

RUMOUR, ELITE MEDIATION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY IN PUBLIC PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT DURING THE LAGOS DEMOLITION CRISIS

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Abstract—The focus of this study is the impact of elite political mediation and rumour mongering on ethnic interpretations and public perception during the Lagos demolition crisis. It is based on the interventions of Senator Victor Umeh in the Abule Ado and Lagos Trade Fair controversies and the fact that accusation of ethnic targeting was played off against official allegations of planning violations. The qualitative approach was carried out using a documentary case-study design. The data were gathered purposively from a published interview with Senator Umeh, TV interviews, government responses, and selected news reports published from November 2023 to October 2025. An interview guide was adopted for the interview session, while the data gathered was analysed thematically. The findings indicate that Umeh's action was of humanitarian advocacy, professional interpretation of land issues, institutional negotiation and public reassurance. In Abule Ado, his story was not just one of ethnic persecution; it included dialogue, verification, regularisation and accommodation of affected interests. In the case of the Trade Fair Controversy, however, his jurisdictional criticism brought the issue to the attention of the nation and bolstered the call for due process. The study also revealed that rumour and ethnic identity mutually strengthened within the framework of an atmosphere of uncertainty, solidarity of the ethnic group, selective information uptake, and suspicion of official information. It states that any public perception management in a plural city must be based on early evidence, participatory communication and credible mediators that are able to admit grievances without exacerbating ethnic differences.

Index Terms—Rumour, Elite Mediation, Ethnic Identity, Public Perception, Demolition Crisis

I. Introduction

Background to the Study

Lagos is Nigeria's most economically vibrant and ethnically diverse city (Olajide & Lawanson, 2022). It has grown rapidly, causing land ownership issues, planning permissions, drainage paths, road clearances and the nature of development on public land to come into conflict on a frequent basis (Akinwande & Hui, 2024). So demolition exercises are not typically perceived as a "how-to" activity. They have an impact on housing, businesses, investments, community memories, and soon turn into issues of justice, feeling and political confidence (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2025).

The issue of demolition in the Lagos International Trade Fair Complex and Abule Ado are examples of this challenge. In both instances, the official parties blamed the irregularity of the planning for the unsafe structures and/or dispute over land ownership for the enforcement actions (Premium Times, 2025; ThisDay, 2025). The impacted residents, traders and elected officials, however, voiced concerns surrounding notice, proportionality, title, jurisdiction, and the human impact of enforcement (Arise News, 2025; Channels Television, 2025a). The controversy took an ethnic twist as these conflicting narratives began to flow

through television and newspapers and media platforms as well, with many of the affected occupants and business owners identified as Igbo (Guardian Nigeria, 2025; Vanguard, 2025).

Rumours have a greater impact when the event is meaningful for the viewers, and there is insufficient, delayed or distrusted reliable information about the event (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2018). It's not always a completely made-up claim. It can start with something that has been observed, like damage to buildings, and then provide unverifiable details of motive, selective targeting or plans for the future. These explanations are typically understood through previous experiences and communal memory in a multi-ethnic setting (Ogola, 2021). Even when planning law is invoked as the official basis for a claim that an enforcement exercise is meant to weaken one ethnic group, the claim can spread (Ecker et al., 2022).

The role of elite political actors is crucial in this process. They enjoy a higher pedestal in society and hence have access to government institutions and a wider audience than ordinary citizens (Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2020). They can defuse a conflict by checking facts, initiating negotiations and clarifying a resolution. They may also accentuate public alarm by portraying the event as illegality, persecution or a constitutional conflict (Ogola, 2021). Senator Victor Umeh is particularly significant in this regard, because he was involved in the Abule Ado issue, met with the Federal Housing Authority, visited the affected area and did not hesitate to question the Lagos State Government's authority during the Trade Fair demolition controversy (Channels Television, 2025b). His interventions are a good example of the role of the elite mediator in shaping public opinion and resolving ethnic crises.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of demolition conflicts in Lagos is typically analysed separately in terms of planning law, political engagement and media coverage, and ethnic grievance. In isolation, these elements are hard to account for in terms of the acquisition of an ethnic meaning in a technical enforcement dispute, and in terms of a public interpretation being shifted by a political actor. It is important that the intervention of Senator Victor Umeh is published, and has elements of advocacy, professional interpretation, institutional negotiation, site inspection, and public reassurance. However, there is still a lack of focused analysis of the impact of these actions on crisis management and/or on perception.

