



## **Framing of Herdsmen and Farmers' Crisis in Select Nigerian Newspapers (2020-2021)**

<sup>1</sup>Taiwo Olatunde OKEOWO\*, <sup>2</sup>Olanrewaju Amos ARISOYIN, <sup>3</sup>Adewale AJAYI, <sup>4</sup>Bamitale Tinuola FILATEI & <sup>5</sup>Ibrahim Moses OYEWOLE

<sup>1&3</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Lagos State University of Science and Technology, Ikorodu, Lagos, Nigeria

<sup>2,4&5</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Trinity University, Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria

<sup>1</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0005-3209-8676>

<sup>2</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9751-1236>

<sup>3</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1647-3854>

<sup>4</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9981-8555>

<sup>5</sup><https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4402-6180>

\*Corresponding Author: [okeowotaiwo2@gmail.com](mailto:okeowotaiwo2@gmail.com)

### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The conflict between Farmers and herdsmen has been on for years, the Nigeria database has recorded 615 violent deaths related to cattle grazing, out of a total of 61,314 violent fatalities in Nigeria (2014). In an explorative study of relevant cases reported by the press across the 36 states from 2006 to May 2014. He was able to establish the frequency, intensity and the pattern of such conflict across Nigeria. This study examined the framing of herdsmen and farmers' crisis in South-West Nigeria newspapers.

**Objective:** The objectives were to content analyse: the prominence accorded to the coverage of the herdsmen and farmers crisis in the selected newspapers; the sources of news in reporting the crisis; the extent to which Nigerian newspapers engaged in investigative journalism in coverage of the crises; the language used in the stories, and assess the framing patterns adopted by the selected newspapers. Framing and gate-keeping theories served as the theoretical framework.

**Method:** The study adopted the descriptive research design; it utilised quantitative and qualitative data generated through content analysis method and key informant interview. A coding guide and an interview guide were used as research instruments. Three national newspapers including the Punch Newspaper, Nigerian Tribune and Daily Trust Newspaper were purposively selected from January, 2020 to December, 2021.

**Result:** This study established that reports on herdsmen-farmers' conflicts are still largely framed in ethnic slants and such frames do not support peace and conflict-sensitive journalism. Based on the findings

**Conclusion:** this study concludes that Journalists need to always cover both sides of the farmers-herders' conflict to ensure fairness while newspaper owners and stakeholders in the newspaper industry should intensify training programmes for journalists on conflict reporting.

**Unique Contribution:** Previous studies had generally examined media framing of herdsmen-farmers' conflict in Nigeria but this study focused on the period the conflict was tense in the South-West sub-region. The study also established that reports on herdsmen-



farmers' conflicts are still largely framed in ethnic slants and such frames do not support peace and conflict-sensitive journalism.

**Key Recommendation:** fairness in journalistic reportage that cover both sides of the farmers-herders' conflict; to promote peace and conflict-sensitive journalism, journalists should desist from ethnic profiling of herdsmen in their reports. Newspaper owners and stakeholders in the newspaper industry should intensify training programmes for journalists on peace and conflict-sensitive journalism.

**Keywords:** Farmer, Herdsmen, Crisis, Newspaper Framing, Conflict-Sensitive Journalism

## INTRODUCTION

Farmers and herdsmen conflicts in Nigeria have been a longstanding issue with escalated dimensions between 2020 and 2021. The crisis, fueled by competition for resources, climate change, and ethno-religious tensions, has pitted farming communities against nomadic herders, with devastating consequences for the country's food security, economy, and social fabric. Against this backdrop, the media's framing of the crisis plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy responses (Onwe et al., 2017). The information contained in newspapers influence readers' opinions as news is presented with authority and sometimes with a tone of advocacy. Newspaper editorials could present in-depth analysis of a situation, event or issue, showing the pros and cons and in the end pointing out why something is "good" or "bad" (Daramola 2003). The kind of editorial has the tendency to influence readers' opinion towards the issues, thus presented. Newspapers have also helped to bring about reforms in government and other areas by focusing public attention on existing needs and problems. The people's needs are highlighted, emphasised and reiterated to the ears of government officials in order to influence policies and other decisions and actions of the government.

The interest of the public can also be protected by the media against the Herdsmen brutality on fellow citizens. The mass media have done much in protecting the interest of the public by crusading the cause of the masses through editorials, commentaries, special features, opinion pages and columns. This study analysed the content of selected national newspapers for the coverage and reportage of conflict activities of the Farmers and Herdsmen within South-West Nigeria.

The media across the globe represent the fourth estate of the realm. The meaning of this is that within the context of governmental and political power in any state, the media in all its forms represent the framework that wields the power to safeguard the political health of democracy through its capacity to frame issues of political significance in ways that influence the fundamental constituents of the state. The role and capacity of the media must be defined and understood within the unique context within which they operate and seek to influence. The postcolonial context of Nigeria constitutes a huge test of the competence and capacity of the Nigerian media to adjudicate matters that do not mean the same to other media across the globe, even though the issues raised have universal significance.



The conflict between herders and farmers, often highlighted by violence, is a longstanding issue in Nigeria. It has been evolving in frequency and intensity, hence assuming new complexities in recent years. According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index, pastoralists, regarded as “Fulani militants”, were the fourth most deadly terrorist group in the world, only behind the Taliban, the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL) and Boko Haram (Institute of Economics and Peace, 2015). Herders are geographically dispersed as far as their nomadic movements, and so are their attacks. Although hostilities have concentrated more in the North-Central, there is an extension to the South-East, South-South, North-West, North-East and the South-West geopolitical zones of Nigeria (SBM Intelligence, 2016). These regions have, in varying degrees, suffered the loss of lives and property as well as displacements due to attacks by the pastoralists. The broad scope of the conflict qualifies it as a national crisis. Despite this reality, the herders-farmers’ conflict has not been given adequate attention and exigency accorded to the Boko Haram insurgency (largely remote to the North-East) and the Niger-Delta crisis (largely remote to the South-South).

