

Conflicts and Nigeria Media: A Look at National Newspapers' Coverage of Herdsmen and Farmers' Clashes

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Media framing and reportage of conflicts can lead to escalation or de-escalation of the conflicts. Because of their roles in audience perception of events and issues, media framing and reportage are considered veritable instruments for conflict resolution. Unfortunately, the conflicts between herdsmen and farmers have become recurrent security challenges facing Nigeria in recent years. Using content analysis, this study examines the coverage of the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State, Nigeria, by three national newspapers (*The Sun*, *The Guardian*, and *Punch*) from March 1, 2018–January 30, 2019 (the time of their ceaseless attacks). Findings show that the newspapers' direction of coverage of the conflicts is highly negative and dominated by a criminality frame. The study concludes that many of the selected newspapers' reporters are yet to imbibe the principles of peace journalism in their news reporting and recommends that the journalists be trained on peace journalism skills to facilitate resolution of the conflicts.

Keywords: herdsmen, farmers, conflict resolution, news framing, peace journalism, war journalism

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Date submitted: 2020-05-27

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On the early morning of March 14, 2018, *The Sun* newspaper reported that more than 25 people were killed by suspected Fulani herdsmen in Dundu village of Kwal District, Bassa Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. The Fulanis are an ethnic tribe in West Africa. The attack, which reportedly occurred at about 7:00 p.m., left many people dead, several houses razed, scores injured, and others rendered homeless. The attacked village was reportedly taken unawares as most residents were preparing for dinner when the entire village was enveloped by a volley of bullets from the attackers. Children, women, and old people scampered for safety, and some lost their lives. This attack and many others have been part of the situation in Nigeria.

Conflicts between herdsmen and farmers started in Plateau State even before 2018. For instance, in December 2011, some armed Fulani men reportedly invaded a village in Plateau State in the dead of night and set some houses ablaze. Those who attempted escaping were captured with hunters' nets and slaughtered with cutlasses, daggers, and axes (Ayo, 2018). Unfortunately, the conflict took a novel dimension in 2018 as automatic weapons were deployed by the attackers, leading to escalation of the crises in other neighboring states and increased casualties. Precisely on January 1, 2018, the herdsmen attacked six communities in Logo and Guma Local Government Areas of Benue State, killing more than 50 people, including women, children, and members of the Livestock Guards (*The Sun*, 2018a). There were other attacks on the neighboring Agatu village, which left about 300 people dead (Duru, 2016). Worse still, on April 24, 2018, another attack was launched by suspected Fulani herdsmen on Ayar-Mbalom village in Gwer East Local Government Area of Benue State, killing 19 people, including two Catholic priests, with some houses burned down (Ameh, 2018).

Since the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria began, those of 2018 and 2019 seemed the most disastrous as scores of people lost their lives and many were maimed, especially in Plateau, Benue, Enugu, and some other Nigerian States. Apart from the abovementioned instances, one of the deadliest clashes, which left more than 200 people dead, occurred on Saturday, June 23, 2018, in a village in Plateau State. Those who survived the attacks were displaced and homeless and turned to begging in major streets in Nigeria (Kazeem, 2018).

The spate of clashes between herdsmen and farmers and the attendant casualties in Nigeria have gained global attention so much that a greater number of violent deaths was attributed to Fulani herdsmen by the Global Terrorism Index in 2018 than Boko Haram insurgents. In its 2018 report, the Global Terrorism Index (2018) said:

While deaths committed by Fulani extremists decreased following the peak of 1,169 deaths in 2014, violence from the group in 2018 is expected to surpass that peak. Nearly 1,700 violent deaths have been attributed to Fulani Ethnic Militia from January to September 2018. An estimated 89% of those killed were civilians. (p. 5)

Similarly, it is also on record that more than 2,000 lives were lost to violent activities and clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the country in 2018, while thousands of Nigerians were displaced by the conflicts (Amnesty International, 2018). The security of lives and property in the states affected by the clashes has been greatly jeopardized. Not even the efforts by the Nigerian government, its law

enforcement agents and charitable nongovernmental organizations could control the situation (Iheanacho, 2017). The recent increase in the death tolls is said to be a result of their acquisition of sophisticated modern weaponry such as automatic guns, tanks, bombs, and more (Olomjobi, 2017).

Often cited as reasons for the conflicts are social and economic interests arising from serious competition over the use of land and fresh water by the two groups—farmers and herdsman (Abbass, 2014; Bello, 2013). Other immediate causes of the conflicts include provocative claims over access rights to farmland and cattle routes. These socioeconomic factors have continued to provoke violent clashes among the herders and farmers in the country in such a manner that the conflicts have become hydraheaded and seemingly intractable.

However, the impact of conflict situation has been found to depend significantly on the pattern and direction of media coverage of such conflict. The media, through news coverage and framing of conflict situations, can actually lead to escalation or de-escalation of conflict. Journalists, like other professionals, are faced with myriad ethical dilemmas in their day-to-day work. Journalism ethics, especially in conflict situations, cut across the micro problems of what the individual journalists should do in particular situations and the macro problems of what the news media should do, given their role in society (Ward, 2009). It is perhaps in the quest to investigate what ethical options the news media should take in covering conflict situations that journalism scholars have introduced the concept of peace journalism as opposed to war journalism. While the latter overvalues violent responses to conflicts in news selection, the former emphasizes how journalists can play more constructive roles in reporting and resolving conflicts. In fact, peace journalism's view of impartiality rests on giving peace a chance in national and international debates (Tumber, 2009).

Indeed, examples abound where media are reported to have helped either to curtail conflict or aggravate it (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Adisa, 2012; Howard, 2014; Mogeckwu, 2011). The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and war on terror in Iraq that resulted in the losses of millions of lives and property have been attributed to a lack of peace-oriented journalism and responsible news frames (Adisa, 2012; Ibrahim et al., 2011). The magnitude of occurrence and escalation of herdsman and farmers' conflicts in Plateau State in 2018 and 2019 seems to have defied government efforts to control the crisis.