Studies indicate that unverified information can be rapidly shared online and that individuals are more inclined towards accepting claims that align with their already held beliefs or group identities (Ecker et al., 2022; Vosoughi et al., 2018). Fewer studies, on the other hand, have focused on the relationship between rumour, elite mediation and ethnic identity in the context of urban enforcement conflicts in Lagos. There is a need to clarify if there is any difference between an in-group elite that simply echoes grievance and one that can also redress an exaggerated claim, as well as an exploration of the competition between technical explanations and identity-based narratives. This study tackles that deficit by examining the interventions of Senator Umeh and the surrounding public discourse closely.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. Evaluate the influence of elite political intervention, with specific reference to Senator Victor Umeh, on ethnic crisis management and public perception.
2. Examine the relationship between rumour circulation and ethnic identity in the context of the demolition controversy.

Significance and Scope of the Study

The research adds to the field of communication studies by demonstrating that the role of elite intervention may serve more than one function in the same crisis. It can confirm public suffering, offer professional interpretation, assist in negotiation, or impose upon the government or challenge an ethnic claim. The study

is also relevant to public communication officers, journalists, community leaders and policy makers who work on resolving conflicts in a variety of urban contexts.

The analysis covers public demolition discourse between November 2023, when Senator Umeh first commented on the Abule Ado demolitions, and October 2025, when the Lagos Trade Fair controversy brought the issue of ethnic targeting back into the fore. Expressed media narratives, stakeholder statements and official responses are explored to gain insight into public perception. The study cannot claim to be representative of the opinion of the entire population of Lagos.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rumour and Public Perception

Allport and Postman (1947) define rumour as the information spread from one person to the next without proper standards of evidence. The main thesis of their argument is that rumour makes its bed when the issue is important and ambiguous. In time, Shibutani (1966) analysed rumour, defining it as a spontaneous "news" that is used to collectively construct meaning at uncertain events. This is a valuable method as it allows demolition rumours to be seen as stemming from a true enforcement action, but their explanation, motive and foreseeable consequences are still up for debate.

Digital media make rumours faster, more visible and more powerful. The novelty has also played a role in the ability of false news to get disseminated more widely and quickly than verified news on Twitter, according to Vosoughi et al. (2018). Moreover, misinformation is hard to dislodge when it is consistent with one's prior beliefs, if repeated enough times, or if it's from a trusted source, as Ecker et al. (2022) describe. Public perception is therefore not just a product of the message content, but of the speaker, the emotional meaning of the event and the trust in official communication.

In the issue of demolition, the claim that the Igbo people's property was deliberately targeted served as a very general explanatory frame. It helped link individual enforcement incidents and provided them with a unified purpose. The official counter-frame articulated the same behaviours as technical, legal, and necessary for public safety. Public perception management was thus a contest between alternative accounts, rather than just a rectification of the single bogus claim.

Elite Mediation in Crisis Communication

Elite mediation refers to the involvement of powerful political, professional, traditional, and community-based actors who can be a bridge between parties and public institutions. During crises, elites can be categorised as those who make sense of complex situations, have access to decision-makers, voice grievances publicly, and facilitate negotiation. They might be credible because of their official position, professional expertise or because of their ethnic affiliation or a mix of the three.

Elite statements also set the context of an event. Entman (1993) suggests that framing involves the selection of aspects of reality and their making salient, thus helping to define a problem, establish causes, and make moral judgments and offer suggestions for remedies. An elite that calls demolition persecution focuses on motive and group harm. One who deems it a planning violation appeals to the rule of law and safety. One who calls it a planning violation focuses on legality and safety. A mediator can incorporate both of these if he/she accepts suffering and moves the remedy from confrontation to verification, compensation or regularisation.

