



Critical Criminology of Media Coverage on the Murder of Indonesian Embassy Staff in Peru

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ABSTRACT

Media coverage of the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru has generated diverse interpretations regarding the motives, characteristics, and context of the crime. This topic warrants scholarly attention, as media construction of criminal cases can shape public perception and social understanding of crime. Although studies on crime news construction have been widely conducted, prior research remains limited in examining cases with diplomatic and inter-state dimensions that simultaneously consider interpretations from both national and international media alongside actors' responses, amid restricted information access and ongoing legal proceedings. This study aims to analyse how media coverage of this case produces diverse interpretations through the lens of critical criminology. A qualitative case study design was employed through digital observation, interviews, and literature review. The analysis draws on Richard Quinney's Social Reality of Crime theory, specifically the propositions of definition of crime, construction of criminal conceptions, and the social reality of crime. The findings reveal that media outlets constructed the case through varied terminology, sources, and narratives, framing it as organised crime, mistaken identity, and geopolitical entanglement. These constructions shaped actor interpretations ranging from ordinary criminal acts, premeditated murder, transnational criminal networks, to international geopolitical interests. This interaction ultimately produced a social reality of crime that is dynamic and contextual, thus, this study demonstrates that crime is a social construction shaped through interpretation, power relations, and media narratives in the public sphere.

INTRODUCTION

Audience perception of criminal events is largely shaped by the ways in which the media present information (Abiodun & Nwaoboli, 2023). This influence is reinforced by the widespread consumption of digital media. In Indonesia, the role of the media has become increasingly significant alongside internet penetration, which reached 80.66% of the population, or approximately 229 million users, with 15.04% accessed online news and current information, in 2025 (APJII, 2025). Limited direct experience and incomplete access to information often lead individuals to form simplified interpretations of criminal incidents, with media framing of ongoing and unresolved events shown to significantly shape public perception prior to any definitive conclusion (Baranauskas, 2022). Consequently, digital mass media have become important sites of meaning construction that shape how the public interprets contemporary events.

One case that vividly illustrates these dynamics is the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Lima, Peru, on September 1, 2025. A Junior Chancery Officer at the Indonesian Embassy was shot near his residence in the Lince district by two assailants who fled the scene on a motorcycle (Darmawan & Dzulfaroh, 2025). CCTV footage showed the victim being shot at close range without any apparent attempt to steal his belongings, suggesting a deliberate and professionally executed attack (Berrios, 2025). Peruvian authorities subsequently classified the incident as a suspected contract killing, leading to the arrest of five suspects linked to the criminal gang Los Maleantes del Cono, although the motive remained under investigation (Berrios, 2025; Diahwahyuningtyas & Dzulfaroh, 2025). The flow of information surrounding the case was influenced by geographical constraints and differences in the legal system, which contributed to limited information availability.

Furthermore, this incident is difficult to explain through the framework of conventional crime, as the victim was an administrative staff member without a strategic position, and the incident occurred within the jurisdiction of another country. There were indications of a modus operandi displaying professional characteristics, including surveillance of the victim prior to the incident, the absence of any indication of theft during the execution, and the involvement of perpetrators affiliated with a transnational criminal network that is generally not associated with opportunistic crime (Berrios, 2025; Buttermann, 2025). As media coverage extended only to the arrest of the perpetrators without providing a clear explanation of the motive, various interpretations emerged among the public, a pattern consistent with findings that repetitive and sensationalised reporting reinforces social stereotypes and shapes public opinion even before legal





proceeding are concluded (Fadhilah, 2024), ranging from global political tension and transnational criminal activity to the possibility of a random criminal act and Peru's generally high crime rate (Faizal, 2025; Tv One News, 2025; Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, 2025).

The crime situation in Peru further reinforced this ambiguity. Data from the Observatorio del Crimen y la Violencia recorded homicide cases from January to August 2025, peaking at 177 cases in August, with 89.5% of victims identified as male (Valdes & Basombrio, 2025).

