Nigeria's Designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and Insecurity In Nigeria: An Application of Game Theory

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Abstract
This paper discusses how the Country of Particular Concern (CPC) labelling of Nigeria by the previous President of the United States, Donald Trump, affected the country and how the strategic interactions that occurred were modelled as a game using a game-theoretic model. Based on documentary sources of U.S. policy texts, governmental reactions in Nigeria, publications of human-rights groups, and security-related data in the period between 2019 and 2024, the research revisits the way CPC classification changed incentives, perceptions and political behaviour. The results indicate that the declarations of Trump, especially the resurgence of alleged persecution of Christians, put reputational and diplomatic strain on the Trump administration, which changed the strategic posture of Nigeria. The government of Nigeria was also simultaneously signalling by rejecting the conceptualisation of Christian genocide and a muted diplomacy to reduce possible sanctions, as it would have in incomplete-information games. The increasing insecurity at the time, such as mass kidnappings in Kebbi, Kaduna, and Niger States and the assassination of Major General U.U. Uba in Borno put the international actors and the domestic government in their respective interpretive gaps. This analysis shows that the CPC designation acted as a strategic shock, and it led to repeated signalling games among the United States, the government of Nigeria, and non-state armed groups. The paper concludes by stating that to comprehend the effect of CPC, the perspectives of political behaviour, religious-freedom diplomacy, and game theory have to be combined. The recommendations policy has focused on enhancing strategic communication, stronger security coordination, and enhanced U.S.-Nigeria diplomatic engagement to curb the misperceptions and to alleviate reprehensible vulnerabilities in the future.

Key words: Religious Freedom and Persecution Country of Particular Concern (CPC), Religious Freedom and Persecution, Nigeria, Security and Policy Response.

JEL Codes: F51, Z12, C72, H56

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Populist politics back in the 21st century have redefined the role of diplomacy all over the world, which has produced ripple effects which go well beyond the

United States borders. The administration of Donald Trump was marked by a particular type of geopolitical signalling, which is transactional diplomacy, selective promotion of human rights, and instrumentalisation of foreign policy to meet domestic and ideological goals (Burrows and Braml, 2025a; Miller and Tserendorj, n.d.). The labelling of some countries as Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) through the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998 was one of the manifestations of such a strategy, which historically was imposed on the state that committed or condoned especially severe abuses of religious freedom (U.S. Department of State, 2025).

In 2019, Nigeria was initially listed on the Special Watch List of the United States, and in December 2020, the Trump administration declared it a Country of Particular Concern (USCIRF, 2020; Religion Unplugged, 2025). The other states that joined the CPC list were China, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Eritrea, and Turkmenistan, which are said to systematically suppress religious minorities (Cable, 2025; Munro and Yi, 2025). Another example that the Trump administration used to justify the inclusion of Nigeria is that the country has been engaged in systematic, chronic, and heinous acts of violation of religious freedom, which includes the targeting of Christian communities, abduction by extremists, and the government alleged that the government has not done enough to prosecute the perpetrators (Religion Unplugged, 2025).

Nevertheless, the Nigerian government vigorously protested against such a designation, stating that it is premised on inaccurate data and that religiously-based violence in Nigeria is not an isolated security issue of terrorism, banditry, and communal discord (Reuters, 2025). This diplomatic panorama, which is here known as the Trump CPC Panic Effect, is not just a political or moral scuffle, but a multifaceted knot of strategic relationships between actors of states and non-state actors. The players in the dynamic strategic environment of decisions based on perceived payoffs, reputational considerations, and signalling incentives include the Nigerian government, the religious groups, international observers and foreign powers. This scenario can be understood in terms of the game theory that offers a strict framework of how rational actors will interact in interdependence and uncertainty situations (Cheng et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025; Lanzetti et al., 2025).

Economically, game theory explains the role of the CPC status as a country in Nigeria to affect trade, investment flows and institutional credibility. The name is likely to have an impact on the confidence of foreign investors and the operations of domestic regulatory agencies, including the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (FCCPC), created according to the Federal Competition and Consumer Protection Act of 2018 (Adekeye, 2024). In this case, the Nigerian state has to compromise between the expectations of global human rights and economic sovereignty as a strategic trade-off of a repeated prisoner dilemma between submission and defiance.

