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NEWSPAPER FRAMING OF CHRISTIAN GENOCIDE IN NIGERIA AND AUDIENCE RESPONSES IN SELECTED NATIONAL DAILIES

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Abstract

This study examined the framing of news stories on Christian genocide in Nigeria by selected national dailies and respondents' reactions to the framing. Specifically, the study sought to determine the frequency of coverage, the direction of reports, the prominence given to the news stories, the dominant frames employed by the newspapers, and respondents' reactions to the framing of the reports. The study was anchored on framing theory and perception theory. A triangulation approach involving content analysis and focus group discussion (FGD) was adopted. The population of the study comprised 1,096 editions of the selected national dailies, namely *Vanguard, TheGuardian, and Daily Sun* newspapers, published between June, 2025 and May, 2026. Using the composite week sampling technique, a sample size of 252 newspaper editions was selected for content analysis, while purposive sampling was used in selecting 20 participants for the focus group discussion from the population of 375 400level (final year) students of Mass Communication Department, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University. The coding sheet, coding guide, and focus group discussion guide served as the instruments for data collection. The findings revealed that the selected national dailies gave a high level of coverage to the incidents of Christian genocide, recording 213 relevant news stories from the 252 sampled editions. The reports were predominantly neutral in direction, while most of the stories were published inside the pages of the newspapers. The most dominant frames identified were terrorism followed by banditry and kidnapping. Findings from the FGD revealed that respondents' reactions were largely dissatisfactory given the fact that most of the stories were framed from the perspective of terrorism and insecurity other than religious intolerance and Christianity attacks. The study recommends that newspapers should sustain balanced and objective reporting, but should provide more investigative coverage, and accord greater prominence to stories on the Christian genocide in order to enhance public understanding and promote informed public discourse on the issue.
Keywords: Analysis, Christian genocide, Framing, News coverage, National dallies, Reactions.

Introduction

Communication is seen as a central aspect of human life and existence on earth. This is because human beings and animals communicate with each other in several ways. For human beings: interpersonal, group, mass communications etc; for animals: signs and sounds. Asemah (2011) makes it clear that human beings mold and control the society through communication. Since communication has several levels which are intrapersonal (within self), interpersonal (between two persons), group (among a group of individuals), mass communication (within the society) and international communication (across countries) (Nwammuo, Nwanolue & Obi, 2019; Nwabueze, 2022), it becomes necessary to say that man cannot survive without communication. Meanwhile, mass communication is simply defined as simultaneous reception of media messages by a dispersed, scattered and heterogeneous audience. Primarily, the broadcast media, the social media and the print media (newspaper in particular) possess the ability to set agenda in the society with their different media reports. Asemah (2011) asserts that the media are responsible for setting the agenda which the audiences follow.

The media communicate to the audience through different means which include News stories, photographs, comments, illustrations and even social media posts. Hence, newspapers are publications that contain news, information and advertisement; the dominant function of newspapers is to inform the public of significant events in the society. Mokris (2011) stated that newspapers, being a popular mass medium in modern information society, perform four basic functions: information, entertainment, persuasion, and the transmission of culture. In a clime where information is in abundance, newspapers are very instrumental in moulding public opinion and creating informed citizens. The core essence of newspapers is information dissemination, acting as a bridge between the leaders and the led, formulate public opinion and act as the watchdog. As a result, they are very important in society because they maintain transparency and integrity especially when the ethics of journalism is adhered to. Consequently, newspapers bring forth issues bothering greater part of the citizens like issues of inequality, economic deprivation, unequal allocation of resources, discrimination, human rights concerns, etc. Hence, newspapers play the role of advocacy; by so doing, they focus their attention to the marginalized voices which leads to social change.

However, framing is defined according to Liabwuk, Barde, Muhammad and Sidi (2019) as a way to help construct public views of social reality while drawing attention to specific aspects of a subject or an idea. The key element of this definition according to Liabwuk et al. is that framing is a way by which people develop a distinct idea regarding an issue. Therefore, the framing of news stories by the newspapers influences audience interpretation of events. Framing (of news stories) has the ability to influence the perception of an issue either as a crisis or otherwise. The fact that the media are the watchdogs of the society (Asemah, 2011), makes it practically important to say that these media organizations can frame a particular issue within the society in a particular way in order to achieve a particular purpose.

Newspapers play a vital part in identifying and reporting early signs of genocide and massacre. In-depth reporting can expose rising patterns of religious violence, discriminatory speech and organized attacks before they amplify into complete genocide. Meanwhile, there are certain factors which could influence the framing of newspapers. Such factors may include; ownership structure, ethnic background, political affiliations, religious and cultural

sensitivities, regional attachments of the media organizations, as the case may be. The implication is that these factors could in one way or the other influence the way a particular social issue is framed on newspaper.

