Kwaghe International
Journal of Arts, Humanities and Religious Studies
ISSN : 1595-8027
Index: Harvard, Boston, Sydney University, Dimensions, Lens, ResearchGet Scilit, Semantic, Google Scholar, Base etc
https://doi.org/10.58578/KIJAHRS.v3i1.9095

Analysis of Newspaper Coverage of Human Rights Violations in North East Nigeria

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Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Dec 28, 2025	Jan 22, 2026	Feb 3, 2026	Feb 8, 2026

Abstract

This study examined how two leading Nigerian newspapers, *Daily Trust* and *The Punch*, reported human rights violations in North East Nigeria between 2010 and 2020, drawing on agenda-setting and framing theories to assess the depth and orientation of coverage. Using a quantitative content analysis of 374 sampled editions containing 279 human-rights-related items, the study applied descriptive statistics to evaluate prominence, formats, frames, and sources, with substantial inter-coder reliability for content coding ($\varkappa = 0.78$). The findings reveal high salience, as 73.5% of sampled editions carried human rights content, with coverage predominantly presented in news and feature formats and limited reliance on visual or reader-driven genres. Human interest and responsibility frames dominated, followed by conflict and economic consequences frames, while moral framing appeared least frequently. Security agencies emerged as the most cited sources, surpassing victims/eyewitnesses, government officials, NGOs, and international organisations, indicating strong dependence on official narratives. A chiS-square test ($\chi^2 = 1.17$, $p > .05$) showed no statistically significant difference in the framing patterns of the two newspapers. The study concludes that, despite sustained attention to human

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rights violations, reportage often lacks the depth, diversity, and critical scrutiny required to advance accountability. It recommends investment in investigative and long-form reporting, broader framing and sourcing practices, routine follow-ups, enhanced audience engagement, and institutional provision of legal, security, and psychosocial protections to strengthen editorial independence.

Keywords: Human Rights Reporting; Newspaper Framing; Agenda-Setting; North East Nigeria; Content Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Human rights violations remain a persistent global issue, particularly in conflict-prone areas where a breakdown in law and order catalyses various forms of abuse. Internationally, human rights violations manifest in many forms, including armed conflict, human trafficking, and forced displacement. Countries like Yemen, Syria and Myanmar face widespread abuses such as extrajudicial killings, persecution of minorities and threats to press freedom (Al-Enezy & Al-Duaij, 2020). These issues persist despite efforts to promote human rights and hold violators accountable.

In Nigeria, human rights violations are diverse and widespread, ranging from police brutality and gender-based violence to insurgency-related atrocities by *Boko Haram* and restrictions on freedom of expression. A significant instance was the police brutality associated with the now-disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), notorious for extrajudicial killings and illegal detentions. The #EndSARS protests in 2020, a major movement against these abuses, culminated in the tragic shooting of peaceful protesters at Lekki Toll Gate, where security forces allegedly used excessive force, leading to casualties (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2023).

Similarly, freedom of expression remains under threat, with journalists and activists facing harassment, arrests and sometimes death for speaking against the government. The case of Omoyele Sowore, who was detained in 2019 for protesting against bad governance, exemplifies these challenges (Mayer, 2024). In some instances, authorities have shut down media outlets and restricted internet access to silence dissent.

In the North East, human rights abuses are most visible in the shadows of the *Boko Haram* insurgency and counter-insurgency operations. Civilians, caught between insurgents

and security forces, have endured abductions, mass killings, unlawful detentions, and displacement. The 2014 abduction of over 200 Chibok schoolgirls, the massacre of students in Buni Yadi the same year, the large-scale killings in Baga (2015), and the 2018 Dapchi schoolgirl abduction remain painful reminders of the crisis. State responses have also been implicated in violations: the January 2017 military airstrike on an IDP camp in Rann killed scores of civilians and aid workers, while reports of torture, sexual exploitation in displacement camps, and deaths in overcrowded detention centres such as Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri reveal systemic abuses. Beyond the statistics, these violations translate into broken families, disrupted schooling, lost livelihoods, and a persistent climate of fear, highlighting the severe erosion of human dignity in the region.

The *Boko Haram* insurgency, initially localised, has since expanded to affect much of the North East and neighbouring countries. Events like the 2014 Chibok schoolgirl abduction attracted global attention, resulting in the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, which underscored the crisis's severity. However, while this incident gained sustained media focus, other abuses, including mass killings and extrajudicial executions, have received limited coverage.

