

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS (2024-2025) ON NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

This paper critically examines media independence and the integrity of conflict management in selected Nigerian newspapers, namely The Guardian, The Nation, Daily Sun and The Chronicle. It focuses on the coverage of religious fundamentalism, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency, and pastoralist-herder attacks between April 2024 and May 2025. The study adopts a qualitative research approach and employs Agenda-Setting Theory as its theoretical framework to examine how the media select, prioritise and frame conflict and national security issues for public attention. The theory emphasises the media's capacity to influence the issues that the public considers important through the prominence and frequency given to particular events and issues. From this perspective, the Nigerian press serves as an important watchdog and agenda setter, particularly in reporting conflicts and drawing public and governmental attention to security challenges. However, concerns remain regarding political interference, ownership influence and the limited autonomy of some media organisations, particularly where newspapers are owned or supported by individuals with political interests. Such influences may affect editorial independence and raise questions about the objectivity and fidelity of conflict reportage. Despite these challenges, Nigerian newspapers continue to play significant roles in informing the public, shaping discourse and drawing attention to conflict situations. The paper argues that limited media autonomy can undermine effective conflict management when reportage is influenced by partisan or political interests. It therefore cautions against propaganda journalism and recommends that government and media proprietors reduce undue interference in editorial processes and strengthen media independence to promote accurate, balanced and responsible conflict reporting.

Keywords: Nigerian media, conflicts, media autonomy and conflict management.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has witnessed increasing cases of internal conflicts, ranging from terrorism and banditry to farmer-herder disputes, communal violence and kidnapping. Unlike in the past, when many conflicts attracted relatively limited media attention, the press now plays a more active role in reporting and shaping public understanding of crises. This growing involvement is partly driven by the public's need for timely information on the causes, developments and consequences of conflicts. Bayraktari and Parajon (2007) note that considerable research has focused on the potential of the media to support democracy and sustainable peacebuilding. However, Parajon (2007) observes that less attention has been given to examining the media's role in conflict management and their capacity either to prevent or incite conflict. Tettey (2009) similarly identifies the media as important actors in highlighting the circumstances and issues underlying conflicts in Nigeria.

Recent security incidents further demonstrate the importance of media reportage in conflict management. The abduction of schoolchildren and a school principal in Oyo State, for instance, illustrates how kidnapping and insecurity have become issues of national concern requiring sustained media attention. Such incidents demonstrate the need for newspapers to provide accurate, balanced and responsible information that informs the public without creating unnecessary fear or aggravating tensions. The way the media frame such security events, identify the causes and actors involved, and report the responses of government and security agencies can significantly influence public perception and the broader understanding of national security.

The media therefore occupy a critical position in conflict situations because their reports can either contribute to conflict escalation or support de-escalation and peaceful resolution (Price & Ross, 2003). Through the selection of sources, framing of events and presentation of competing perspectives, media reportage can influence the credibility and legitimacy attached to conflicting parties and their positions. Responsible and balanced reporting is consequently essential to effective conflict management. Conflict itself is an inevitable aspect of human interaction and arises from incompatible interests, needs and goals. Best (2006) defines conflict as “the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups,” while Ross (2003) relates it to competing interests and differing interpretations of what is at stake in a dispute. When poorly managed, conflict can result in tension, violence, social instability and war, making conflict management essential for peaceful coexistence.

It is against this background that this study examines the fidelity and conflict-reporting practices of selected Nigerian newspapers between April 2024 and May 2025. The study seeks to determine whether the selected newspapers reported conflict and national security issues accurately, objectively and responsibly, or whether their reportage sometimes contributed to the escalation of tensions. It therefore focuses on the extent to which the Nigerian press functions as an impartial reporter and constructive actor in conflict management, particularly in its coverage of contemporary security challenges confronting the country.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nigeria has experienced persistent internal conflicts arising from political, ethnic, religious and socio-economic tensions. These conflicts have weakened national cohesion, disrupted the social fabric and negatively affected economic development. Economic shocks have further intensified competition for scarce resources, thereby contributing to struggles over political power, religious and ethnic identity, and access to resources (Elbadawi & Hegre, 2022). Stremlan (2006) also links the persistence of conflicts to the weakening influence and limited independence of the media in Nigeria.