Christian Genocide in Nigeria dates back in 2009 (when it started with Boko Haram revolt) till 2026 (with heightened attacks on Christian villages), in over 12 States mainly in the Northern and Middle Belt in Nigeria. It is especially centered on the Northern part of Nigeria recalling the occurrence which took place on 19th January, 2026. The recent insecurity trends in Northwest, Nigeria indicate a rising wave of mass abductions carried out by armed groups operating from forested enclaves; they periodically attack villages, schools and places of worship. Reports from international news agencies like Reuters highlight that the number of victims reported immediately after such incidents often varies significantly.

Security agencies sometimes conserve the actual numbers of the victims showing that something is hidden. The most affected states include Benue, Niger, Plateau, Kaduna, Borno, Adamawa, Taraba, Nasarawa, and Zamfara. The violence keeps increasing and being documented by international human rights and media organizations. Reports by Human Rights Watch in 2024 showed that multiple armed groups like the bandits, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, etc, kept on with the practices of killings, kidnappings, sexual violence, lootings, etc, both in the Northwest and Northeast parts of the country and no one is usually held responsible for these attacks, not the security forces, nor their officers.

Hence, these three national dailies: *Daily Sun, Vanguard,* and *TheGuardian* newspapers were analyzed to find out the extent of the reportage of Christian Genocide in Nigeria. The contents of the newspapers were analyzed to ascertain the framing of this sensitive topic and how it relates deeply to the ethnic, religious and regional tensions in Nigeria. Studies have shown that framing of issues affects how the public see such issues. McCombs and Shaw (1972) in Ukonu et al. (2020) maintain that media coverage of sensitive, social and moral issues often reflects media agenda and affects public perception of (those) issues.

Therefore, the fact that the press have a way of designing stories depending on editorial policies or the house styles of those specific media organizations, it suffices to say that the news stories are framed to make a sense of the issue as presented. Based on this, the study set out to discover the extent of the press coverage of Christian genocide in Nigeria with greater focus on the framing of the incidents from the mid-2025 to mid-2026. The essence is to ascertain the extent and how the stories were framed and the consequent reactions by the audience selected in this study.

Statement of the Problem

The press have assumed the function/ role of provision of information, surveillance, watchdog, interpretation of incidents in the society (Asemah, 2011). This is a strong indication that news reports maybe presented in a particular direction depending on the house style and disposition of the reporters. To report a story is one thing and the framing of that story is another. Hence, this study is set to examine the newspaper reports on Christian Genocide in Nigeria with a special focus to the framing of the stories by *Daily Sun, Vanguard,* and *TheGuardian* newspapers.

In the past few years, Nigeria has faced persistent incidents of violence connected to religious and ethno-religious clashes, particularly against Christian communities in the North and Middle Belt regions. The escalating violence marked by murders, kidnappings, leveling of churches, and forced displacement has sparked widespread allegations that Christians are being intentionally singled out. Some organizations have gone as far as categorizing these systematic assaults as genocide. The classification of violence in Nigeria is contested, oscillating between themes of religion and general conflict. While the media heavily influence public understanding, inconsistent reporting creates ambiguity, and there is currently insufficient academic research exploring these media portrayals. Possibility is that the press must have covered these incidents of Christian genocide in the country. The major issue is to determine the framing of the news stories by the selected dailies so as to discover the dominant theme used in the coverage as well as determine the audience interpretation of the framing of the incidents.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- To determine the frequency of reportage of Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies.
- To evaluate the direction of the coverage of Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies.
- To ascertain the prominence of coverage given to the news stories on Christian genocide in the selected national dailies.
- To find out the dominant frames assigned to the news stories on Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies.
- To evaluate respondents' reactions to the framing of the Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies.

Significance of the Study

This study is very relevant because it takes a closer look at how the print media tell the story of the violence against Christian communities in Nigeria. By diving into these news narratives, the research carefully monitors trends of attacks and displacement, creating a reliable record of events that are too often ignored, played down, or argued over in public discussion. It also serves as a wake-up call for journalists, highlighting how their choice of words, the tone they set, or even what they omit can totally change public perceptions and reactions to faith-based violence. In addition, the results of this study show how news reports can act as early warning signs of brewing trouble. Human rights groups and religious organizations can also use this evidence to back up their work, push for better aid, and hold those responsible accountable. Furthermore, the study enhances public awareness by fostering informed discussions on religious freedom, social cohesion, and national unity in a multi-religious society like Nigeria. The research lays a foundation for future studies on media framing, genocide reporting, and religious violence, thereby enriching academic debate and encouraging further scholarly inquiry into the intersection of media, conflict, and human rights.