Mass media have devoted time and space to reporting and commenting on herdsman-farmers' clashes in the country. There are also many content analytical studies on media coverage and reportage of herdsman-farmers' conflicts in the country (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Adisa, 2012). However, going by available literature, these existing studies are limited in their methodological approaches, and their findings may, therefore, lack generalizability. For instance, Adisa (2012) suggested the study of more representative samples of newspapers in Nigeria, as his findings are based on only 10 editions of two newspapers. In Olomjobi (2017), weekend editions of the newspapers are omitted in the sample selection. Yet none of the available few studies on media coverage focused particularly on the recent menace in Plateau State, which is becoming unbearable in frequency of occurrence and death toll. It therefore becomes imperative to investigate the media coverage of herdsman-farmers' clashes in Plateau State of Nigeria with a view to ascertaining how it has enhanced the mitigation of the conflict in the area.

Research Questions

The following research questions serve as a guide for the study:

- RQ1: What are the major presentation formats adopted by the selected newspapers in reporting the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State?*
- RQ2: How prominent are the issues about the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State portrayed in Nigerian newspapers?*
- RQ3: What is the direction of coverage adopted by the selected newspapers in reporting the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State?*
- RQ4: What is the dominant frame used in coverage of the herdsmen-farmers' clashes in Plateau State by the selected newspapers?*

Conflict and Media Reports

The development of every society or nation depends significantly on the surveillance role of mass media in covering and reporting events that happen in society. By virtue of their surveillance function, media outlets are always on the lookout for events and happenings that would be of interest to their audiences (Olomajobi, 2017). One of such events is conflict, which represents disagreement between one group and another. In virtually every country of the world today, there are spontaneous and long-standing crises or conflicts that, if unattended, could hinder the corporate existence of such nation or country. Nigeria, for instance, is faced with series of conflicts, including the resource-use conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in some parts of the country, political and religious conflicts, and ethnic, intertribal, and communal conflicts that have become rampant in various regions and states of the country in recent times. The most dominant among these are the conflicts between herdsmen and farmers. This leading conflict threatens national security to the core.

Mass media, through their surveillance function, perform a formidable role in reporting conflict situations to the audience. Even when the media are not the original sources of information about conflict situations, people still turn to media for some confirmation and fresh perspectives (Olomajobi, 2017). Thus, through reporting and framing of conflicts, the mass media can shape public perception, understanding, views, and opinion formation about a conflict situation.

However, scholars are of the view that mass media can play both negative and positive roles in reporting conflicts. For instance, it is suggested that:

Their role can take two different and opposing forms; either the media takes an active part in the conflict and has responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the resolution of conflict and alleviation of violence. (Puddephatt, 2006, p. 25)

In terms of taking active parts in the conflict, media reporters often represent the conflicting groups and thus project their respective views and interests to the detriment of the other. Thus, a conflict situation is bound to escalate when media frame and disseminate information about conflict issues and the identities of conflicting parties in such a way that entrenches polarization (Olomjobi, 2017). All media, including old and new media, can be used to escalate or de-escalate conflicts. So, the question now is: What can be done to tip the balance in favor of de-escalation rather than escalation (Junne, 2013)?

To avoid escalation and encourage conflict resolution, journalism scholars and ethicists have been exploring frameworks of principles and norms for responsible journalism. The result of the effort has been the identification of five stages in the development of journalism ethics: first, the invention of ethical discourse for journalism in the 16th century; second, public ethics; third, the liberal theory of the press; fourth, objective journalism; and fifth, today's current mixed-media ethics, which lack consensus on what principles apply across media types (Ward, 2009). It should be noted that the liberal ideal of the press-pioneered news interpretation and activism tradition seeks to explain the significance of events with intent to bring reform. One of the ways of news interpretation is peace journalism.

Peace Journalism

Peace journalism was propounded by a Norwegian peace studies scholar, Johan Galtung, in the 1970s. For Galtung (2007), today's media reporting on conflict is mainly war-oriented. To this end, he argues that whether media producers (journalists) are aware of it or not, news reporting encourages perceptions of conflicts that are, in most cases, fueling war. Therefore, as an alternative approach to this kind of reporting, Galtung (2007) proposed a new dimension to conflict reporting that he termed peace journalism. He summarizes his advice to journalists as follows:

Go for the less newsworthy to get a more balanced picture; particularly more coverage of nonelite nations, nonelite people, nonpersonal (like structural) causes of events and for more positive events. Be conscious of the tendency to cast the nonelite in a negative light, to disregard the structural, and go for the negative, like the violence, rather than the positive, like the solutions. (Galtung, 2007, p. 3)

Thus, the peace journalism model seeks to encourage a new style of reporting on conflict that downplays the objectivity and impartiality norms, but rather elevates subjective interpretation of conflict situations in such a manner that peace is advocated. Peace journalism also involves how editors and journalists subjectively make selections and frame their stories to pave the way for the audience to contemplate and value nonviolent responses to conflict. It considers journalists as not just mere stenographers of facts but active and frontline participants in conflict resolution who should leverage their understanding of conflict transformation to update the concepts of balance, fairness, and accuracy in their news reports (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007). Thus, the major ethical ideology for peace journalism is not only fairness, accuracy, and balance but also a subjective interpretation that explains the significance of world events. For peace journalists, informing the public means challenging the status quo, opposing wars, and promoting social causes. The comparison between peace and war journalism is clarified in Galtung's (1998) classical table reproduced here as Table 1.

Table 1. Galtung's Table. (Source: Galtung, 1998).

