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Viewing through the lens of solutions journalism: A critical discourse analysis of press reportage of herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract

The discord between herders and farmers in Nigeria represents a complex challenge arising from resource shortages, environmental deterioration, population pressures, land conflicts, and socio-economic disparities, resulting in heightened violence, displacement, and financial losses. The media plays a crucial role in combating insecurity within any society. Consequently, this study thoroughly investigates the media's coverage of the herders-farmers conflict from the viewpoint of solutions journalism, analyzing trends, dynamics, dimensions, impact, and compliance with solutions-focused principles. The research is grounded in the Agenda Setting Theory, complemented by the Framing Theory and the Social Responsibility Media Theory. A critical discourse analysis was performed to comprehend how media portrayals influence public perceptions and policy responses. The findings revealed that media coverage primarily emphasizes conflict-escalating frames, overlooking narratives that promote peace, and has a substantial impact on public perceptions and actions. Journalists, as the finding indicated, encounter obstacles such as insufficient training, resources, and political pressure, which impede solutions-oriented reporting. It concluded that the manner in which the media frames and reports on the herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria significantly affects their development, yet the inclination towards sensationalism and ethnic stereotypes is misaligned with solutions-oriented principles. In order to advance peacebuilding efforts, this study recommended the implementation of consistent training programmes focused on solutions journalism, the establishment of media guidelines that prioritize ethical reporting, the enhancement of media literacy, governmental backing for solutions journalism initiatives, and the creation of dialogue platforms among stakeholders to generate thorough and constructive reports.

Keywords: Solutions journalism, critical discourse analysis, press reportage, herders-farmers conflict

1. Introduction

Insecurity has intensified into a widespread and intricate issue impacting Nigeria and numerous other developing countries, evolving from isolated events into a national emergency. Traditionally, Nigeria's security challenges were primarily limited to minor offenses and ethno-religious conflicts; however, the introduction of democratic reforms and the growth of civil liberties have resulted in a complex security environment marked by insurgency, terrorism, banditry, kidnappings, and ritualistic murders (Abdullahi & Dango, 2023 ^[1]; Amadi & Onwubiko, 2022 ^[10]; Ezeaka, 2024 ^[26]; Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda, 2016 ^[51]; Kusugh, Suemo & Achakpaikyo, 2025 ^[39, 40]; Nwankwo *et al.*, 2023 ^[53]; Nwodu, Ezeoke & Ezeaka, 2021 ^[55]; Obiora, Agbachukwu & Adikuru, 2025 ^[58]; Obiora & Uche, 2024 ^[59]; Omemma, 2017 ^[76]; Okpala & Chukwu, 2023 ^[69]; Uche & Obiora, 2023) ^[91]. The National Human Rights Commission (2025) indicates a notable rise in fatalities related to conflict in 2025, with at least 2,266 deaths recorded in the first half of the year alone, underscoring the gravity and extent of Nigeria's insecurity crisis. Likewise, Amnesty International (2025) ^[11] reported more than 10,217 deaths due to gun violence across various states within two years of the current administration's term, highlighting the unprecedented magnitude of violence and loss of life (Owolabi, Alade & Onwuka, 2023) ^[80].

Among these conflicts, the clash between farmers and herders has emerged as a significant and destructive issue impacting nearly every region in Nigeria. This conflict, which is rooted in socio-economic, environmental, and political tensions, has escalated into humanitarian crises characterized by mass displacements, the destruction of livelihoods, and severe economic consequences, particularly within the agricultural sector (Victor, Gommert, Yunusa & Ameh, 2025 ^[95]; Wonuola & Adisa, 2023 ^[97, 98]; Omosefe & Adewunmi, 2021 ^[78]; Shepuya, 2024) ^[82]. It also illustrates a broader regional pattern of conflict that involves

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a complex interplay of various societal factors, further complicated by the role of non-state Actors whose representation in the media significantly influences public perception and policy responses (Shepuya, 2024) ^[82].