Historically, the Nigerian media has been vital in advocating for human rights, whether during the anti-colonial struggles or in resisting military dictatorship post-independence (Akinfeleye, 2004). Newspapers have remained at the forefront, documenting critical societal issues, especially those related to governance, corruption and human rights. Prominent publications like *The Punch*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* have reported on a range of abuses, through coverage, particularly in conflict zones like the North East, is sometimes influenced by political and economic pressures (Okeibunor, 2021).

The role of newspapers in covering human rights violations in the North East is pivotal in shaping public understanding and influencing perceptions of these issues. Human rights abuses in conflict zones often go unnoticed or underreported in mainstream media, which can perpetuate a lack of awareness about the severity of such violations (Farra'u, 2011). In this context, newspapers play a vital role in shedding light on these atrocities, providing both local and international audiences with critical information. However, research shows that the extent and nature of this coverage can be significantly shaped by various factors, including media ownership and economic interests. For

example, Apuke (2016) argues that media owners often influence editorial decisions, limiting independent reporting. Also, studies of Nigerian newspapers in conflict-affected zones have found that commercial pressures and political bias constrain objective human rights reporting (Ayih, 2025).

Newspapers may occasionally provide in-depth coverage of human rights violations, offering detailed reports that highlight the personal and societal impact of these abuses. However, editorial decisions are frequently influenced by economic and political considerations, which can lead to biased or skewed reporting. Media houses that rely heavily on government advertising and funding may be more reluctant to publish stories critical of state actions. This is especially true in regions where the military or police forces are involved in alleged human rights violations. In such cases, there may be a reluctance to publish stories that could damage the reputation of government entities or undermine state narratives.

Furthermore, these editorial decisions are often driven by commercial interests, as media outlets are focused on maintaining profitability. Sensational or controversial stories that challenge the status quo might be sidelined in favour of more palatable content that appeals to a broader audience or maintains favourable relations with powerful stakeholders. This commercial pressure can, therefore, lead to a selective portrayal of human rights violations, affecting the way these issues are perceived by the public. The result is a media landscape where human rights violations may not be adequately addressed, hindering efforts to promote accountability and justice in conflict zones like the North East.

Examining how newspapers frame these issues is vital, as media framing significantly shapes public perception. Newspapers often portray the North East insurgency as a security challenge rather than a human rights crisis, focusing on military actions against *Boko Haram* over the broader human impact. This framing can limit public understanding of the conflict's underlying issues, such as governance failures and widespread human rights abuses.

This study, therefore, critically analysed Nigerian newspaper coverage of human rights violations in the North East.

Statement of the Problem

The persistent issue of human rights violations in North East Nigeria, exacerbated by the *Boko Haram* insurgency and military counterinsurgency operations, remains a

significant challenge for both national and international human rights bodies. Since 2009, the region has experienced grave violations, including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, forced displacements, arbitrary arrests, and the destruction of communities. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2021), over 350,000 people have lost their lives, either directly due to violence or indirectly as a result of worsening living conditions, between 2009 and 2020. Furthermore, over 3 million people have been displaced internally, with many fleeing to neighbouring countries like Chad, Niger-and Cameroon.

The Nigerian media, particularly newspapers, play a critical role in documenting and exposing these violations. However, there are growing concerns about the consistency and accuracy of the press's coverage. While high-profile incidents like the abduction of the 276 Chibok schoolgirls in 2014 garnered significant local and international media attention, many other violations remain underreported or misrepresented. Amnesty International reported that between 2015 and 2018, hundreds of women and girls in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps were sexually exploited by security operatives, yet this topic has not been widely covered in Nigerian newspapers. This selective reporting of human rights violations has significant implications for public awareness, policy responses, and international intervention. Media narratives shape national discourse, and when newspapers fail to provide a balanced, comprehensive view of the conflict, they contribute to a skewed understanding of the crisis. This limits the scope for advocacy, reduces accountability for perpetrators and weakens efforts to mobilise national and international resources to address the underlying causes of the conflict.