Previous studies (e.g Arcan, 2013; Zia and Syedah, 2015; Savrum and Miller, 2015) on conflict reporting focused more on major terrorism attacks, ethnic conflicts and rise of insurgencies across different parts of the world and found bias in newspaper framing of the conflicts. Studies on conflicts in Nigeria (e.g Asemah and Edegoh (2012) Okoro and Odoemelam (2013); Aligwe et al., (2017) Ngwu, Ekwu and Chiaha (2015) Nwankpa and Onyekosor (2015; Jimoh, 2014 ) have also focused more on the newspaper reportage of Boko Haram insurgency, Niger-Delta crisis, Jos crisis, Chibok Girls crisis, among others. However, only few studies have examined how newspapers frame the conflict in each geo-political zone of the country. The mass media have often been blamed on inflaming crisis, particular regarding the nature of their reportage (Hamid & Baba 2014).

Thus, there are many unsettling questions on the way the media report conflicts as the ‘frames’, language and slant used to report crisis may have implications for the outcome and understanding of the issues in the crisis and may, indeed, contribute to the cycle of reprisal attacks. Therefore, this study interrogates the extent of the application of conflict-sensitive journalism in the reportage of the herders-farmers’ conflict in South-West Nigeria, a zone that became an epic Centre of farmers-herders’ crisis between 2020 and late 2022. In essence, this thesis examines the nature, dimensions and nuances of newspaper reportage of the farmers-herders’ conflict in South-West Nigeria and to attempt an alternative perspective on the pattern of reportage based on the principles of conflict-sensitive journalism.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of this study are to:

1. determine the prominence accorded the coverage of the farmers and herdsmen’ crisis in the selected newspaper;
2. identify the sources of news in Nigerian newspapers in reporting the farmers and herdsmen’ crisis in the South-West;
3. investigate the extent to which Nigerian newspaper engagement in investigative journalism in coverage of farmers and herdsmen’ crises in the South-West;
4. Examine the language used in the headline stories on farmers and herdsmen’ crises in the South-West in the selected Nigerian newspapers.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Concept of Conflict, Crisis and Violence**

Conflict can be described as a disagreement among groups or individuals characterized by antagonism and hostility. This is usually fuelled by the opposition of one party to another, in an attempt to reach an objective different from that of the other party. The elements involved in the conflict have varied sets of principles and values, thus allowing such a conflict to arise. As agreed by many scholars, conflict is a natural phenomenon that is inevitable in all spheres of human existence and stems from the fact that there is bound to be disputes, disagreements, claims, and counter-claims, contestations over resources, values, and wealth in the cause of human interaction within a society (Peterside and Gambo, 2022). Ekwonchi and Nze (2019) submit that conflict exists in every environment where we have two or more individuals living together. They explain that when people of different religion and culture live within the same national space for weeks, months, years and decades without any form of quarrels, disagreements and clashes of interest, it means that individuals who make up the group are either saints or fools. In a layman's term, conflict is perceived as a disagreement either between two individuals or among group members.

Disagreements among individuals usually lead to conflicts and fights. On a broader scale, conflict represents the persistent and persuasive nature of intergroup and international competition among disparate interests and values that underlies power dynamics (Jeong, 2005 as cited in Ekwonchi and Nze, 2019). Coser (1956) as cited by Peterside and Gambo (2022) perceives conflict in terms of the struggle between parties over desirable values. He explains that it is the struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals. In other words, conflict is defined as a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirement and even sometimes perception (Management Study Guide, 2022).

Crisis on the other hand is mostly used in the social sciences to mean stress, conflict, tension, panic, catastrophe, and disaster. The term is used synonymously with many situations that have generalized the meaning. Cengage (2018) states that because of its varied meanings the term 'crisis' has not been useful in building systematic knowledge about social phenomena. He added that the term cover almost any situation and is not helpful in analysis that emphasis variables and relationship among variables. However, the term crisis can be used in the terms of substantive and procedural. Substantive uses specify the content of a policy, problem, or situation. Procedural concepts emphasises general characteristics or situation, without regard to whether a particular case involves, i.e. intentional crisis, political crisis, or an individual crisis. In the field of communication, crisis is closely treated as urgent condition or situation that needs immediate response. Skinner, Von Essen, Merham and Motau (2010) call crisis a critical situation and turning point, that moment of drama when hostile forces are at the height of their opposition. They wrote, "Crisis can be almost anything you perceive it to be." Citing Ajala (2001), Nwanne (2015) notes that a crisis is an unexpected development, which very often embarrasses an organization, frightens the public and puts company's credibility and decency under intense



scrutiny. Ajala (2001) writes that to some worst instances, a crisis creates the threat of death and loss of property. She describes crisis as a period of heightened uncertainty that increases the need to plan, or a point in time which external or internal pressures change objectives and operational practices of an organisation. One of the prominent scholars of modern public relations Sam Black (1989) states that there are occasions when catastrophe, minor or major, demands immediate and effective action rather like a fire engine or a lifeboat responding to an SOS. In a simple expression, Ogedengbe, Ade-Inasa and Adesemoye (2019) wrote that crisis is the case when things go abnormal or bad.