Peace/Conflict Journalism	War/Violence Journalism
I. Peace/Conflict Oriented	I. War/Violence Oriented
Explore conflict formation, x parties, y goals, z issues, general "win, win" orientation.	Focus on conflict arena, two parties, one goal (win), war, general zero-sum orientation.
Open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture.	Closed space, closed time; causes and exits in arena, who threw the first stone.
Making conflicts transparent.	Making wars opaque/secret.
Giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding, see conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity.	"Us-them" journalism, propaganda, voice, for "us" see "them" as the problem, focus on who prevails in war.
Humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapons.	Dehumanization of "them"; more so the worse the weapon.
Proactive: prevention before any violence/war occurs.	Reactive: waiting for violence before reporting.
Focus on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture).	Focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded, and material damage).
II. Truth Oriented	II. Propaganda Oriented
Expose untruths on all sides/uncover all cover-ups.	Expose "their" untruths/help "our" cover-ups/lies.
III. People Oriented	III. Elite Oriented
Focus on suffering all over, on women, aged, children, giving voice to voiceless.	Focus on "our" suffering, on able-bodied elite males, being their mouthpiece.
Give names to all evildoers.	Give names to "their" evildoers.
Focus on people peacemakers.	Focus on elite peacemakers.
IV. Solution Oriented	IV. Victory Oriented
Peace = nonviolence + creativity.	Peace = victory + cease-fire.
Highlight peace initiatives, also prevents more war.	Conceal peace initiatives before victory is at hand.
Focus on structure, culture, and peaceful society.	Focus on treaty, institutions, and controlled society.
Aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation.	Leaving for another war, return if the old flares up again.

The Center for Global Peace Journalism (as cited in Youngblood, 2016) also identified 10 elements of peace journalism that would serve as guiding principles to journalists while reporting on conflicts. The elements are:

1. Peace journalism is proactive, examining the causes of conflict and leading discussions about solutions.
2. Peace journalism looks to unite rather than divide and eschews oversimplified "us versus them" and "good guy versus bad guy" reporting.
3. Peace journalism rejects official propaganda and instead seeks facts from all sources.

4. Peace journalism is balanced, covering issues/suffering/peace proposals from all sides of a conflict.
5. Peace journalism gives voice to the voiceless instead of just reporting for and about elites and those in power.
6. Peace journalists provide depth and context rather than just superficial and sensational blow-by-blow accounts of violence and conflict.
7. Peace journalists consider the consequences of their reporting.
8. Peace journalists carefully choose and analyze the words they use, understanding that carelessly selected words are often inflammatory.
9. Peace journalists thoughtfully select images they use, understanding that they can misrepresent an event, exacerbate an already dire situation, and revictimize those who have suffered.
10. Peace journalists offer counternarratives that debunk media-created or -perpetuated stereotypes, myths, and misperceptions (Youngblood, 2017, p. 6).

Therefore, as an alternative or remedial approach, peace journalism is a normative ideology that addresses journalists to the ethical task of prioritizing peace and nonviolent resolution of conflicts. The onus now lies on the journalists, as a matter of ethical options, to embrace this rather new approach in their everyday coverage and framing of conflicts.

Framing Theory

Sociological approaches to framing theory could be traced to Goffman (1974), who assumed that individuals cannot understand the world fully and therefore consciously interpret and classify their experiences to make sense of the world around them. However, it was the seminal work of Entman (1993) that formalized framing theory and conceptualized audience frames as "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information" (p. 53). Later, Scheufele (1999) differentiated media frames and audience frames. He saw media frames as important tools for journalists to reduce complexity and convey issues in ways that allow audiences to make sense of them with limited amounts of prior information. Similarly, audience frames are regarded as individual-level interpretive schemas among audiences that allow people to categorize new information quickly and efficiently based on how that information is described by journalists.

Perhaps the most widely circulated definition of framing that characterized its effects on news stories is:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (Entman, 1993, p. 52)

Framing is therefore all about news ideation. The theory assumes that the media focus attention on certain events and then place them within a field of meaning. Thus, framing affects how a story is told and influences public perception and attitudes (Bullock, Wyche, & Williams, 2001). One reason for this is

that the public's lack of awareness, along with a reliance on media for information and decision making, makes people more likely to be influenced by framing (Okoro & Odoemelam, 2013). It is further noted that:

When the media place stories in specific frames, they lend a different meaning to the news. The media increase or decrease the salience of issues, which allows the public to remember and make judgments on such issues. Framing assumes that subtle changes in the wording of the description of a situation might affect how audience members think about the situation. (Auerbach & Block-Elkon, 2005, as cited in Okoro & Odoemelam, 2013, p. 86)

Thus, the major assumption of framing theory of the media is that how the media reports are presented to their audiences influences perceptions and interpretations of the information and consequently reactions to the messages.

Relating this theory to this article, it shows that the direction of coverage and the frame used by the selected newspapers under study in reporting the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State, Nigeria, would influence the way the people understand and interpret the conflict as well as the way they perceive the contending parties. Besides, the theory offers explanation to suggest that media coverage and framing of the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State, Nigeria, influence public perception, concerns, and reactions about the conflict. In other words, advocating for peace in the news reports on the conflict is significantly a function of how the media choose to frame and report the crisis.

Methodology

Content analysis is employed in this study. Content analysis is the analysis of what is contained in a message (Shehu, 2015). The researchers consider this method most appropriate because through the analysis of the content of the newspapers, the researchers will generate relevant data that will answer the research questions raised for this study. The population of the study comprises all the editions of *The Sun*, *The Guardian*, and *Punch* newspapers within a period of 11 months—March 1, 2018, to January 30, 2019. The newspapers are purposely selected based on the knowledge that they are national daily newspapers. Previous studies show that the readership of these newspapers cuts across all the six geopolitical zones in the country (Ahmed-Gamgum, 2018; Iheanacho, 2017; Ojomah, Idakwoji, Usman, & Orokpo, 2019; Olomjobi, 2017).