The media, however, remain important actors in conflict management because their reporting can shape public perceptions, influence conflict narratives and either promote peace or aggravate tensions (University for Peace, 2009). Concerns have therefore been raised about whether the Nigerian press maintains objectivity and independence when reporting sensitive conflict issues, or whether political, ethnic and other interests influence its coverage.

It is against this background that this study examines the coverage of conflict issues by selected Nigerian newspapers between April 2024 and May 2025. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether the Nigerian press has functioned primarily as an impartial reporter of conflicts or as an active participant whose reportage may contribute to conflict escalation or management.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What frequency is given to specific conflict events in some Nigerian newspapers?
2. What is the direction/tone of these reports?
3. What level of objectivity are such reports?

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This paper is generally aimed at assessing how some Nigerian newspapers covered or reported crises issues within the period of April 2024 to May 2025. Specifically, the study hopes to:

1. determine the frequency of coverage given to events in some Nigerian newspapers
2. determine the direction / tone of these reports.
3. examine the level of objectivity of such reports.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PRESS COVERAGE OF CONFLICT IN NIGERIA

As a developing nation, Nigeria requires a press that is responsive to the principles of developmental journalism and national integration. Consequently, caution and professionalism are essential in the coverage of conflicts, particularly those motivated by political, ethnic, religious or socio-economic interests. Excessive emphasis on crisis-oriented reporting may have negative consequences for national unity and the commitment required to promote stability and development in a developing democracy. The press therefore has a responsibility to report conflicts in ways that inform the public without unnecessarily heightening tensions or deepening existing divisions.

The need for responsible conflict reporting is particularly important given the pluralistic and heterogeneous nature of Nigerian society. Nigeria comprises diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural groups, each with distinct identities, values and social practices. Therefore, conflict reporting in such a complex environment requires journalists who possess adequate professional competence, cultural awareness and sound knowledge of the issues involved. Folarin (2004) argues that the complexities of the Nigerian society demand careful and informed media coverage, suggesting that sensitive conflict situations should not be entrusted to inexperienced or inadequately prepared reporters.

The role of the Nigerian press in conflict reporting has also attracted criticism concerning its level of objectivity and impartiality. Ekeanyanwu (2023), in examining the role of the press in political issues in Nigeria, observes that the Nigerian press has, on several occasions, functioned more as an active participant in political affairs than as an impartial observer and reporter. This tendency has continued to raise concerns about the credibility and neutrality of media coverage in the country (Umechukwu, 2010). The Nigerian Press Council has similarly expressed concern over certain unethical practices within the media, particularly the publication of sensational and unverified allegations capable of damaging the reputation of individuals and institutions (Galadima & Enighe, 2022).

In a similar vein, the Guild of Editors in 2000 criticised the tendency of some media organisations to adopt rigid positions either in support of or against particular sides in political conflicts. The Nigerian Union of Journalists has also acknowledged concerns about divisions and unprofessional practices among some journalists in the gathering, analysis and reporting of news (Galadima & Enighe, 2022). These observations demonstrate the difficulties associated with maintaining objectivity, balance and professional ethics when reporting conflict situations in Nigeria.

The coverage of conflicts without compromising the fundamental ethics of journalism remains one of the major challenges confronting journalists and media organisations in Nigeria. Since conflict is an enduring feature of human society, journalists are frequently required to report crises involving sensitive political, ethnic, religious and

communal interests. However, conflict reports sometimes fail to uphold the principles of objectivity, balance, thorough investigation and sound professional judgment. Such shortcomings may contribute to the escalation of conflicts rather than their resolution (Ogbemudia, 2012). Responsible conflict reporting therefore requires journalists to provide accurate, balanced and well-researched information while avoiding language and narratives that could inflame tensions.