Table 1. Homicide Case Reports in Peru, January – August 2025

Month	Male	Female	Total
January	145	19	164
February	99	9	108
March	158	18	176
April	141	22	163
May	142	15	157
June	142	13	155
July	156	15	171
August	155	22	177
Total	1,138	133	1,271
Percentage	89.50%	10.50%	-

Despite these high crime rates, foreign nationals are rarely targeted in Peru (Collins, 2025). This highlights the multifaceted nature of the case and its relevance for scholarly inquiry into the ways in which meaning has been constructed around the incident by both the media and the public. From a critical criminological perspective, crime is not a neutral category but is socially constructed through norms, power relations, and labelling processes involving media institutions and other social actors (Aparatu et al., 2025), making this case a particularly significant site of inquiry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To examine these competing constructions of meaning, the present study draws upon several strands of relevant scholarship. Research on crime reporting consistently shows that the media do not merely transmit information but actively construct social reality through the selection of issues, language, and perspectives shaped by editorial interests. Suryasuciramadhan et al (2024) found that Kompas.com and Liputan6.com framed the Brigadier Joshua murder case differently, producing distinct public perceptions. Gobang (2023) showed that power relations and elite interest shaped corruption reporting in local print media, marginalising affected communities. Maharani & Tutrianto (2025) found that commercial pressures and rapid digitalization have reduced the quality of crime journalism and reinforced public fear of crime. In the context of diplomatic violence and politically sensitive cases, Espiritu (2025) argued that the media coverage of the ICC arrest of former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte was shaped by competing ideological and political interests, as different outlets employed distinct frames ranging from legal legitimacy to political persecution, demonstrating how media institutions selectively construct narratives around high-stakes political events. Similarly, Kuroishi (2025) demonstrated that Japanese media gradually reframed the assassination of Shinzo Abe from an act of political terrorism to an individual criminal act, shaping public interpretations of the event.

Studies on public perceptions of crime further highlight the media's role in influencing how criminal incidents are understood and evaluated. Fadhilah (2024) found that repetitive and sensationalised crime reporting reinforces social stereotypes and shapes public opinion even before legal proceedings are concluded. Andersson (2025) demonstrated that individuals' interpretations of crime-related information are shaped by their predisposed beliefs, values, and social context, as these dispositional features function as a filter through which audiences selectively engage with and make sense of criminal events. Azzahra et al (2025) further demonstrated that public perceptions are shaped by how media select, emphasise, and frame particular aspects of an issue, and audiences may interpret the same issues differently depending on the framing employed. Maulani et al (2025) showed that social media discourse can reinforce collective narratives that dominate public sentiment towards law enforcement issues. Akbar et al (2024) highlighted the role of local online media in shaping public perceptions of security. Nwodu et al (2021) found that although social media broadens opportunities for public discussion, audiences continue to exercise critical judgment when evaluating information. Likewise, Lau & Sermada (2023) demonstrated that educational attainment and media literacy contribute to generational differences in the interpretation of historical criminal events. Bhaskara et al (2021) showed that online news reporting can foster critical awareness of legal issues among academic communities. Kurniawan & Savitri (2026) argued that media construct crime realities through selective emphasis, shaping public moral judgements of offenders and criminal events. Adriana & Paramita (2026) further demonstrated that digital platforms such as TikTok can generate public discourse capable of reshaping opinions on long-standing legal cases, highlighting the expanding spaces in which crime realities are constructed. From a critical criminological perspective, Aparatu et al (2025) argued that crime is not a neutral category but is socially constructed through norms, power relations, and labelling processes involving



media institutions and other social actors.

Research on crime against diplomatic actors introduces an important symbolic and political dimension, Butt (2024) argued that incidents of serious violence involving diplomatic personnel extend beyond ordinary criminality, as such cases generate interstate consequences including the erosion of bilateral trust, cycles of diplomatic retaliation, and broader strain on international relations, impacts that distinguish violence against diplomatic actors from crimes involving ordinary individuals. Through the crime script analysis of contract killings in the Netherlands, Korte & Kleemans (2022) found that such crimes involve systematic planning, specialised roles, and complex logistical support. Thomas (2021), in an analysis of targeted killings across Kenya, South Africa, and Mozambique, similarly demonstrated that execution sites are strategically selected based on the victim's predictable routines, with perpetrators most commonly targeting victims at or near their homes when arriving or departing, in order to maximise effectiveness while minimising the risk of offender identification.