Moreover, they are unarguably among the newspapers with the highest circulations in Nigeria. Therefore, the 30 editions of each selected newspaper for each month multiplied by 11 (11 months of the study) = 330 each. The 330 editions multiplied by 3 (i.e., three selected newspapers) = 990. The 990 editions of the newspapers form the population for this study.

The sample size for this study is 198 editions of the selected newspapers. This is determined using Nwanna's (1981) sample size formula. The formula proposes that if the population is a few hundred,

a 40% or more sample will do; if many hundred, 20%; if a few thousand, 10%; and if several thousand, 5% or less will do. Therefore, since the population of this study is many hundreds, 20% was used as the expected frequency value. Thus, Nwanna's (1981) formula is:

$$n = \frac{NV(P)}{100}$$

Where:

n = sample size,

NV = Population Value,

P = Expected frequency value.

Therefore: $(990 \times 20) \div 100$

$n = 198$ (Actual sample size).

For convenience, the sample size of 198 is divided equally among the three selected newspapers, resulting in 66 editions for each of the three selected newspapers. The purposive sampling technique is further employed to select the 66 editions of each of the three newspapers. It is the selected 66 editions of each of the three newspapers that make up the 198 sampled editions. Purposive sampling allows researchers to rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their studies (Ohaja, 2003), and it is selected based on characteristics of a population and the objectives of the study. The purposive sampling technique is, therefore, employed to select 198 sampled editions of the selected newspapers according to their ability to meet the purposes of the study. To not fall into a periodicity problem in the study (that is, the problem of studying a time that the event did not occur), the days of attacks within the period of the study are first identified. But given the nature of newspaper as a print medium, events that happen today are usually reported on the succeeding days. Therefore, some editions are selected based on two days after each attack to take care of news stories, while some are three to five days after each attack to take care of opinion articles, features, and other units of analysis in the study.

The instrument for data collection is coding sheet. To ensure reliability and validity of the instrument, Holsti's (1969) intercoder reliability formula is adopted to obtain 80% agreement between two independent coders who coded 24 editions (eight each) of the selected newspapers for the pretest. The instrument is also face-validated by two professors of mass communication before it is used in collecting the data. The content categories examined in the selected newspapers include:

Story type: This means the form in which the particular story to be coded is written. They include news stories, features, cartoons, opinions, and editorials.

Story placement: In this category, emphasis is on where the stories appear in the selected newspaper. In this study, the following pages are of interest to the researchers: the front, back, inside, and editorial pages. Herdsmen-farmers' stories on the front, editorial, and back pages indicate prominence while the stories on the inside pages indicate non-prominence.

Direction of coverage: A story is coded as positive if it depicts fair and balanced coverage of the clashes between herdsmen and farmers as indicated in the peace journalism principles highlighted above. It is coded as negative if it portrays one-sided coverage or uses demonizing speeches in presenting any of the conflicting parties. A story is coded as neutral if its direction is neither positive nor negative.

Frame of story: This involves the focal slants or angles from which the stories about herdsmen and farmers are reported. They include conflict, criminality, human interest, religious, ethnic, political response, economic consequence, and resolution frames. A story is coded as conflict frame if both the herdsmen and farmers are depicted as aggressors. A story is coded as criminality frame if it is from the angle of one-sided attacks or killings by either herdsmen or farmers. A story is coded as human interest frame if it is presented in an emotional way, showing how individuals or groups of people are affected by the clash between herdsmen and farmers. A story is coded as religious frame if it emphasizes the differences in the religious identities of the herdsmen and farmers as the cause of the conflict. A story is coded as ethnic frame if it suggests ethnicity as the motivation for aggression by one or both conflicting parties. A story is coded as political response frame if it depicts the reactions or responses of the Nigerian government, politicians of both the ruling and opposition parties to the conflict between herdsmen and farmers. A story is coded as economic consequence frame if it portrays the economic implications of the conflict. A story is coded as resolution frame if it focuses on peace attempts or newsmakers urging a settlement of the conflict.

Data Presentation

The coding sheet is used to record the codes assigned to variables in the content category, after which the data are transferred to Microsoft Office Excel 2007 Spreadsheet for analysis on Statistical Product and Service Solutions Version 16. A total of 180 contents on the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State are identified and analyzed in the selected editions of the newspapers. *The Sun* (64 contents) reports the conflict more frequently than *The Guardian* (62 contents) and *Punch* (54 contents) as found in the selected editions within the study period.

RQ1: What are the major presentation formats adopted by the selected newspapers in reporting the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State?

Table 2 and Figure 1 below indicate the types of stories that the selected newspapers adopt in reporting the issues on herdsmen and farmers' clashes in Plateau State. The result shows that 121 (67.2%) of 180 reports on issues about herdsmen and farmers are presented as news stories across the selected newspapers. This is followed by 22 (12.2%) reports on features, 21 (11.7%) reports on opinions, and 16 (8.9%) reports on editorial. No cartoon about herdsmen and farmers is found across the selected newspapers. The above result shows that the selected newspapers predominantly adopt news story as their major presentation format. *The Sun* covers the clashes more through news stories with 52 (81.3%) reports than *The Guardian* 48 (77.4%) and *Punch* 21 (38.9%). Apart from the news story, presentation formats adopted by the selected newspapers in their reportage include features = 12 (22.2%), opinions = 9 (16.7%), and editorials = 12 (22.2%) in *Punch*; features = 6 (9.7%), opinions = 4 (6.5%), and

editorials = 4 (6.5%) in *The Guardian*; features = 4 (6.3%) and opinions = 8 (12.5%) in *The Sun*. No editorial report on herdsmen and farmers is found in *The Sun* within the period of the study.

Table 2. Story Table.