Several factors have been identified as contributing to poor media performance in conflict reportage. These include professional incompetence, lack of commitment among some journalists, inadequate working facilities and the failure to reflect Nigeria's cultural diversity in media staffing (Ogbemudia, 2012). These challenges may affect the ability of journalists to adequately understand and interpret conflicts involving different cultural and ethnic communities. In addition, some broadcast organisations have been criticised for violating the guidelines of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) in their coverage of conflict-related events, thereby raising concerns about professional responsibility and ethical compliance.

Another significant challenge is media ownership and control. The influence of media proprietors and senior management can affect the editorial independence of journalists and determine the direction, scope and tone of reports on political, ethnic and religious conflicts. Journalists may face pressure to align their reportage with the interests of media owners or organisational management, thereby compromising objectivity and balanced reporting (Ogbemudia, 2012). This situation underscores the need for greater professional independence, adherence to ethical standards and responsible journalism in the coverage of conflicts in Nigeria. Ultimately, the Nigerian press can contribute meaningfully to conflict management and peaceful coexistence when conflict reportage is guided by accuracy, fairness, balance, cultural sensitivity and a commitment to the public interest.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

The essential responsibility of the media as the “fourth estate of the realm” is to significantly play or perform the watchdog role by monitoring the activities of the organs of government and other societal powers accountable. It true that media is not formally recognized as part of a political system, it wields significant indirectly social influence (Schultz, 1998) in societal repositioning. Being the watchdog of the society, the media have followed and reported conflicts even from the period colonial era. From that period till now, the potentiality of media in campaigning against government policies However, Umechuckwu (2010) suggests that media organisations have often engaged in imbalanced, sensational and unconstructive reporting of conflict situations, thereby undermining efforts towards effective conflict management and peaceful resolution. Such reporting practices may intensify existing tensions, reinforce divisions among conflicting parties and ultimately complicate the management and resolution of crises (Umechukwu, 2010).

Similarly, Ginneken (2008) observes that the media possess significant potential to serve as an effective check on state power, although this capacity has been considerably weakened by political influence and control over the years. According to the author, the media have, in some instances, been subjected to the influence of political parties and governments through patronage and other forms of pressure, while others have faced repression, thereby limiting their ability to report issues freely and truthfully. Despite these challenges, the media continue to play a significant role in promoting good governance, poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, infrastructural development, the promotion and protection of human rights, peacebuilding and conflict management.

Yusuf (2010) in his essay entitled *constitutional responsibility of the press* explains that “the traditional conception of objectivity has always been the reporting and publishing of accounts of events as they occur without any injection or comments”. He further argues that “since members of the public are reasoning beings, what they need is nothing less than bare facts of event”. The social responsibility of the press is the devotion of the press to the service of public interest through the provision of accurate, truthful and complete accounts of the day’s events to the public. By so doing, acting as a forum for members of the public to exchange comments on and criticism of public issues. Yusuf and Enahoro (2022), in their work *Redefining the Media in a Democracy*, argue that the media have a responsibility to provide the public with accurate and truthful information. They further contend that the media are expected to educate citizens about their rights, duties and obligations to the nation while contributing to the development of positive moral values among members of society.

Across the world, the media performs the most challenging task of information gathering and dissemination. The Nigerian democratic culture has given the print media the privilege of setting conflict discourse to the plane. This invariably makes the press powerful and influential. The Agenda-setting theory empirically demonstrates link between media exposure and audience motivation to seek orientation and audience perception of the public on conflict issues. With the above theory, the media is expected to raise conflict issues to the plane of discussion. Consequent upon this, the conflict reporter is expected to play an Ombudsman’s role between major players in a conflict field. Galadima and Enighe (2022) in their views asserted that the conflict reporter is never expected to be biased and subjective, rather should play down on advocacy journalism.