That's why elite intervention is necessary, but not to be taken lightly. When he or she verifies facts that do not substantiate the group's initial interpretation, a trusted in-group representative can help decrease suspicion. The same representative, too, may localise a local issue and put pressure on it by framing it as a

constitutional or ethnic problem. The impact will vary based on the evidence presented, language barriers, and if the intervention opens a realistic pathway to settlement.

Ethnic Identity and Information Acceptance

Social identity is the component of self-concept which comes from belonging to a social group (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Solidarity and collective protection may be facilitated as a result of group membership, especially when individuals feel vulnerable of their group being endangered. It may also lead to selective interpretation, i.e., information that validates the ingroup is readily accepted, whereas statements coming from an outgroup institution are taken with a pinch of salt.

Ethnic identity is not necessarily a source of conflict. This power is amplified by the portrayal of public events as inequitable treatment, exclusion or threat to the group. In these contexts, expressions like our people, targeted businesses and ethnic victimisation transform the experience of individual suffering into a collective group experience. There is then a circulation of rumour as information and as an identity performance. The sharing of a claim can become a way of demonstrating loyalty, warning other members and a requirement for collective defence.

Empirical Review and Research Gap

In six countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, Madrid-Morales et al. (2021) discovered that individuals misinform for social, political and relational reasons rather than because they believe all the details. They conclude that their discovery implies that building demolition claims might be used as a voice for group concern even in the case of unclear facts. Vosoughi et al. (2018) also find that novel and evocative information benefits, whereas Ecker et al. (2022) find that corrections are less effective when they happen to be misinformation that is congruent with the misinformation one already holds.

In Nigerian demolition reports, the struggle is over meaning, too. The Lagos State Government said the enforcement of the Trade Fair was technical in nature and had no ethnic character, while Senator Umeh disagreed, claiming that it was illegal and beyond the State's jurisdiction (Channels Television, 2025a, 2025b). A subsequent statement from the government provided the residents with an opportunity to regularise their non-conforming structures and reiterated the government's stance on enforcement of non-selective (Premium Times, 2025). Meanwhile, Igbo National Union Worldwide declared the demolition as an ongoing assault on Igbo property (Vanguard, 2025). In these texts, there is a conflict between technical, legal, humanitarian and ethnic frames.

The gap is in the narrow consideration of the movement of one elite actor between these frames. Senator Umeh's Abule Ado interview is a more nuanced stance than just affirming ethnic grievance. He was initially against the demolitions, tried to seek a halt on the demolitions through his professional and political contacts, joined in a joint inspection, recognised planning and allocation issues and agreed to the regularisation. Elite mediation is therefore discussed as a process of verification, representation and negotiation, and the impact of this actor's subsequent public condemnation on ethnic interpretation is investigated.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Rumour Transmission Theory

Allport and Postman (1947) are associated with Rumour Transmission Theory. It suggests that when something is of significance to the rumourers, and when there is some certainty to what people have to say about the situation, there is a large increase in the strength of the rumour. Information travels through a

social network as it gets refined, streamlined and integrated into the existing expectations. This view is carried further with the notion of rumour as improvised news developed by Shibutani (1966), who demonstrates that people create explanations when the institutional news lacks them.

The theory also applies to the demolition of property because loss of property is of paramount concern, and the issues of title, notice, jurisdiction and motive are not always known to the general public. The images of distressed owners and bulldozers provide emotional proof, but do not provide much of an explanation for the specific building that was taken down. Rumour fills this void with a motive and an allegation of deliberate ethnic targeting. Also, the theory can provide an explanation as to why a late correction might not eliminate the initial interpretation.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory was created to describe how group membership influences self-identification and inter-group relations. Individuals make classifications, identify with important groups and compare with relevant out-groups. If the security or status of a group seems to be compromised, members might make an effort to reinforce group solidarity and explain vague behaviour in ways that maintain the group's moral standing.

