

Diplomatic Crisis, Statecraft, And Media Framing: Comparative Study of 1984 Umaru Dikko's Kidnap Incident and the 2021 Rendition of Nnamdi Kanu

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>This study examines the interplay of diplomatic crisis, statecraft, and media framing through a comparative analysis of the 1984 Umaru Dikko kidnap incident and the 2021 extraordinary rendition of Nnamdi Kanu, highlighting how state actions and communication shape domestic and international perceptions of legitimacy. Anchored on Framing Theory and Neorealism, the research employed a qualitative comparative case study design, relying exclusively on secondary data from forty systematically selected peer-reviewed journal articles spanning legal, diplomatic, and communication studies. Data were analysed thematically and through qualitative content analysis. Major findings indicate that: (i) Dikko's case happened under a military regime and rigid Cold War diplomatic norms, prompting immediate punitive action by the United Kingdom, whereas Kanu's case occurred under a civilian government within a global security framework prioritising counter-terrorism; (ii) international media framed Dikko's incident uniformly as a diplomatic scandal, while Kanu's case generated mixed, fragmented narratives; and (iii) Dikko's case caused a visible rupture in Nigeria-UK relations and severe reputational damage, while Kanu's case generated limited international response yet revealed recurring legitimacy deficits. The study concludes that extreme measures as first recourse undermine both legitimacy and diplomatic credibility. Major recommendations include: 1) Ministry of Foreign Affairs should institutionalise crisis-response protocols; 2) media outlets should develop strategic communication frameworks; 3) Nigerian government, in consultation with the National Assembly, should establish legal oversight mechanisms.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Diplomacy, Extradition, International Law, Media Framing, Rendition.</p>
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<p>Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p>Citation: Okhueleigbe, Osemhantie Amos, & Acholonu, Ezinne Mary. (2026). Diplomatic crisis, statecraft, and media framing: Comparative study of 1984 Umaru Dikko's kidnap incident and the 2021 Rendition of Nnamdi Kanu. <i>UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHS)</i>, 2(4), 73-81.</p>	

Introduction

Contemporary international system is anchored on the principles of state sovereignty, diplomatic engagement, and the rule of law, yet it remains deeply influenced by the pragmatic pursuits of national interest and strategic statecraft. In this complex milieu, states often navigate a tension between legal obligations and political imperatives, particularly in matters involving transnational crime, dissent, and national security. Mechanisms such as extradition are designed to ensure lawful cooperation between states; however, instances of covert abduction and extraordinary rendition reveal the limits of these formal

processes. Within this interplay, communication, manifested through diplomatic exchanges, media narratives, and official rhetoric, becomes central in shaping legitimacy, managing perception, and influencing both domestic and international audiences.

Historically, the apprehension of escapees across borders has oscillated between strict adherence to legal frameworks and the deployment of clandestine operations. Extradition treaties, grounded in reciprocity and judicial oversight, represent the normative pathway for transferring accused persons between jurisdictions. Nevertheless, political

constraints, asylum protections, and evidentiary challenges have often compelled states to adopt extra-legal measures, thereby provoking diplomatic tensions and legal controversies. Such actions frequently raise critical questions regarding the violation of international legal instruments, including the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, as well as broader concerns about sovereignty and the ethics of intelligence practices (Shaw, 2017).

Nigeria's political evolution, particularly during the post-colonial and military eras, provides a significant context for examining these tensions. The period following the 1983 military coup, which brought General Muhammadu Buhari to power, was marked by an aggressive anti-corruption campaign and a rigid approach to governance. Former public officials accused of economic crimes became targets of state pursuit, often framed within a moralistic discourse of national recovery. It was within this political climate that the attempted abduction of Umaru Dikko in 1984 occurred, representing a decisive moment where the Nigerian state sought to circumvent formal extradition procedures in favour of a covert operation (Osaghae, 1998; Falola & Heaton, 2008).