The CPC label creates a signalling game between the international community, the government of Nigeria, and religious communities in the religious context. The reactions of the government are viewed as an indication of either good intentions in bringing changes or as a defence mechanism. In their turn, non-state religious actors change their advocacy/resistance strategies depending on such signals (Petersen and Schjoedt, 2025; Al-Qahtani et al., 2025). Reactions of the international community (either in sanctions or in changes of aid or rhetorical criticism) change further the payoff structure of the game, which then influences future cooperation or antagonism.

Politically, the CPC declaration by Trump fits into the general trends of populist foreign policy, which seeks to assert moral authority through the use of strategic labelling to serve geopolitical interests (Seese & Ryan, 2022; Burrows and Braml, 2025b). In the case of Nigeria, this is a signalling equilibrium challenge of whether to publicly oppose the designation and face the threat of losing reputation in Western quarters, or secretly change its policies to suit the demands of the U.S. without giving away sovereignty. According to Agboba (2024) and Adeniran (n.d.), the tendency of Nigerian political elites to counter such international pressure with the help of elite bargaining and symbolic compliance is inherently rational, which is how game-theoretic reasoning predicts that such strategies should be used.

In this regard, the game theory applied in the CPC panic effect is an analytical tool that is structured to understand the way Nigeria negotiates the crossroads of international pressure, domestic legitimacy and religious pluralism. It allows the modelling of interaction wherein more than two rational actors who have divergent goals react strategically to the actions of other players. In the footsteps of the energy systems (Cheng et al., 2025), the cybersecurity (Liu et al., 2025), and decision optimisation (Su et al., 2025) applications of game theory, this paper places the Nigerian reaction to the Trump CPC labelling in a strategic context that unveils the rationality of adaptive behaviour under international examination.

Overall, the CPC panic phenomenon in Nigeria has summed up the tensions between the external moral signalling and the domestic policy sovereignty. Applying the principles of game theory, this paper aims at identifying the equilibrium strategies that characterise the economic, religious, and political reaction by Nigeria to the international designation as Country of Particular Concern. In this way, it adds to the recent literature on the topic of developing countries utilising strategic rationality to navigate the global order that is defined by populist realpolitik and institutional contestation.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Country of Special Concern (CPC)

The Country of Special Concern (CPC) designation, which has been made under the United States International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998,

has acquired new prominence with the recent pronouncements by Donald Trump indicating that he may implement a more aggressive global religious freedom policy upon re-election. The literature frames the CPC framework as a normative mechanism and a strategy mechanism of foreign policy. According to other scholars, including Farr (2018) and Rogers (2020), the United States has begun to use CPC designations not only to reflect its willingness to penalise violations of religious freedoms, but also to show its adherence to human rights standards. The CPC mechanism, however, acquired a more politically charged form during the previous Trump administration, especially in Africa, where analysts noted an open trend of selective pressure and transactional diplomacy. The Nigerian CPC title in 2020 was used in acknowledging this change, creating a broad discourse among scholars who were doubtful about whether it was an appropriate nomenclature that depicted the Nigerian religious conflict reality or a wider signalling political agenda.

The current research on the U.S.A.-Africa relations under Trump defines the environment of foreign policy as unpredictable, potentially overreliant on public threats, and highly responsive to the interests of domestic evangelical electorates. According to Shinn (2021) and Adebajo (2021), Trump tended to make decisions based on ideological promises and not on the consensus of the multilateral level, which increased the susceptibility of African states to arbitrary retaliatory measures. His more recent declarations accusing some African governments, including Nigeria, of not protecting the lives of Christians and minority groups have renewed a scholarly interest that a Trump government, once more, might recycle or grow more aggressive in CPC. Although these pronouncements are rhetoric, they are viewed as plausible indicators since Trump has already been willing to label Nigeria as a CPC and now has substantial implications on the diplomatic and policy expectations of Nigeria.

The body of literature on the Nigerian conflict situation in the context of religion provides a complicated scenario, which makes the U.S. judgments even more complicated. Researchers Falola and Heaton (2020), Onapajo and Uzodike (2021) and Ibrahim (2020) all report that the presence of religious violence in Nigeria is seldom state-sponsored, but rather due to a combination of terrorism, communal grievances, banditry, institutional weakness, and socioeconomic pressures. Such a multidimensional character creates an informational asymmetry between the U.S. and the outside world, where the U.S. tends to view religious violence in the narrow perception of persecution, whereas domestic scholars attribute it to structural and governance-related factors. This spacing, in turn, provides a situation where threats to external sanctions, like the label of the CPC, can cause disproportionate fear among the policy-making communities in Nigeria, particularly when linked to an actor with huge security and economic power.