Theoretical Framework

Media Framing Theory

Framing is related to the agenda-setting tradition but has an expansion by focusing on the essence of an issue rather than the issue itself. Gregory Bateson is the proponent of the framing theory in the year 1972. It is the belief and the opinion of Gregory Bateson that the media through their means of designing and sending out media messages, could influence how the media consumers see and perceive a particular issue (Agudosy, Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2018; Ikegbunam & Agudosy, 2019). As a part of the media effect theories, framing is largely utilized in analyzing the way an issue is framed; thus, influencing the audience reactions to a whole array of exterior stimuli (De Vreese, 2004, in Ikegbunam & Agudosy, 2019). The essence is that the way an issue is reported by the media may determine the way the issue will be understood and interpreted by the audience members. Hence, the media can pay greater attention to a particular aspect of the information while eliminating the other aspects and this has an implication on how the message will be interpreted.

Practically, framing theory portends that the angle the media report an issue of national concern determines the way the people to whom the contents are exposed understand the issue (Nwabueze, Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2019). This implies that framing theory has something in common with the agenda setting theory in the sense that in agenda setting, the media talk about an issue or about an event; but in framing, the media talk about an issue or about an event in a particular way, thereby, assigning frames to those issues and events. Hence, media framing is all about focusing on the real meaning of the issue at hand rather that the issue itself (Obiakor & Owuamalam, 2023).

The basic assumption here is that frames are given to stories in order to give prominence to an aspect of the story, by so doing, the other aspects are neglected. This is why Chavez (2001, in Epepe, 2019) pointed out that frames in headlines, introductions and questions, among others, establish the structure of the story and, ultimately, help audiences compartmentalize their thoughts about the subject and make judgment. In relation to this study, that national dailies are most likely to have reported the Christian genocide in Nigeria and must have framed the stories in a particular way. The framing of those reports is the essence of this study.

Perception Theory

Perception theory is the process by which an individual pays attention to a stimulus after getting exposed to such stimulus, and interpreting the stimulus based on the criteria developed by the audience member himself (Bovee, Thil, Dovel & Wood, 1995). For Obiakor, Obiora and Okafor (2025), the theory involves the linear process of exposure, attention and interpretation of media messages. This is the reason why individuals are at liberty of choosing how to perceive or interpret a particular media content depending on individual's inclination and perspective. In that case, a single media content could be interpreted differently by different individuals. What this means is that the way a particular individual sees a media message may differ from the way another individual sees the same message even in the same circumstance. The major point is that for perception to take place there must be an exposure with a certain level of attention paid to the issue or the stimulus, then an interpretation (Ezinwa, 2014) which is the last stage of the perception process. Noteworthy is the fact that the perception process makes reference to past experiences. This theory is very relevant to

this study since the journalists or editors are at liberty to frame the issue of the Christian genocide in Nigeria, leaving the media audience with the opportunity of interpreting such frames as constructed by the media house.

The Review

Media Framing of Conflict and Religious Violence

Conflict, in one form or another, keeps resurfacing across Nigeria's social and political fabric. Time after time, news outlets shape how ordinary people make sense of these crises (sometimes subtly steering public opinion without most people even noticing). The media, being an important source of information about religion and conflicts for the people, exert certain degree of influence on citizens' perceptions, opinions and behaviours. In framing Theory, Entman in 1993 for instance, established how journalists highlight certain slices of reality while letting others fade into the background. That single editorial choice can completely change how people see what is at stake, who is to blame, or what might actually fix things.

The fact that the media have a lot of influence on the understanding and interpretation of conflicts in the society makes the media to frame issues based on choice of placement and direction which makes the audience to make more sense and meaning of the issue at hand. Hence, framing is used by the media house in directing the audience members on how they should think about an issue. By so doing, the audience members are made to focus their attention not just on an issue but on factors beyond the face value of the issue itself. This is the basis of the use of frames as tools for religious manipulations depending on the intent of framing. This research integrates agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020) and the logic of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). These frameworks illuminate how individual narratives become collective symbols and how digital discourse shapes perceptions.

Audience Perception and Media Framing

Framing has a lot to do with perception; the major essence of framing is to focus on one aspect of an issue while eliminating or playing down on the other aspects of the news story. Invariably, audience members are made to think about an issue in a particular angle depending on how the framing is conducted. Hence, the mass media utilize framing in shaping people's perception of issues in the society by focusing on a particular direction in news presentation and hiding the other angles. Perception is seen to be the process of getting exposed to news content, paying attention to the news content, and then interpreting the news content (Obiakor, Obiora & Okafor, 2025) to suit the current state of the audience based on earlier or past experiences. McLeod et al. (2017) hinted that people's perceptions are normally resultant of exposure to media content. The information presented and the way such information is presented have a lot to do with the thoughts, feelings and the attitudes of the audience of the news story.