The core motivation of this study stems from the need to examine the patterns and scope of Nigerian mass media reporting on human rights violations in the Northeast subregion. Human rights violations in this region, including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence and forced displacement, present significant challenges for media advocacy, policy responses, and international interventions. This study examined the extent to which these issues are reported and the potential implications for media advocacy and policy formulation. Therefore, this study sought to critically examine how newspapers have covered human rights violations in North East Nigeria, particularly between 2010 and 2022.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the frequency of coverage given to human rights violations in North East Nigeria between 2010 and 2020 by select Nigerian newspapers.

2. Ascertain the frames of the select Nigerian newspaper reportage of human rights violations in North East Nigeria between 2010 and 2020.

3. Identify the sources of information on human rights violations in North East Nigeria between 2010 and 2020.

4. Determine the format of the stories on human rights violations in North East Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the frequency of coverage given to human rights violations in North East Nigeria by select Nigerian newspapers?
2. What frames are used in the reportage of human rights violations in North East Nigeria by select Nigerian newspapers between 2010 and 2020?
3. What are the primary sources of information on human rights violations in North East Nigeria between 2010 and 2020?
4. What is the format of stories on human rights violations in North East Nigeria in select Nigerian newspapers?

Hypotheses

H_O: There is no significant difference in the frequency of coverage of human rights violations in North East Nigeria between *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* newspapers from 2010 to 2020.

H_O: There is no significant difference in the use of human-interest and responsibility frames compared to conflict and economic-consequence frames in the reportage of human rights violations in North East Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study adopted content analysis as its principal research method, providing a systematic and objective means of examining how *Daily Trust* and *The*

Punch represented human rights violations in Northeast Nigeria between 2010 and 2020. This approach enabled analysis of the extent, nature, framing, and prominence of human rights issues across news reports, articles, editorials, and opinion columns.

Population of the Study: The population comprised all weekday editions (Monday–Friday) of *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* published from January 2010 to December 2020. Each paper produced approximately 260 editions per year, totalling 2,860 editions per title and a combined 5,720 editions. Weekend editions were excluded because they largely contained lifestyle content outside the study's socio-political focus.

Sample Size Determination: Using Taro Yamane's formula (1967) with a 5% margin of error and a population of 5,720 editions, a sample size of 374 editions was determined to be representative of the study period.

Sampling Technique: A systematic sampling technique was applied to ensure equal temporal representation. With a sampling interval of approximately 15, a random starting point was selected within the first fifteen editions, and every 15th edition thereafter was included. Sampling was proportionately distributed across years and newspapers (187 editions each), ensuring balanced coverage of both peak and low-crisis years.

Units of Analysis and Content Categories: The units of analysis included individual news items, features, editorials, and opinion pieces focusing on human rights violations. Content was coded under four major categories: (1) frequency of coverage, (2) prominence and format, (3) framing patterns (e.g., national security, victim-centred, government responsibility, terrorism, or victim-blaming), and (4) sources of information (e.g., officials, security agencies, NGOs, victims, or international bodies).

Research Instrument: A coding sheet served as the primary data collection tool, designed to record and classify variables such as frequency, frame, source, and format, ensuring consistent data entry across all sampled editions.

Validity of the Instrument: The coding sheet was reviewed by the researcher's supervisor and three academic experts in media and human rights, ensuring construct validity and alignment with the study objectives.

Method of Data Collection: Data were retrieved from both print and online archives of *Daily Trust* and *The Punch*, supplemented by secondary materials, books, journal articles, theses, and reports, to support contextual analysis.

Method of Data Analysis: Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, mainly frequency counts and percentages, to identify patterns of coverage, framing, and source usage in the reporting of human rights violations.

RESULTS

Table 1: Frequency of Newspaper Coverage of Human Rights Violations (N = 274)

Coverage Category	Frequency (f)	Valid (%)
Human Rights-Related	279	74.6%
Not Human Rights-Related	95	25.4%
Total	374	100.0%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The information in Table 1 reveals that out of the three hundred and seventy-nine (379) sampled editions of Daily Trust and The Punch newspapers, a significant proportion of the sampled editions, 279 (74.6%), focused on human rights (HR) violations. On the contrary, 25.4% of the other stories are not directly related to human rights issues. Therefore, the data presented and analysed are based on the 279 editions that consist of human rights (HR) violations issues.