The analysis of sanctions and International pressure is scholarly literature offering a beneficial context to explain the response of Nigeria to the CPC

designation. Studies by Hafner-Burton (2008), Guzman (2008), and Whitaker (2019) reveal that states that face threats due to human rights tend to react to their dangers with a combination of compliance, resistance, symbolic reform, and diplomatic lobbying. These reactions are majorly influenced by the perceived cost, reputational and strategic interdependence with the actor who imposes a sanction. In the case of Nigeria, analysts observed the speedy diplomatic overlap with the U.S. State Department, tightening the narrative control of the religious freedom-related concerns, and efforts to demonstrate the positive turn of security operations since the 2020 decision by the CPC. Such behaviour patterns indicate that Nigeria did not take the designation as mere criticism and therefore, it was a threat that had material consequences, including security aid, international reputation, and geopolitical status.

The CPC process is also beginning to be interpreted by the literature through the perspectives of signalling, strategic interaction and repeated political games. According to Peksen (2019) and Drezner (2003), the sanction threats generate what is so-called panic effect, especially when the targeted state lacks the certainty of the probability, the intensity, and the time when the penalties will occur again in the future. The recent reiterations of Trump, suggesting that some African states can once again be declared CPC violators, are the perfect fit for this model. Since Nigeria has been labelled previously, the new statements by Trump are used within a repeated game, in which previous penalties help to escalate the effectiveness of the following threats. As a result, the strategic conduct of Nigeria, such as advanced diplomatic acumen and frontal communication on religious liberty, is an effort to either pre-empt or avert the possible sanctions in future. Although the literature provides important information about sanctions, religious conflict, and the U.S.–Nigeria relations, it has not delved into the full scope of addressing how the rhetoric of Trump working recently may be utilised as a strategic signal or how the reaction of Nigeria can be attributed to a game-theoretic format of payoffs, beliefs, and credible threats. This is where the argument of game-theoretic analysis of the CPC effect in Nigeria comes in.

2.2 Theoretical Framework (Game Theory Perspective)

The main point of analysis of the strategic situation around the renewed CPC pronouncements of Trump and the further reactions of Nigeria is based on Game Theory. In its simplest form, Game Theory focuses on the decisions made by rational actors in interdependent situations, in which the action of an actor affects the outcome of other actors. The CPC scenario is an ideal fit into this framework since the United States and Nigeria are in an environment where there is asymmetric power, incomplete information and strategic signalling. The recent statements of Trump are what the signalling theorists refer to as costly signals. His readiness to use sanctions has already been established since Trump declared Nigeria a CPC in 2020, which means that his new threats will be credible in a game-theoretic sense. As the weaker party, Nigeria should deduce the likelihood that Trump may act in the event he comes back to power, and this deduction will determine its reaction policy.

The recent developments of insecurity in Nigeria, especially the increased number of kidnappings, targeted killings and mass kidnappings, have developed controversies concerning the susceptibility of some religious groups to the Nigerian society and more global interest in how the Nigerian government is addressing the situation. The extraordinary incidents, such as the mass kidnapping of school children in Kebbi State and Niger State and the assassination of General Uba in Borno during a military operation, show how the Nigerian security environment has become increasingly vulnerable. The local and international observers have extensively covered these developments, and this has made the efforts of Nigeria to project itself as the overseer of the internal security dynamics even more difficult. The magnitude and rate of such attacks, according to many analysts, are not just aspects that point to the weak aspect of the state but also create more pressure points that make Nigeria more vulnerable to any external critique and threats of sanctions like the U.S. CPC designation.

The violence has escalated, serving as a polarised international narrative. Scholars, advocacy networks and human rights organisations claim that this process of church attacks, kidnapping of clergy and killings of church officials in the northern and central regions of Nigeria constitutes a kind of Christian genocide or a systematic persecution. Their premise is that the attacks were concentrated in the communities, which predominantly belonged to the Christians, and the pastors and priests were killed, and churches were symbolically targeted. Nevertheless, other scholars highly refute this conclusion and assert that in Nigeria, violence is multi-causal, multi-faceted, and not fueled by a state-backed religious motive. Overlapping causes that are cited by these scholars include terrorism, banditry, economic marginalisation, territorial competition, and governance breakdown, and the two religions are the main victims of the increasing insecurity. In this way, the discussion is still contentious, yet the fact that the security situation in Nigeria is getting increasingly poor gives ample grounds to external actors, most notably the United States under the Trump rhetoric, to make the crisis sound moral and religious.