The security situation in Nigeria is closely linked to socio-economic disparities, corruption, marginalization, and uneven distribution of resources, which heighten tensions and the likelihood of conflict (Ajetunmobi, 2023 ^[6]; Bello *et al.*, 2025 ^[15]; Ezeaka, 2024 ^[26]; Obamuyi & Fapetu, 2016 ^[57]; Suleiman-Shika, 2024) ^[89]. Oladipo (2024) ^[70] highlights that divisions based on ethnicity, religion, and politics exacerbated by perceptions of ethnic superiority and socio-cultural differences further widen societal divides, leading to persistent violence and instability. The media, as a significant societal player, fulfills a dual function: it educates the public and shapes perceptions, yet its coverage can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes, incite hate speech, and escalate conflicts (Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda, 2016 ^[51]; Okpala & Chukwu, 2023) ^[69]. Researchers contend that media bias, influenced by political, ethnic, or religious loyalties, frequently leads to skewed reporting that perpetuates societal fractures and hinders conflict resolution initiatives (Dahunsi, 2016; Ghazi-Tehrani & Kearns, 2020 ^[30]; Toyese & Omolola, 2024) ^[90]. Moreover, the emergence of social media has intensified these challenges, introducing misinformation, citizen journalism, and increased polarization, thus further impacting the security landscape (Ogbe, Jiboyewa & Ekwem, 2025 ^[62]; Azeez *et al.*, 2025) ^[12].

In the face of these challenges, solutions journalism has surfaced as a groundbreaking method that has the potential to reshape media narratives by prioritizing responses and constructive solutions instead of merely concentrating on issues. In contrast to conventional conflict reporting, solutions journalism aims to deliver evidence-based, solution-focused coverage that underscores positive responses, community resilience, and possible pathways to peace (Hopkinson & Dahmen, 2021 ^[33]; Okocha *et al.*, 2025) ^[65]. This shift in paradigm is in harmony with the wider objectives of civic, peace, and participatory journalism, which strive to empower communities, enhance public trust, and encourage civic engagement (Okocha *et al.*, 2025) ^[65]. In Nigeria, initiatives like Nigeria Health Watch serve as examples of efforts to integrate solution-oriented approaches into journalistic practices, particularly in areas such as health, which can also be applied to reporting on security matters like the herders-farmers conflict (Oluyemi *et al.*, 2025) ^[75].

Despite the global and regional adoption of solutions journalism, empirical research on its application to security conflicts in Nigeria remains scarce. This gap is particularly evident in the context of the herders-farmers conflict, where media narratives often continue to reinforce stereotypes and deepen societal divides (Kusugh, Suemo & Achakpaikyo, 2025) ^[39, 40]. Therefore, this study aims to critically analyze press reportage of the herders-farmers conflict through the lens of solutions journalism, utilizing critical discourse analysis to understand how media representations shape public perceptions and policy responses. The investigation seeks to assess whether media coverage aligns with solutions-oriented principles and how such framing influences societal understanding and conflict dynamics in Nigeria.

Objectives: This study critically analyzes press reportage of the herders-farmers conflict through the lens of solutions

journalism, utilizing critical discourse analysis to understand how media representations shape public perceptions and policy responses. Specifically, the objectives include:

1. To investigate the trend and dynamics of Herders - Farmers Conflict in Nigeria.
2. To examine Dimension of Press Reportage of Herders - Farmers Conflict in Nigeria.
3. To determine the Impact of Press Reportage of Herders hFarmers Conflict in Nigeria.
4. To ascertain how Press Reportage of Herders - Farmers Conflict aligns with solutions-oriented principles in Nigeria.
5. To find out the challenges of Press Reportage of Herders - Farmers through solutions-oriented principles in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Insecurity: The concept of insecurity encompasses a multifaceted array of implications, ranging from physical danger and instability to emotional distress and societal disintegration. At its core, insecurity signifies peril, unpredictability, and a deficiency of safeguards that threaten peace, stability, and safety (Beland, 2005, as cited in Omodero, 2024) ^[77]. It manifests as an emotional state of dread or nervousness stemming from actual or perceived threats, often resulting in a sense of vulnerability and helplessness within individuals and communities (Achumba, Ighomereho & Akpor, 2013 ^[3], as cited in Omodero, 2024) ^[77]. This vulnerability is compounded by factors such as poor governance, ethnic divisions, economic hardship, and the proliferation of illegal arms, which collectively exacerbate the security challenges faced by Nigeria (Nasiru, 2020 ^[48]; Olojede, 2022) ^[73].

In the Nigerian context, insecurity is not merely about the absence of peace but also involves a complex web of multidimensional threats including Boko Haram terrorism, banditry, kidnappings, and the persistent farmer-herder conflicts that threaten the safety of lives and property (Nasiru, 2020 ^[48]; Olojede, 2022) ^[73]. These threats are intricately linked to underlying socio-economic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and weak institutional responses, which foster a climate of fear, displacement, and economic disruption (Udoh *et al.*, 2019) ^[92]. The "Resource Curse" theory further elucidates how Nigeria's abundant natural resources, paradoxically, contribute to insecurity by fueling conflict and civil unrest when revenues are mismanaged or diverted from human development (Udoh *et al.*, 2019) ^[92].

