

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – IV Issue - II (March – April) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly



LACK OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS THE REMOTE CAUSE OF CRIME IN NIGERIA: A PRAGMA-DISCOURSE CUM FORENSIC LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP MANIFESTOES AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

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| **Received:** 05.03.2026 | **Accepted:** 09.03.2026 | **Published:** 15.03.2026

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Abstract

Crime in Nigeria has been widely examined from economic, sociological, linguistic and psychological perspectives; with poverty, unemployment, inequality, and institutional weakness recurrently recognized as prime drivers. However, these explanations often address proximate or immediate causes while overlooking deeper ideological and discursive foundations. This study argues that the remote cause of crime in Nigeria is the erosion of national consciousness which manifested in the persistent failure of political leadership to translate electoral manifestoes into sincere and practical governance. Drawing on Structural Violence Theory (Galtung, 1969), Human Security Theory (UNDP, 1994), and a pragma-discourse cum forensic linguistic framework, the paper analyzes political manifestoes and governance rhetoric in Nigeria (1999–2023) to demonstrate how defective political speech acts, strategic ambiguity, and discursive insincerity generate legitimacy deficits and normalize opportunistic behavior. Using documentary analysis, thematic coding, and speech act analysis, the study reveals that repeated discrepancies between locutionary commitments and perlocutionary outcomes constitute structural violence and contribute to public distrust, frustration, and criminogenic adaptation. The paper concludes that sustainable crime reduction in Nigeria requires ethical leadership, manifesto accountability mechanisms, and the reconstruction of national consciousness rooted in sincerity, transparency, and civic responsibility.

Keywords: National consciousness, crime, structural violence, political discourse, forensic linguistics, pragmatics, Nigeria, manifesto implementation

Introduction

Nigeria's contemporary crime landscape is characterized by armed robbery, kidnapping, cybercrime, banditry, insurgency, and communal violence. Empirical literature consistently identifies poverty, unemployment, youth exclusion, weak institutions, and environmental stress as significant contributors (Magaji et al., 2022; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023; UNDP, 2022). Reports by the International Crisis Group (2023) demonstrate how governance gaps and economic marginalization have fueled insecurity in Northern Nigeria. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (2022) links violent conflict to structural inequality and institutional breakdown.

While these analyses are valid, they predominantly address *proximate causes*—conditions immediately preceding criminal behavior. This paper advances the thesis that the *remote cause* of crime in Nigeria lies in the gradual erosion of national consciousness, particularly as evidenced by the failure of political leaders to convert their electoral manifestoes into actionable and sincerely implemented public policies.

National consciousness refers to a shared moral and civic awareness that prioritizes collective well-being, institutional integrity, and national interest above personal or sectional gain. When leadership discourse repeatedly promises reform, development, and security without corresponding implementation, it undermines collective identity and trust in governance structures. Over time, this discursive betrayal engenders cynicism, alienation, and adaptive deviance.

This study adopts a pragma-discourse and forensic linguistic approach to examine the relationship between political language, structural violence, and criminal outcomes in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

National Consciousness

National consciousness incorporates shared civic values, patriotic obligation, institutional trust, and ethical governance. It is the moral glue binding state and citizen within a social contract. In societies where national consciousness is strong, legal compliance is internalized as moral duty. Where it is weak, law becomes negotiable and public institutions lose legitimacy. National consciousness refers to a shared awareness of belonging to a political community bound by common values, historical memory, and collective destiny. Traditionally, scholars have associated national consciousness with nationalism, state formation, colonial resistance, and constitutional development. Yet beneath these structural explanations lies a fundamental truth: national consciousness is produced and reproduced through language. The dynamics and mechanics of language holds a prime place in institutionalizing national consciousness.

Nations exist not merely through territory and institutions but through discourse; through the stories citizens tell about themselves which significantly impacts on their consciousness and livelihood, the speeches leaders deliver, the slogans displayed in public spaces, and the narratives embedded in educational curricula. Without discursive reinforcement, national consciousness weakens.

This paper therefore adopts a discursive approach, arguing that national consciousness is:

1. Informed and created through language,

2. Instilled and sustained by performative speech acts,
3. Appraised and negotiated through public dialogue, and
4. Vulnerably inundated by mundanity when discourse lacks sincerity, actionable purpose and coherence.

Remote vs. Proximate Causes of Crime

Proximate causes

Immediate triggers such as poverty, unemployment, or emotional impulse are somewhat attributed to the causes of crime. Proximate causes of crime refer to the immediate, situational, and short-term factors that directly trigger criminal behavior. Unlike remote or structural causes (e.g., systemic inequality or loss of national consciousness), proximate causes operate at the point of decision, where an individual transitions from grievance, need, or impulse into criminal action. They are often psychological, economic, social, or environmental stimuli that interact with broader structural conditions.