Despite providing a strong foundation, the existing literature reveals a notable research gap. Most studies examine media framing, public perceptions, or diplomatic violence as separate areas of inquiry. Research integrating these three dimensions within a single case, particularly one involving a non-elite diplomatic staff member in a host country, remains limited. The scarcity of factual information during the early stages of the investigation into the murder of the Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru cannot be regarded as a passive or neutral condition. From a critical criminological perspective, the absence of official information creates a contested space in which the media actively produce knowledge. Rather than awaiting verification, media organisations fill informational gaps by constructing narratives through specific frames shaped by their institutional interests. This phenomenon is consistent with Richard Quinney's argument, as cited in Pandey (2023), that crime is not an objectively existing reality but rather a social construction formed through definitions produced by actors who possess power over the circulation of information within society, including the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in responding to the case. As the primary definer of the incident, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs faced a bureaucratic dilemma between preserving Indonesia-Peru bilateral relations and responding to public reactions that had already been shaped by media representations. This reflects Monaghan's (2022) argument that institutional communications work functions as an ideological conductor that directs public attention toward official interpretations of events, positioning state agencies as a symbolic safeguard of social order even when the factual basis of those interpretations remains contested. This dynamic further reflects findings by Walsh et al (2024) that news-making consistently cultivates understandings that favour institutional authority, often placing state agencies in a defensive position as they attempt to manage the consequences of media representations that precede or contest official accounts. Accordingly, the diverse interpretations that emerged among various actors cannot be understood merely as a consequence of limited factual information from the crime scene. Rather, they reflect a broader tension between media-constructed realities and the bureaucratic realities of the state. This study, therefore, seeks to address the existing research gap by examining how informational ambiguity in mass media reporting generates multiple constructions of meaning surrounding the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of how media coverage generated diverse interpretations of the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru. This approach enables the researcher to examine social dynamics through descriptive data in the form of written and spoken narratives and to provide a comprehensive interpretation of how the incident was constructed and understood by different actors (Sembiring et al., 2024; Wada et al., 2024). The study is exploratory in nature as it seeks to identify the factors and conditions that shaped crime narratives, while also adopting a critical perspective by focusing on the relationship between media discourse and the construction of social reality by various actors. Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, digital observation was conducted by reviewing and analysing reports from national and international media outlets, as well as expert statements presented through publicly accessible blogs, an official podcast, and a news broadcast available on YouTube. The aim was to identify differences in perspectives, reporting patterns, and narrative constructions surrounding the case (Sen et al., 2021). Second, a semi-structured interview was conducted with an official from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This interview was undertaken to obtain the perspective of Indonesia's official authority regarding media coverage of the case and to understand the constructions and interpretations that emerged (Sugiyono, 2023). Third, a literature review of news articles, academic journals, and reference books was conducted to establish a systematic analytical framework. This review covered theoretical discussions on media constructions of crime, public perceptions of criminal events, and security issues concerning diplomatic actors relevant to the case.

The research follows a systematic analytical framework that structures the study from its initial focus through to its concluding assessment. The study begins with media coverage of the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru as its central subject of inquiry. Data collected through digital observation and semi-structured interview are subsequently used to examine narrative constructions produced by three categories of actors, such as mass media, official authorities, and external observers, in the formation and dissemination of information surrounding the event. These constructions are then analysed through Richard Quinney's theory of the social reality of crime, directed at





three core concerns, namely the definition of crime, the diversity of media reporting constructions, and the ambiguity embedded in the reported event. This analytical process yields two principal findings, the ambiguity in the definition of crime and the divergence of narratives across media and among the actors involved, which collectively lead to the conclusion that crime is a socially constructed phenomenon shaped diversely through interpretative processes carried out by mass media and the relevant actors engaged with the case.