### **Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution**

This refers to the actions taken at the early stages of a conflict to avert escalation or the recurrence of violence. Miller (2005) concedes that the term conflict prevention can be misleading because, in a theoretical sense, not so much preventing is done as resolving. He further clarifies that the focus of conflict prevention is to identify and analyse early warnings in order to avoid violent forms of conflict engagement. Conflict prevention generally takes two forms: direct conflict prevention and structural conflict prevention. Conflict management encompasses the limitation, containment and litigation of a conflict situation (Best, 2005). Conflict management is often adopted as a response to addressing a conflict situation when total resolution of such conflict is not feasible. The thrust of conflict management usually is, though a conflict situation may prove unsolvable, at least its negative and destructive capacities should be curtailed and contained. Conflict management, Miller (2005) notes, is never a one-off activity but a constant process.

Conflict resolution on the other is aimed at putting an end to a conflict by facilitating agreement between contending parties in their areas of incompatibility. Conflict resolution processes may involve mediation, conciliation or third-party negotiation. For a conflict situation to be truly resolved, there must, first, be a recognition of the causes and the perceptions of the conflicting parties, then, solutions that would be mutually satisfying can be devised to bring a finality to the conflict.

### **Media Coverage of Armed Conflicts around the Globe**

In the year 2000, 40 conflicts were recorded across the world; this took a downward trend over the years, with 30 conflicts recorded in 2007. By the end 2008, 28 major conflicts were being fought in 24 countries (Ploughshares2009 armed conflict report- preview). The report further showed that majority of these conflicts occurred in Africa and Asia. Millions have died from these conflicts and many others displaced. In all these cases, mass media often plays a key role in today's conflict. Basically, their role can take two different and opposed forms. Either the media takes an active part in the conflict and responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thus contributing to the resolution of conflicts and alleviation of violence (International Media Support 2006). Dimitrova & Stromback (2008); Nwafor et al., (2013) also opined that mass media play a critical role in modern warfare, the media however face a number of challenges in war reporting. On one hand, they are expected to act as watchdogs, to verify the accuracy of the facts they receive and publish, at the same time to provide the information that people need in order to be free and self-governing. On the other hand, the media must also be



sensitive to public opinion. Sundar (2001) in his policy brief stated that the higher cost of news gathering in remote regions, with the geopolitical and economic priorities of the West, means that conflicts occurring at close proximity to the metropolitan centers receive coverage at the expense of those occurring further away in less developed regions of the world. He further stated thus:

A study of conflict reporting in the world's major news outlets in 2000 shows that the Israel Palestine conflict was by far the most covered- five times greater than the next most covered conflict. Virgil Hawkins, the researcher who conducted the study, notes: 'By contrast, conflict in Africa, which has been, in post- Cost-War world, responsible for up to 90 percent of the world's total war dead, suffered an almost complete media blackout. Coverage of the massive war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which caused in excess of one million deaths in the year 2000, was almost insignificant (Sundar, 2001).

Aside this, there had been question of whether The Times and other news organizations, simply overplay the Israel-Palestine conflict, why does The Times pay so much attention, particularly on the Palestinian conflict, when there are so many hot spots and so much carnage in the world (Sullivan 2014).

### **Herders-Farmers' Conflict in Nigeria: Nature, Causes and Complexity**

Interaction between nomadic herders and farmers is inevitable. If anything, there exist all likelihood for a symbiotic relationship between them. Through barter or purchase, nomadic herders, on the one hand, may depend on farmers in their host community for grains, and the farmers, on the other hand, may depend on the herders for dairy products. Also, farmers may make crop residues available to herders as feeds for their cattle, while dungs from the herders' cattle could be utilized as manure by farmers. Blench (2003) asserts that forging a cordial relationship with farmers is most crucial for nomadic herders so they could be welcomed and tolerated in a visited farming community in subsequent times. It is when herders are unable to develop a mutual relationship with the farmers of a particular community that they resort to either "flexible movement patterns that involve encountering new arable communities every year" or "intimidation of the farmers" (Blench, 2003, p. 2). This hints on how conflict tends to breakout between herders and farmers in Nigeria.

The fundamental cause of the conflict between nomadic herdsmen and crop farmers in Nigeria lies in their competition for natural resources. Herders and farmers compete for land and water, with the former seeking these resources for the benefit of their cattle and the latter interested in using them for the cultivation of crops. This competition has turned aggressive in recent decades due to increasing scarcity of the resources, a phenomenon that has been alluded to as a direct effect of climate change (Abugu & Onuba, 2015; Odoh & Chigozie, 2012; Shettima & Tar, 2008). According to Bakuh (2005), 45 per cent of the land mass in Africa is desertified, and as a result of reduced land mass available for farming and grazing, violent conflicts tend to erupt between farmers and pastoralists in their pursuit of space. Desertification and drought in Northern Nigeria, Abugu and Onuba (2015) point out, are the major reason why Fulani herders are forced to migrate down to other regions, especially the southern part, of the country. Abass



(2012) adds that decrease in annual rainfall and shortening of the wet season are contributory factors to the itinerancy of Fulani herders toward the south. Odoh and Chigozie (2012) concludes that while resource scarcity may be the immediate cause of the conflict between herders and sedentary farmers in Nigeria, climate change constitutes the remote cause.

Farmland and grazing route encroachment readily incite clashes between pastoralists and farmers. Farmers confront herders when cattle stray into their farmlands and destroy their crops. Cases of such confrontations whereby herders react with violence are rife. Abass (2012) avers that over 60 per cent of reported cases of the herders-farmers conflict occur during the dry season. Meanwhile, Olayoku (2014); Odoemelam et al., (2013) affirms that, resultant from the incursion of livestock on farmlands, clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria assume greater intensity during planting and harvest periods. Conversely, herdsmen also feel aggrieved when they discover that portions of land that had hitherto served them as grazing routes have been taken over by farmers for cultivation. By virtue of their nomadic movement, Fulani herdsmen are outsiders in any farming community they temporarily settle. Hence, they are considered the “landless group” by the community farmers (the “landed group”) who claim the right to land use and ownership (Shettima & Tar, 2008).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section explains the theoretical framework that support this study. The study is guided by the Gate-Keeping Theory and the Media Framing theory.