In terms of Game Theory, this disputed account has a direct contact with the strategic behaviour of Nigeria. The government of Nigeria is playing the game of incomplete information, whereby it cannot have complete control over the interpretation of the internal events by the external players. The recent declarations of Trump, in which he also incriminated the countries on the grounds of their inability to secure the minority of religions, are also public statements that increase the chances of a new label of Nigeria as a violator of CPC. The understanding of these external perceptions and the plausibility of the threats given by Trump, considering the previous designation, has compelled Nigeria to now make its strategy decisions with a greater degree of uncertainty. With each fresh mass kidnapping or high-profile murder, including that of General Uba, there is a shift in the opinion of outside observers

regarding Nigeria and its ability or desire to protect its citizens. In signalling theory, they are the accidental signals which, however, affect the payoff structure of the game.

Nigeria has a diminishing strategic space as the insecurity intensifies, as outlined by Game Theory. The increasing level of violence reduces the credibility of Nigeria's claim that the state is successfully dealing with it. Insecurity thereby undermines its defensive discourse in the international scene. This creates what Drezner (2003) refers to as a panic effect, wherein a state expects to face some expensive sanctions not because it considers it guilty of the claims, but due to the fact that outside observers might see failure to contain violence as a sign of persecution or negligence. In this respect, the increased number of kidnappings, mass abductions, and targeted killings changes the payoff matrix of expected cost of inaction or denial to be higher as compared to the perceived cost of visible, albeit partial, compliance or reform.

These strategic pressures are exhibited in the behaviour of the Nigerian government. As a reaction to Trump's revived CPC rhetoric and rising insecurity, Nigeria has stepped up diplomatic activity in the US, more open dialogue regarding efforts to safeguard religious communities, and changed the emphasis of the narratives toward the non-religious causes of violence. These behaviours can be explained as the best response to a signalling game. Nigeria tries to deploy the counter-signals that portray insecurity as the crisis of a nation, rather than a crisis of religion, thus undermining the basis of CPC designation. At the same time, it also engages in selective reforms, military incursions, and high-profile publicised arrests to show hustle. This does not always address the issue of insecurity, yet it acts in a strategic way to change the perception of the outside world and minimise the chances of future sanctions.

Game-theoretic interactions also play off with the competing international narratives of the genocide of Christians. When the genocide argument is advanced by the advocacy groups, they establish the external nodes of pressure that alter the belief system of the U.S. government, thereby raising the chances of sanctions. Nigeria should look forward to this change and counter it with tact and strategic counterargument, informative communication, and lobbying. On the contrary, as other scholars and organisations disdain the genocide allegation and blame violence on structural forces, Nigeria has a short-term benefits game, as it can leverage the alternative descriptions to undermine the ethical legitimacy of CPC status. The actions of the Nigerian government, which swing between deniability, recognition, reform declarations and diplomatic reassurances, are typical of a rational actor who struggles in an environment that is highly complex in terms of belief updating.

Generally, the Nigerian government's behaviour during the increasingly deteriorating insecurity is characteristic of a game-theoretic interaction due to the presence of credible threats, incomplete information, signalling, and

evolving payoff structures. Growing rates of kidnapping, en masse school kidnappings, and high-profile murders make Nigeria susceptible to external criticism and thus heighten its need to resort to strategic signalling and positioning in diplomacy. This dynamic is amplified by Trump through his renewed articulations, which are turning a security crisis into a prospective game of international sanctions, and in response, Nigeria is trying to find a balance with a combination of defensive discourses, selective reforms, and calculated diplomacy. This is a strategic game that explains why Game Theory offers the most appropriate theoretical approach to explain the emerging CPC effect in Nigeria.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study design used in the study is a qualitative research based on the documentary and strategic behaviour modelling. Since the CPC designation is politically and diplomatically sensitive and the Nigerian context of security is an intricate environment, qualitative approaches provide the versatility needed to decode the decisions made by actors, strategic relations, and the ensuing implications of the Trump pronouncements. The methodology permits the triangulation of several data sources, which are official statements, international reports, media publications, security briefings, and scholarly writings, to re-establish the logic of interaction between the United States and Nigeria during and after the CPC designation.