The analysis draws upon Richard Quinney's theory of the social reality of crime as its primary analytical framework. As part of the critical criminological school of thought, this theory is viewed not as an objective fact existing independently of society but as a social construct shaped through political and human interactions, rather than an immutable given (Chao, 2022). Three of Quinney's propositions as cited in Pandey (2023), were operationalised in this analysis, namely, the concept of definition of crime examines how different actors define the murder of the Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru, considering Quinney's argument that acts classified as crime are the result of definitional processes carried out by groups possessing social legitimacy and authority, second, the concept of construction of criminal conceptions examines how the media shape public understanding of the characteristics and motives of crime through the narratives they produce and disseminate, in line with Quinney's argument that communication institutions play a central role in shaping public perceptions of crime, third, the concept of social reality of crime emphasises that interpretations of the murder are neither singular nor entirely objective but vary according to the perspectives, interests, and social contexts of those following developments in the case, reflecting Quinney's argument that the social reality of crime is a product of social processes involving power relations and the construction of meaning.

RESULT

Mass Media Constructions of an Indonesian Embassy Staff Member in Peru

The murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Lima, Peru, on September 1, 2025, received extensive coverage from both national and international media outlets. Media reports not only covered the chronology of the incident and developments in the investigation but also featured statements from the Peruvian police, the Peruvian Minister of the Interior, the Indonesian government, and officials of the Indonesian Embassy in Peru, each placing different emphasis on possible motives, the involvement of criminal groups, diplomatic responses, and Peru's broader security situation. The selection of media sources was based on the completeness of information, diversity of perspectives, and depth of analysis provided, while also considering their credibility, national and international reputation, and consistency in reporting verified information.

Table 2. Media Coverage of the Murder of an Indonesian Embassy Staff Member in Peru

No.	Media Outlet	Article Title	Author	Publication Date	Article Description
1.	Al Jazeera	Peru Pledges to Investigate the 'Heinous' Killing of Indonesian Diplomat	Al Jazeeraa Author	September 2, 2025	Indonesia Embassy perspectives, rising crime, and bilateral relations.
2.	Intellinews	Indonesian Diplomat Killed in Targeted Shooting in Lima	Alek Buttermann	September 2, 2025	Premeditated attack, witness evidence, mistaken identity, and intelligence-related speculations.
3.	Infobae	¿Quién mató al funcionario de la embajada de Indonesia en Perú? Teorías e hipótesis alrededor de su asesinato por sicarios	Manuel Rojas Berrios	September 3, 2025	Organised crime, motive attribution based on the victim's relationships, and political dynamics.
4.	The Guardian	Indonesia Embassy Official's Shooting in Lima Probably a 'Contract Killing', Says Peru Government	Dan Collyns	September 3, 2025	Peruvian government response, security measures, homicide trends, and reports of foreign nationals are rarely targeted.
5.	Asian News Network	Indonesia Retrieves Body of Embassy Staff Killed in Peru	Yvette Tanamal	September 9, 2025	Repatriation, alleged involvement of individuals of Asian origin, non-local motives, and diplomatic links.
6.	BBC News Indonesia	Lima Anggota Geng Ditangkap terkait Pembunuhan Staf KBRI	BBC News Indonesia Author	September 15, 2025	Victim background, surveillance, crime rates, and political context.

7.	Kumparan News	di Peru – Bagaimana Perkembangan Investigasi Sejauh Ini? Menguak Para Pelaku Pembunuhan Pegawai Kemlu Zetro Purba di Peru	Kumparan News Author	September 16, 2025	Prepetrator identities, evidence discovery, organised crime involvement, and police- linked weapons.
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Substantial variations were identified in the narrative constructions advanced by the selected media outlets. Al Jazeera situated the incident within the broader context of Peru-Indonesia bilateral relations, which had recently been strengthened through the signing of a free trade agreement one month prior to the incident, while simultaneously highlighting Peru's criminal environment through data on elevated homicide and extortion rates throughout 2025 (Al Jazeera, 2025). Intellinews constructed its reporting around the ambiguity of the motive, noting that the victim occupied an administrative position and was not known to have faced prior threats, thereby generating multiple interpretative possibilities ranging from mistaken identity and personal disputes to potential links with intelligence interests (Buttermann, 2025). Infobae adopted the most comprehensive investigative approach by examining the involvement of the local criminal group "One Family", the presence of contacts associated with Venezuelan and Colombian telephone codes in the victim's mobile phone, the "Dragon Rojo" fraud network, the "Sam Gor" narcotics network, and Indonesia's domestic political dynamics during the administration of President Prabowo (Berrios, 2025).