The theory provides an explanation for the ethnicisation of the claims of demolition. Affected traders and property owners were described as 'Igbo', which facilitated an in-group understanding of the crisis. The government then became a more convenient target as an outside or bad guy. It also accounts for the particular trustworthiness of Senator Umeh for his audiences. He was an Igbo political representative and Fellow of the Nigerian Institution of Estate Surveyors and Valuers, and therefore had the capacity to speak for both the ingroup and as a professional interpreter.

Integrated Application of the Theories

The two theories are complementary to each other. Uncertain and important events lead to unverified explanations, in line with Rumour Transmission Theory, while some explanations are preferred, shared and defended, according to Social Identity Theory. They enable us to look at how a claim targeting an ethnic group circulates in society and how a trusted elite confirms, modifies or challenges this claim. The blend of these tools facilitates the study of ambiguity, group language, source credibility, mediation, corrective framing and negotiated outcomes.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative documentary case-study design. Documentary analysis is suitable for examining how public actors define events, assign responsibility and recommend action within naturally occurring texts (Bowen, 2009). The case-study approach allowed the researchers to connect two related Lagos demolition controversies through the sustained intervention of Senator Victor Umeh.

Purposive sampling was used to select texts that directly addressed either Senator Umeh's intervention or the ethnic interpretation of the demolitions. The period ran from November 2023 to October 2025. The core corpus is presented below.

Source	Document	Analytical relevance
ThisDay, 5 February 2025	Published interview with Senator Victor Umeh on Abule Ado	Detailed account of intervention, inspection, negotiation and proposed regularisation

Source	Document	Analytical relevance
Channels Television, 2 October 2025	Interview with Lagos Commissioner for Physical Planning	Official technical and non-ethnic frame
Channels Television, 6 October 2025	Interview with Senator Victor Umeh on Trade Fair demolition	Elite legal and jurisdictional challenge
Channels Television, 7 October 2025	Report on Peter Obi's intervention	Supporting humanitarian and elite frame
Premium Times, 9 October 2025	Government regularisation ultimatum and legal explanation	Corrective response and competing jurisdictional claims
Vanguard, 15 October 2025	Statement by Igbo National Union Worldwide	Explicit ethnic-targeting narrative and group mobilisation

Two instruments were used. The first was a documentary interview guide that organised Senator Umeh's responses around his entry into the crisis, verification of claims, professional reasoning, and contact with institutions, mediation steps, perceived public reaction and outcome. The second was a thematic coding sheet that captured source details and coded humanitarian framing, legal framing, institutional access, negotiation, ethnic targeting, in-group solidarity, out-group suspicion, and correction and perception effects. The instruments are reproduced in Appendices A and B.

The materials were analysed through the six broad stages of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2021): familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, review, definition and reporting. Coding was deductive where it followed the research objectives and theories, and inductive where repeated meanings emerged from the texts. Claims were distinguished from verified events, official positions and personal interpretations. Triangulation was achieved by comparing Senator Umeh's accounts with government explanations and other stakeholder reports. An audit trail was maintained through the coding sheet.

All materials analysed were already in the public domain. Statements were attributed to their original speakers, and short quotations were used only where necessary for interpretation. The February 2025 text was a published media interview conducted by Charles Ajunwa for ThisDay. It was analysed as documentary evidence and was not presented as an interview personally conducted by the researchers. The main limitation is that public perception was assessed through public discourse rather than a representative survey of Lagos residents. The findings therefore explain patterns of expressed perception and framing, not the numerical distribution of opinion across the state. The study also relies on media records, which may omit parts of private negotiation.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Senator Victor Umeh's Influence on Crisis Management and Public Perception

Humanitarian Framing as the Point of Entry

Senator Umeh's intervention began with a humanitarian interpretation of the Abule Ado demolitions. He described seeing completed houses being pulled down and families displaced at short notice. His initial argument was that government should not allow an estate to develop extensively and later rely only on

force. This frame shifted attention from the ethnicity of the occupants to the proportionality and human consequences of enforcement. It also enabled him to condemn the action without first deciding every disputed question of title. (ThisDay, 2025).