Beland (2005, as cited in Out *et al.*, 2025) emphasizes that insecurity also involves a psychological dimension, characterized by a lack of psychological security and self-confidence, which hampers individual and societal progress. This emotional distress, coupled with physical threats, creates an environment where trust erodes, and societal cohesion is undermined. In Nigeria's case, insecurity manifests as a pervasive state of defenselessness, where communities live under constant threat of violence, loss of property, and even death, fostering a climate of fear and uncertainty (Achumba *et al.*, 2013 ^[3]; Olojede, 2022) ^[73].

Specifically, the ongoing herders-farmers conflict exemplifies this insecurity, representing a significant threat to peace and stability across Nigeria. It is characterized not only by direct violence but also by the broader social and economic disruptions it causes displacement, destruction of

livelihoods, and deepening ethnic and regional tensions. This multidimensional insecurity is rooted in environmental scarcity, resource competition, and socio-political marginalization, all of which are exacerbated by weak governance and inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms (Nasiru, 2020^[48]; Wonuola & Adisa, 2023)^[97, 98].

In relation to this study, insecurity can be defined as a state where the peace, safety, and stability of individuals and communities are threatened, leading to psychological distress, societal fragmentation, and recurring violence. It is both a condition and a perception where actual threats coexist with fears and anxieties that influence how conflicts, such as the herders-farmers clashes, are reported and understood in the media. Analyzing press reportage through the lens of solutions journalism offers a new perspective on how media can shape narratives around insecurity, potentially fostering constructive responses rather than perpetuating fear and division. Therefore, understanding insecurity in this comprehensive manner is crucial for critically examining media representations and promoting peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria's volatile security landscape.

Farmers-Herders Conflict

The farmers-herders conflict is one of the most enduring and complex security issues in Nigeria, rooted in historical, socio-economic, environmental, and political dimensions. This conflict, often characterized as a resource-based confrontation, involves disputes between sedentary agricultural communities and mobile pastoralists over limited land, water, and vegetation resources (Victor *et al.*, 2025)^[95]. Historically, tensions between farmers and herders trace back to the earliest human societies symbolized by biblical narratives such as Cain and Abel where conflicts over land and resources laid the groundwork for enduring disputes (Okoro, 2018)^[67, 68]. In contemporary Nigeria, the situation has escalated into violent clashes, resulting in casualties, displacement, and economic losses, with the conflict becoming more frequent and intense due to increasing scarcity of resources and environmental degradation (Ifeanacho, Durueke & Masi, 2024)^[35].

Scholars conceptualize this conflict not merely as a territorial dispute but as a manifestation of broader resource governance challenges intertwined with ethnic, religious, and political identities (Higazi & Yusuf, 2023^[32]; Ochoche & Tanko, 2023)^[61]. Higazi and Yusuf (2023)^[32] define farmers-herders conflict as "sustained confrontations between sedentary agricultural producers and mobile pastoralists, arising from competing land use systems and exacerbated by environmental change, inadequate governance mechanisms, and socio-cultural differences." This perspective highlights how environmental factors, such as desertification and climate change, along with weak state institutions and ineffective land management policies, serve as catalysts for conflict escalation. Additionally, Ochoche and Tanko (2023)^[61] emphasize that these disputes are often deeply intertwined with identity politics, where access to land and resources becomes entangled with ethnic and religious affiliations, further complicating resolution efforts. The media's portrayal of farmers-herders conflicts can significantly influence public perceptions and policy responses. Historically, press coverage has sometimes perpetuated stereotypes, fueled ethnic and religious tensions, and hindered peacebuilding efforts (Okoro, 2018)

^[67, 68]. In the context of this study, analyzing press reportage through the lens of solutions journalism offers an opportunity to shift narratives from conflict-centric portrayals to constructive, solution-oriented discourse. This approach can illuminate community resilience, successful conflict mitigation strategies, and collaborative governance initiatives, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the conflict's root causes and potential pathways to peace.

In relation to this study, the farmers-herders conflict is conceptualized as a resource-driven, identity-entwined dispute characterized by environmental stressors and governance failures. Understanding this conflict within a media framework that emphasizes solutions journalism allows for critical examination of how press reports either reinforce conflict narratives or promote constructive responses. Therefore, the concept of farmers-herders conflict in this context encompasses both the socio-environmental realities on the ground and the media representations that shape public discourse, with implications for fostering peace and social cohesion in Nigeria.