Hence, the mass media rely heavily on frames for the purpose of conveying information to the audience whose understanding of the message presented is dependent on the frames as chosen by the mass media. The more favorable the frames are, the more positive the audience interpret the message and the vice versa. Therefore, the stories of the

Christian genocide in Nigeria will definitely be perceived in a particular direction depending on the angle which the mass media present the stories of this prevailing issue. Bard (2023) maintained that news coverage provides the general public with an image in their minds (depending on the intent of the coverage). This is the reason why mass media organizations must be very careful about the frames that are presented on news stories so as not to deceive the audience while attaching frames to news stories.

Basically, there are two sides that exist in opinion formation which are the framing of the news content by the mass media and the perception attached to the frames by the audience members. This brings about the ability of the mass media to influence the self, the audience members and society at large (Tsfati & Cohen, 2012). Inversely or conversely, the media have the capability of presenting either positive or negative perception depending on the intent of framing. This has manifested in the news presentation of the Christian genocide in Nigeria. The starting point of perception is the setting of agenda by the media, followed by the framing of the agenda by the same media, and then the interpretation of the messages by the audience. Thin mass media coverage can be affected by some factors such as resource availability, time constraints, ideological and cultural factors (Harcup & O'neill, 2017). Thus, as Liao (2023) opines that the mass media should provide the public with appropriate messages on critical issues; similarly, the current study aimed to examine newspaper framing of Christian genocide in Nigeria and audience reactions in selected national dailies.

A Brief on Christian Genocide in Nigeria

Christian oppression and religiously stimulated violence in Nigeria have existed for decades, particularly in Northern and Middle Belt regions of the country. However, the crisis escalated significantly from the early 2000s with the emergence of extremist groups, communal conflicts, and growing insecurity. According to Abba and Nwankwo (2025), persecution of Christians in North Central Nigeria has lingered for decades, but became more severe with the rise of extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), leading to killings, displacement, and destruction of churches and communities. The authors noted that States such as Plateau, Benue, and Niger have witnessed brutal attacks and displacement of Christians from their ancestral communities (Abba & Nwankwo, 2025).

From 2014 subsequently, attacks on Christian communities reportedly intensified, resulting in reduced church activities, population displacement, and abandonment of places of worship by indigenes. The authors explained that many Christians fled their homes for safety, while churches in affected areas experienced drastic reductions in attendance because of persistent violence and insecurity. Similarly, Aluko (2024) observed that Boko Haram, ISWAP, armed bandits, and violent extremists contributed significantly to the persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria through killings, kidnappings, and destruction of property.

Between 2020 and 2026, Nigeria witnessed increasing cases of insurgency, banditry, farmer–herder conflicts, and religious extremism, especially in Northern and Middle Belt regions. Several international reports and scholarly works documented repeated attacks on Christian villages, clergy, worship centers, and farming communities (Petri & Bainbridge, 2025). These attacks led to thousands of deaths and the displacement of many Christians into

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. According to the International Institute for Religious Freedom (2025), Christians in Nigeria became major victims of Islamist extremism, particularly in conflict-prone regions where attacks on rural communities and churches became frequent. Despite differing scholarly opinions on whether the violence should officially be classified as "genocide," many researchers and religious organizations argue that the persistent killings, displacement, and targeted attacks against Christian communities indicate systematic persecution. Nevertheless, some scholars maintain that the Nigerian crisis is complex and also involves political, ethnic, economic, and territorial factors beyond religion alone (Danjuma & Yusuf, 2025).

Methodology

In this study, the research methods employed were content analysis and focus group discussion (FGD). Content analysis involves examining the manifest content of communication to identify patterns and themes (Ohaja, 2003, p. 14). It is the study of recorded human communication such as books, newspapers, magazines, bulletins, board postings on the internet, laws and constitutions as well as any component or collections thereof Babbie (2013). The content analyzed in this study includes advertisements, news stories, features, opinion articles, editorials, cartoons, photographs, etc, as found in *Daily Sun, Vanguard and TheGuardian* newspapers. The population of the study consisted of all publications of *Daily sun, Vanguard and TheGuardian* newspaper from June 01, 2025 to May 31, 2026. This twelve- month period covered Christian genocide and religious violence in diverse parts of Nigeria, totaling 365 days, multiplied by three newspapers resulting in 1095 editions.

