, media slant, conflict, prejudice, and propaganda are major staples in her media practice. This is because the mass media is an instrument that could be utilised to shape beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. It is also a veritable instrument that could be used to advance objectivity and fairness.

III. Result and Discussion

3.1 Conflict Reporting by Nigerian Press

Conflict has been defined as an inevitable aspect of human interaction and unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions. As Zartman (1991), posits, it is

“inherent in decisions even when there is only one person.” Viewed from the Latin origin of the word, “confligere”, which means, “to strike together”, conflict results essentially from the fact of human social relations and the choices and decisions humans have had to make in their daily existence. Outside of its intra-personal context, therefore, it involves according to Stagner: a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both; each party mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to that goal (Msughter et al., 2023). Hence the inevitability is not strictly as a result of the social inter-reaction, but because of the threat which one party perceives the other as constituting to the goal that could lead to conflict.

To Akintayo and Agbu (2002) therefore, “conflict is viewed as an action, which prevents, obstructs, interferes with and injures or renders ineffective another’s action, with which it is incompatible”. According to Coser (as cited in Adedeji, 2005), apart from incompatibility of goals, struggles over value, and claims to scarce resources in which the opponents aim to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals could also lead to conflict. This kind of conflict, Adedeji (2005), notes, not only highlights the competition between values in Coser’s perception of conflict but could be injurious or destructive. However, contrary to the common notion of conflict as a negative phenomenon, certain perspectives also hold conflicts as “not necessarily of negative consequence”.

Sanda, as cited in Aondover et al., (2022) for instance, asserts that conflicts “could provide opportunity for change towards the greater good of concerned parties”. She identifies such conflicts as those that may arise as a result of differences over ideas, and goals or the means of achieving them. Shortly, we shall see whether this position agrees with the reality of the development of Nigerian journalism. In fact, as a psychological term, Akintayo and Agbu (2002), note that conflict refers to: opposition between two or more contradictory needs, motives, wishes, impulses or desires...It is seen as a struggle between collective actors who use social power to defeat or remove opponents and to gain status, power, resources and other scarce values. Conflicts essentially connote disagreement, dispute or controversy in ideas.

Alozieuwa (2015) study on “Conflict as an Ideological Orientation of the Nigerian Media” postulates that the reality of the impact of the media on violent conflict has become a global phenomenon. In Nigeria, the author notes that this reality is obviously driving the growing desiratum for the instituting of peace journalism. Owing to its complex make-up, however, but essentially as a result of a lack of a national resolve to forge a truly united nation, Nigeria has remained a country where ethnicity, regionalism and religion are objective factors of daily life. General perception tends, therefore, to cast the country’s media as influenced by these primordial pulls, especially in times of crisis.

Continuing, the scholar argues that rather than primordial considerations, the Nigerian media is fundamentally driven by an ideology of conflict into which it was born; within which it was nurtured and which it has internalized from the colonial through immediate post-independence political era to the authoritarian military period. Thus, the Nigerian media tends to operate with a siege mentality and as a media in captivity. The paper posits that until the media weans itself from this orientation, its perception of issues will continue to be shaped by the ideology of conflict, in which case the efforts at peace journalism may remain a mirage.

If we assume that everybody has an ideology, that growing up in any culture provides an ideology, that ideology is implanted in the language and hidden in the cultural assumptions, then it is only common sense that the members of the culture who work in the information industries in the various media also have ideologies. The crucial challenge

facing journalism however is how it can be a handmaid and catalyst of social development. To achieve this, it has to work harder for greater public acceptance. It has to be closely associated with the popular struggle against poverty and disease, against deprivation and want and against inequality and injustice. It has to show a greater sensitivity to the issues that concern the destiny of the nation.

The first assertion above by Hahn in Msughter et al., (2022) apparently points to the fact that the media has an underlying national or social ideology within any cultural milieu that drives it. The other assertion by Omu, as cited in Msughter et al., (2022) also clearly underlines what informs that ideological orientation within the Nigerian context. According to Alozieuwa (2015), the discourse on Nigeria's media orientation vis-à-vis its behavior during crises and conflicts have focused mainly on its primordial orientation. To most scholars and public intellectuals, aside from the personal interests of the average journalist and media owners, which often border on the pecuniary, the Nigerian media is mostly influenced by ethno-regional and religious considerations in its reportage of daily events in society. In other words, to this school of thought, ethno-regional interests form the principal ideology driving the Nigerian media in its perception of national issues.