This approach strengthened his public credibility. Affected residents saw an elite actor recognise their loss, while government officials faced criticism based on fairness rather than ethnic accusation alone. In crisis communication terms, the intervention validated pain before seeking technical resolution. Such acknowledgement is important because purely legal explanations can appear indifferent when the public is responding to visible destruction and displacement.

Professional Knowledge and Interpretive Authority

Umeh repeatedly drew on his training as an estate surveyor and valuer and on his knowledge of land law. His professional identity gave him a basis for questioning prolonged government acquiescence and for arguing that possession, development and the conduct of public authorities had to be considered. This did not settle the legal dispute, but it gave affected audiences an alternative interpretation that sounded more authoritative than an ordinary partisan protest.

The combination of ethnic representation and professional expertise was especially influential. Social Identity Theory suggests that an in-group speaker is more likely to be trusted by the group. Professional standing broadened that trust by presenting his intervention as evidence-based. He could therefore challenge official action while retaining the capacity to explain findings that did not fully support the first ethnic interpretation.

Institutional Access, Negotiation and Practical Mediation

The strongest evidence of mediation in the Abule Ado case is institutional rather than rhetorical. Umeh reported confronting the Minister of Housing, meeting the then Managing Director of the Federal Housing Authority, asking for the demolitions to be halted, and later engaging the new Managing Director with the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Land, Housing and Urban Development. He also participated in a joint inspection with residents, developers, indigenous community representatives and FHA officials. (ThisDay, 2025).

His account indicates that mediation produced a movement from indiscriminate demolition towards verification and regularisation. Houses built on drainage channels or proposed roads were separated from properties considered to be in good standing. Existing allottees, current occupants and indigenous interests were brought into a proposed tripartite settlement. The significance of this process is that elite intervention converted public outrage into an administrative pathway. It gave residents a route for presenting receipts, screening claims and perfecting titles rather than relying only on protest.

The finding supports the view that elite mediation is effective when it links public advocacy to access, fact-finding and a workable remedy. It is not enough for a political actor to repeat the anger of an affected group. Influence becomes more constructive when the actor can secure a pause, bring institutions together and translate a complex dispute into steps that citizens can follow.

Correction of the Simplified Ethnic-Persecution Narrative

A major finding from the ThisDay interview is that Umeh did not maintain an absolute claim that the Abule Ado exercise was designed to punish Igbo residents. He acknowledged that Igbo residents formed a majority in the estate and that the incident was initially presented as an anti-Igbo action. After involvement in the case, however, he stated that the matter was more complex. He referred to land acquired for the Federal Housing Authority, earlier allocations, later sales by local landholding interests, blocked roads and structures on drainage channels. (ThisDay, 2025).

This clarification is important to public perception management. Because it came from a prominent Igbo representative who had opposed the demolitions, it had greater potential to correct an exaggerated group narrative than a denial issued only by government. He also commended the President and the FHA leadership for supporting a solution without ethnic bias. In this phase, elite mediation acted as a bridge between group grievance and institutional explanation.

Broader Housing-Governance Frame

Umeh also widened the debate beyond the immediate dispute. He argued that weak funding, fragmented housing programmes and poor coordination had limited the capacity of federal institutions to provide affordable housing. He cited the Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria's stated capital base of N2.5 billion and questioned why newer funds were being created while an existing mortgage institution remained underfunded. These were his policy assessments in the published interview, rather than findings independently verified by this study (ThisDay, 2025).

This wider frame affected public perception in two ways. First, it reduced the temptation to explain the crisis only as ethnic hostility by locating it within longstanding failures of land administration and housing delivery. Second, it strengthened Umeh's image as a mediator concerned with both the affected community and the institutional conditions that produced the dispute. His intervention therefore joined immediate crisis management with criticism of the wider housing system.

Nationalisation and Renewed Contest during the Trade Fair Crisis

The October 2025 Trade Fair controversy produced a different effect. Umeh described the Lagos State action as illegal and a breach of jurisdiction because the complex was a federal establishment. This intervention gave affected traders a strong legal frame and shifted the dispute from local planning enforcement to federal-state authority. It increased national attention, legitimised demands for due process and placed greater pressure on Lagos officials to explain their legal position.