The study is based on secondary data, with the main sources being reputable sources collected systematically. They include the documents published by the U.S. Department of State on religious freedom in other countries, speeches and other public statements of former President Donald Trump, reports of the governmental agencies of Nigeria, reports on the security situation published between 2019 and 2024, and data from international human-rights organisations like the Human Rights Watch, the International Crisis Group, and Amnesty International. The sources of media like the BBC, Al-Jazeera, Reuters and premium Nigerian newspapers were also consulted to get the narratives of the people and the political reactions. Articles about CPC designations, Christian persecution controversies, religious freedom, U.S.–Africa relations, and game-theoretic political behaviour that were published as articles in academic journals were reviewed to locate the study within the existing academic discourse.

In order to analyse the strategic aspects of the CPC designation, the paper uses a game-theoretic analytical model. Particularly, a two-player strategic interaction model is developed between (i) the United States, which is portrayed by a Trump administration, and (ii) the Government of Nigeria. The model is based on the assumption that the U.S. has two possible strategies: either imposing or threatening sanctions after the CPC listing, or (b) remaining diplomatically flexible. Nigeria, on the other hand, is presented with options that include (a) raising domestic security measures and showing a willingness

to respect religious freedom, or (b) keeping everything as it is and decrying any external influence. The inferences made about the payoffs are based on the observable political behaviour, such as the diplomatic reactions of Nigeria, the statements made by the top government officials and changes in the security operations during the period being studied.

Moreover, the paper uses process tracing to determine event lines between the CPC label and the behavioural response of the Nigerians and the changing security relations. The major pointers observed are: (1) the growth in insecurity, including the increased kidnapping of schoolchildren in Kebbi, Kaduna, and Niger States; (2) high-profile killings, including the one of Major General U.U. Uba in Borno State; and (3) changes in the rhetoric of the public and international community on claims of a genocide against Christians versus the counter-argument to that by government actors and Muslim leaders. Such indicators contribute to the reflection of the internal security environment of Nigeria and assist in assessing whether the pronouncements of Trump changed the priorities of the governments or not the behaviour of the insurgents.

Lastly, a thematic analytical process of data analysis is performed, making it possible to draw out common patterns, including fear of sanctions, reputational signalling, strategic denial, and blame-shifting, which are all theoretically expected in game theory. Themes are arranged in the main lines of the core of credibility of threats, strategic compliance, deterrence and maximising payoffs, and they offer interpretive clarity in the behaviour that is perceived on both sides. The documentary analysis, game theoretical modelling, and process tracing can be combined to engage the intensive and context-specific evaluation of the impact that Trump CPC label exerted on the governmental behaviour of Nigeria and the processes of insecurity.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

Table 1 presents the description of the game theory

Table 1: Description of the Game

Element	Description
Players	Player 1: United States (Trump Administration)
Player 2: Nigerian Government	
Game Type	Repeated strategic game with incomplete information (asymmetric beliefs about intentions, severity of religious persecution, and state capacity).
U.S. Strategies	**S1:** Maintain CPC designation and threaten sanctions
S2: Relax pressure and pursue diplomatic engagement	

Nigeria's Strategies	**N1:** Strengthen security actions, demonstrate religious freedom, and engage diplomatically
N2: Reject allegations, deny religious framing, maintain status quo	
U.S. Payoffs	High payoff: Successful pressure leading to reforms; domestic support from evangelical groups.
Low payoff: Perceived hypocrisy or failure to influence Nigeria.	
Nigeria's Payoffs	High payoff: Avoid sanctions, preserve sovereignty reputation, reduce diplomatic pressure.
Low payoff: Sanctions imposed, increased international criticism, emboldened insurgents.	
Equilibrium Logic	The dominant equilibrium tends toward a **signalling equilibrium**, where Nigeria publicly denies CPC allegations but privately increases engagement and selective compliance to avoid negative payoffs.
Impact of Insecurity	Rising kidnappings and attacks increase uncertainty, encouraging U.S. actors to believe allegations, and encouraging Nigeria to signal resolve through intensified diplomacy rather than uniform security improvements.
Role of Trump's Pronouncement	Increases threat credibility for S1; shifts Nigeria's expected payoff matrix; heightens incentive for N1 (selective compliance + narrative management).
Incentives of Non-State Actors	Insurgents interpret state weakness or international pressure as opportunities to escalate attacks, exploiting the information asymmetry within the strategic environment.
Overall Dynamic	A triangular signalling game involving the U.S. government, Nigerian government, and non-state armed groups, with each actor adjusting strategies to maximise political, reputational, or operational payoffs.