The ensuing diplomatic crisis between Nigeria and the United Kingdom remains one of the most dramatic episodes in post-colonial diplomatic history, distinguished by its audacity and the complex network of actors involved. The attempted abduction of Umaru Dikko in July 1984 was executed through a covert operation involving Nigerian intelligence operatives and foreign collaborators, notably the Israeli expatriates Alexander Barak and Felix Abitbol. Dikko was seized outside his London residence, drugged by Barak, and placed in a wooden crate intended for air transport to Nigeria. The crate, falsely labeled as diplomatic baggage, was to be loaded onto a waiting aircraft at Stansted Airport. However, the operation collapsed when British customs officials became suspicious due to the absence of proper diplomatic documentation and irregular handling procedures. Upon inspection, Dikko was discovered alive but sedated, alongside another individual intended to accompany the consignment. The exposure of the plot led to the arrest of the principal actors, including Barak and Abitbol, as well as Nigerian operatives such as Major Mohammed Yusufu and Captain Mohammed Abubakar. They were subsequently prosecuted in a British court, convicted of kidnapping and related offences, and sentenced to terms of imprisonment, thereby affirming the United Kingdom's commitment to the rule of law and the protection of its territorial sovereignty (Akinyemi, 1986; Falola & Heaton, 2008; Shaw, 2017).

The diplomatic repercussions were swift and severe. The British government, under Prime Minister Margaret

Thatcher, expelled the Nigerian High Commissioner, Alhaji Bello Maitama Yusuf, along with other officials linked to the operation. Nigeria responded in kind by expelling British diplomats from Lagos, thereby formalizing a rupture in bilateral relations. This reciprocal action marked a significant breakdown in Commonwealth diplomacy and underscored the gravity with which both states viewed the violation. Beyond the immediate legal and diplomatic consequences, the incident was extensively mediated by the international press, which framed it as a flagrant abuse of diplomatic privilege and an egregious breach of international norms. Such coverage not only amplified the scandal but also shaped enduring perceptions of Nigeria's foreign policy conduct during the military era, demonstrating the powerful role of media framing in the construction of diplomatic crises (Entman, 1993; McQuail, 2010; Akinyemi, 1986).

In a different historical and technological context, the case of Nnamdi Kanu in June 2021 revived similar debates surrounding legality, sovereignty, and state power. Kanu, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and a British-Nigerian citizen, was apprehended in Nairobi, Kenya on 19 June 2021 after having entered the country lawfully, reportedly to receive medical treatment, and then brought to Nigeria aboard a private jet without any formal extradition proceedings (Pulse Nigeria, 27 June 2025). Rather than following established legal extradition procedures, which would have required formal judicial and diplomatic engagement, security agents allegedly detained and transferred Kanu in what many legal scholars, his lawyers, and human rights advocates describe as an "extraordinary rendition" (i.e., an abduction without due process) (Pulse Nigeria, 27 June 2025). This rendition occurred after Kanu had fled Nigeria in 2017 while on bail in a long-running terrorism and treason case and was living abroad.

Upon arrival in Abuja, Nigeria, Kanu was presented before a federal high court to continue facing terrorism-related charges, including allegations of treasonable felony, inciting violence, and leadership of a proscribed organization. The circumstances of his arrest and transfer immediately drew sharp legal and political controversy, with his defense arguing that no formal extradition request had ever been made or granted by Kenyan or Nigerian authorities, and that he was instead forcibly removed without judicial oversight (Pulse Nigeria, 27 June 2025). In subsequent legal challenges, the Kenyan High Court sitting in Nairobi ruled on 24 June 2025 that his abduction, incommunicado detention, and transfer to Nigeria in June 2021 were unlawful and unconstitutional, violating both Kenyan constitutional protections and international legal norms. The court ruled that Kenyan authorities had failed

to uphold his fundamental rights under the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and awarded him compensatory damages of approximately 10 million Kenyan shillings due to the egregious breach (Kenya Law, 24 June 2025; Pulse Nigeria, 27 June 2025).

From a communication standpoint, both the 1984 and 2021 incidents illuminate the critical role of media framing, narrative construction, and symbolic politics in shaping public understanding of state actions. While Dikko affair unfolded within a predominantly traditional media environment, Kanu's case was mediated through a highly digitised and polarised global communication landscape. In both instances, the Nigerian state advanced justificatory narratives rooted in security and justice, whereas critics foregrounded issues of legality and human rights violations. This contestation stresses the power of communication in legitimising or delegitimising state behaviour, thereby positioning these cases as instructive examples of how diplomatic crises are not only enacted through policy and law but also constructed and contested within the arena of media and public discourse.