The ethno-regional orientation of the Nigerian media has thus been traced to its partisan origin – that is, how it emerged at a particular point in history. Hence the contention that, despite its vibrancy, the Nigerian media has not been able to wean itself from that origin. But a careful study of the Nigerian media will reveal that in addition to those primordial pulls, there is an acute “war” mentality. The average journalist seems to set out in the day with this “we and them” mentality. Such mentality in itself is conflict-generating, especially in a society like ours in which the state bears overwhelming influence on most critical aspects of the life of the citizenry and in which the state seems permanently disconnected from society (Alozieuwa, 2015).

In the daily conceptualization of his duty to society, the Nigerian journalist appears imbued with the fervor that he is the conscience of society, its fighter and defender. He is therefore constantly driven by the urge to fight the enemy of the people – the state. In the process, the Nigerian journalist's perception of issues, even when these issues fall beyond the realm of state and society, has become essentially conflictually-defined. This orientation in many instances underpins his reportage. Incidentally it is not usually perceived in this light. Instead, the primordial pulls in him are perceived as responsible. In most cases, questionable reportage of issues or events, especially conflict-related ones, give much premium to the primordial inhibitions of the journalist than his operational mentality, which perceives almost every issue in conflictual terms. Being a terrain with which he is thus familiar, in an unconscious “demonstration” of the life of the citizenry and in which the state seems permanently disconnected from society, he exaggerates conflict situations and so “unconsciously” fuels their escalation.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This paper employed Framing Theory. Framing is one of the major theories in contemporary communication research. While in sociology, the term was already being used in the mid-1950s. Its popularity in media and communication studies began only in the early 1990s, when Entman's article about 'framing as a fractured paradigm' was published. As Vliegthart and van Zoonen (2011) noted the use of the term 'frame' has grown exponentially in research about news and journalism, with an unprecedented peak in 2008 and 2009. The framing theory explains the process whereby an originator of communication builds into their message the perspectives which they want audience to read the message from. The basis of the theory is that any given issue, event or

development can be viewed and understood from varying perspectives. Stated differently, every phenomenon can be seen through different frames of meaning depending on who is seeing and the circumstances of the seeing (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a).

Hence, framing has been described as “the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue”, and it is “a way of giving some overall interpretation to isolated items of fact”. A frame is developed “through selection, emphasis, and exclusion.” A given frame makes people to direct their attention on certain messages, while failing to see the other. In other words, a frame determines what is perceived and what is not perceived, what is understood and what is not understood, what is felt and what is not felt.

Media gatekeepers in selecting and packaging news inevitably engage in framing. As all other members of society, they are not immune to social judgments and biases. Thus, McQuail (2010) contends that it “is almost unavoidable for journalists to” engage in framing “and in so doing to depart from pure ‘objectivity’ and to introduce some (unintended) bias”. Consequently, framing has been described as “an essential feature of news”. Within the context of this study, the framing theory helps to put in perspective the role of the gatekeepers in influencing the judgments and feelings of the audience by virtue of what they highlight and what they fail to highlight in their reportage of ethnic interest groups. Thus, the process of news production in regard to these groups could be understood from the perspective of the thought, judgment and emotion the gatekeepers intended to provoke in their audience.

For decades, the historic epochs of framing theory were embedded in sociological studies, political science, psychology, and its introduction in the field of communication by (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024a). Goffman was among the early scholars to explore the impact of framing in the construction of social reality by investigating the practices through which meanings are explicated in communication. Numerous studies have discovered that framing has the capacity to reveal the obscurities and multiplicities implanted or deficient in contents of news stories. Frame analysis is critical in investigating persuasive news in addition to evaluating reports directed towards the practice of media’s established ideologies. To frame is to select any angle of a professed reality and constitute them to be salient in news coverage to such a degree as to explicitly cultivate a problem identification, causative understanding, moral judgment, and or treatment recommendation for the piece described.