In spite of the responsibility faced by the press, they can also be divided on focus, based on either ethnical or religious interest. In other words, the press, in the course of handling conflict issues could be heavily influenced by sections of the Nigerian society. Ojiji (2008) observes that media influences may be driven by factors such as solidarity, religious affiliation, the pursuit of political power and the control of resources. The author further identifies religious fundamentalism as one of the significant factors capable of influencing media operations and shaping the manner in which issues are reported. However, the proliferation of newspapers and the

emergence of several independent media organisations in Nigeria have helped to reduce some of the undue influences exerted on media institutions, particularly those within the print media sector.

In the context of conflict, the press has a pivotal role to play as an important arena for public discourse and the exchange of competing perspectives. Media initiatives that are designed to operate within the framework of national development and peacebuilding possess considerable potential to contribute to sustainable conflict management. Through responsible and constructive reporting, the press can promote democratic principles, encourage dialogue among conflicting parties, provide platforms for diverse viewpoints and contribute to peaceful approaches to conflict prevention and resolution.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

The Guardian

The Guardian is one of Nigeria's prominent national newspapers and was established by Alex Ibru, with the support of renowned journalist Stanley Macebuh. The newspaper published its first weekly edition on 22 February 1983 and commenced daily publication on 4 July 1983. Its emergence was partly influenced by the desire to introduce a high standard of professional journalism that emphasised credible, analytical and independent reporting. Its philosophical orientation is captured in its slogan, "Conscience, Nurtured by Truth," which reflects its commitment to truth, responsible journalism and editorial independence (Asuzu, 2005).

Historically, *The Guardian* developed a reputation for providing extensive coverage of political, economic and social issues and presenting itself as independent of political parties, ethnic groups and religious interests. However, like other Nigerian newspapers, its history has also been shaped by the country's political environment. During the military era, the newspaper experienced state repression, including the arrest and detention of journalists under restrictive press laws (Cheryl & Mba, 1997). Its historical commitment to editorial independence and its national outlook make *The Guardian* relevant to this study. Its coverage of conflicts and national security issues between April 2024 and May 2025 can therefore be assessed in relation to its stated commitment to truth, professionalism and non-partisanship. The newspaper's ideological premise provides a basis for examining whether its conflict reports during the study period demonstrated media fidelity, balance, accuracy, objectivity and responsibility, particularly when reporting politically, ethnically or religiously sensitive security issues.

Daily Sun

Daily Sun is a privately owned Nigerian newspaper established by Dr Orji Uzor Kalu, a businessman and former Governor of Abia State. The newspaper was launched on 1 July 2002, began weekly publication in January 2003 and subsequently commenced

daily publication in June 2003. Its establishment occurred during a period when Nigeria's democratic transition created opportunities for the expansion of privately owned media organisations and increased competition within the newspaper industry.

The newspaper's editorial orientation is generally characterised by popular and accessible journalism, with attention to political, social, economic and human-interest issues. Its distinctive headlines and presentation style have contributed to its appeal to a broad readership, particularly younger and middle-aged audiences. As a commercial newspaper, its approach reflects the need to attract and retain readers in a competitive media environment. This orientation is significant to the present study because the pursuit of audience attention may influence how conflict and security issues are framed and presented. The study therefore examines Daily Sun to determine whether its reporting of national security and conflict-related issues between April 2024 and May 2025 prioritised factual accuracy, balance and responsible journalism or relied on sensationalism and emotionally charged framing.

The Chronicle

The Chronicle is a state-owned newspaper based in Calabar, Cross River State, with its historical roots tracing back to 1971, when it was established by the then military administration of the South-Eastern State under Uduokaha Esuene. The newspaper emerged primarily as a government-owned platform for information dissemination and public communication. Its ideological foundation was therefore closely connected to the state's communication objectives and the broader role of government-owned media in informing citizens about government policies and activities.

Over the years, *The Chronicle* experienced a decline in readership and circulation, particularly following the emergence and expansion of privately owned newspapers. Critics of state-owned media have often argued that government ownership can affect editorial independence because such newspapers may face pressure to present government policies and activities favourably. Alaka (2014) notes concerns regarding the tendency of governments and politicians to influence media organisations to serve political interests, sometimes at the expense of objective reporting.