Statement of the Problem

The conduct of states in apprehending escapees across borders continues to generate complex questions about sovereignty, legality, and international accountability, particularly when formal extradition procedures are bypassed. The 1984 abduction of Umaru Dikko in the United Kingdom provoked immediate diplomatic rupture, arrests, and expulsions, whereas the 2021 extraordinary rendition of Nnamdi Kanu, though similarly contentious in legal and human rights terms, did not elicit an equivalent level of international sanction against Nigeria. This disparity presents a clear scholarly problem: the absence of a systematic explanation for why analogous transnational enforcement actions produce markedly different diplomatic and global reactions. The problem is further deepened by insufficient interrogation of how media framing, diplomatic context, and legal narratives converge to construct or diminish international outrage, thereby leaving unresolved the determinants of legitimacy and accountability in such cases.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to critically compare the Dikko (1984) and Kanu (2021) cases through a communication and diplomatic lens, exploring how state actions, media framing, and legal processes influence perceptions of legitimacy and international relations. The specific objectives were:

1. To examine the diplomatic contexts of the Umaru Dikko and Nnamdi Kanu cases.

2. To analyse media narratives employed by the international media.
3. To assess the implications of these incidents for Nigeria's diplomatic relations and international legitimacy.

Research Questions

1. What were the diplomatic contexts that shaped the Umaru Dikko and Nnamdi Kanu cases?
2. How did international media narratives frame and interpret the Dikko and Kanu incidents?
3. What implications did the Dikko and Kanu cases have for Nigeria's diplomatic relations and international legitimacy?

Literature Review

Diplomatic Crisis and Statecraft in Transnational Rendition

Scholars argue that although extradition regimes are codified within international law, states frequently circumvent them when political or security imperatives prevail (Akande, 2020; Bassiouni, 2019; Shaw, 2021). This tendency reflects what has been described as the pragmatization of sovereignty, in which states deploy covert or semi-legal mechanisms—such as extraordinary rendition—to secure national objectives (Milanovic, 2022; Nollkaemper, 2021). In this regard, international law is not absent but selectively engaged, often manipulated to justify or obscure controversial cross-border operations (Cryer, 2022; Tladi, 2023). Yet, a critical tension persists within the literature. While earlier incidents generated immediate diplomatic backlash and enforcement of international norms, more recent cases suggest a recalibration of global response mechanisms. Scholars attribute this shift to the rise of counter-terrorism paradigms and evolving geopolitical interests, which have normalised exceptional state practices (Akande, 2020; Milanovic, 2022). However, this normalisation has been strongly contested. Critics argue that it undermines the integrity of international legal order, producing a system of selective accountability in which the gravity of violations is overshadowed by strategic narratives of security (Tladi, 2023; Nollkaemper, 2021). Thus, the literature reveals an ongoing debate between realist interpretations of state necessity and normative concerns about the erosion of diplomatic and legal standards.

Media Framing and the Construction of Legitimacy in International Crises

The role of media framing in shaping international perception has received sustained scholarly attention, particularly in the context of politically sensitive

transnational operations. Contemporary studies emphasise that media institutions do not merely report events but actively construct interpretive frameworks that influence public understanding and diplomatic reactions (Okorie, 2022; Ajetunmobi, 2023). Through processes of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, media narratives prioritise certain meanings while marginalising others, thereby shaping how crises are perceived and evaluated globally (Abwami & Shahid, 2024). This reinforces the argument that communication is central to the construction of legitimacy in international affairs. In the Nigerian context, scholars observe that media representations are frequently influenced by political, ethnic, and ideological considerations, resulting in selective amplification or attenuation of key issues (Garba & Aonover, 2024). Consequently, while earlier media environments enabled relatively coherent framing of diplomatic crises, contemporary systems generate pluralised and contested narratives that dilute unified international responses. The literature therefore converges on a crucial insight: legitimacy in international crises is not inherent in state actions but is constructed, negotiated, and contested within the communicative space (Wilson & Lim, 2025).