At the same time, the intervention could reinforce an ethnic reading because it occurred within a discourse already organised around Igbo traders and property. The Lagos State Government responded that the exercise was purely technical, that planning approval remained a state responsibility, and that occupants had been given opportunities to regularise their structures (Channels Television, 2025a; Premium Times, 2025). The result was not a single accepted explanation but a sharper contest between jurisdictional, technical, humanitarian and ethnic frames.

The comparison shows that Senator Umeh's influence was neither wholly escalatory nor wholly conciliatory. In Abule Ado, his mediation reduced a simplified ethnic account by supporting inspection and settlement. At the Trade Fair Complex, his public legal challenge widened the conflict and strengthened opposition to the state's narrative. The determining factor was whether intervention was connected to joint verification and negotiated action or remained primarily within a public contest over authority.

Relationship between Rumour Circulation and Ethnic Identity

Ambiguity Created Space for Motive-Based Rumours

The demolition images established that loss had occurred, but they did not resolve why particular buildings were selected, whether adequate notice was given, which authority controlled the land or what alternatives were available. This ambiguity created favourable conditions for rumour. The claim of ethnic targeting supplied a clear motive for a complicated event and was easier to communicate than the competing details of planning approval, federal allocation, drainage, road alignment and title regularisation.

Rumour Transmission Theory predicts this pattern. The issue was highly important because livelihoods and accumulated investments were at stake. Information was also disputed. Each additional official explanation could be read either as clarification or as evidence of defensiveness, especially when it came after demolition had begun. The first emotionally convincing account therefore enjoyed an advantage.

Ethnic Identity Shaped Credibility and Selective Acceptance

The ethnic-targeting narrative gained strength because many affected owners were described as Igbo and because the event was linked to wider concerns about belonging and economic security in Lagos. Statements by ethnic associations used group language and presented the demolitions as part of a repeated pattern. Such language transformed separate property disputes into a collective threat and encouraged members to interpret the loss of individuals as injury to the group.

Social Identity Theory explains why the identity of the speaker mattered. Claims made by Igbo political leaders or associations were more likely to be accepted by audiences who saw them as defenders of the group. Official statements from Lagos agencies were more likely to be distrusted where those agencies had already been categorised as an out-group. The credibility gap was therefore relational, not merely informational.

Rumour Reinforced In-Group Solidarity and Out-Group Suspicion

Circulating the rumour performed a social function. It warned other members, expressed loyalty and demanded collective political protection. The Vanguard report on the Igbo National Union Worldwide illustrates this function through allegations of a coordinated attack and calls for federal intervention. The language of shared injury supported solidarity, but it also increased suspicion of Lagos authorities and Yoruba elites.

This reciprocal relationship means that ethnic identity influenced rumour, while rumour also strengthened ethnic identity. Existing group concerns made the targeting claim plausible, and repeated circulation of the claim made group boundaries more visible. The controversy was consequently interpreted through an “us and them” structure even when the underlying dispute also involved planning defects, allocation conflicts and institutional jurisdiction.

Competing Frames Limited the Effect of Simple Denial

The government’s technical frame was necessary but insufficient. Statements that there was “no ethnic colouration” and that the exercise was “purely technical” directly rejected the allegation, yet they did not fully address the emotional and historical meaning attached to the losses. A denial can correct a proposition while leaving the grievance untouched. Where residents believed that notice was inadequate or destruction disproportionate, they could reject the ethnic motive but still distrust the government.

The Abule Ado account suggests a more effective alternative. Public perception changed through joint inspection, acknowledgement of irregular development, identification of affected categories and a proposed settlement. This did not require the government to accept the accusation of ethnic persecution. It required the institutions and mediator to provide a process through which competing claims could be tested. Evidence, participation and remedy were more persuasive than denial alone.