On the part of the FGD method, 375 active 400-level (final year) students of Mass Communication Department, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU), Igbariam campus, formed the population for the second method of this study. Composite week sampling technique was used in this study to select the days that represented the months in the study. This technique provides that every day of the week is covered in the sample. The outcome is that every month will include the 7 days of the week. Hence, the sample size is determined as follows: 7 days multiplied by 3 newspapers multiplied by 12 months totaling 252 editions of the newspapers. Therefore, this figure served as the sample size for content analysis part of this study. On the other hand, purposive sampling technique was used to draw 20 participants from the 375 active Mass Communication students' population for the qualitative aspect of this study. The units of analysis in this study include the following: Frequency (high, moderate, low); Direction (favourable, unfavourable & neutral); Frames (terrorism, banditry/kidnapping, religious fanaticism, politics, corruption & illiteracy); Prominence (front page, back page, editorial page & inside page). The Coding sheet, coding guide and focus group discussion guide served as the instruments for the data collection while two sessions of 10 discussants each, were conducted for the FGD.

The data collected in the study are presented using the frequency tables, percentages and pie charts. Out of 252 sampled editions of the selected newspapers for the period of 12 months under study, a total of 213 reports were discovered on Christian genocide in Nigeria. From these editions, *Daily Sun* newspaper recorded 82 (eighty two) reports, *Vanguard* newspaper featured 69 (sixty nine) issues while *TheGuardian* newspaper has 62 (sixty two) reports. The first four objectives of the study were analyzed using the content analysis

method of study while the fifth objective was analyzed using the focus group discussion method.

Thematic Data: Answers to Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the frequency of reportage of Christian genocide in Nigeria in the national dailies?

Table 1: Distribution of data showing the frequency of coverage

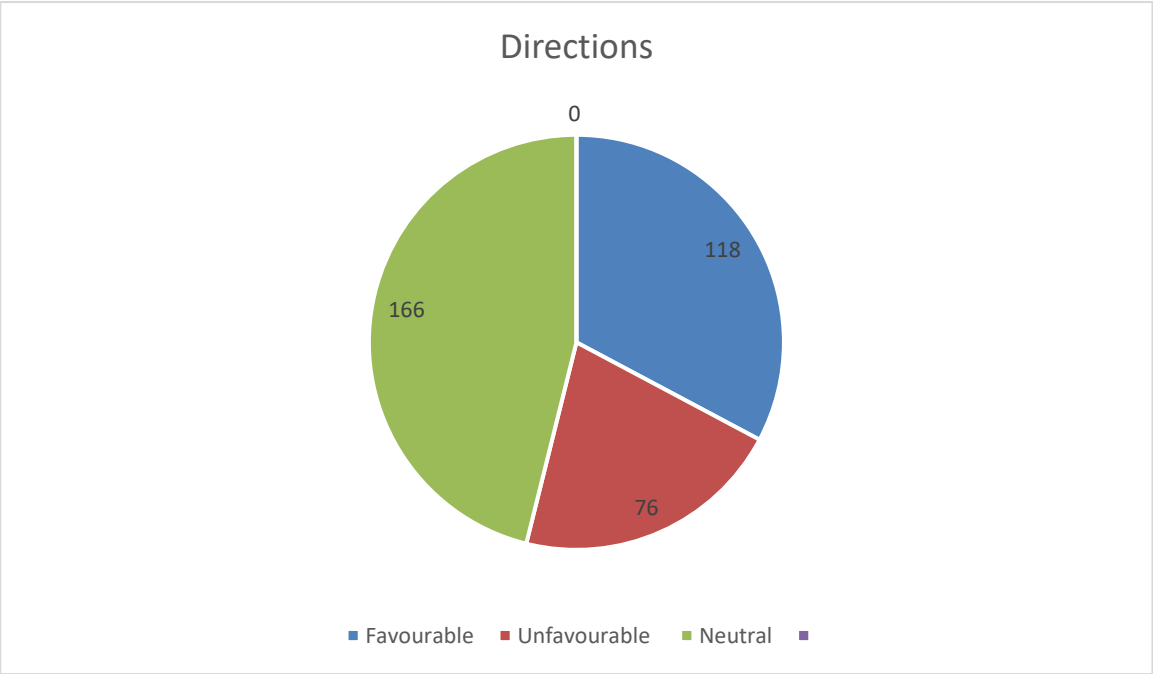
Frequency	*Daily Sun*	*TheGuardian*	*Vanguard*	Total	Percentage
June	9	7	8	24	11
July	5	3	3	11	5
August	5	4	4	13	6
September	4	5	4	13	6
October	6	3	6	15	7
November	6	5	5	16	8
December	7	4	6	17	8
January	7	5	6	18	9
February	8	7	7	22	10
March	9	6	7	22	10
April	8	7	8	23	11
May	8	6	5	19	9
Total	**82**	**62**	**69**	**213**	**100**

Source: Researcher's content analysis, 2026.

Data presented in Table 1 above show the monthly distribution of newspaper reports on the Christian genocide in Nigeria. The higher ranking reports were published in June with 24 reports (11%), followed by April with 23 reports (11%). In all, 213 reports were discovered out of the 252 sampled editions of the three newspapers under study. Hence, the frequency of coverage of the topic under study is high since 213 issues were discovered in 252 editions sampled in the study. This means that the national dailies did justice to the reportage of the issue under discussion.