The Guardian focused on the official response of the Peruvian government and the increase in national homicide rates based on data from the Sinadef public death registry, while emphasising that foreign nationals are relatively uncommon victims of homicide in Peru, thereby influencing broader perceptions of public security (Collins, 2025). Asian News Network highlighted the possibility that the motive originated from circumstances predating the victim's assignment to Peru, given his relatively brief period of service in the country, and associated the incident with the earlier death of another Indonesian diplomat in Jakarta under unusual circumstances (Tanamal, 2025). BBC News Indonesia framed the case within the context of weaknesses in Peru's legal system, highlighting reports of surveillance prior to the shooting and the declining independence of judicial institutions, which were considered to have enhanced the operational capacity of organised criminal groups (BBC News Indonesia, 2025). Meanwhile, Kumparan News concentrated on developments in the Peruvian police investigation, including the arrest of five members of the criminal group Los Maleantes del Cono and the discovery of a Taurus .380 semi-automatic pistol registered to an active member of Peru's National Directorate of Special Operations (Dinoes) (Kumparan News, 2025).

Expert Responses and Institutional Perspectives

Beyond media reporting, alternative interpretations of the case were articulated by various actors through digital platforms. These actors were selected on the basis of their credibility, academic and professional expertise in geopolitics, international relations, and law enforcement, as well as the relevance of their perspectives to the case under investigation.

Table 3. Stakeholder Response to the Murder of an Indonesian Embassy Staff Member in Peru

No.	Media Platform	Publication Name	Content Title	Response to the Issue
1.	Youtube	TvOne News	Diplomat Ditembak di Peru, Ada Apa?	An international relations expert and a former Head of the Criminal Investigation Agency linked the case to high crime rates, mafia activity, and indications of a premeditated murder.
2.	Youtube	Akbar Faizal Uncensored	Peta Konflik Elite & Infiltrasi Asing, Skenario Makar dan Terorisme di Balik Demo Berdarah	A geopolitical researcher associated the shooting with geopolitical dynamics and potential liminal warfare.
3.	Blog	Ugm.ac.id	Diplomat RI Tewas Ditembak, Dosen Hubungan Internasional UGM Desak Investigasi Tuntas	An international relations lecturer at UGM argued that no evidence currently supports a political motive and called for further investigation.
4.	Blog	Umy.ac.id	Diplomat Indonesia Tewas Ditembak di Peru, Pakar HI UMY Ungkap Akar Masalah Keamanan	An international relations lecturer at UMY viewed the incident as a random crime driven by Peru's security conditions, with limited implications for bilateral relations.



Expert responses revealed diverse analytical approaches that may be classified into three principal perspectives. The first is a criminalistic and domestic security perspective represented by the Police Commissioner General (Ret.) Ito Sumardi, former Head of the Criminal Investigation Agency of the Indonesian National Police (Bareskrim Polri), drawing upon his professional experience in law enforcement, argued that the characteristics of the incident indicated a planned and organised operation, as reflected in the rapid execution of the attack, the perpetrators' preparedness to flee the scene, and the absence of any indication of robbery, suggesting that the victim constituted the primary target of the assault (Tv One News, 2025). Ito Sumardi further emphasised the need to examine the victim's digital footprint, communication patterns, and witness testimonies from the surrounding area, while noting that the victim's position was not directly associated with transnational crime, thereby leaving personal and relational motives open to consideration within the investigative process (Tv One News, 2025). Suzie Sudarma, an international relations scholar from the University of Indonesia, situated the incident within the broader context of declining state capacity in responding to internal and external pressures. Suzie also highlighted the victim's status as an administrative staff member without full diplomatic immunity, which potentially increased interaction with the social environment beyond the formal sphere of the embassy and exposed the victim to a broader range of security risks (Tv One News, 2025).