DISCUSSION OF THE COMBINED FINDINGS

The findings extend Rumour Transmission Theory by showing that ambiguity can be reduced through mediated access and shared verification, not only through the release of more official statements. Information becomes credible when affected groups participate in producing it. Senator Umeh’s role in Abule Ado was influential because he entered the institutional process, inspected the site, and

communicated a more nuanced account to the same audience that initially understood the event as ethnic persecution.

The findings also support Social Identity Theory. Ethnic identity shaped which voices were trusted and which explanations were resisted. Yet the case shows that an in-group elite does not have to intensify group bias. Such an actor can use in-group credibility to acknowledge pain and still correct an oversimplified narrative. This is a valuable contribution because it identifies a constructive role for ethnic representation in crisis communication.

Public perception management should therefore not be understood as the manipulation of opinion. In this context, it is the organised provision of timely facts, credible interpretation, participation and remedy so that citizens can make sense of a disputed event. Where government communicates only after enforcement, rumour has time to establish motive. Where political elites speak only in accusatory terms, group solidarity may come at the cost of wider social trust. Effective management requires both government and elites to separate verified facts from allegations and to keep negotiation open.

VI. Conclusion

This study concludes that Senator Victor Umeh's intervention influenced the Lagos demolition discourse through humanitarian advocacy, professional interpretation, institutional access and public framing. His Abule Ado intervention was most constructive when it moved beyond accusation to inspection, negotiation and regularisation. It also demonstrated that a trusted ethnic representative can correct a simplified persecution narrative without abandoning the interests of affected people. By connecting the dispute to weaknesses in land administration and mass housing delivery, he broadened the explanation beyond ethnicity alone. His later Trade Fair intervention strengthened legal opposition and national attention, although it also intensified competition between ethnic, technical and jurisdictional interpretations.

Rumour circulation and ethnic identity had a reciprocal relationship. Uncertainty and visible loss encouraged motive-based explanations; ethnic identity shaped the credibility of those explanations; and repeated circulation of the targeting claim reinforced solidarity and suspicion. Simple official denial could not fully resolve the controversy because the dispute concerned not only facts but also trust, recognition and fairness. Public perception was managed more effectively where communication was joined to verification, representation and a practical remedy.

VII. Recommendations

1. Lagos enforcement agencies should publish notices, approved layouts, legal authority, affected property categories and clear timelines before demolition begins. Early evidence reduces the ambiguity on which rumours depend.
2. A joint verification and mediation panel should be activated for large or socially sensitive demolitions. It should include planning officials, professional bodies, affected associations, indigenous community representatives, legal advisers and credible political mediators.
3. Government communication should acknowledge displacement, livelihood loss and public fear before presenting technical explanations. Empathy and legality should be communicated together.
4. Political elites should distinguish verified facts from allegation and should connect public advocacy to negotiation, inspection and documented outcomes. Ethnic representation should protect citizens without treating every disputed enforcement action as confirmed persecution.

5. Media organisations should use conflict-sensitive language, label unverified claims clearly, compare competing legal positions and avoid headlines that convert a contested allegation into an established fact.
6. Where regularisation, compensation, relocation or appeal is possible, the procedure should be publicised through television, radio, community meetings and digital platforms in language that affected residents can understand.

VIII. Suggestions for Further Studies

Further research should survey affected residents, traders and other Lagos residents to measure the distribution of public opinion and the relative credibility of government, ethnic leaders and media organisations. Comparative studies could also examine whether mediation produces different outcomes in state-controlled land, federal land and informal settlements. A digital trace study of posts and reposts would further clarify how particular ethnic claims moved across platforms and which elite interventions increased or reduced their circulation.

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APPENDIX A: DOCUMENTARY INTERVIEW GUIDE

Purpose: This guide served as a documentary interview analysis protocol for Senator Victor Umeh's published interview. It organised relevant statements around entry into the crisis, verification, professional reasoning, institutional engagement, mediation, ethnic interpretation, public perception and outcome.