Research Question Two: What is the direction of coverage of Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies?

Pie Chart 1: Direction of Christian genocide in the national dailies

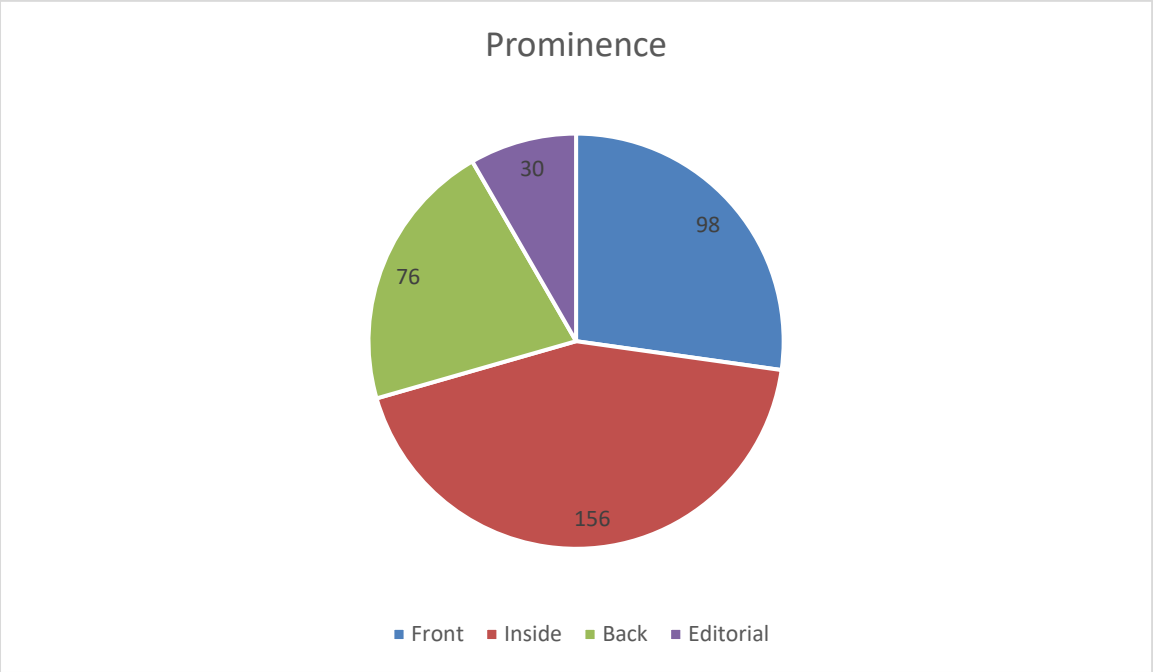


Source: Researcher's content analysis, 2026.

Analysis of the data presented in the pie chart above revealed that neutral reports constituted ranked the highest proportion of coverage with 98 reports (166°), followed by 70 favourable reports with (118°) and 45 unfavourable reports which accounted for the least coverage (76°). This pattern indicates that the selected newspapers predominantly adopted a neutral tone in reporting the Christian genocide in Nigeria.

Research Question Three: What is the level of prominence given to the news stories on Christian genocide in the selected national dailies?

Pie chart 3: Showing the prominence of the coverage



Source: Researcher's content analysis, 2026.

Analysis of the data presented in the pie chart above indicates that 92 reports, representing 156°, were published inside the pages of the newspapers under study, making it the most frequently used placement by the selected newspapers. This was followed by the front page with 58 reports (98°), the back page with 45 reports (76°), and the editorial page which recorded the least coverage with 18 reports (30°). It has to be noted that prominence in the newspapers is measured using this order of preference: front page, back page, editorial page and inside page. The implication is that the selected newspapers gave low prominence to the reports on Christian genocide, as the majority of the stories were published inside the pages of the newspapers under study. This suggests that although the issue received consistent media attention, it was not consistently treated as the most important news of the day.

Research Question Four: What are the dominant frames assigned to the news stories on Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies?

Table 4: Distribution of data showing the dominant frames assigned to the new stories

Frames	***Daily sun***	***TheGuardian***	***Vanguard***	**Total**	**Percentage**
Corruption	8	5	4	17	8
Politics	10	7	8	25	12
Illiteracy	2	4	6	12	6
Religious fanaticism	16	10	13	39	18
Terrorism	24	21	22	67	31
Banditry/ kidnapping	22	15	16	53	25
Total	**82**	**62**	**69**	**213**	**100**

Source: Researcher's content analysis, 2026.