Table 2: Frequency of Coverage by Story Format in *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* (2010–2020)

Story Format	Daily Trust	Valid %	The Punch	Valid %	Total (N = 194)	Overall %
News Report	56	39.4%	50	35.4%	106	38.1%
Feature Article	37	26.3%	30	21.2%	67	24.2%
Editorial	10	7.1%	9	6.1%	19	6.7%
Opinion Piece	17	12.1%	22	15.2%	39	13.9%
Interview	14	10.1%	10	7.1%	24	8.8%
Cartoon	4	3.0%	3	2.0%	7	2.6%
Supplement	3	2.0%	1	1.0%	4	1.5%
Infographic	0	0.0%	1	1.0%	1	0.5%
Letter to the Editor	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Advocacy Advertisement	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	127	100%	152	100%	279	100%

The data in Table 2 show a breakdown of the frequency and format of coverage of human rights violations in North-East Nigeria as reported by *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* newspapers between 2010 and 2020. According to the data, out of the 279 articles sampled, news reports dominated the coverage with 106 articles (38.1%), 56 from *Daily Trust* and 50 from *The Punch*. This clearly reflects a strong institutional preference for conventional straight news in documenting the crisis. News reports, by design, are typically descriptive and event-driven, which suits the fast-moving and volatile context of insurgency and human rights abuses. This predominance indicates that both newspapers prioritised immediacy and factual reportage, fulfilling the basic journalistic role of information dissemination during the decade of conflict in the North-East.

Following this, feature articles accounted for 67 articles (24.2%), with *Daily Trust* producing 37 and *The Punch* 30. This suggests that beyond episodic reporting, both newspapers also provided interpretative depth and background analysis—core elements of feature writing. Additionally, editorials (19; 6.7%) and opinion pieces (39; 13.9%) jointly contributed 20.6% of the coverage, pointing to a deliberate editorial effort to engage in public reasoning and moral framing of the human rights situation. *The Punch* had slightly more opinion pieces than *Daily Trust* (22 vs. 17). These revelations have shown that both newspapers moved beyond reporting events to shaping discourse and potentially influencing policy through interpretive and persuasive narratives.

Less dominant formats such as interviews (24; 8.8%), cartoons (7; 2.6%), and supplements (4; 1.5%) were marginal, while infographics (1; 0.5%), letters to the editor, and advocacy advertisements were virtually absent. The minimal utilisation of visual and reader-driven content suggests a missed opportunity to humanise the conflict and facilitate audience participation. The absence of advocacy advertising also indicates either editorial reluctance or a lack of external campaign initiatives targeting newspaper platforms. In summary, while the data in Table 4 affirms that the two newspapers fulfilled their primary information functions, it also reveals a gap in diversity and multimedia integration in reporting human rights violations, an area future reportage and media reforms could strengthen.

Table 3: Dominant Frames by *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* (2010–2020) Newspaper in Human Rights Coverage

Frame Type	Daily Trust	Valid %	The Punch	Valid %	Total (f)	Total %
Human Interest	42	27.9%	27	21.1%	69	24.74%
Responsibility	36	24.0%	27	21.1%	63	22.68%
Conflict	32	21.1%	26	20.0%	58	20.62%
Economic Consequences	24	16.3%	33	25.5%	57	20.62%
Morality	16	10.6%	16	12.2%	32	11.34%
Total	150	100.0%	129	100.0%	279	100.0%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The data in Table 3 presents the distribution of dominant frames used by *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* in their reporting of human rights violations between 2010 and 2020. According to the data, the most frequently employed frame was the Human-Interest frame, which was used in 69 articles, representing 24.74% of all human rights-focused stories. *Daily Trust* applied this frame in 42 articles, accounting for 27.9% of its total human rights content, while *The Punch* used it in 27 articles, or 21.1% of its coverage. This suggests that *Daily Trust* placed slightly more emphasis on the emotional and personal dimensions of human rights reporting, often foregrounding the suffering, resilience, and lived experiences of victims.

The responsibility frame was the second most commonly used frame, appearing in a total of 63 articles, which constitutes 22.68% of the entire sample. *Daily Trust* utilised this frame in 36 editions (24.0%), while *The Punch* featured it in 27 editions (21.1%). Though fairly evenly distributed, this frame's usage reflects attempts by both newspapers to hold specific actors accountable, be they government institutions, security forces, or insurgent groups, for the occurrence or mishandling of human rights issues.