### **Gate-Keeping Theory**

Kurt Lewin was apparently the first one to use the term “gatekeeping” which he used to describe a wife or mother as the person who decides which foods end up on the family dinner table (Lewin 1947). The gatekeeper is the person who decides what shall pass through each gate section. Although he applied it originally to the food chain, he then added that the gating process can include a news item winding through communication channels in a group. This is the point from which most gate-keeping studies in communication are launched. White (1961) was the person who seized upon Lewins comments and turned it solidly towards journalism. The gatekeeper decides which information will go forward, and which will not. In other words a gatekeeper in a social system decides which of a certain commodity- materials, goods and information- may enter the system. Important to realize is that gatekeepers are able to control the public knowledge of the actual events by letting some stories pass through the system but keeping other out. Gatekeepers can also be seen as institutions or organizations. In a political system there are gatekeepers, individuals or institutions which control access to positions of power and regulate the flow of information and political influence. Gatekeepers exist in many jobs, and their choices hold the potential to colour mental picture that are subsequently created in peoples understanding of what is happening in the world around them. Media gate-keeping showed that decision making is based on principles of news values, organizational routines, input structure and common sense. Gatekeeping is vital in communication planning and almost all communication planning roles include some aspect of gatekeeping.



### **Relevance of the Gatekeeping Theory to the Study**

This theory deals with the processes and factors which influence the decisions of media organizations to select or reject potential newsworthy items for publication. Thus, this study examines the factors which influence the selection or rejection of stories on farmers-herdsmen conflict in South-West Nigeria. The media may prevent some news, comments, or article that may glorify the acts of terrorists in the eye of the public. Incidentally, terrorism is the media's stepchild, a stepchild, whom the media, unfortunately, can neither completely ignore nor deny (Miller 1982:1). So as the terrorists serve as the theatre for media, so also the media and journalists indirectly facilitate the achievement of terrorists' goal or penchant for publicity. In other words, "terrorists aimed at achieving maximum coverage and publicity by selecting soft targets and engaging in symbolic action that is usually dramatic" (Tunman, 2003: 135), and which serve journalists with veritable events that could be reported. In this way, terrorists' acts are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end of gaining publicity and notoriety through media Reports.

### **Media Framing Theory**

The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses attention on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. Framing is an important topic since it can have a big influence and therefore the concept of framing expanded to organizations as well. The media draws the public attention to certain topics, it decides what people think about, and the journalists select the topics. The way in which the news is brought, the frame in which the news is presented, is also a choice made by journalists. Thus, a frame refers to the way media and media gatekeepers organize and present the events and issues they cover, and the way audiences interpret what they are provided. Frames are abstract notions that serve to organize or structure social meanings. Frames influence the perception of the news of the audience, this form of agenda-setting not only tells what to think about, but also how to think about it. Media products are human products, constructs that the audience takes for granted.

According to Fairhurst & Sarr (1996) framing consists of three elements, which are: Language, Thought, and Forethought. Language helps us to remember information and acts to transform the way in which we view situations. To use language, people must have *thought* and reflected on their own interpretive frameworks and those of others. Leaders must learn to frame spontaneously in certain circumstances. Being able to do so had to do with having the *forethought* to predict framing opportunities. In other words, one must plan in order to be spontaneous. (Deetz, Tracy & Simpson 2000). In the field of communication science, framing has become one of the most popular concepts. Recent overviews all document the popularity and tremendous increase in the use of the concept (Borah, 2011; Chong & Druckman, 2007a; D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010; de Vreese & Lecheler, 2012; Matthes, 2009,2012; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In political communication research, ideas from both traditions have posited by Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980) is clearly more aligned with the sociological perspective, whereas much of the later framing effects literature has a psychologically oriented foundation. The framing notion was picked up by Entman (1993), who transferred framing to the study of the mass and news media, in particular. At the core of the news framing research stands the quest to understand and explain why "(often small) changes in



the presentation of an issue or an event produce (sometimes larger) changes of opinion" or other outcome variables (Chong & Druckman, 2007b, p. 104).

As outlined above, journalistic news frames play a transformative role vis-à-vis other frames that are sponsored by various stakeholders, such as political elites. Journalistic news frames take a starting point in journalists' discretion and autonomy; these frames help journalists and news media organizations shape their selected topics in their own particular manner and style; and journalistic news frames are used in the adaptation and modification of frames from elites. For example, in a policy discussion on a welfare issue where two political actors offer a different framing of the topic, a journalist or news organization may transform this event into a story that focuses on example of the implementation of a new policy. Or the policy discussion can become subsidiary to a story focusing on the political conflict and disagreement between the political actors while also juxtaposing their two frames. Each case is an example of a journalistic news frame offering a template to understand an issue or event. The journalistic news frame stresses some aspects of the case and pushes others to the background, and the frame highlights the active role of journalists in constructing news stories, a process which is at the core of mediatisation.