Story Format	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
News story	121	67.2	67.2	67.2
Features	22	12.2	12.2	79.4
Opinions	21	11.7	11.7	91.1
Editorial	16	8.9	8.9	100.0
Total	180	100.0	100.0	

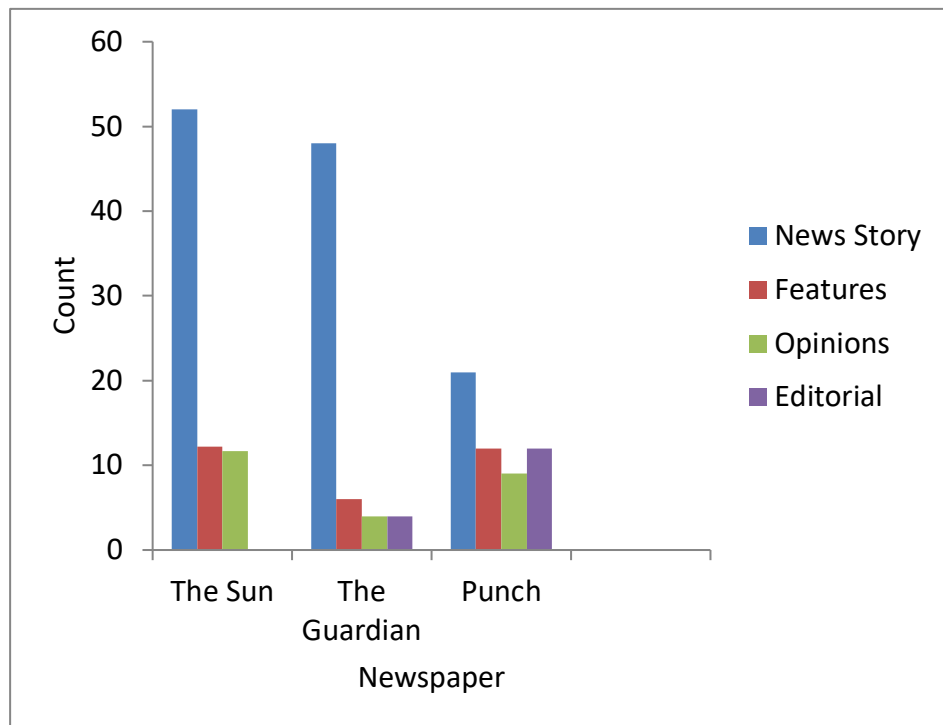


Figure 1. Bar chart showing story format.

RQ2: How prominent are the issues about the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State portrayed in Nigerian newspapers?

Table 3 and Figure 2 show how prominent the issues about the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State are portrayed in Nigerian newspapers. The result shows that the selected newspapers give high prominence to the issues by placing 97 and 16 (62.8%) out of 180 news reports on the front and editorial pages, respectively. However, 67 (37.2%) reports are placed on inside pages. No report on the clashes between herdsmen and farmers is found on the back pages across the selected

editions of the newspapers within the period of the study. Comparatively, *Punch* 39 (72.2%, front + editorial) gives more prominence to the conflict than *The Guardian* 38 (61.3%, front + editorial) and *The Sun* 36 (56.3%).

The fact that a majority of the reports on the conflict appear in big and catchy headlines that are bold enough to attract attention also suggests high prominence. Examples of such headlines as found in the studied editions include "Herdsmen Kill 42 in Fresh Plateau Attack" (*The Sun*, 2018b, p. 1), "Herdsmen Kill 25 in Fresh Plateau Attack" (*The Guardian*, 2018, p. 1).

Table 3. Cross Tabulation of Story Placement.

Newspaper	Story Placement			Total
	Front Page	Editorial Page	Inside Page	
<i>The Sun</i>	36	0	28	64
<i>The Guardian</i>	34	4	24	62
<i>Punch</i>	27	12	15	54
Total	97	16	67	180

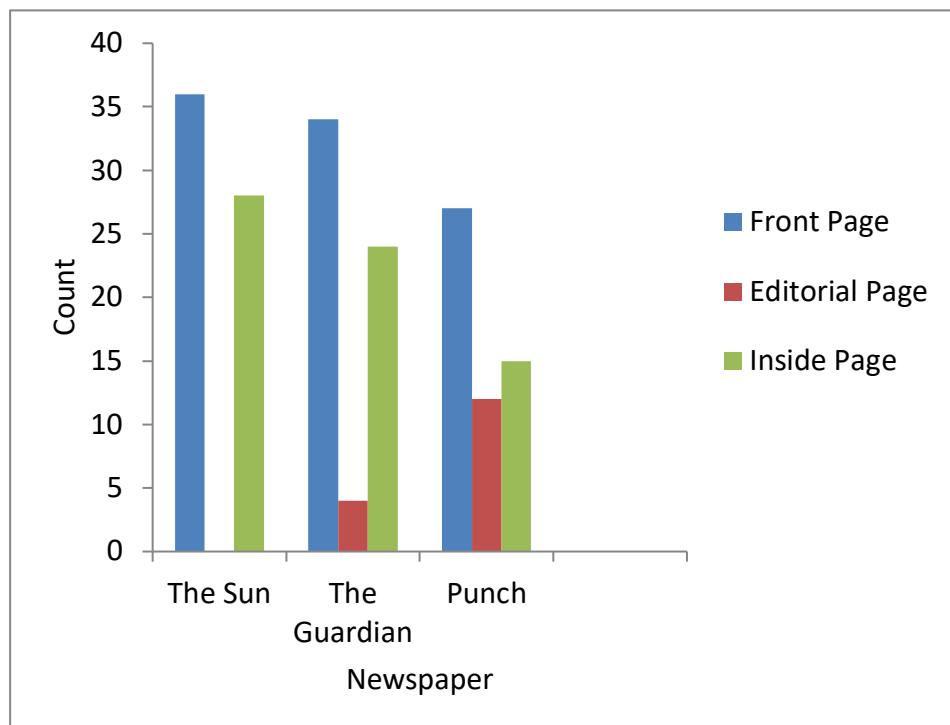


Figure 2. Bar chart showing story placement.