A geopolitical and transnational perspective was advanced by Ulta Levenia, a geopolitical researcher specialising in international political and security issues, who associated the case with the concept of liminal warfare, a form of conflict operating within a grey zone that is difficult to attribute directly to specific actors, particularly within the context of strategic competition among major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China. According to Levenia, domestic conditions within a state, including the presence of criminal networks, may be utilised as instruments of indirect pressure against other states, particularly in response to Indonesia's relatively independent foreign policy orientation (Faizal, 2025). This perspective situates the incident within a broader geopolitical framework by considering potential linkages between domestic dynamics and the strategic interests of international actors (Faizal, 2025). An academic perspective emerged from academic analyses. Muhadi Sugiono of the University of Gadjah Mada argued that the possibility of the incident constituting an ordinary criminal act remains open and that further investigation is required before any definitive conclusion can be reached, also noted that should evidence of a political motive emerge during the investigative process, the incident could carry serious implications for Indonesia-Peru bilateral relations (Grehenson, 2025). A similar view was expressed by Bambang Wahyu Nugroho of the University of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, who interpreted the case as a random criminal act occurring within the context of Peru's high level of security vulnerability and assessed that it would be unlikely to generate significant consequences for bilateral relations between the two countries (Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, 2025).

From an institutional perspective, an in-depth interview was conducted with an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia whose responsibilities include matters relating to law enforcement cooperation and regional cooperation. The interview findings indicate that the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted two consistent institutional approaches in responding to the case. First, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs exercised control over the use of official terminology by reminding law enforcement authorities not to prematurely communicate conclusions regarding an incident that remained under investigation, particularly in consideration of the potential social impact on the victim's family. Second, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs implemented a restrictive information management approach by refraining from providing excessive information to the media until the motive of the crime had been officially established (Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, personal communication, April 28, 2026). This institutional stance demonstrates that the sending state's authorities were not solely engaged in the diplomatic management of the case but also contributed to shaping the boundaries of the emerging public discourse. Through the regulation of official terminology and the management of information flows, state institutions indirectly influenced the interpretative space available to both the media and the public in understanding and constructing meaning around the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru.

DISCUSSION

Patterns and Characteristics of the Murder of an Indonesian Embassy Staff Member in Peru

The murder occurred during what initially appeared to be a routine and non-confrontational situation, as the victim was cycling home with his wife along Arequipa Avenue in the Lince district when he was suddenly confronted by an armed assailant who fired at close range toward his head before fleeing with an accomplice on a motorcycle prepared at the scene, after which the victim was taken to Javier Prado Clinic but did not survive, while his wife was unharmed (Darmawan & Dzulfaroh, 2025). Initial findings indicated that no valuables belonging to the victim had been taken following the shooting, allowing robbery to be ruled out at an early stage of the investigation (Berrios, 2025). CCTV footage analysed jointly by investigators and prosecutors showed that the perpetrators had monitored the area for approximately thirty minutes prior to the attack, while the motorcycle used during the incident had reportedly been observed near the victim's residence on several occasions in the days preceding the shooting (BBC News Indonesia, 2025; Berrios, 2025; Collins, 2025). Testimony from local residents further supported these findings by reporting the presence of unfamiliar individuals in the neighbourhood under the pretext of offering television repair services (BBC News Indonesia, 2025). Investigators also recovered digital evidence from the victim's mobile phone, including telephone numbers with Venezuelan and Colombian country codes, as well as communication records linking the victim





to a woman located within the area of influence of the criminal group One Family, led by El Chino (Berrios, 2025).

The Investigation subsequently led to the arrest of the criminal group Los Maleantes del Cono by the Criminal Investigation Directorate of the Peruvian National Police, including two Venezuelan nationals identified as the gunman and the motorcycle rider involved in the attack (BBC News Indonesia, 2025; Kumparan News, 2025). During which authorities seized firearms, explosives, mobile phones, motorcycles, and narcotics, while one of the most significant findings was that the Turus .380 semi-automatic pistol used in the murder was registered to an active member of Peru's National Directorate of Special Operations (Dinoes), prompting further investigation into the weapon's origin and distribution (Kumparan News, 2025). The pattern of actions identified during the investigation indicates a planned and systematic form of criminal activity, reflected in the surveillance conducted prior to the attack, the perpetrator's presence near the location before the shooting, the use of a motorcycle to facilitate mobility, the division of roles between the gunman and the rider, and repeated close-range shots directed at the victim's head without any attempt to seize personal belongings. These characteristics closely resemble the pattern of contract killing identified by Korte & Kleemans (2022), who found that contract killings generally involve target surveillance, routine monitoring, selection of an execution site, the use of specialised means of execution, and escape by vehicle, while Thomas (2021), in an analysis of targeted killings across Kenya, South Africa, and Mozambique, similarly demonstrated that execution sites are deliberately selected based on the victim's predictable routines, with victims most commonly targeted at or near their homes when arriving or departing, which is consistent with the pre-attack surveillance and location selection identified in the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member case in Peru.