### **Relevance of the Media Framing Theory to the Study**

The media framing theory is relevant to this study based on the assumption that the media's framing of news influences how the media audience would interpret social issues. It follows that the frames adopted by the Nigerian press in the reportage and coverage of the conflict between herders and farmers would likely be reflected in the direction of public discourse in the country. There is bound to be an interaction between how the Nigerian press frame the herders-farmers conflict and the way the Nigerian public come to understand and interpret the conflict and perceive the conflicting parties. Moreover, the framing theory gives support to the conjecture that news framing by the media can be informed by the manner in which news sources present issues to journalists. This research study, as part of its objectives, seeks to identify the major sources of new stories on the herders-farmers conflict in the selected newspapers as a means, among other reasons, to further comprehend why news media outlets tend to frame conflict situations the way they do.

### **EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

Violent conflicts are a major global concern and, naturally, the causes and repercussions of these conflicts have prompted a plethora of research studies. Communication researchers, particularly, have sought to evaluate the role of the media within the context of varying conflict situations in different parts of the world. For instance, Zia and Syedah (2015) studied the print media coverage of the Kashmir conflict, a protracted feud between India and Pakistan. Their inquiry was, from the outset, premised on the potentiality of the media to influence conflict prevention and resolution. Adopting the quantitative content analysis approach, three newspapers were selected for the study, one each from the two conflicting countries, and one from the United States of America "as a mediator" (p. 162). Editions of *The Times of India* (India newspaper), *Dawn* (Pakistan newspaper), and *The New York Times* (US newspaper) between October and December 2008 were analysed. The results of the study showed that the conflict was given maximum news coverage by *The Times of India* and closely followed by *Dawn*, whereas it only



received slight coverage in the *The New York Times*. The selected newspaper predominantly gave negative coverage to issues related to the conflict than positive coverage that could have engendered the resolution of the conflict. It was noted that the newspapers reflected the socio-political agenda of their respective countries in their coverage of the conflict. The researchers concluded that war journalism was the prevalent approach in the coverage of the three newspapers in that much salience was accorded to violence while peaceful alternatives were neither sufficiently presented nor emphasized.

Arcan (2013) studied the role played by the Turkish media in the ethnic conflict between the Kurds and the Turks. The coverage of two Turkish newspapers- Sözcü and Radikal newspapers- were examined. The two newspapers were deliberately chosen because of their differing ideological and political attachments. According to the author, Sözcü newspaper was known to be secularist, republican and nationalist and supported the status quo against peace process, while Radikal newspaper, known to be left-liberal, maintained a stance toward peace process. The study covered editions of the selected newspapers published between April 3, 2013 and June 26, 2013, analysing the newspapers' coverage of activities of the Wise people Committee tasked by the Turkish government to facilitate a peace process to end the conflict. Findings of the study showed that news stories in Sözcü newspaper were mainly from a war/violence journalism perspective but Radikal newspaper dominantly adopted a peace journalism approach; somewhat reflecting the newspapers' respective ideological and political attachments.

From the interview, it was gathered that journalists from the privately-owned newspaper were more prone to being assaulted especially when their reports go against the views of the government. The researchers recommended, among other things, that for the print media to have a more robust impact in the resolution of conflicts in Uganda, appropriate laws must be put in place to foster media freedom in the country.

In an audience-based study, Chebii (2015) investigated the role the media may have played in the escalation of violent conflicts during and after the 2007 Kenyan general election. The researcher drew a sample of 373 respondents from a target population of 12,975 residents of three locations in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The survey findings revealed that 69.8 per cent of the respondents believed the media played an escalatory role while 30.2 per cent thought the media played a de-escalatory role. While 61.3 per cent of the respondents agreed that the media encouraged hate speeches during the election, 38.7 per cent of the respondents disagreed. Also, 71 per cent of the respondents believed the media promoted propaganda during the election, the remaining 29 per cent believed otherwise. Based on indicated media preference of the respondents, the researcher inferred that local (vernacular) media outlets in Kenya were more likely to contribute to the escalation of conflict than national media outlets in the country. It was also surmised that variables such as age, gender, social status and religion, to a great extent, determine what influence the media would exert on individuals during periods of conflict.



## METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was used for this study. Content analysis enables researchers to “describe communication content” (Wimmer and Dominic, 2011, p. 150) and “enumerate the details of communication, their content, their function, their form or structure” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 238). According to Sobowale (1993: p. 17), “content analysis focuses on the manifest content of communication. In other words, only messages that have been coded by way of formal presentation can be content analysed”.

Media contents can be analysed either quantitatively or qualitatively or combination of both. Hence, this study adopts both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The use of qualitative content analysis will enable the researcher to explain the data generated from the quantitative content analysis.

The population of study consists items from the three newspapers (*Punch, Tribune and Daily Trust*) newspapers in Nigeria. As at December 2022, there were fifty-eight functional national newspapers operating across Nigeria while six were online-based newspapers according to Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ 2022). The newspapers were chosen for the study due to the fact that they were national newspapers with wide geographical spread and circulation. This was supported by key informant interview with six journalists who covered the crisis beat for the three selected newspapers.

However, the ownership of each newspaper influences how it reports on the herdsman–farmers conflict. *The Punch and Nigerian Tribune*, both privately owned and based in the South, naturally reflected southern viewpoints. They placed significant emphasis on the conflict’s impact on local communities. *The Nigerian Tribune*, with its strong ties to the Yoruba region, allowed that cultural background to further shape its editorial tone. In contrast, *Daily Trust*, operated from the North by Media Trust Limited, offered a northern perspective on the issue. Its reporting often appeared more balanced or even sympathetic toward herders. Ownership and a newspaper’s location affect more than just overarching editorial direction. They determine which stories are chosen, how those stories are presented, and the tone found in each headline. Framing and Gatekeeping Theories highlight this: media ownership wields considerable influence over how topics are portrayed to the public and what information ultimately reaches readers.