RQ3: What is the direction of coverage adopted by the selected newspapers in reporting the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State?

The result from Table 4, Table 5, and Figure 3 below indicates a high negative coverage of the issues concerning the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State by the selected newspapers. Many of the reports, 86 (47.8%), across the selected newspapers are negative. However, 46 (25.6%) of the reports in the selected newspapers point to positive directions, while 48 (26.7%) of the reports maintain neutral views. Comparatively, *The Sun*, 36 (56.3%) gives more negative reports than *The Guardian*, 26 (41.9%), and *Punch*, 24 (44.4%). Again, *Punch*, 18 (33.3%) covers the conflict more positively than *The Guardian*, 16 (25.8%) and *The Sun*, 12 (18.8 %).

The negative coverage of the conflict also manifests predominantly in the perceived meanings of the newspapers' choice of words and use of demonizing speeches such as "blood thirsty Fulani herdsmen," "Killer herdsmen" (*The Sun*, 2018c, p. 1), "the assailants," "the attackers" (*The Sun*, 2018d, p. 1) and "herdsmen murdered," "herdsmen slaughtered" (*The Sun*, 2018b, p. 1). The newspapers also present more one-sided coverage than balanced coverage by reporting only the views and reactions of the farmers on the clash, to the neglect of those of the herdsmen. An example of such one-sided coverage can be seen in *The Sun* (2018e) report, which reads thus: "The Berom ethnic nationality in Plateau State has accused Fulani herdsmen of raping and killing women in various communities in Riyom, Jos South, and Barkin-Ladi Local Government areas of the state" (p. 1). This report continues in a one-sided direction without imputing the views or responses of the herdsmen to the accusations. This is a negative report that is capable of escalating the conflict.

Table 4. Direction of Coverage.

		Frequency	Percentage	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Positive	46	25.6	25.6	25.6
	Negative	86	47.8	47.8	73.3
	Neutral	48	26.7	26.7	100.0
Total		180	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Cross Tabulation of Direction of Coverage.

		Direction of Coverage			Total
		Positive	Negative	Neutral	
Newspaper	<i>The Sun</i>	12	36	16	64
	<i>The Guardian</i>	16	26	20	62
	<i>Punch</i>	18	24	12	54
Total		46	86	48	180

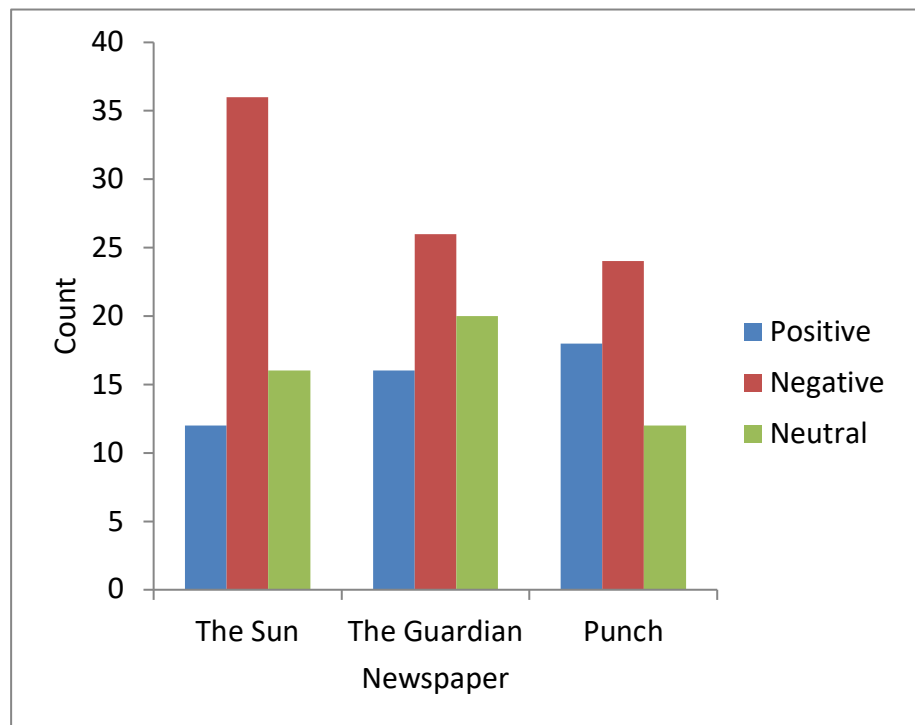


Figure 3. Bar chart showing direction of coverage.

RQ4: *What is the dominant frame adopted by the selected newspapers in their coverage of the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State?*

The result in Figure 4 below indicates that, among the eight frames of report by the selected newspapers, the clash between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State is reported more on the criminality frame. Many of the reports on the conflict, 64 (35.6%), come in a criminality frame. Comparatively, *The Sun*, at 24 (37.5%), adopts the criminality frame more than *The Guardian* at 22 (35.5%) and *Punch* at 18 (33.3%). Other frames adopted by the selected newspapers include resolution frame = 15 (27.8%), ethnic frame = 6 (11.1%), political response frame = 6 (11.1%), conflict frame = 3 (5.6%), human interest frame = 3 (5.6%), and religious frame = 3 (5.6%) in *Punch*. *The Sun* has ethnic frame = 12 (18.8%), resolution frame = 8 (12.5%), human interest frame = 8 (12.5%), religious frame = 4 (6.3%), economic consequence frame = 4 (6.3%), and political response frame = 4 (6.3%). *The Guardian* has resolution frame = 12 (19.4%), human interest frame = 8 (12.9%), conflict frame = 8 (12.9%), political response frame = 8 (12.9%), and ethnic frame = 4 (6.5%). No report on economic consequence frame is found in *Punch* and *The Guardian*. Similarly, no reports on conflict frame and religious frame are found in *The Sun* and *The Guardian*, respectively.