Source: Author's compilation, 2025

The political game with a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) designation of Trump in Nigeria can be interpreted as a repetitive game where two main participants are engaged, namely the United States, the Trump Administration, and the Nigerian government. The game has the trait of partial information where each group has unequal beliefs on what the other intends to do, how serious the religious persecution would be and the ability of Nigeria to avert violence. There are two major strategies that the U.S can be acting on: one can be retaining the CPC designation and threatening sanctions (S1), or reducing pressure and engaging in diplomatic activities (S2). In its turn, Nigeria may react by enhancing domestic security, proving its intentions to religious freedom, and acting at the diplomatic level (N1), or refusing to accept the claims, denying that such violence has been framed by religion, and keeping the situation unchanged (N2).

The U.S. payoffs are determined by the efficiency of their strategies; a high payoff would be successful in making Nigeria adopt reforms and can get domestic backing of the evangelical groups, whereas a low payoff would be the U.S. being hypocritical or ineffective. In the case of Nigeria, the high payoff is obtained when there are no sanctions, sovereignty and international criticism, and the low payoff when there are sanctions, international criticism and emboldened rebels. The logic of equilibrium of this type of interaction is more likely to be a signalling equilibrium, where Nigeria publicly refutes CPC accusations but privately engages more and chooses to obey reforms to avoid being punished.

Insecurity increases, including kidnappings and attacks, and with this comes uncertainty in the game. These types of occurrences make it more probable that the United States actors will interpret the scenario as persecution, and that Nigeria will send the message of determination by escalating its diplomacy instead of consistent security enhancements. The credibility of the threat of adhering to the CPC designation (S1) is strengthened by the pronouncement of Trump, altering the expected payoff matrix of Nigeria and increasing the incentives of selective compliance accompanied by the narrative management (N1).

It is also the strategic environment of non-state actors, including insurgent groups. They view the perceived state weakness or international pressure as an avenue for intensifying the attacks, using the asymmetry of information in the game. In general, the dynamic is a triangular signalling game between the U.S. government, the Nigerian government, and the non-state armed groups, where each actor is adaptively optimising its strategies to maximise either political, reputational or operational payoffs. This framework identifies the interplay between CPC designations, domestic insecurity and international pronouncement in the development of behaviour of both state and non-state actors in complex and interdependent manners.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The results of this research have shown that the CPC designation of Trump, together with later pronouncements, had a great change on both Nigerian and United States strategic calculations, although the designation did not lead to any sanctions instantly. The actions of the Nigerian government at this point were indicative of the strategy of strategic denial, reputation management, and selective compliance, all of which are in line with the expectations of game theory. The government responses of the Nigerian authorities also focused on national sovereignty and disavowed the characterisation of Nigeria as hostile to religious freedom, although alongside more diplomatic overtures to U.S. officials, hinting at an underlying worry with the reputational and financial returns to the CPC classification. The openness of Nigeria in terms of its stance of defiance was in contrast to the silent diplomatic lobbying, which the game theory views as a move to reduce the negative payoffs whilst signalling the determination.

The situation worsens considering the security developments that took place during the period under review. Insecurity, which had increasingly deteriorated due to mass abduction of schoolchildren in Kebbi State, Niger State, and as far as Kaduna State, as well as the high-profile murder of a Major General U.U. Uba in Borno State strengthened the idea that Nigeria was losing control of its own internal security dynamics. These occurrences gave rhetorical weapons to U.S. actors and Christian advocacy groups who claimed that the violence constituted some sort of Christian genocide, especially in the Middle Belt and Northwest. On the other hand, the Nigerian officials, the Muslim leaders, and various scholars denied this account and argued that even the Muslims, traditional rulers, security staff, and children of all religions were victims of violence. This difference in stories is game theoretically an asymmetry in payoff: the U.S. advocacy groups have more power to gain leverage by increasing accusations of religious persecution, and the Nigerian authorities have more to lose by changing the frame of the conflict to criminality and banditry instead of religious cleansing.