### **Sampling Procedure for Key Informant Interview (KII)**

Six reporters (two from each newspaper organisation) assigned to cover the farmers-herdsmen conflict in South-West Nigeria were selected for the key informant interview. The participants (interviewees) were selected using purposive sampling technique. They were selected because of their experiences in reporting the farmers-herdsmen conflict. Data were presented using tables, frequencies, and percentages for the content analysis, while findings from the key informant interviews were presented narratively and thematically, providing both statistical trends and contextual insights



#### 4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### **RQ 1: To what extent did the selected newspapers accord prominence to the coverage of the farmers and herdsmen’ crisis?**

Prominence of a story is measured by frequency of reportage and placement of the stories.

**Table 1: Newspaper**

Newspaper	Placement	Percent
The Punch	252	40.2
Tribune	210	33.5
Daily Trust	165	26.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows that Punch newspaper gave the highest attention (40.2%) to the reportage of herdsmen and farmers’ crisis, followed by Tribune newspaper (33.5%) while Daily Trust newspaper gave the least attention to the reportage with 26.3% coverage, which is around quarter of the reports. In all, Southern newspapers gave more attention (73.7%) to the reportage of farmers-herdsmen crisis than the only northern based newspaper. This may be attributed to the fact that the stories the crisis occurred in Southern Nigeria.

**Table 2: Year of Report**

Year	Frequency	Percentage
2021	333	53.1
2020	294	46.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows the frequency of reportage of herdsmen-farmers’ crisis between 2020 and 2021. Results reveal that most of the reports (53.1%) were published in 2021 while about half of the reports (46.1%) were published in 2020. This shows about 7% increase in the 2020 reportage. All the reports indicate that herdsmen-farmers’ crisis in Nigeria was adequately reported by the selected newspapers. If the total reports are shared on daily basis, it means there was one report on herdsmen-farmers’ crisis for nearly each day in the entire 2020 and 2021.

**Table 3: Placement of Story**

Placement	Frequency	Percentage
Inside Page	555	<b>88.5</b>
Main Lead (Front Page)	42	<b>6.7</b>
Others (Front Page)	25	<b>3.8</b>
Op-Ed Page	6	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>



Table 3 shows that most of the stories on herdsmen-farmers’ crisis (88.5%) were placed on the inside pages of the selected newspapers while 10.5% of the stories made it to the front pages of the newspapers. Given the fact that newspapers needed to pay attention to other stories, it can be inferred that the herdsmen-farmers’ crisis was given adequate prominence in terms of placement of the stories.

**RQ 2: What are the sources of news in selected Nigerian newspapers in reporting the farmers and herdsmen crisis in the South-west?**

The second research question examines the sources of news in the selected Nigerian newspapers in the reportage of herdsmen-farmers’ crisis

**Table 4: Sources of News**

<b>Main Source of Story</b>		
<b>Source</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Reporter’s Interview	459	73.2
Statement/Press Release	168	26.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Main Speaker in the Story</b>		
<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Farmers/Farmers’ Association	160	25.5
Government’s Officials	145	23.1
Herders/Herders’ Association	105	16.7
Victims	83	13.2
Security Operatives (Police, the Military, DSS, etc)	64	10.2
Traditional/Community Leaders	41	6.5
Eyes Witness/Members of the Public	24	3.8
Religious Leaders/Organizations	3	.5
Socio-Cultural Groups (Arewa, MASSOB, OPC)	2	.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 shows that the dominant source of reports on herdsmen-farmers’ crisis (73.2%) were reporters’ interviews. This indicates a high level of credibility of the stories as reporters were on ground to get first hand views of the crisis. Results equally show that farmers and farmers’ associations constituted at least a quarter (25.5%) of all the speakers in the stories, followed by government officials (23.1%) and then the herdsmen/herdsmen’s associations (16.7%). The victims (10.2%) were also allowed to air their views while security operatives had 10.2% opportunity to



express themselves on the crisis. In all, the main stakeholders in the crisis (farmers, herdsmen and the victims) constituted more than half of the main speakers in the crisis (55.4%). What this implies is that key stakeholders were not just reported, they were allowed to express their grievances.

**RQ 3: To what extent did selected Nigerian newspaper engage in investigative journalism in the coverage of farmers and herdsmen crises in the Southwest?**

**Table 5: Format of Coverage**

Format	Frequency	Percentage
News Report	477	76.1
Interview	80	12.8
Editorial	29	4.6
Feature	25	4.0
News Analysis	6	1.0
Column/Opinion	5	.8
Investigative Report	3	.5
Cartoon	2	.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.5 shows that most stories on herdsmen-farmers' crisis in the selected newspapers were reported in news report format (76.1%) while there were only three investigative reports constituting 0.5%. This shows that investigative reports were relegated in the reportage of the farmers-herdsmen' crisis in South-West Nigeria.

**RQ 4: What is the language used in the stories on farmers and herdsmen' crises in the South-West in the selected Nigerian newspapers?**

The fourth research question was focused on finding out the dominant type of language used by the selected newspapers in reporting the farmers-herdsmen' crisis in South-West Nigeria.

**Table 6: Language**

Language	Frequency	Total
Non-conflict sensitive	356	56.8
Conflict sensitive	271	43.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 shows that most of the language used (56.8%) in the reportage of herdsmen-farmers' crisis in South-West Nigeria by the selected newspapers were not conflict-sensitive as the use of the term "Fulani herdsmen" was common in most of the reports.