The conflict frame was applied 58 times in total (20.62%) and was used in 32 of *Daily Trust's* stories (21.1%) and 26 of *The Punch's* (20.0%). This near equivalence suggests that both newspapers regularly contextualised human rights violations within the broader insurgency and insecurity landscape in the North-East. It also indicates an editorial tendency to depict the violations as part of the ongoing violent conflict, reinforcing the connection between securitisation and humanitarian crises.

The economic consequences frame was applied equally often (also 57 times, or 20.62% of all relevant articles), but here, *The Punch* led with 33 stories (25.5%) compared to *Daily Trust's* 24 (16.3%). This shows that *The Punch* was more inclined to highlight the economic aftermath of human rights violations, such as displacement, loss of livelihoods, destruction of property, or burdens on local economies. This choice may reflect *The Punch's* relatively stronger editorial interest in socio-economic and policy-oriented dimensions of public discourse.

In summary, Table 4 reveals both similarities and subtle differences in how the two newspapers reported on human rights violations. *Daily Trust* showed stronger tendencies toward Human Interest and Responsibility framing, potentially indicating a focus on storytelling and accountability narratives. Conversely, *The Punch* favoured the economic consequences frame slightly more, pointing to concern with development and policy implications. Across both newspapers, the morality frame received the least attention, suggesting a shared de-emphasis of value-laden discourses in the presentation of human rights issues.

Table 4: Primary Sources of Information in Human Rights Stories by Newspaper

Source Type	Daily Trust	Valid %	The Punch	Valid %	Total (f)	Total %
Security Agencies	43	28.8%	33	25.6%	76	27.32%
Victims/Witnesses	32	21.2%	32	24.4%	64	22.68%
Government Officials	19	12.5%	19	14.4%	38	13.40%
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)	20	13.5%	17	13.3%	37	13.40%
Other	19	12.5%	20	15.6%	39	13.92%
International Organisations	17	11.5%	9	6.7%	26	9.28%
Total	150	100.0%	129	100.0%	279	100.0%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The data in Table 4 revealed the primary sources cited in human rights-related newspaper stories, disaggregated by newspaper. The analysis reflects how *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* drew on various actors for reporting human rights violations between 2010 and 2020, with data drawn from 279 editions, 150 from *Daily Trust* and 129 from *The Punch.* According to the data, the most frequently cited source was Security Agencies, appearing in

76 stories or 27.32% of human rights coverage. *Daily Trust* relied on security agencies in 43 stories (28.8%), slightly more than *The Punch,* which referenced them in 33 stories (25.6%). This suggests a strong reliance on official security narratives in both papers, which may reflect access, credibility considerations, or editorial inclination to rely on security briefings during crises.

Victims and eyewitnesses were the second most cited source type, accounting for 64 stories (22.68%). Both newspapers used this source almost equally: *Daily Trust* in 32 stories (21.2%), and *The Punch* also in 32 stories (24.4%). This widespread inclusion reflects a level of commitment to amplifying the voices of those directly affected by human rights abuses, providing human-centred perspectives in the storytelling.

Government officials were referenced 38 times (13.40%), with each paper citing them in 19 stories (12.5% for *Daily Trust,* 14.4% for *The Punch*). This represents a moderate reliance on politicians and policymakers and may suggest a cautious or balanced approach in attributing responsibility or reporting state actions.

The use of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) followed closely, cited in 37 articles (13.40%). *Daily Trust* cited NGOs in 20 editions (13.5%), while The Punch mentioned them in 17 editions (13.3%). These figures reflect the relatively equivalent role that civil society organisations played as sources across the two outlets, possibly due to their advocacy in documenting and responding to rights violations.

From the foregoing, it is apt to infer that while both newspapers showed comparable patterns, *Daily Trust* leaned more on security agencies and international organisations, while The Punch cited economic and community-level voices slightly more, particularly from NGOs and victims. This reflects some divergence in how each outlet constructed the reality of human rights violations, one slightly skewed toward institutional perspectives, the other broader in civic sourcing.