Additional symbolic pressure was created by renewed proclamations by Trump, who posited that Nigeria, with Buhari and other regimes that followed, had allowed unrestricted attacks on Christians. This added to a situation in which the non-state armed forces might have revised their strategic anticipations, perhaps seeing heightened international criticism as indicators of state weakness or a loss of deterrence. The rise in kidnappings and attacks of 20202022 may be viewed as the insurgents and bandit organisations taking the opportunity to use the credibility gap of the state in accordance with the logic of incomplete-information games. In the game-theoretic model, the maximum payoffs are obtained by the insurgents by increasing the violence in the case when government responses seem to be disjointed or constrained by diplomatic considerations. Simultaneously, the ambivalent reaction of the Nigerian government, which involved both condemnation, negotiations, and partial military attacks, can be seen as an effort to balance between the dual audience issue because the international community and the domestic political needs must be considered.

In general, this evidence has shown that the CPC designation was a strategic shock and pushed Nigeria into a repeated game where signalling, counter-signalling and narrative competition operated. Even though the title did not officially alter the security architecture of Nigeria, it affected the cognitions, motivations, and responses of primary actors. The U.S. wanted to employ the CPC designation as a threat tool, whereas Nigeria used diplomatic resistance and internal framing to evade reputational sanctions. The interaction of these behaviours highlights the explanatory nature of game theory in trying to explain the CPC effect.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has discussed how the Country of Particular Concern (CPC) designation of Trump has affected Nigeria and has delved into examining how

the two countries interact strategically through a game-theoretic model. As shown in the analysis, the CPC classification, despite being mostly symbolic, had significant political impacts by changing incentives, perceptions, and strategic reactions. The actions of Nigeria at the time demonstrated a calculated desire to balance the issue of sovereignty with the threat of international sanctions, which led to the diplomatic repositioning of the country and the use of more aggressive narrative control. The statements by Trump heightened these dynamics by positioning the insecurity in Nigeria as a Christian persecution crisis, thus benefiting the domestic political agenda of the U.S. by situating Nigeria as an object of further scrutiny. These geopolitical processes were combined with the escalation of insecurity, which is demonstrated by more kidnappings, military deaths, and regional politics, which are consistent with strategic behaviour in the presence of incomplete information.

The paper concludes that the CPC designation presented both risks and opportunities to Nigeria. The critical vulnerability is in the fact that external stakeholders can understand domestic violence as a manifestation of religious persecution, thus continuing pressure on punitive actions. The chances that arise out of the prospect of utilising international focus on empowering security-sector reformations and interfaith peacebuilding efforts can be seen as opportunities. Game theory sheds light on the fact that the long-term payoffs of Nigeria will rely on its credible signalling, which is showing consistent protection of all the religious groups, enhancing transparency in the security operations, and eliminating the incentive systems that allow the manipulation of the international narratives by non-state armed groups. The CPC effect of Trump on Nigeria shows the relevance of studying international diplomacy as a type of strategic interaction, depending on incentives, expectations and perceptions. Game theory offers a potent perspective regarding the explanation of the behaviour of the actors, and how Nigeria can redefine future payoffs by enhancing domestic capacity, heightening narrative coherence, and interacting better with international partners.

6.0 Recommendations

These findings can be used to make a number of policy recommendations. To begin with, the Nigerian government needs to implement a consistent strategic communication system that can give verifiable, factual reports on the violence, particularly where genocide occurs in the Middle Belt, and refute the arguments that portray Nigeria as a conflict solely on a religious front. Second, a better coordination of security is required, especially in states like Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Zamfara, Borno, and others, where strategic omissions have empowered armed forces. Strengthening

The collection of intelligence, enhancing military manoeuvrability, and investing in local-level early warning systems are essential measures. Third, Nigeria ought to harmonise and expand diplomatic contact with the United States by setting organised consultations on religious liberty and security

assimilation to lessen the threat of misunderstandings that lead to punitive labels like CPC. Finally, the civil society institutions, such as Christian, Muslim, and traditional institutions, should cooperate to implement the peacebuilding mechanisms aimed at minimising the instrumentalisation of the religious identity by the violent groups.

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