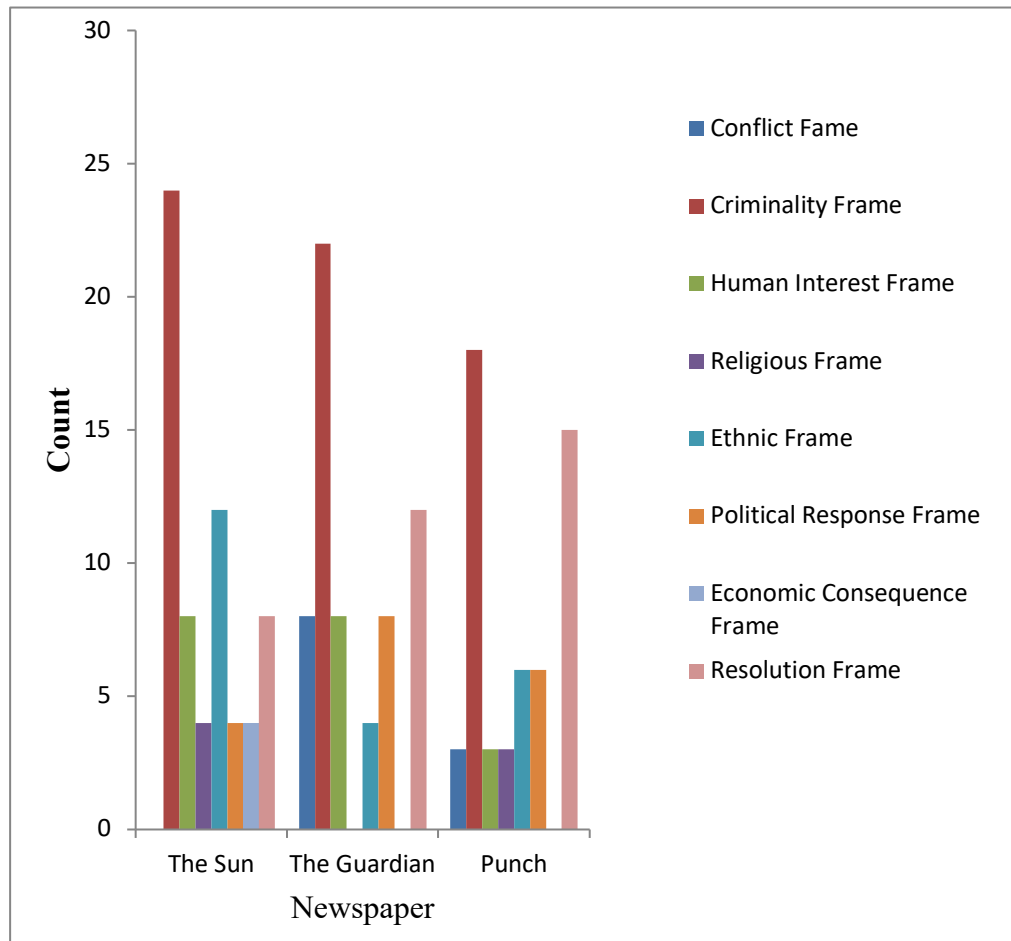


Figure 4. Bar chart showing frames of stories.

Discussion of Findings

This study investigates the national newspapers' coverage of the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State, Nigeria. The presentation formats adopted by the newspapers in reporting the conflict are first identified and analyzed. It is observed that the newspapers presented a majority of their reports on the conflict in the form of news stories (67.2%), followed by features (12.2%), opinions (11.7%), and editorials (8.9%), leaving cartoons with no content. The fact that most reports are presented as news stories depicts an episodic reportage of the clashes, thus giving little or no room for news analysis and interpretation, which usually come in the form of features. Episodic reporting style, such as this, can do little in resolving the conflict. This is because providing news analyses and interpretation through features and other opinion articles gives voices to all parties involved in a conflict to dialogue for peace building. In fact, news analysis and interpretation are essentially key elements of peace journalism (Galtung, 2007). This finding about episodic reportage of the conflict is consistent with the

postulation of Galtung (2007) that today's media reporting on conflict is reactive, mainly war-oriented, and encouraging perceptions of conflicts as us-versus-them situations. If newspapers continue presenting the conflict mostly in news story format, the implication is that there is bound to be further escalation of the conflict, thus making the mitigation of the conflict impossible.

From this standpoint, the study examines how prominent the issues about the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State are portrayed in Nigerian newspapers. Findings reveal that the newspapers accord high prominence to the conflict within the period of the study. This is evident as a majority of the newspapers' reports on the conflict appear on the front and editorial pages (62.8%), indicating prominence, while few reports (37.2%) are obscured on the inside pages. This finding contradicts that of Olomjobi (2017), who found the level of prominence that the newspapers accorded the conflict to be low. This contradiction may be a result of the infrequent nature of the conflict in 2017 when Olomjobi conducted his study. But the recent upsurge of the conflict in 2018 and 2019 may have made newspapers place large chunks of their reports of the conflict on the front pages with bold, catchy headlines, thereby giving high prominence to the conflict. By giving prominence to the issues concerning the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State, it implies that the selected newspapers recognize the significance of the conflict to the society, thus laying emphasis on such conflicts as part of major societal issues that need to be addressed.

On the direction of coverage of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers by the selected newspapers, it is observed that the newspapers mostly cover the conflict in a negative manner (47.8%) rather than in a positive manner (25.6%). There is one-sided coverage and use of demonizing speeches such as "killer herdsmen," "blood thirsty Fulani herdsmen" (*The Sun*, 2018d, p. 1), and so on, in presenting one of the conflicting parties. However, few of the reports on the conflict are neutral (26.7%). The negative coverage of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers by a majority of the Nigerian newspapers has been identified by other researchers within the country. For instance, it was noted specifically that news coverage of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria has been more violent and narrowed, featuring words like "killer herdsmen," "gun-carrying herdsmen," "Jihadist herdsmen," "greedy farmers," and "intolerable farmers" (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017, p. 77). The implication of this high negative coverage of the conflict is that such coverage is capable of escalating the conflict by inciting the farmers to take up arms and seek revenge on the herdsmen or the entire society.