Analysis of the data presented on the table above reveals that the frames employed by the selected newspapers in reporting the Christian genocide in Nigeria were corruption, politics, illiteracy, religious fanaticism, terrorism, and banditry and kidnapping. The table indicates

that terrorism was the most dominant frame with 67 reports (31%), followed by banditry/kidnapping with 53 reports (25%). Incidentally, religious fanaticism accounted for only 39 reports representing 18% of the reports.

Research Question Five: What are the respondents' reactions to the framing of the news stories on Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies?

As earlier noted, two focus groups were conducted with 10 persons each totaling 20 discussants. This was done to examine their reactions to the framing of the news stories on Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies. While some participants appreciated the reports they considered balanced and factual, others believed that the newspapers did not adequately portray the nature and implications of the attacks.

Discussant A^1 observed: *"I think most of the newspapers tried to report the incidents as security issues. Whether I agree with that or not, I believe they were careful not to make the reports more divisive."* Some participants agreed to this statement. This suggests that some of them viewed the newspaper framing of the attacks as an attempt to maintain objectivity and avoid inflaming tensions.

Discussant A^2 stated: "*I noticed that different newspapers report the same incident differently. One newspaper described it mainly as terrorism, while another as insecurity or banditry. This makes me wonder which report presents the complete picture; so I feel these newspapers are so economical with the facts; these attacks are religious motivated, not just insecurity."* Most of the participants agreed to this position; this implies that some respondents did not react quite positively to the reports.

Discussant B^1 commented: "*I feel that the reports stop at telling us that people were attacked without explaining what led to the attacks or what happened afterwards. I believe follow-up stories and more background information would help readers understand the issue better instead of leaving many questions unanswered."* Some discussants also agreed with this position. This response shows that the participants expected more comprehensive reporting and follow-up coverage. These highlight the perceived influence of media framing on public understanding of the Christian genocide in Nigeria. Their general reactions are that of dissatisfaction as the reports are framed as ordinary insecurity other than Christianity attacks.

Discussion of Findings

The **first** research question aimed to determine how frequently the selected national dailies reported the Christian genocide in Nigeria. The findings showed that the selected newspapers gave considerable coverage to incidents of Christian genocide throughout the study period, although the level of coverage varied from one month to another. This result indicates that the selected national dailies played a significant role in keeping the public informed about incidents of the Christian genocide in Nigeria; this is a credit to the agenda setting theory of mass communication. The study reveals that Christian genocide received a high level of media attention in the selected national dailies. This finding is in line with Obiakor, Ezeorji and Okeke (2024) whose finding on the coverage of the 2023 post-election activities and protests is very high. Hence, the finding is in line with the fact that the media play the social responsibility function which implies that the press are the major purveyors of information in society (Ekeli 2008; Agudosy, Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2018; Ikegbunam & Agudosy, 2019), although Nwabueze, Ikegbunam and Obiakor (2019) were probing the social

responsibility role of the media since they most often neglect certain areas and certain frames in their reportage.

The **second** research question aimed to determine the direction of news stories on Christian genocide in Nigeria as reported by the selected national dailies. The result revealed that the selected newspapers recorded the least proportion of favourable reports, while neutral reports constituted the highest proportion of the stories. The highest proportion of neutral reports could be attributed to the journalistic principle of objectivity and fairness in news reporting. According to McQuail (2010), journalists are expected to present news in a balanced and impartial manner, allowing audiences to form their own opinions based on the facts presented rather than the personal views of the reporter. Similarly, Ojala (2021) argues that neutrality remains an important principle of journalism because balanced or impartial reporting enhances the credibility of the media and promotes public trust in news content.

The **third** research question aimed to determine the prominence of news stories on Christian genocide in Nigeria in the selected national dailies. The result revealed that although stories on the Christian genocide received considerable attention, majority of the reports were reported inside the pages of the newspapers. This suggests that although the selected national dailies considered incidents of Christian genocide newsworthy, editorial decisions on story placement influenced the prominence accorded to such reports. According to Adisa (2003) and Folarin (2004), as cited in Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013), reports published on the front page are generally regarded as the most important, followed by those on the back page, while inside-page reports are considered less prominent. Furthermore, Umechukwu (2001) and Aliagan (2006), as cited in Ojebuyi and Ekennia (2013), observed that in conflict reporting, the editorial page is regarded as one of the most valued sections of the newspaper after the front page because it reflects the newspaper's official position on issues. This finding indicates that Christian genocide received low prominence in the selected national dailies, since the front, back and the editorial pages received less placement than the inside pages.