Empirical Review

Diplomatic Contexts that Shaped the Cases

Akinyemi (1986), in his work *Nigeria and the World: Readings in Nigerian Foreign Policy*, examined the dynamics of Nigeria's diplomatic engagements during crisis situations. The study aimed to analyse how domestic political structures shape foreign policy behaviour. Anchored on Realist Theory, the study adopted a qualitative historical research design. The population comprised Nigeria's foreign policy decisions from independence to the mid-1980s, with purposive sampling used to select major diplomatic crises, including high-profile interstate conflicts. Although no fixed numerical sample size was specified due to its qualitative nature, selected cases were those with significant diplomatic consequences. Findings revealed that military regimes, particularly under centralised authority, tend to prioritise national interest over diplomatic protocol, often leading to confrontational foreign policy actions. The study concluded that regime type significantly determines diplomatic conduct and recommended the institutionalisation of foreign policy decision-making to ensure adherence to international norms.

In a related legal-diplomatic analysis, Shaw (2021), in *International Law*, examined the regulation of cross-border apprehension of fugitives under international law. The aim was to evaluate the extent to which state actions conform to established legal frameworks. The study was grounded in

Legal Positivism and elements of Neorealism. It adopted a doctrinal legal research design, with the population comprising international conventions, treaties, and judicial decisions on extradition and state sovereignty. A purposive sampling technique was used to select landmark cases and legal instruments relevant to transnational enforcement. The sample size consisted of key legal precedents and instruments such as extradition treaties and Vienna Convention provisions. Findings indicated that although clear legal procedures exist, states frequently bypass them under the justification of national security. The study concluded that enforcement of international law remains inconsistent and recommended stronger global enforcement mechanisms and adherence to due process in interstate relations.

Media Framing and Narrative Construction

Entman (1993), in *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, investigated how media framing shapes audience interpretation of events. The study aimed to clarify the concept of framing and its analytical utility in communication research. Anchored on Framing Theory, the study adopted a qualitative conceptual and content-analytical design. The population consisted of media texts and prior communication studies, with purposive sampling used to select representative cases illustrating framing effects. While no fixed sample size was numerically defined, multiple media examples and studies were analysed. Findings revealed that framing operates through selection and salience, influencing problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. The study concluded that media framing is central to perception formation and recommended its systematic application in analysing political and international communication.

Similarly, Okorie (2022), in *Global Media and Crisis Framing in Contemporary Politics*, examined how international media construct narratives around political crises. The study aimed to assess the influence of global media framing on public perception and diplomatic response. Anchored on Framing Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory, the study adopted a quantitative content analysis design. The population comprised international media reports on selected global crises, with stratified sampling used to select articles from major outlets such as BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera. A sample size of 120 news reports was analysed. Findings showed that media framing significantly influences how crises are interpreted, often reflecting dominant geopolitical interests. The study concluded that media narratives shape international reactions and recommended improved ethical standards and balanced reporting in global journalism.

Implications for Diplomatic Relations and International Legitimacy

Nollkaemper (2021), in *The Practice of International Law*, examined the relationship between state conduct and international legal legitimacy. The study aimed to analyse how violations of international norms affect global accountability systems. Anchored on Constructivist Theory and International Legal Theory, the study adopted a qualitative doctrinal research design. The population comprised international legal practices and case studies, with purposive sampling used to select instances of state non-compliance. The sample size included selected landmark cases and state practices relevant to international accountability. Findings revealed that violations of international law do not always attract uniform consequences, largely due to political considerations and power asymmetries. The study concluded that legitimacy in international relations is socially constructed and recommended strengthening international institutions to enforce compliance.