Against the above backdrop, the negative style of covering the conflict between herdsmen and farmers by the selected newspapers fits perfectly with the characteristics of war journalism, which includes focusing on only two parties to the conflict, us-versus-them journalism, propaganda, seeing one party as the problem, focusing on who prevails in war, and dehumanization of opponents (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007). Thus, the findings of this study provide further empirical support to the postulation that today's conflict reporting by the mainstream media is predominantly war-fueling (Galtung, 2007). The study establishes that the coverage of the conflict between herdsmen and farmers by a majority of the Nigerian newspapers currently is more tilted toward encouraging war than building peace.

The fourth objective of this study is to determine the dominant frame adopted by the selected newspapers in reporting the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Plateau State, Nigeria. Findings

show that the newspapers predominantly adopt criminality frame. This is evident in the choices of words employed by the newspapers in describing the herdsmen and the clashes. These words include "attackers," "hoodlums," and "marauders" (*The Sun*, 2018e, p. 1). Since media frames guide public perception of events (Scheufele, 1999), words such as these can convey the knowledge of only one-sided (criminal) attack by the herdsmen, making the farmers see it the way the media have portrayed it—as criminal attacks or invasions of their farms and communities by the herdsmen. This finding is closely related to the observations of Olomjobi (2017), who noted that incidents and issues relating to the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria were framed mostly as criminal situations rather than as conflict situations, as perpetration of crimes rather than as clashes over scarce resources.

Outside Africa, the dominance of criminality frames has been reported in northern Myanmar Rakhine State, where victimizing languages such as "long-persecuted," "most persecuted," "executed," "discriminated," and "unarmed" (Myint, 2017, p. 49) were employed by the media outlets in describing the suffering of the Muslim community in that country. Similarly, high criminality frames were identified in the news coverage of Asian regional conflicts involving India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Lee & Maslog, 2005). High criminality frames were also discovered in Al Jazeera's online reportage of both Bahrain's uprising during the military Saudi intervention and Syria conflict following chemical weapons attacks in Damascus (Abdul-Nabi, 2015). Criminality frames also dominated media reportage of the Turkish and Syrian jet planes that were hit by Turkey's and Syria's armies in 2012 and 2014, respectively (Ersoy, 2016). The preponderance of criminality frames in the reportage of conflicts by newspapers can influence the audience perception and interpretation of the conflicts as criminal situations. This may not help resolve the conflicts.

However, *Punch's* adoption of resolution frame more than the other two newspapers depicts the efforts of its reporters and other peacemakers toward resolution of the conflict through their reports. On its own part, *The Sun* adopts ethnicity frame more than the other two newspapers. This finding affirms the observations of other scholars that, apart from being just scarce resource-use conflict, the dispute between the herdsmen and the farmers is regarded as having ethnic color (Ofuoku & Isife, 2009; Tonah, 2006). *The Guardian's* adoption of conflict frame more than the other two newspapers justifies its presentation of both herdsmen and farmers as aggressors in the reports across the selected newspapers. *The Guardian* also adopts political response frame more than the other two newspapers, but this does not preclude the fact that the frame is not mostly adopted in the reports. Thus, it can be said that the relatively low adoption of political response frame by the newspapers suggests low response or reactions of the Plateau State government and the federal government, as well as the politicians of both the ruling and opposition parties to the clashes between herdsmen and farmers in the state. Also, the least adoption of religious frame shows that even though there is a difference in the religious identities of the herdsmen and farmers, it does not manifest as the major cause of the conflict in Plateau State. The little or no adoption of economic response frame, however, shows little portrayal of the economic implication of the conflict by the selected newspapers even as the conflict has led to the damage of property worth millions of naira in the state.

Conclusion

The contributions of this study allow us to state that the conflict between herdsman and farmers in Plateau State, Nigeria, may continue unabated if Nigerian newspapers continue with their current style of reporting the crisis. This is because, as the findings of this study indicate, the newspapers frame the conflict mostly as perpetration of crimes rather than as clashes over scarce resources. The high criminality frames can influence public perception against peaceful resolution of the crisis. It shows that many Nigerian journalists are yet to imbibe the principles of peace journalism in their reportage or framing of conflict situations. Peace journalism represents a balanced style of reporting that explains the significance of issues involved in a conflict with a view to encouraging peaceful resolution of the crisis. Thus, the high negative direction of coverage, the portrayal of one party (the herdsman) as attackers, the use of demonizing speeches, and one-sided reports in framing of the conflicts by the newspapers all depict undue regard to fairness, balance, and interpretation, which are the tenets and ethical bases of peace journalism.

Consequently, this article recommends that the selected newspapers go beyond episodic reportage of the conflict between herdsman and farmers to provide more detailed and interpretative analysis of the conflict situations through news analysis or features. News interpretation will give a balanced view of the sufferings of the victims and point to peace proposals from all sides of the conflict. It will make for better understanding of the intricacies behind the conflict.

The newspapers should also tilt a majority of their reports on the conflict toward a positive direction by eschewing demonizing words and sensationalism. They should provide fair and balanced coverage of the herdsman and farmers to facilitate easy resolution of the conflict.

Akin to the above are effective training and retraining of the reporters in the selected newspapers and the Nigerian journalists as a whole on the principles of peace journalism in framing conflict situations. Above all, there is a clarion call for the Nigerian government at all levels to put more efforts in their attempts to resolve the conflicts between herdsman and farmers in Plateau State.

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