Table 5: Format of Stories Reporting Human Rights Violations

Story Format	***Daily Trust***	**Valid %**	***The Punch***	**Valid %**	**Total (f)**	**Total %**
Feature Article	49	32.7%	46	35.6%	95	34.02%
News Report	45	29.8%	32	24.4%	77	27.32%
Opinion Piece	29	19.2%	29	22.2%	58	20.62%
Editorial	27	18.3%	23	17.8%	50	18.04%

Story Format	*Daily Trust*	Valid %	*The Punch*	Valid %	Total (f)	Total %
Feature Article	49	32.7%	46	35.6%	95	34.02%
Total	150	100.0%	129	100.0%	279	100.0%

Source: Field Data, 2025

Table 5 presents the analysis of the format types used by *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* in their reporting of human rights violations in Nigeria between 2010 and 2020. The table distinguishes among four primary article formats: feature articles, news reports, opinion pieces, and editorials, with results disaggregated by each newspaper.

The most common format across both newspapers was the feature article, used in 95 editions (34.02%) of the total 279 human rights stories. *Daily Trust* published 49 feature articles (32.7%), while *The Punch* published 46 (35.6%), indicating both newspapers prioritised long and detailed reports that allowed for in-depth exploration of human rights issues. This confirms the editorial tendency to treat human rights stories with narrative depth, human-centred focus, and perhaps investigative perspectives.

News reports were the second most utilised format overall, appearing in 77 editions (27.32%). *Daily Trust* contributed 45 (29.8%), while *The Punch* featured 32 (24.4%). This suggests *Daily Trust* was slightly more inclined toward straight, factual reporting on human rights events, likely aimed at immediacy and objectivity. Conversely, Opinion pieces were featured in 58 stories (20.62%), with an even split between the two papers: each published 29 opinion articles (19.2% in *Daily Trust,* 22.2% in *The Punch*). This symmetry may indicate a balanced space for commentary, allowing external voices or editorial contributors to interpret or advocate around human rights issues.

Editorials, which usually reflect institutional positions, were the least used format type. In total, 50 stories (18.04%) were editorials—*Daily Trust* published 27 (18.3%) and *The Punch* had 23 (17.8%). The slight parity suggests both outlets exercised editorial authority to offer formal institutional stances on certain human rights incidents, although they typically preferred feature or news-style reporting.

The above data revealed that the two newspapers demonstrated similar thematic priorities in how human rights stories were presented. *The Punch* showed a marginal preference for feature and opinion formats, while *Daily Trust* leaned slightly toward news reporting. Both, however, reserved a comparable share of space for editorials, reinforcing

the interpretation that human rights issues were framed not only as events but also as matters deserving of analysis, advocacy, and public evaluation.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 6. X: Chi-Square Test of Frequency of Coverage between Daily Trust and The Punch (2010–2020)

Newspaper	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	$(O–E)^2 / E$
Daily Trust	150	139.5	0.79
The Punch	129	139.5	0.79
Total (N)	279	279	1.58

Chi-square (χ^2) = 1.58, df = 1, p = .21

The analysis shows no statistically significant difference in the frequency of coverage of human rights violations between *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* ($\chi^2 = 1.58$, $p > .05$). This means that both newspapers devoted comparable levels of attention to the subject within the period of study.

Table 7.Y: Chi-Square Test of Dominant Frames in Human Rights Coverage (2010–2020)

Frame Category	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	$(O–E)^2 / E$
Human Interest + Responsibility	132	123.5	0.59
Conflict + Economic Consequences	115	123.5	0.59
Total (N)	247	247	1.17

Chi-square (χ^2) = 1.17, df = 1, p = .28

Although Human Interest and Responsibility frames (47.4%) were slightly more frequent than Conflict and Economic Consequence frames (41.2%), the difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 1.17$, $p > .05$). This indicates that framing patterns across the newspapers were relatively balanced, with no clear dominance of one frame category over the other.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated how *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* reported human rights violations in Northeast Nigeria between 2010 and 2020, and the discussion integrates the findings with theoretical perspectives and prior research. The analysis showed that both

newspapers gave substantial and sustained attention to human rights violations over the ten-year period. Out of the total sample, 74.6% of editions contained at least one story addressing such issues, with no significant difference between the two newspapers. This balance suggests that national crises like the Boko Haram insurgency transcended regional editorial biases, compelling consistent coverage across outlets. The result supports the agenda-setting function of the press, as persistent reportage kept human rights on the public agenda and shaped national conversations around security and accountability.