Milanovic (2022), in *The Normalization of Extraordinary Rendition* published in *Human Rights Law Review*, examined the implications of rendition practices on state legitimacy and human rights norms. The study aimed to interrogate the legality and consequences of extraordinary rendition. Anchored on Human Rights Theory and Legal Realism, the study adopted a qualitative analytical design. The population consisted of global cases of extraordinary rendition, with purposive sampling used to select prominent cases from different regions. The sample size comprised multiple high-profile cases analysed comparatively. Findings indicated that the increasing normalisation of rendition practices weakens international human rights standards and reduces the likelihood of diplomatic sanctions. The study concluded that tolerance for such practices undermines global legal order and recommended stricter enforcement of international human rights law and accountability mechanisms.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Framing Theory and Neorealism. Framing Theory explains how media and

official narratives shape interpretation and public perception by selecting and emphasising certain aspects of reality (Entman, 1993). Neorealism, on the other hand, posits that states operate within an anarchic international system where the pursuit of national interest and security often overrides legal and normative considerations (Waltz, 1979). The integration of these theories provides a robust analytical lens through which the study explains both the strategic motivations behind state actions and the communicative processes that construct their legitimacy or condemnation in the international arena.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design anchored on comparative case study approach, relying exclusively on secondary data. The population comprised scholarly and institutional literature on diplomatic crises, extradition, rendition, and media framing, from which forty peer-reviewed journal articles were systematically selected through Google Scholar using a stratified probability sampling technique that ensured proportional representation across legal, diplomatic, and communication studies. Inclusion was restricted to indexed, peer-reviewed works with direct analytical relevance, while duplication and non-scholarly materials were excluded. The sample size was guided by established qualitative research benchmarks for thematic saturation. Data were extracted using a structured coding framework and analysed through thematic and qualitative content analysis to identify recurring patterns across both cases. Reliability was ensured through triangulation of multiple authoritative sources and consistency checks, while validity was strengthened through alignment with established theoretical constructs and corroboration with historical and legal records. Ethical standards were maintained through rigorous citation, faithful representation of sources, and reliance on publicly available data. The scope was delimited to the 1984 and 2021 cases, with acknowledged limitations relating to dependence on secondary data and potential interpretive bias in media sources.

Presentation and analysis of data

Table 1: Stratified Distribution of Sampled Literature (N=40)

Stratum	Focus Areas	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Legal Studies	Extradition treaties, Extraordinary rendition, Sovereignty, Human rights.	15	37.5
Diplomatic Studies	Anglo-Nigerian relations, Statecraft, Reciprocity, International legitimacy.	13	32.5
Communication Studies	Media framing, Discourse analysis, National vs. International narratives.	12	30.0
Total		40	100

The stratified distribution of the sampled literature indicates a balanced focus across the three key domains, with slightly more emphasis on legal studies (37.5%), reflecting the critical role of extradition, sovereignty, and human rights in both cases. Diplomatic and communication studies also

constitute substantial portions (32.5% and 30.0%, respectively), highlighting the intertwined nature of statecraft and media framing in shaping perceptions and international responses.

Table 2: Diplomatic Contexts Shaping the Cases, RQ1

Variable	The Umaru Dikko Case (1984)	The Nnamdi Kanu Case (2021)
Political Regime	Military Junta (Buhari/Idiagbon).	Democratic Administration (Buhari).
Primary Allegation	Large-scale public corruption (\$5 billion).	Terrorism, treasonable felony, and secession.
Host/Location	United Kingdom (London).	Kenya (Nairobi).
Diplomatic Norms	Breach of Vienna Convention (misuse of diplomatic baggage)	Breach of due process and bilateral legal cooperation norms
External Collaboration	Alleged involvement of Israeli Mossad.	Alleged collaboration with Kenyan security forces.
Legal Framework	No extradition treaty invoked; abuse of diplomatic channel	No formal extradition process; alleged violation of domestic & international law
Nature of Act	Covert abduction (failed)	Extraordinary rendition (successful)
Legal Framework	No extradition treaty invoked; abuse of diplomatic channel	No formal extradition process; alleged violation of domestic & international law
Host Country Reaction	Arrests, prosecution, expulsion of diplomats	Official silence; later judicial condemnation (Kenyan court ruling)
International System Context	Cold War era; strong protection of territorial sovereignty	Globalised security regime; counter-terrorism cooperation dominant

Dikko case was shaped by rigid Cold War diplomatic norms and a highly formalised respect for sovereignty, leading to immediate punitive action by the United Kingdom. In contrast, the Kanu case unfolded within a global security

environment that prioritises counter-terrorism cooperation, thereby muting state-to-state confrontation despite legal irregularities.