At the same time, the victim's status as a member of a diplomatic institution adds an additional dimension to the interpretation of the case, as Butt (2024) demonstrated that incidents of serious violence connected to diplomatic personnel carry consequences that reach beyond the criminal act itself, encompassing reputational damage to the sending state, potential diplomatic tensions between the states involved, and heightened security sensitivities for diplomatic missions, distinguishing such cases from homicides involving ordinary individuals. Although no conclusive evidence has established a political motive or a direct connection between the incident and the victim's diplomatic position, the victim's institutional status nevertheless contributed to the sensitivity of the case and broadened the range of interpretations that emerged in response to the incident.

Analysis of the Social Reality of Crime Theory in Media Reporting on the Murder of an Indonesian Embassy Staff Member in Peru

Through the Social Reality of Crime theory, Quinney as cited in Pandey (2023) argues that crime cannot be understood as a wholly objective reality but rather as a product of social processes shaped by power relations, interests, and the construction of meaning within society. From this perspective, the definition of crime, the formation of public perceptions, and the emergence of multiple interpretations of a criminal event constitute integral elements of the social reality of crime itself, which focuses on three of Quinney's principal propositions, namely definition of crime, construction of criminal conceptions, and the social reality of crime (Pandey, 2023).

In the proposition of definition of crime, Quinney, as cited in Pandey (2023) argues that crime is defined through formal classifications established by actors possessing social legitimacy and authority. In this case, the Peruvian National Police and the Peruvian Minister of the Interior classified the incident as a contract killing based on the organised nature of the attack, evidence of prior planning, and the absence of robbery as a motive (Al Jazeera, 2025; BBC News Indonesia, 2025; Berrios, 2025; Collins, 2025). By contrast, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted a more cautious position by refraining from concluding either the motive or classification of the crime before the completion of the investigation, which may be understood as an institutional effort to regulate official terminology and avoid premature public speculation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, personal communication, April 28, 2026), while officials of the Indonesian Embassy in Peru associated the incident with Peru's broader crime situation (Al Jazeera, 2025). The former Head of Bareskrim Polri interpreted the case through a criminalistic perspective, emphasising the rapid and organised nature of the execution, whereas academic lecturers maintained that the possibility of an ordinary criminal act or a random crime remained open (Grehenson, 2025; Tv One News, 2025; Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, 2025). International relations observers focused on the victim's lack of full diplomatic immunity as a factor potentially increasing exposure to broader security risks, while geopolitical researcher situated the case within a grey zone that is difficult to attribute directly and considered possible connections between domestic dynamics and the strategic interests of international actors (Faizal, 2025; Tv One News, 2025). The diversity of these definitions demonstrates the absence of a singular interpretation of the case, as each actor constructed meaning according to their position, authority, interests, and institutional context, consistent with Quinney's proposition (Quinney, 1970). This finding is also consistent with Andersson (2025), who found that interpretations of social events are shaped by the values, beliefs, and perspectives of individuals and groups, as each actor engaged with the available information through the lens of their institutional position and predisposed worldview, which aligns with Bhaskara et al (2021), who found that online news reporting can foster critical awareness of legal issues among academic communities.