The **fourth** research question aimed to ascertain the dominant themes employed by the selected national dailies in reporting the Christian genocide in Nigeria. The result revealed that terrorism emerged as the most dominant theme followed by banditry/kidnapping. This suggests that the selected national dailies placed greater emphasis on the security and violent dimensions of the Christian genocide other than its religious dimension. The prominence given to terrorism with banditry and kidnapping indicates that the newspapers primarily portrayed the Christian genocide from the security angle other than the religious angle it beckons. This finding supports Entman's (1993) framing theory, which posits that the media select certain aspects of reality and make them more salient in order to promote a particular interpretation of events. Similarly, McQuail (2010) argues that editorial decisions influence the selection and emphasis of news content, thereby shaping public understanding and perception of social issues. The relatively lower attention given to themes such as corruption, religious fanaticism, politics and illiteracy suggests that these aspects were considered less central to the newspapers' narratives on Christian genocide.

The **fifth** research question sought to understand respondents' reactions to the framing of news stories on the Christian genocide in Nigeria by the selected national dailies. The result from the focus group discussions revealed that the respondents' reactions were largely

dissatisfactory by the manner in which the newspapers framed their reports. While some participants expressed greater confidence that the reports were objective, balanced, and fair, most of them perceived the reports as biased, and lacking adequate context which generated skepticism and reduced trust. These findings are consistent with Chong and Druckman (2007), who argue that the way an issue is framed significantly, influences how audiences interpret events, form opinions, and make judgments about public issues. Similarly, McQuail (2010) maintains that the media shape public understanding through the selection, presentation, and emphasis of news content. This is the reason why the audience may they develop the tendency of withdrawing from the mainstream media as a result of distrust and turn towards alternative sources (Müller & Schulz, 2021, in Obiakor, 2024). Overall, the findings suggest that respondents' reactions were mostly dissatisfactory since the national dailies were being economical with the fact that the attacks are primarily on Christians; the reports are seen as mere insecurity issue in the country. This is the position of Obiakor and Nwabueze (2019) when they noted that gratifications sought may not always be gratifications derived. Hence, social media now serve as one of the major sources of information for the audience (Ikegbunam & Obiakor, 2021; Obiakor, Adikuru & Agbakaj, 2022; Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeaso, 2023; Obiakor, Ikegbunam & Ezeja, 2024; Obiakor, Obiora & Okafor, 2025; Obiakor, 2025; Obiakor, Ezeorji & Uboh, 2026).

Summary

This study investigated newspaper framing of Christian genocide in Nigeria and audience reactions to the framing of the stories in selected national dailies. The research was motivated by the increasing reports of violent attacks against Christian communities across different parts of Nigeria and the significant role of the mass media in informing the public, shaping perceptions, and influencing discourse on issues of national concern. Specifically, the study sought to: determine the frequency, the direction, the prominence and the dominant frames in the selected newspapers as well as the respondent's reactions to the framing of Christian genocide in Nigeria. The study adopted the mixed method of content analysis and focus group research methods in analyzing the three selected newspapers under study. A total of 213 relevant newspaper reports were discovered from the 252 sampled editions of the newspapers. The results of the study were analyzed showing how their links with the framing and perception theories were established.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that Christian genocide in Nigeria received considerable newspaper attention during the twelve-month period under review. The study further established that the selected newspapers predominantly adopted a neutral direction in reporting the incidents. On framing, the findings showed that terrorism emerged as the dominant frame employed by the newspapers, followed by banditry and kidnapping. This suggests that the selected newspapers largely presented the incidents within the broader context of insecurity rather than exclusively as religious persecution. In terms of prominence, most reports were published inside the pages of the newspapers. This implies that although the issue received consistent coverage, it was not always accorded the highest editorial priority. Finally, the respondents feel dissatisfactory about the framing of the news reports

since the stories were framed from the angle of insecurity other than the angles of politics, illiteracy, and religious persecution.

Recommendations

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

- Newspapers should ensure more consistent and comprehensive coverage of the Christian genocide and other forms of religiously motivated violence irrespective of the scale or location of the incidents. Reports should be more direct and supported by thorough investigative journalism to avoid sensationalism or underreporting.
- Media organizations should give greater prominence to significant reports by placing major stories on front pages or other strategic positions where they can attract wider public attention.
- Journalists should provide greater contextual analysis by examining the political, social and religious dimensions of the crisis rather than from an isolated view.
- Government at all levels should strengthen security measures in vulnerable communities and ensure prompt responses to reported attacks.
- Security agencies should improve intelligence gathering, investigate incidents thoroughly, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.
- Religious and community leaders should promote peaceful coexistence, interfaith dialogue, and conflict prevention initiatives within their communities. They should also collaborate with government agencies, civil society organizations, and the media to discourage hate speech, reduce religious tensions, and encourage peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- Future studies should expand the scope of research by including additional newspapers, television stations, radio, online news platforms, and social media to provide a broader understanding of the media coverage of the Christian genocide in Nigeria. Researchers may also investigate audience perceptions of such media coverage and examine how media framing influences public opinion and policy responses to religious violence.

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