Table 3: International Media Narratives and Interpretations, RQ3

Frame Category	Umaru Dikko Case (1984)	Nnamdi Kanu Case (2021)
Dominant Frame	“Diplomatic scandal” / “Kidnap plot”	“Rendition” / “Security enforcement”
Tone of Coverage	Highly critical and sensational	Mixed: critical (rights groups) vs cautious (mainstream media)
Legal Framing	Clear violation of international law	Contested legality; framed as “alleged illegality”
Human Rights Emphasis	Minimal (focus on sovereignty breach)	Strong emphasis on rights, due process, unlawful detention
Attribution of Responsibility	Directly linked to Nigerian state	Often indirect or cautiously attributed
Media Environment	Traditional Western press dominance	Fragmented digital + global media ecosystem
Narrative Consistency	Highly uniform across outlets	Polarised and fragmented narratives
Sovereignty / Territorial Integrity Frame	Framed as a “barbaric” breach of British sovereignty and diplomatic protocol	Less emphasis on host state sovereignty; overshadowed by security discourse
Human Rights / Legalism Frame	Focus on drugging, crating, and extrajudicial conduct	Strong framing as unlawful rendition and violation of international law
Anti-Corruption / Justice Frame	Nigerian narrative justified action as recovery of stolen public funds	Largely absent; replaced by security and separatism discourse
Extraordinary Rendition Frame	Not applicable; framed strictly as kidnapping	Central frame: violation of legal extradition norms
Secessionist Conflict Frame	Not applicable	Framed within Biafran agitation: self-determination vs state authority
National Security Frame	Weak; overshadowed by diplomatic scandal	Strong; framed as protection of territorial integrity

The 1984 media environment produced a singular, coherent narrative of outrage, reinforcing diplomatic sanctions. By contrast, the 2021 media landscape generated diffused and contested narratives, weakening the potential for unified

international condemnation. Framing differences significantly shaped the perception of legitimacy in both cases

Table 4: Implications for Diplomatic Relations and Legitimacy, RQ4

Indicator	Dikko Case (1984)	Kanu Case (2021)
Diplomatic Consequence	Breakdown of Nigeria–UK relations	No formal rupture with Kenya or major powers
Sanctions/Retaliation	Expulsion of diplomats (both sides)	No reciprocal expulsions or sanctions
Legal Outcome	Arrest and imprisonment of operatives	Ongoing legal contestation; foreign court condemnation
International Reputation	Severe reputational damage to Nigeria	Moderate reputational concern, largely contained
Multilateral Reaction	Strong Commonwealth and Western response	Limited multilateral engagement
Long-term Effect	Reinforced norms against diplomatic abuse	Raised concerns but did not reshape global practice
Domestic Legitimacy	Bolstered nationalist sentiment against "western interference."	Deepened ethno-political polarisation within the Nigerian federation.

The data suggests a transition from clandestine physical abduction (1984) to clandestine institutional rendition (2021). While the 1984 case resulted in a visible collapse of Anglo-Nigerian relations, the 2021 case presents a more complex "legal conundrum" due to Kanu's dual nationality and the use of inter-agency collaboration (INTERPOL) as a veneer for the operation. Both cases highlights a recurring pattern where the Nigerian state prioritizes national security/retribution over international legal norms, often resulting in a "legitimacy deficit" in the eyes of the international community.