In the proposition of construction of criminal conceptions, Quinney, as cited in Pandey (2023) argues that communication institutions, particularly the mass media, play a central role in shaping public perceptions of crime through the selection of information sources, the emphasis of particular aspects, the use of specific terminology, and the development of narratives that reflect their institutional interests. In this case, at least four interpretative frames were identified, the first framed the case as a reflection of Peru's deteriorating domestic security conditions, advanced by Al Jazeera through data on rising homicide and extortion rates, and reinforced by The Guardian through Sinadef data illustrating an ongoing security crisis in Peru (Al Jazeera, 2025; Collyns, 2025). The second emphasised the possible involvement of organised crime and transnational criminal networks, developed by Infobae through its explanation of multiple criminal hypotheses involving local criminal groups, transnational networks, and Indonesia's domestic political dynamics, reinforced by BBC News Indonesia through witness accounts from the victim's neighbourhood and by Kumparan News through reports concerning the arrest of members of Los Maleantes del Cono and the discovery of a firearm linked to a member of the Peruvian police (BBC News Indonesia, 2025; Berrios, 2025; Kumparan News, 2025). The third frame constructed ambiguity regarding the motive by highlighting the victim's position as an administrative staff member with no known history of threats, exemplified by Intellinews, which presented multiple interpretative possibilities ranging from mistaken identity to potential intelligence-related interests (Buttermann, 2025). The fourth directed attention towards the possibility of a non-local motive developed by Asian News Network through its association of the case with conflicts potentially predating the victim's assignment to Peru and with the earlier death of another Indonesian diplomat (Tanamal, 2025). The diversity of narrative constructions identified in this study demonstrates that media reporting in the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru did not produce a singular and homogeneous construction of meaning. Instead, the incident was represented through multiple interpretative frameworks, reflecting the distinct institutional contexts, editorial orientations, and interpretative priorities of individual media organizations. These differing frames illustrate that the media function not merely as channels of information but also as active actors in shaping public understanding of crime. This finding aligns with Suryasuciramadhan et al (2024), who argue that variations in media framing reflect differing editorial policies in the construction of public opinion. Similarly, Espiritu (2025) contends that media coverage of politically sensitive events is often influenced by competing ideological and political interests, leading media organizations to employ different interpretative frames in representing the same event. This finding is also supported by Kuroishi's (2025) study, which demonstrated how Japanese media gradually transformed public understanding of the assassination of Shinzo Abe through a narrative shift from political terrorism to individual criminality.

Finally, the proposition of the reality of crime, Quinney, as cited in Pandey (2023), argues that crime is not defined solely by the criminal act itself but is constructed through social processes involving institutions, the media, public opinion, and broader socio-political contexts, where dominant groups that succeed in constructing and disseminating their version of reality ultimately shape how society understands a criminal event. In the case of the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru, the absence of a definitive conclusion regarding the motive created space for multiple interpretations to emerge in the public sphere. Consequently, understandings of the incident were not formed through a single source of information but through interactions among state institutions, media reporting, expert interpretations, and the surrounding socio-political dynamics. This finding is supported by Aparatu et al (2025), who contend that definitions of crime are not neutral but are shaped by social norms, power relations, and labelling processes involving both media institutions and other social actors, and it is further reinforced by Fadhilah (2024), who found that repeated crime reporting characterised by limited and ambiguous information tends to shape public opinion even in the absence of a final legal determination. Collectively, these dynamics demonstrate that public understandings of crime are the product of a layered, evolving, and socially constructed process, as articulated in Quinney's proposition of the social reality of crime.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that media reporting on the murder of an Indonesian Embassy staff member in Peru generated multiple interpretations shaped through the interaction of state institutions, law enforcement authorities, mass media, academics, and the broader socio-political context surrounding the case. Through Richard Quinney's Social Reality of Crime framework, the findings reveal that different actors constructed distinct definitions of the incident according to their respective positions and forms of authority. The Peruvian authorities classified the case as a contract killing, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted a cautious institutional approach, the former Head of Bareskrim Polri interpreted it as a planned murder, while observers and academics associated the case with Peru's crime situation, geopolitical dynamics, and the continuing possibility of an ordinary or random criminal act. The media further contributed to the construction of public understanding through diverse reporting frames, ranging from narratives of Peru's domestic security crisis to the potential involvement of non-local factors. The ambiguity surrounding the motive and the limited availability of official information created space for competing interpretations to emerge in the public sphere. Consequently, the social reality of the case was not derived solely from the criminal act itself but was constructed through the social processes that produced, circulated, and interpreted information.

These findings underscore the importance of caution in reporting international criminal cases that remain under investigation, as well as the need for stronger public information literacy to reduce susceptibility to speculative





narratives. Academically, this study reinforces the understanding that crime is not merely an objective event but a social construct shaped by power relations, institutional interests, and competing interpretations within the public sphere, as conceptualised in Quinney's Social Reality of Crime theory.

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