The historical background of *The Chronicle* is particularly relevant to this study because ownership and editorial control are important factors in evaluating media fidelity in conflict reporting. As a government-owned newspaper, its coverage of security challenges and conflicts during April 2024 to May 2025 provides an opportunity to assess whether ownership structures influence the framing of national security issues. The study can therefore examine whether the newspaper maintained professional standards of accuracy, balance and objectivity or whether its reporting reflected governmental perspectives and interests.

The Nation

The Nation is a privately owned Nigerian national newspaper established on 31 July 2006 and published by Vintage Press Limited. The newspaper is widely associated

with Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who was instrumental in its establishment. Its emergence occurred during Nigeria's democratic period, at a time when privately owned newspapers were increasingly influential in shaping political discourse and holding public officials accountable.

The ideological orientation of *The Nation* is built around principles such as freedom, justice, democracy and a market-oriented economy. Its readership traditionally includes political and business elites, professionals, educated Nigerians and other upwardly mobile members of society. The newspaper has established printing and distribution operations that enable it to reach audiences across different parts of Nigeria. Its editorial position has also been associated with strong political commentary and criticism of government policies, particularly during periods when it was perceived to be aligned with opposition political interests (Ojo, 2015; Adegboyega, 2016).

This political and ideological orientation is important to the present study because perceptions of political alignment can influence the way newspapers frame conflicts, government responses and national security challenges. The assessment of *The Nation* during the period April 2024 to May 2025 will therefore consider whether its reporting of conflict and national security issues demonstrated media fidelity through accuracy, fairness, balance, objectivity and adherence to professional journalistic ethics. It will also examine whether political perspectives or ideological orientations influenced the selection, framing and presentation of conflict-related news.

Relevance of the Selected Newspapers to the Study

The selection of *The Guardian*, *Daily Sun*, *The Chronicle* and *The Nation* provides a useful basis for evaluating media fidelity and conflict reporting in Nigeria because the newspapers represent different historical, ownership and ideological orientations. *The Guardian* represents a long-established privately owned national newspaper with a stated commitment to professional and independent journalism; *Daily Sun* represents a relatively younger commercial newspaper with a popular readership orientation; *The Chronicle* represents the perspective of a state-owned media organisation; while *The Nation* represents a privately owned newspaper with a strong presence in political and public affairs reporting.

These differences are important in examining the coverage of conflict and national security issues between April 2024 and May 2025. During this period, Nigerian newspapers reported on several security-related issues, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal conflicts, political tensions and other threats to national security. The historical and ideological backgrounds of the selected newspapers provide a framework for examining whether ownership, institutional orientation and editorial philosophy influenced the manner in which these conflicts were reported. The study, therefore, evaluates the extent to which the selected newspapers adhered to the principles of media fidelity, accuracy, objectivity, balance, fairness and

responsible conflict reporting, as well as the extent to which their reportage contributed to or supported efforts towards conflict management and national security.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a content analysis research design to examine the reportage of conflict and national security issues in selected Nigerian newspapers. The design enabled the researcher to systematically assess the frequency, direction, tone and objectivity of reports on selected conflicts, particularly religious fundamentalism, including Boko Haram insurgency, and pastoralist-herder conflicts. Content analysis is described as a systematic procedure for examining the content of communication (Walizer & Weiner, as cited in Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). Similarly, Nwamuo (1997) defines it as a research method for the objective and systematic description of the manifest content of communication. Based on these definitions, relevant categories were developed for analysing the selected newspaper reports.

The study focused on four Nigerian newspapers: The Guardian, The Nation, Daily Sun and The Chronicle. These newspapers were selected based on their relevance to national discourse and their coverage of public and security-related issues. The population comprised 1,132 editions published within the study period of April 2024 to May 2025, from which a sample of 520 editions was selected. Three editions were randomly selected weekly from the daily newspapers, while all editions of the weekly newspaper within the period were considered. A data coding sheet was used as the instrument for data collection. The instrument captured variables such as frequency of coverage, editorial content, direction or tone, balance and objectivity. Reports relating to the selected conflict issues were categorised as pro-government, anti-government, anti-opposition or neutral, while balance and bias were assessed to determine the level of objectivity in the reportage.