**Table 7: Slant**

Sides Covered	Frequency	Percentage
One side covered	376	60.0
All sides covered	251	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 7 shows that most of the reports on farmers-herders' crisis (60%) were one sided. This shows that the reports were not balanced.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

### *Prominence of Stories on Herdsmen-Farmers' Crisis*

*Punch* newspaper gave the highest attention (40.2%) to the reportage of herdsmen and farmers' crisis, followed by *Tribune* newspaper (33.5%) while *Daily Trust* newspaper gave the least attention to the reportage with 26.3% coverage, which is around quarter of the reports. As expected, Southern newspapers gave more attention (73.7%) to the reportage of farmers-herdsmen crisis than the only northern based newspaper. Results of the content analysis further revealed that most of the reports (53.1%) were published in 2021 while about half of the reports (46.1%) were published in 2020. This shows about 7% increase in the 2020 reportage. The increase in the reports points to the fact that the selected newspapers gave attention and more seriousness to the herdsmen-farmers' crisis. More so, most of the stories on herdsmen-farmers' crisis (88.5%) was placed on the inside pages of the selected newspapers while 10.5% of the stories made it to the front pages of the newspapers. Given the fact that newspapers needed to pay attention to other stories, it can be inferred that the herdsmen-farmers' crisis was given adequate prominence in terms of placement of the stories.

### *Sources of News*

The dominant source of reports on herdsmen-farmers' crisis (73.2%) was reporters' interviews. This indicates a high level of commitment of the selected newspapers to reporting the herdsmen-farmers' crisis. Results equally showed that farmers and farmers' associations constituted at least a quarter (25.5%) of all the speakers in the stories, followed by government officials (23.1%) and then the herders/herders' associations (16.7%). The victims (10.2%) were also allowed to air their views while security operatives had 10.2% opportunity to express themselves on the crisis. In all, the main stakeholders in the crisis (farmers, herdsmen and the victims) constituted more than half of the main speakers in the crisis (55.4%). What this implies is that key stakeholders were not just reported, they were allowed to express their grievances.

### *Engagement in Investigative Journalism*

Most stories on herdsmen-farmers' crisis in the selected newspapers were reported in news report format (76.1%) while there were only three investigative reports constituting 0.5%. This shows that investigative reports were relegated in the reportage of the herdsmen-farmers' crisis in South-West Nigeria. The newspapers did very little to critically analyse issues surrounding herdsmen-farmers' crisis while independent investigations by the newspapers were rarely done.



### *Language Used*

Most of the language used (56.8%) in the reportage of herdsmen-farmers' crisis in South-West Nigeria by the selected newspapers were not conflict-sensitive as the use of the term "Fulani herdsmen" was common in the reports. In other words, most of the language used did not promote the concept of peace journalism. More so, most of the reports on herders-farmers' crisis (60%) were also one sided.

Framing refers to the pattern of reportage adopted by the media in reporting an issue. More than half of the reports (55.5%) on herdsmen-farmers' crisis were ethnically framed, followed by conflict (19.5%) and criminality frames (10.2%). Like previous studies, the use of the phrase "Fulani herdsmen" was common in the stories. This implies that all herdsmen were of Fulani extraction and majority of the principal perpetrators of violence (76.1%) in herdsmen-farmers'

### *Factors that Influenced Newspaper Framing of the Crisis*

The major factors that influenced the framing of reports on herdsmen-farmers' crisis include the principle of fairness, ownership of the media outfit, regional and national interest, availability of knowledgeable sources and personal security of the reporter.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings, this study concludes that:

1. The herdsmen-farmers' conflict was given adequate coverage and prominence by the selected newspapers.
2. Although there was cumulative diversity of sources in the stories, most of the reports were one sided. The farmers were given more attention than the herdsmen.
3. The dominant source of reports on herdsmen-farmers' crisis were reporters' interviews.
4. Most stories on farmers-herders' conflict were reported in news format while investigative reports are rarely done
5. There was dominant use of ethnic frames to report farmers-herdsmen conflict in Nigeria and such frames do not support peace and conflict-sensitive journalism

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are hereby made based on the findings and conclusion of this study:

1. **Balanced Coverage:** Journalists should report on both farmers and herders to ensure the story remains fair and not one-sided.
2. **Conflict-Sensitive Reporting:** News organizations need to train their staff to handle stories about peace and conflict with care, steering clear of language that could fuel ethnic tensions.
3. **In-Depth Journalism:** Newspapers should invest more in investigative reporting. Rather than just giving routine updates, they should explore the deeper reasons behind the conflict.



4. Editorial Standards: Editors must establish clear guidelines that discourage ethnic profiling. They should encourage reporters to stick to the facts and include all perspectives when covering national conflicts.

5. Cooperation: Media outlets, professional bodies, and government agencies must work together. By collaborating, they can create journalism that helps resolve conflicts and unites communities.

### **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

### **Acknowledgements**

We acknowledge Mr. Wale Ajayi and Dr. Oyewole Ibrahim for assisting us with data collection. We equally appreciate the Lagos State University of Science and Technology and Trinity University Library staff for their cooperation and support.