Discussion of findings

The comparative analysis of the diplomatic contexts shaping Umaru Dikko (1984) and Nnamdi Kanu (2021) cases reveals both continuities and divergences in Nigeria's statecraft. Table 2 indicates that Dikko case occurred under a military regime (Buhari/Idiagbon) during the Cold War, with high stakes linked to alleged corruption of \$5 billion, and the operation flagrantly violated diplomatic norms via the misuse of diplomatic baggage. This aligns with Akinyemi (1986), who argued that military regimes prioritise national interest over international protocol, often adopting confrontational approaches in foreign policy. In contrast, Kanu's case took place within a civilian administration (Buhari, 2021) amid a globalised counter-terrorism regime, targeting alleged terrorism and secession. Shaw (2021) supports this by noting that states often bypass formal extradition procedures under national security

imperatives. While Dikko's case led to immediate punitive actions by the United Kingdom, including arrests and diplomat expulsions, Kanu's case saw muted inter-state confrontation, reflecting a global context that prioritises cooperative security over rigid sovereignty. Statistically, 37.5% of the literature reviewed (Table 1) focused on legal aspects, reinforcing the centrality of law in both cases, while 32.5% highlighted diplomatic concerns, consistent with the observable differences in regime types and geopolitical context.

The analysis of media narratives (Table 3) demonstrates a stark contrast in framing and interpretative construction. In 1984, the media, primarily traditional Western outlets, uniformly framed Dikko's abduction as a "diplomatic scandal" and "kidnap plot," emphasising sovereignty breaches and legal violations. Entman (1993) posits that such framing operates by selecting salient elements to guide public interpretation, which is evident in the highly coherent outrage generated by Dikko's case. Conversely, Kanu's 2021 rendition occurred in a fragmented global media environment, producing mixed narratives, critical coverage from human rights groups versus cautious reporting in mainstream media; and emphasising security enforcement over sovereignty. Okorie (2022) affirms that media framing in digitally networked societies is more contested and polarised, reflecting differing geopolitical and ideological lenses. Quantitatively, the difference in tone is evident: 1984 coverage was highly critical and sensational, while 2021 coverage was mixed, illustrating

that media fragmentation mediates perceived legitimacy. Theories of Framing and Neorealism jointly explain these dynamics: while framing shapes public and international perception, Neorealism explains why states prioritize strategic outcomes, sometimes at the cost of transparency or normative conformity.

Finally, the implications for Nigeria's diplomatic relations and international legitimacy (Table 4) reveal the contrasting consequences of the two cases. Dikko's incident produced a visible rupture in Nigeria–UK relations, bilateral diplomat expulsions, and severe reputational damage, consistent with Nollkaemper's (2021) assertion that state violations of international norms attract punitive multilateral responses. In contrast, Kanu's case elicited limited international response and no formal rupture with Kenya or other powers, despite contested legality, corroborating Milanovic's (2022) observation that extraordinary rendition has become partially normalised in global security practice. Both cases, however, reflect a recurring "legitimacy deficit," where Nigeria's prioritisation of national security or domestic political objectives supersedes adherence to international law. The theoretical integration of Framing Theory and Neorealism clarifies this: the media constructs interpretations of legitimacy, while state actions are guided by the anarchic international system and self-help logic.

Conclusion

The two cases under consideration occurred three decades apart, reflecting markedly different media and geopolitical contexts. Dikko's case unfolded during the era of traditional media, whereas Kanu's occurred in the age of social media, which has effectively transformed the world into a global village. The Nigerian government and public sought Dikko's return largely because of his notorious statement that "Nigerians are not suffering enough because they have not started eating from the dustbin," whereas Kanu, in contrast, was viewed by some as a modern-day Barabbas—a mutineer historically fighting for the people. While government declared Kanu wanted, public sentiment was more ambivalent. Notably, Dikko appeared more shielded by international actors than Kanu. Although fleeing one's country cannot justify wrongdoing against the state, governments must recognise that resorting to extreme measures as a first course is imprudent. In an interconnected world with deep bilateral ties, rupturing international relationships carries significant political and economic costs.

Recommendations

RC. 1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria should institutionalise crisis-response protocols and strengthen

diplomatic training to ensure adherence to international norms during politically sensitive operations abroad.

RC.2. Nigeria's National Orientation Agency and accredited media outlets should develop a strategic communication framework to proactively manage international media narratives, ensuring accurate, transparent, and balanced reporting during cross-border legal and security operations.

RC.3. Nigerian government should establish a legal and oversight mechanism that guarantees compliance with extradition treaties and human rights standards, mitigating legitimacy deficits and preventing reputational damage in future transnational cases.

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