Data collected through the coding sheet were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented through frequencies, percentages and tables. The analysis was organised around three major areas: the frequency of coverage, the direction and tone of reports, and the level of objectivity. The subsequent analysis therefore examines how *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, *Daily Sun* and *The Chronicle* reported conflict and national security issues during the study period, with particular attention to media fidelity, balance, fairness and objectivity in their reportage.

DATA COLLECTION AND THE RESPONSES OF THE SELECTED NEWSPAPERS TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Simple frequency tables were used to present data gathered. These tables helped in answering the question of press roles in covering issues.

Table I shows that a total of 511 editorial items were covered out of 520 newspapers sampled. This was as a result of accessibility and availability of the newspapers. Out of this figure, *The Guardian* covered 86 editorial items on religious fundamentalism

and 58 items on pastoral herders. *The Nation* covered 84 items on religious fundamentalism and 25 on pastoral herders. *Daily Sun* had 79 on religious fundamentalism and 45 on pastoral herders, while *Nigerian Chronicle* had 25 on religious and 19 on pastoral herders, giving a total of 511 editorial items.

TABLE I: Distribution of Conflict Reports according to Newspaper's Editorial Contents

Newspapers	Editorial Content							
	Religious Fundamentalism		Pastoral Herders Attack		Others		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The Guardian	86	56.9	58	38	7	5.1	151	100
The Nation	84	55.1	25	16.3	43	28.6	152	100
Daily Sun	79	50.1	45	28.9	32	21	156	100
Nig. Chronicle	23	44.2	19	36.2	10	19.3	52	100
Total	272	53.2	147	28.8	92	18	511	100

To convert the coverages in simple percentage, we have Guardian, $86/151 \times 100 = 56.9\%$ (Religious Fundamentalism) and $58/151 \times 100 = 38\%$ (pastoral herders), for *The Nation*; $84/152 \times 100 = 55.1$ (Religious Fundamentalism) and $25/152 \times 100 = 16.3$ (Post Election Violence). For *Daily Sun*, we have $79/156 \times 100 = 50.1$ (Religious Fundamentalism) and $45/156 \times 100 = 28.9$ for pastoral herders. For *Nigerian Chronicle*, we have $23/52 \times 100 = 44.2$ (Religious Fundamentalism) and $19/52 \times 100 = 36.2$. Out of the 511 editorials 92 editions were on other stories which had $92/511 \times 100 = 18\%$.

In table II, the following labels were created to determine the tone or direction of the newspaper. This is done to determine the actual role the various newspapers played in covering conflict issues. Pro-government indicates reports in the newspapers which support the government stand on the conflict issue raised in the report, both in language and content. While Anti-government indicates reports which oppose the government stand. Pro-opposition: This indicates stories or reports which present or support the public opinion on the issues raised. Anti-opposition represents reports that do not support the public opinion on the issues raised in the report: rather, such reports take sides with the government both in language and content. Neutral: This is used in this study to indicate such reports that do not betray their stance or take any of the earlier positions, both in content and language of the report.

TABLE 2: Analysis of Conflict Reports according to Story Tone/Direction

Story Tone / Direction												
Newspaper	Pro. Govt		Anti Govt		Pro Oppo		Anti Oppo		Neutral		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The Guardian	15	10.4	63	43.8	7	4.9	29	20.1	30	20.8	144	100
The Nation	13	11.9	37	33.1	3	2.8	41	37.1	15	14.6	109	100
Daily Sun	9	7.3	66	53.2	10	8.1	28	22.5	11	8.9	124	100
Nig. Chronicle	24	53.8	0	0	0	0	13	30.3	5	15.9	42	100
Total	61	14.6	166	39.6	20	4.8	111	26.4	61	14.6	511	100

The result of the analysis in Table II shows that out of the 419 editorial reports on conflict, *The Guardian* had 15 reports on pro-govt, 63 on Anti-govt, 7 on pro-opposition, 21 on Anti-opposition and 30 reports on neutral. To convert the reports in simple percentages, we have $15/144 \times 100 = 10.4\%$, $63/144 \times 100 = 43.8\%$, $7/144 \times 100 = 4.9\%$, $29/144 \times 100 = 20.1$ and $30/144 \times 100 = 20.8\%$ respectively.