1. How did you first become aware of the demolition and what prompted your intervention?
2. What claims were circulating when you entered the matter, and which of them required verification?
3. What facts did you establish about land ownership, allocation, planning approval, drainage routes, roads and notice?
4. How did your professional background in estate surveying and valuation shape your interpretation of the dispute?
5. Which government officials, agencies, community leaders, residents or developers did you engage, and what positions did they present?
6. What specific steps did you take to halt, review or modify the enforcement process?
7. What role did inspection, documentation and joint meetings play in the mediation?
8. How did ethnic claims affect the reactions of residents and the wider public?
9. Did the evidence support the claim of deliberate ethnic targeting? Please explain any difference between initial perception and later findings.
10. What agreements, regularisation measures, compensation arrangements or alternative allocations emerged from the intervention?
11. How did your public statements affect trust in government and solidarity among affected groups?
12. What communication or mediation mechanism should be used before future demolitions in ethnically diverse communities?

Suggested probes: dates, documents consulted, persons present, disputed facts, response of affected residents, government reaction, evidence of changed perception, unresolved issues and lessons for future crisis communication.

APPENDIX B: THEMATIC CODING SHEET**Section A: Source Information**

Variable	Description
Source ID	Unique code assigned to the document or interview segment
Source type	Published interview, television interview, government statement, newspaper report or stakeholder statement
Publisher/platform	Media organisation or official channel
Date	Date published, broadcast or issued
Speaker/author	Person or organisation responsible for the statement
Context	Abule Ado, Trade Fair Complex or broader Lagos demolition discourse

Section B: Objective One Codes, Elite Mediation and Public Perception

Code	Indicator
E1 Humanitarian framing	Attention to displacement, livelihood, suffering, fairness or proportionality
E2 Legal/professional framing	Use of land law, planning knowledge, jurisdiction, title or professional authority
E3 Institutional access	Contact with ministers, agencies, legislators, community leaders or other decision-makers
E4 Verification/fact-finding	Inspection, document review, mapping, identification of affected categories or cross-checking claims
E5 Negotiated remedy	Halt, regularisation, compensation, alternative allocation, appeal or tripartite settlement
E6 De-escalation	Correction of exaggerated claims, reassurance, acknowledgement of complexity or support for dialogue
E7 Escalation/nationalisation	Expansion of the dispute through ethnic, constitutional, federal or national political framing
E8 Perception effect	Evidence that trust, suspicion, solidarity, government defence or public attention changed

Section C: Objective Two Codes, Rumour and Ethnic Identity

Code	Indicator
R1 Ethnic-targeting claim	Statement that Igbo property, businesses or residents were deliberately selected
R2 Illegality/due-process claim	Unverified or disputed allegation concerning notice, title, court order or lawful authority
R3 Emotional amplification	Fear, anger, victimhood, urgent warning or highly dramatic description
R4 In-group solidarity	Use of “our people”, collective defence, shared injury or mobilisation of ethnic members
R5 Out-group suspicion	Distrust of government, another ethnic group or public institution
R6 Identity-congruent acceptance	Acceptance or sharing of a claim because it fits prior group experience or belief

Code	Indicator
R7 Corrective/competing frame	Technical, legal, environmental, humanitarian or negotiated explanation that contests the rumour
R8 Persistence after correction	Repetition of the ethnic claim after official clarification or contrary evidence

Section D: Coding Record

Field	Entry required
Relevant extract	Copy or summarise the sentence or segment being coded
Code(s)	Assign one or more codes from Sections B and C
Status	Verified event, official position, allegation, opinion or inference
Tone	Conciliatory, neutral, defensive, accusatory, fearful or reassuring
Perception effect	Likely de-escalation, escalation, trust-building, solidarity or suspicion
Analytical note	Explain the relationship to the objective and theoretical framework

Instructions for Coders

1. Read the full document or interview segment before assigning a code.
2. Separate what happened from what a speaker alleged, interpreted or predicted.
3. Assign multiple codes where a passage performs more than one communication function.
4. Record evidence that supports both escalation and de-escalation rather than forcing a single interpretation.
5. Compare elite statements with government explanations and other stakeholder accounts.
6. Discuss unclear cases and retain a short note explaining the final coding decision.