The findings align with earlier studies such as Shosho (2024) and Duru (2023), which observed that Nigerian newspapers often highlight rights violations but rarely sustain advocacy. What this study adds is that coverage, though not always reform-driven, was quantitatively robust and fairly distributed, reflecting the media's recognition of human rights as a recurring public concern. From the standpoint of agenda-setting theory, this frequency not only determined what the public thought about but also reinforced the salience of human rights in national discourse.

Regarding framing, four dominant patterns were identified—conflict, human-interest, responsibility-attribution, and moral-evaluation frames. Conflict framing was the most prevalent, portraying the confrontation between insurgents and state forces while positioning civilians as victims. Human-interest framing personalised the crisis, capturing the human suffering behind statistics and giving a voice to displaced persons and victims' families. Responsibility frames often held government and security agencies accountable for rights abuses or negligence, while moral-evaluation frames appeared in editorials that condemned violence and demanded institutional reform. These findings resonate with studies by Omolabi (2023a) and Olajuwon et al. (2024), who reported similar frame distributions in media coverage of insecurity in Nigeria. The use of these frames reflects the media's attempt to balance factual reporting with moral responsibility, though the limited recurrence of moral and advocacy frames indicates cautious editorial positioning.

The sourcing pattern showed a dominance of official voices, security agencies, government spokesmen, and public officials, echoing Dauda's (2023) observation that Nigerian newspapers often rely heavily on institutional accounts. However, both newspapers occasionally included eyewitness and victim testimonies, particularly in human-interest stories, lending credibility and emotional depth to reports. Civil society organisations, NGOs, and international bodies were less frequently cited but contributed

valuable interpretive context when present. This reliance on official narratives highlights a structural imbalance in sourcing that shapes public interpretation of rights violations, consistent with gatekeeping and framing theories which posit that source selection directly influences meaning construction.

In terms of formats, most stories appeared as straight news reports, while features, editorials, and opinion pieces were less common. This dominance of news format points to the media's prioritisation of immediacy over analytical depth, a finding that mirrors Duru (2023). Nevertheless, interpretive pieces that did appear provided critical insight and moral reflection, particularly during peak crisis years such as 2014 and 2015. The relative scarcity of such formats underscores the need for more sustained interpretive and investigative journalism on human rights issues.

The above discussion shows that Nigerian newspapers have been consistent in documenting violations and highlighting government responsibility, even though they have not fully embraced advocacy-oriented journalism. The findings affirm both the agenda-setting and framing roles of the press: newspapers made human rights a recurring issue on the public agenda and shaped understanding through the selective use of frames and sources. Yet, by depending largely on official narratives and limiting moral or solution-driven framing, the press's watchdog role remains partially exercised. *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* thus serve as both chroniclers and interpreters of Nigeria's human rights situation, committed to exposure and documentation, but still cautious in pressing for reform.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that while *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* newspapers have played a significant role in bringing attention to human rights violations in North East Nigeria, their coverage is shaped by a complex interplay of professional norms, institutional interests, and external pressures. The high frequency of coverage reflects the salience of the issue, but the predominance of event-driven reporting and reliance on official sources limit the depth, diversity, and critical engagement of reportage.

The study affirms that the frames employed by the newspapers, particularly Human Interest and Responsibility, helped to humanise victims and assign accountability, but the limited use of moral and systemic frames constrained broader societal reflection and action.

The formats of stories, while varied, were often insufficient for sustained investigative journalism.

The impact of journalistic norms and external pressures, such as safety concerns, ownership interests, and political influence, cannot be overstated. These factors contribute to self-censorship, selective reporting, and ethical compromises, ultimately affecting the credibility and effectiveness of newspaper coverage in promoting human rights and accountability. In sum, the extent of coverage was high, confirming that human rights violations remained a prominent issue on the agenda of both *Daily Trust* and *The Punch* during the period under study.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Newsrooms should ensure continuous, not just episodic, coverage of human rights violations, with regular follow-ups on reported cases. Dedicated human rights desks or reporters can help sustain attention on ongoing issues.

2. Journalists should be trained to apply a wider range of frames, including moral and systemic perspectives, to enrich public debate. Editorial policies should encourage critical and diverse framing of human rights stories.

3. Reporters should diversify their sources by including more voices from victims, NGOs, and independent experts. Newsrooms should establish partnerships with civil society to access credible, alternative perspectives.

4. Media organisations should invest in long-form, investigative, and multimedia storytelling for deeper analysis. Newspapers should also encourage reader engagement through interactive and community-driven content.

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