The Nation had 13 reports on pro-govt, 37 on Anti-govt, 3 on pro-opposition, 41 on Anti-opposition and 15 reports on neutral. In like manner, it had its percentages as follows: $13/109 \times 100 = 11.9\%$, $37/109 \times 100 = 33.9\%$ respectively.

For *Daily Sun*, 9 reports were on pro-govt, 66 on Anti-govt, 10 on pro-opposition, 28 on Anti-opposition and 11 on neutral. Having $9/124 \times 100 = 7.3\%$, $66/124 \times 100 = 53.2$, $10/124 \times 100 = 8.1$, $28/124 \times 100 = 22.5$ and $11/124 \times 100 = 8.9$ respectively. While *Nigerian Chronicle* had 24 reports on pro-govt, 0 on Anti-govt, 0 on pro-opposition, 13 reports on Anti-opposition and 5 reports on neutral.

TABLE 3: Analysis of Conflict Reports according to Level of Objectivity

Level of Objectivity						
Newspapers	Bias		Balance		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
The Guardian	97	67.3	47	32	144	100
Nation	73	66.9	36	33	109	100
Daily Sun	109	87.9	15	12.1	124	100
Nig. Chronicle	30	71	12	28.6	42	100
Total	316	74	113	26	511	100

From the response, it is deduced that all the newspapers under study were bias in covering of conflict issues during the period under study. The result confirms what Umechukwu (2001) said about the media not being balanced and constructive in reporting of issues. Galadimma and Enighe (2001), in their analysis of the Nigerian press, share a similar view, arguing that the Nigerian print media have, over the years,

been used by some political godfathers and influential media proprietors as instruments for advancing personal and political interests. This situation raises concerns about the independence and objectivity of the press, particularly in the coverage of politically sensitive issues and conflicts. The influence of powerful individuals and media owners may affect editorial decisions, news framing and the overall direction of media reportage, thereby undermining the principles of balanced and impartial journalism. For further answer to the question of press objectivity in covering conflict issues, another table of classification was developed by this study as a level of objectivity and the newspapers' contents were categorized as bias and balance to ascertain the level of objectivity of each newspaper under study.

A breakdown shows that *The Guardian* had 97 reports on bias and 47 on balance, to convert the coverage in percentage, we have for *The Guardian* $97/144 \times 100 = 67.3\%$ for bias and $47/144 \times 100 = 32.7\%$, for balance.

The Nation had 73 reports on bias and 36 on balance, in percentage, we have $73/109 \times 100 = 66.9$ for bias and $36/109 \times 100 = 33\%$ while *Daily Sun* had 109 reports on bias and 15 on balance, in percentage, we have $109/124 \times 100 = 87.9\%$ for bias and $15/124 \times 100 = 12.1\%$ for balance. We have for *Nigerian Chronicle* 30 reports on bias and 12 on balance, the percentage $30/42 \times 100 = 71\%$ for bias and $12/42 \times 100 = 28.6\%$ for balance.

DISCUSSION OF RESULT ON PRESS ROLE IN CONFLICT ISSUES

From the analysis and interpretation of the result in table I, it showed that all the four newspapers analysed had a very good coverage on the two conflict issues under study. This is an indication that the press in Nigeria is actually performing their role as "the fourth estate of the realm." This result also agrees with Idowu's (1999) assertion that democratic culture has given the media in general the privilege of setting the agenda of conflict discourse. This invariably makes the press powerful and influential.

From the result, it means that the press has raised conflict issues to the plane of discussion for the public to get the right information that will enable them take an informed decision. It also means that the press exists as an organ of information, surveillance and enlightenment. It is in recognition of these roles of the press that they have been assigned a constitutional role in the Nigerian constitution.