### **Sources of funding**

The study was not funded.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### **Authors' Contributions**

So and so conceived the study, including the design, so and so collated the data, and so and so handled the analysis and interpretation, while so and so the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

### **Data availability statement**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

### **Citation**

Okeowo T. A., Arisoyin A.O, Ajayi A, Filatei B.T, & Banjoko D.K (2026). Framing of Herdsmen and Farmers' Crisis in Select—Nigerian Newspapers (2020-2021). *International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research*, 4(1), 335-354. doi:10.5281/zenodo.19134603



## REFERENCES

- Abugu, S. O., & Onuba, C. O. (2015). Climate change and pastoral conflicts in the Middle Belt and South-East Nigeria: Implication on human resource of the regions. *Global Journal of Human Resource Management*, 3(5), 44-51.
- Ajala, V.O. (2001). *Public relations in search of professional excellence*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ibadan: Maybest Publication.
- Aligwe, H.N., Nwankwo, S. U. & Nwafor, K. A. (2017). Agricultural Communication and Food Security in Nigeria: The Mass Media Role. *World Applied Sciences Journal* 35(5): 843-847. Available online at: [https://www.idosi.org/wasj/wasj35\(5\)17/22.pdf](https://www.idosi.org/wasj/wasj35(5)17/22.pdf)
- Arcan, E. H. (2013). Ethnic conflicts and the role of the media: The case of Turkish media. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(10), 338-346.
- Asemah, E. S., & Edegoh, L. O. (2012). Mass media agenda and conflict resolution in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. *Afrrev Ijah*, 1(4), 112-129.
- Bakuh, B. T. (2005). The environment, peace and conflict in Africa. In S. G. Best (Ed.). *Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Black, S. (1989). *Introduction to public relations*. Lagos: West African Book Publishers Limited.
- Best, S. G. (2004). The method of conflict resolution and transformation. In S. G. Best (Ed.). *Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*, (pp. 93-115). Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Blench, R. (2003). Transformation of conflict between pastoralists and cultivators in Nigeria. Retrieved on August 1, 2016 from <http://www.rogerblench.info/Conflict/Herder-farmer%20conflict%20in%20Nigeria.pdf>
- Cengage, (2022). *Crisis*. International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. Retrieved August 02, 2022 from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/crisis>
- Chebii, Z. K (2015). The role of media in conflict management: The case of electoral conflicts in Kenya. *Journal of Global Peace and Conflict*, 3(2), 39-61.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Reviews*, 10, 103-126.
- Daramola, I. (2005). *Mass media and society*. Lagos: Rothan Press Limited.
- Deetz, S.A. et al (2000) *Leading organizations through Transition*. London: Sage.



- Entman, R. M., Matthes, J., & Pellicano, L. (2009). Nature, sources, and effects of news framing. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen, & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, (pp. 175-190). New York: Routledge.
- Ekwenchi, O. C & Nze, U. N. (2019). Let's talk not kill their cows: Assessing the role of communication in preventing conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. In *ACCE thematic book on Communication, Migration, and Social Inclusion in Nigeria*.
- Fairhurst, G. & Saar, R. (1996) *The art of Framing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hamid & Baba. (2014). *Resolving Nigeria's 'Boko Haram' Insurgence: What Role for the Media*. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042>.
- Jimoh, J. (2014). Conflict Sensitive Journalism in the Nigerian Context. *Journalism and Media in Nigeria: Context, Issues and Practice*, p. 69-83, Canada University Press.
- Management Study Guide, (2022). *Understanding conflict- meaning and phases of conflicts*. Available at: <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/understanding-conflict.htm> accessed on 5/8/2022.
- Miller, C. E. (2005). *A glossary of terms and concepts in peace and conflict studies*. San Jose: University for Peace.
- Nwafor, K. A., Odoemelam, C.C. & Duru, V. (2013). Analysis of Newspaper Frames of the August 26, 2011 Bombing of the United Nations Building in Abuja Nigeria by the Boko Haram Sect and the Image Implication. *EBSU Journal of Mass Communication, Vol. 1 No. 1*. March 2013, pp. 109-120.
- Odoemelam C.C., Okeibunor, B. N. & Nwafor, K. A., (2013). Newspaper Editorial Frames of Security Issues in Nigeria: Implications for Development Objectives. *International Policy Brief Series, Social science & Law Journal of Policy Review & Development Strategies, 3(1)*, 1-10.
- Ogedengbe, K; Ade-Inasa, I.; Adesemoye, S.A. (2019). *Understanding public relations*. Lagos: Jimsalaam Limited.
- Olayoku, P. A. (2014). Trends and patterns of cattle grazing and rural violence in Nigeria (2006-2009). Retrieved on August 15, 2016 from <http://www.ifranigeria.org/IMG/pdf/cattlegrazing-rural-violence-nigeria-pdf>
- Onwe, E.C.N., Nwafor, K. A. & Orji-Egwu, A. (2017). Framing of Terrorism in Africa Media: A Comparative Study of Frames Employed in Reporting Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabab in Kenya. *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research*, 25(6), 1225-1233. Available online at: [https://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr25\(6\)17/8.pdf](https://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr25(6)17/8.pdf)



- Peterside, Z.B. & Gambo, A. N. (2022). The Niger-Delta conflicts and Federal Government responses in the Fourth Republic. In *NTA/tvc Journal of Communication*. Jos. Vol. 6(1), pp: 27-36.
- Skinner, C.; Von Essen, L.; Mersham, G. & Motau, S. (2010). *Handbook of Public relations*. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. South Africa: Oxford University Press.
- Stromback, J. & Dimitrova, D (2008) *Foreign policy and the framing of the 2003 Iraq War in elite Swedish and US Newspapers*. Retrieved from <http://mwc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/1/2/203>
- Sullivan, M. (2014, November 22). The conflict and the coverage. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/23/opinion/sunday/the-conflict-and-the-coverage.html>
- Sundar, U. (2001) *The role of media in reporting conflicts*: Retrieved from: <http://www.epsusa.org/publications/policybriefs/harris.pdf>
- Sobowale, I. (1983) *Scientific Journalism*, Lagos, John West
- Tar, A. (2008). *The Politics of Neoliberal Democracy in Africa: State and Civil Society in Nigeria*. London: Tauris Academic Studies.
- Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction*. International edition. Wadsworth Cengage Learning
- White, D Manning (1961) "*The "gate keeper": A case study in the selection of news*" *Journalism Quarterly* 27: 383–391