Framing theory suggests that news coverage can have effects on how people think about social issues. Giltin (1980) who introduced the notion of frames in communication describes frames as “persistent patterns of cognition, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion.” Media frames, in particular, have been defined as the core or central organizing idea of the news package that provides the means for understanding events or as “conceptual tools” used to convey, interpret, and evaluate information.

Although several interpretations of the concept have been suggested, Entman's definition remains the most widely used. Entman (2004), defines framing as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and or solution. Journalists' use of frames facilitates the ease with which a news consumer can understand more complex issues in highlighting connections with pre-existing ways of perceiving events or phenomena and when a particular frame is utilized, it influences how people think about a particular issue and what interpretive schema will become most applicable.

Furthermore, framing theory can be differentiated from agenda-setting in that framing is about the “presentation of issues,” while agenda-setting is about the “salience of

issues". However, while not intentionally presenting biased information, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007), assert that how an issue is structured and presented in news reports can influence how it is understood by audiences. Thus, frames can shape people's interpretations of events in the world around them. Media framing theory is built on the premise that how an issue is represented in the news always exerts some degree of influence on how it is understood and interpreted by the audience. Research on framing generally, according to de Vreese (2005), has identified two main types of frames: issue-specific frames and generic frames. Issue-specific frames are used to describe specific kinds of news stories, such as college football. Issue-specific frames focus on the media framing of particular events or topics by examining them in detail and they are difficult to generalize. They denote the more concrete frameworks established in debates on specific issues.

Generic frames, in theory, apply to any kind of news story. They are broader and can be applied to different news topics and issues across time and different cultural times. Two common generic frames, according to Iyengar (1991), are episodic and thematic, gleaned from an analysis of U.S. television news stories on various topics. Episodic frame refers to the news that is presented as a case study that is event-oriented in practical terms. Scholars have argued that "episodic" frames are more common in news media. Other scholars have proposed different framing matrixes that, in some cases, overlap with each other. A story has an episodic frame if it discusses an event in isolation, while a thematic frame puts an event in a broader interpretation or context. Issues that cannot be readily reduced to the level of specific events are seldom covered at all. This is problematic from a normative perspective, as an overreliance on episodic frames can be detrimental to an audience's understanding of events, particularly when similar events should be seen as connected or as responsible for problems in society.

The conflict frame in a news story emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions. Neuman, et al (1992) found that conflict frame is commonly used in news media to spark off a chain of reactions or to wield sentiment into the propositional media content. According to Adeyemo (2018) the conflict frame is a unique propositional content, especially in the print media to sell newspapers, because conflict frames arouse curiosity and anxiety. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) assert that the human-interest frame "brings a human face or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue, or problem". It often leans towards showing sympathy and sentiment with the supposed victim in a given news event. In crises, for example, the media frame stimulates the psychological pulse of people which ultimately leads them to a more negative attitude toward the crisis (Onyejelem & Aondover, 2024b).

From these frames, responsibility is typically the most commonly found in "serious news programs" or in news stories about crises. Unlike the findings of Iyengar's content analysis, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), found that responsibility frames could equally blame an individual or government. In crisis news, individuals were blamed more often when the story employed frames of morality, human interest, or attribution of responsibility. Conflict and economic consequence were the next most commonly used frames.

IV. Conclusion

The press framing and counter-framing of the Amotekun Security Network in southwestern Nigeria reveal a complex narrative driven by diverse sociopolitical agendas, concerns, and interests within the region and nationwide. Amotekun, established as a

regional security outfit by southwestern states to address insecurity, has faced various framings, both supportive and critical. Many local and regional media sources frame Amotekun as a necessary response to escalating violence, such as banditry, kidnapping, and herder-farmer conflicts. This framing emphasizes the inadequacy of federal security apparatuses in effectively addressing the unique challenges in the southwest, thus portraying Amotekun as an empowerment tool for self-defense and safety. Proponents see it as essential for protecting lives, fostering peace, and boosting confidence in regional governance. The media's framing and counter-framing of Amotekun reflect broader debates about security, governance, and federalism in Nigeria. The paper concludes that as Amotekun continues to operate, these narratives influence public perception and shape political discourse on the need for regional versus centralized approaches to security, with implications for other regions considering similar initiatives.

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