Also from the deduction, more reports were on religious fundamentalism as *The Guardian* had 56.9%, *The Nation* 55.1%, *Daily Sun* 50.1% and *Nigerian Chronicle* 44.2%. This is evident because the operations of this fundamentalist (Boko Haram) were so prevalent during the period under study. This is in line with what Olutugun and Sefeolu (2001) assertion which indicate that all aspects of the Boko Haram insurgency were extensively covered and intensely reported by the media.

Also, out of 511 editorials used for this study, from the table, reports on conflict issues had 82% while other stories had 18%. This is a clear indication that the press was actively involved in the coverage of conflict issues. There is also an indication from

table I that the independent newspapers had a positive influence in coverage. It is evident that the three independent newspapers under review -. *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *Daily Sun* had more conflict reports than the government owned newspaper, *Nigerian Chronicle* which had 44 .2%.

Table 2 of this study really depicted the various stands the individual newspapers took in the course of reporting. From the table, it is obvious that the Nigerian Press have left much to be desired. This is because the various newspapers allowed various inhibitions to influence their professional performance. Out of the 511 editorial reports on conflict, only 14.6% did not betray their stands or take any position. With this, researcher observes that the Nigerian journalists have allowed their employer to influence the way and manner they carry on with their professional duties. It is deduced from the analysis that the independent newspapers, i.e. *The Guardian*, *The Nation* and *Daily Sun* were Anti-government while the government owned newspaper was pro-government.

In all, the Nigerian newspapers having played significant roles in covering conflict issues, yet, this observable propaganda cannot encourage the use of the media as a means of conflict management. Rather it has the potential to turn the press into a sectional press with its attendant difficulties in managing conflicts of national magnitude.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It is evident that all the newspapers studied show considerable remarks on the coverage of the issues examined in this research (Religious fundamentalism and pastoral herders). The study revealed that 82% of the reports were on conflict issues while other stories had just 18%. This is a clear indication that the Nigerian newspapers served as the watchdog of the society during the period under study.

Another point worthy of note is the various stands the individual newspapers took while reporting. From the result, out of the 511 editorial reports on conflict issues, only 14.6% did not take any position. That means that the Nigerian journalist has allowed his employer and other factors to influence his report on conflict issues. The result also showed that all the newspapers were bias in their covering of conflict issues. The Nigerian newspapers must be chided for allowing ownership influences to affect their professionalism.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the Nigerian press plays a significant role in the coverage and interpretation of conflict situations. Although the selected newspapers demonstrated considerable attention to conflict-related issues, the analysis also revealed concerns regarding the extent of media independence, balance and objectivity in conflict reportage. The findings suggest that the ideal of an independent press is sometimes compromised by political interests, ownership influence and other external pressures. Consequently, some aspects of conflict reporting may reflect

particular interests or perspectives rather than a comprehensive and balanced representation of the issues involved. This has important implications for conflict management, as biased, sensational or partisan reportage may contribute to the escalation of tensions rather than promote peaceful resolution. The study therefore concludes that the Nigerian press must strengthen its commitment to professional ethics, media fidelity and socially responsible journalism, particularly when reporting sensitive political, ethnic, religious and security-related conflicts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Nigerian press should avoid propaganda journalism. Media organisations should uphold the principles of accuracy, fairness, balance and objectivity and should avoid using news platforms to promote partisan or political interests. Where particular positions must be presented, they should be handled with caution and balanced with relevant perspectives.
2. Greater diversity in media ownership should be encouraged. Broader participation in the ownership and management of Nigerian media organisations should be promoted to reduce excessive concentration of media power in the hands of a few individuals or interest groups. Media owners should ensure that personal, political or commercial interests do not undermine fairness, objectivity and diversity in news coverage.
3. Media employment should reflect Nigeria's diversity. Media organisations should promote diversity in the recruitment and deployment of journalists to reflect the country's complex ethnic, cultural, religious and geographical composition. This will enable journalists to develop a better understanding of the communities and conflicts they cover and reduce the possibility of cultural misrepresentation.

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