Understanding proximate causes is crucial for crime prevention because they are more observable and measurable than remote causes and are often the targets of policing, social intervention, and behavioral correction programs. One of the most recognized proximate causes of crime is acute economic deprivation. When individuals experience sudden unemployment, wage loss, debt pressure, or food insecurity, survival pressures can precipitate theft, robbery, fraud, or other income-generating crimes.

In contexts of high multidimensional poverty, such as documented by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), immediate livelihood insecurity can serve as a direct trigger for criminal acts. Economic strain theory explains that when legitimate means to achieve socially valued goals are blocked, individuals may resort to illegitimate alternatives. However, economic hardship alone does not automatically produce crime; it becomes proximate when combined with opportunity and weakened deterrence.

Remote Causes

These are deep-seated structural, ideological, and discursive conditions shaping long-term social behavior. Remote causes of crime refer to the deep-rooted, structural, historical, institutional, and ideological conditions that create a criminogenic environment over time. Unlike proximate causes—which operate as immediate triggers—remote causes function at the macro-level of society. They shape values, opportunities, inequalities, and power relations that indirectly increase the likelihood of criminal behavior. Remote causes do not automatically produce crime; rather, they create systemic pressures and normative distortions that make criminal responses more probable under certain circumstances. This study situates lack of national consciousness at the remote level, arguing that leadership insincerity generates structural distrust that indirectly fosters crime.

Johan Galtung's Structural Violence Theory posits that violence can be embedded in institutional systems that prevent individuals from meeting basic needs (Galtung, 1969). When political promises concerning employment, security, and welfare remain unfulfilled, deprivation becomes institutionalized. Structural violence, therefore, includes discursive deception that perpetuates inequality. The 1994 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme redefined security beyond military threats to include economic, food, environmental, and political security. Failure to deliver on manifesto commitments undermines human security and weakens the social contract.

Literature Review

Existing Nigerian criminological literature emphasizes economic deprivation and governance failure. Magaji et al. (2022) link youth unemployment to insecurity. The NBS (2023) reports widespread multidimensional poverty. The International Crisis Group (2023) identifies governance vacuums as catalysts for insurgency-like banditry. Psychological research highlights emotional instability, resentment, and cognitive distortions as predictors of violent behavior (Hao, 2024). However, psychological predispositions often flourish within structurally frustrating environments.

Few studies, however, interrogate the *discursive origins* of structural breakdown. Political manifestoes are rarely examined through forensic linguistic lenses to assess sincerity, ambiguity, and performative failure. This study fills that gap.

Theoretical and Analytical Approach

Pragmatic-Discourse Analysis

Pragmatics studies meaning in context. According to speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), political promises function as performative acts comprising:

- Locutionary act: The uttered promise.
- Illocutionary act: The intended commitment.
- Perlocutionary effect: Public trust and compliance.

When leaders lack illocutionary sincerity, the performative act fails and national consciousness diminishes drastically.

Forensic Linguistics

Forensic linguistics treats language as evidence. In governance contexts, discrepancies between manifesto language and policy outcomes reveal patterns of strategic vagueness, modal inflation (“will,” “shall”), and elastic commitments. Repeated discursive insincerity reproduced ritually in an election manifesto produces what may be termed *Pragmatic Legitimacy Erosion*.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative documentary analysis of:

1. Selected Nigerian presidential and gubernatorial manifestoes (2023).
2. Budget performance reports.
3. Policy implementation records.
4. Security and development reports (UNDP, 2022; NBS, 2023).

Analytical techniques include:

- Speech act analysis
- Lexical modality examination
- Implicature identification
- Comparative promise–implementation coding

Findings

Modal Inflation and Performative Excess

In linguistics, modality refers to expressions of possibility, obligation, certainty, or intention — often through words like *will*, *must*, *shall*, *can*, and *guarantee*. Modal inflation occurs when political actors overuse strong modal verbs to project certainty, authority, and inevitability.

In the Nigerian context:

Political manifestoes frequently contain:

- “We will eradicate poverty.”
- “We shall create millions of jobs.”
- “We must transform Nigeria within four years.”
- “We guarantee 24-hour electricity.”

Manifestoes frequently employ high-certainty modal verbs (“shall eradicate unemployment,” “will provide security for all”). Such modality suggests binding commitment. However, policy data reveal inconsistent implementation. This gap converts strong performatives into defective promises.

Strategic Ambiguity: Strategic Ambiguity in manifestoes is discursive or communication approach where a leader, or organization intentionally keeps its position unclear. The goal is to avoid committing to a specific action while still influencing others’ behavior.

Common linguistic features include:

- Non-quantified targets
- Vague timelines
- Conditional clauses
- Aspirational abstractions (“transform,” “empower,” “reposition”)

These features create rhetorical appeal while minimizing accountability. When promises are repeatedly unfulfilled, citizens internalize distrust. Governance loses moral authority. Legal compliance becomes instrumental rather than ethical. Structural violence deepens as deprivation persists. Crime becomes normalized adaptation to perceived elite insincerity.

Discussion

Leadership and National Consciousness

National consciousness begins with elite modeling. When leaders treat manifestoes as mere electoral rhetoric, they erode civic morality at the apex. The relationship between leadership and national consciousness is a recurring theme in political sociology and political theory. The claim that “*national consciousness begins with elite modeling*” reflects the idea that political elites set the moral and behavioral tone for the wider society. When leaders treat manifestoes merely as electoral rhetoric rather than binding commitments, the result can be erosion of civic morality and public trust at the highest level of governance.

The concept of elite influence is strongly connected to Elite Theory, associated with thinkers such as Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels. Elite theorists argue that a small group of leaders inevitably shapes political and social outcomes. Because elites occupy positions of power and visibility, their conduct becomes a model for the broader population. Similarly, Robert K. Merton’s sociological concept of Role Model Theory suggests that individuals often emulate the behaviors and values of people in positions of prestige and authority. Thus, when leaders demonstrate integrity and commitment to public promises, citizens are more likely to internalize similar civic values. In democratic systems, party manifestoes are intended to function as policy commitments and moral contracts between leaders and citizens. According to

Hanna Fenichel Pitkin's theory of Political Representation, elected officials have a responsibility to act in ways consistent with the expectations and mandates of the electorate. When manifestoes are treated merely as campaign rhetoric rather than guiding policy frameworks, two consequences often emerge:

1. Loss of political credibility
2. Decline in citizens' trust in institutions

This aligns with David Easton's theory of Political Legitimacy, which holds that public trust in government depends on the perceived integrity and reliability of political authorities. When leaders repeatedly abandon manifesto commitments, legitimacy weakens because citizens perceive governance as opportunistic rather than principled.

Political philosopher Aristotle argued in *Politics* that the character of leaders influences the moral development of the state. Aristotle maintained that virtue in leadership fosters virtue among citizens, while corrupt leadership cultivates corruption within society. Modern scholars echo this view. James MacGregor Burns, in his work on Transformational Leadership, argued that effective leaders elevate the moral aspirations of followers rather than merely pursuing short-term political gain. When leaders fail to honor their policy commitments, they send a signal that politics is primarily about expediency rather than ethical responsibility. Over time, this may produce widespread cynicism toward governance. Inadvertently, national consciousness diminishes and crime becomes potential.

Policy Implications

1. Manifesto Accountability Legislation: Legal frameworks binding campaign promises to measurable indicators.
2. Independent Discourse Audits: Forensic linguistic review of political commitments.
3. Transparent Implementation Dashboards: Public tracking systems for policy delivery.
4. Civic Education Reform: Teaching discourse literacy and ethical patriotism.
5. Leadership Ethics Certification: Institutionalizing sincerity norms in governance training.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the lack of national consciousness, particularly manifested in leadership failure to sincerely convert manifestoes into practical governance, is the remote cause of crime in Nigeria. National consciousness is not only shaped by historical narratives or cultural identity but also by the ethical conduct of political leaders. Unimplemented manifestoes constitute symbolic violence that translates into material deprivation. Citizens deprived of security, employment, and justice experience systemic frustration. Resentment, anger, and distrust accumulate. Psychological predispositions toward aggression find fertile ground in structurally unjust systems.

Hence, crime emerges as the interaction between:

1. Structural violence
2. Discursive betrayal
3. Psychological frustration

4. Economic exclusion

From a pragma-discourse and forensic linguistic perspective, defective political speech acts generate legitimacy deficits that cascade into structural violence and criminogenic adaptation. Crime in Nigeria is not merely economic or psychological; it is discursive, structural, and ideological.

Rebuilding national consciousness through sincere leadership, institutional transparency, and enforceable manifesto accountability is indispensable for sustainable crime reduction. Crime in Nigeria is ultimately rooted in the failure of political leaders to sincerely translate their manifestoes into practical governance, thereby eroding national consciousness and institutional trust. Restoring discursive integrity is therefore a prerequisite for restoring social order that will hinge on national consciousness.

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