Solutions Journalism

Solutions journalism represents an innovative and evidence-based approach to reporting that emphasizes responses to social problems rather than solely highlighting their existence. Unlike traditional problem-focused journalism, solutions journalism critically investigates how individuals, communities, and institutions address societal issues, assessing the effectiveness, impact, and replicability of these responses (Fink & Schudson, 2014^[28]; Rosenberg, 2014). This approach aligns with the broader, interpretative, and analytical functions of journalism sometimes referred to as depth, explanatory, or long-form reporting which aim to provide audiences with a nuanced understanding of complex social dynamics (Fink & Schudson, 2014)^[28].

Situated within the category of constructive journalism, solutions journalism applies positive psychology techniques to foster more engaging and productive narratives, while remaining faithful to core journalistic principles of accuracy and fairness (McIntyre, 2015)^[43]. McIntyre (2015)^[43] describes constructive journalism as a continuum, suggesting that solutions journalism is part of a spectrum that integrates traditional reporting with a focus on societal resilience and progress. The core aim is to shift the narrative from problem-centric to response-oriented, highlighting successful strategies, innovative tactics, and effective remedies that can inspire further action and social cohesion (Aitamurto & Varma, 2018^[4]; Okocha *et al.*, 2025)^[65].

Historically, solutions journalism emerged as a response to the limitations of conventional conflict and crisis reporting, which often leads to public disengagement and "news fatigue" due to repetitive problem-focused narratives (Okocha *et al.*, 2025)^[65]. Its development was influenced by earlier journalistic frameworks such as peace journalism advocating non-violent conflict resolution and civic journalism, which promotes democratic participation by involving the community in storytelling (Lough & McIntyre, 2018)^[42]. Similar approaches, like restorative narrative and advocacy journalism, also aim to foster societal healing and active civic engagement, though each serves distinct purposes (Dahmen, 2016^[19]; Wenzel *et al.*, 2017)^[96].

In relation to the press reportage of Nigeria's herders-

farmers conflict, solutions journalism offers a compelling framework for reorienting narratives. Instead of solely depicting violence, displacement, and ethnic tensions, it encourages media practitioners to explore and highlight constructive responses such as community dialogue initiatives, conflict resolution programmes, and policy reforms that are making tangible differences. This shift can contribute to fostering understanding, reducing tensions, and promoting peacebuilding efforts in a highly polarized environment. Such an approach is especially relevant given the conflict's deep-rooted resource, environmental, and identity issues, which require nuanced, multi-faceted responses.

In the context of this study, solutions journalism is conceptualized as a journalistic approach that emphasizes evidence-based, constructive reporting on societal responses to the herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria. It seeks to provide a balanced, comprehensive picture by showcasing effective strategies and fostering a narrative of hope and resilience. Viewing press reportage through the lens of solutions journalism enables a critical discourse analysis that assesses not only how the media depict the conflict but also how they can serve as catalysts for positive change by promoting narratives of cooperation, innovation, and social progress. This paradigm shift in media coverage can influence public perceptions, policy responses, and ultimately contribute to conflict transformation and sustainable peace in Nigeria.

Trends and Dynamics of Herders - Farmers Conflict in Nigeria:

The patterns and dynamics of the conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria are fundamentally rooted in a complex interaction of environmental, socio-economic, political, and cultural elements, which have developed over time, thus influencing the character and reporting of these conflicts. Ndubuisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu (2019) ^[50], Omodero (2024) ^[77], and Popoola (2023) ^[81] agree that insecurity in Nigeria is deeply embedded and multifaceted, encompassing issues such as terrorism, insurgency, banditry, and communal violence. Akindoyin and Obafemi (2025) ^[7] further explain that the security threats facing Nigeria destabilize communities and disrupt economic activities, with the herders-farmers conflict being a critical aspect, particularly in the Middle Belt region. These conflicts are exacerbated by poverty, deprivation, and unemployment, which act as catalysts, perpetuating a cycle of violence that erodes social cohesion and development (Olojede, 2022 ^[73]; Otu, 2025) ^[79].

The enduring nature of the herders-farmers conflict is well established, with researchers observing its transformation from traditional disagreements over land and grazing routes to more deadly and politicized confrontations (Bagu & Smith, 2017 ^[23]; Vande, 2020 ^[93]; Vande and Aka-Ajani, 2025) ^[94]. Historically, conflicts were settled through community leaders or judicial processes, with fatalities being uncommon (Vande and Aka-Ajani, 2025) ^[94]. However, recent changes, including environmental degradation and demographic shifts, have heightened these disputes, leading to more violent confrontations involving cattle rustling, banditry, and even criminal activities disguised as resource conflicts (Nyong *et al.*, 2022 ^[56]; Ohadiugha & Gado, 2025) ^[63].

Environmental factors such as desertification and water scarcity have compelled herders to migrate southward, resulting in heightened confrontations with agricultural

communities over diminishing resources (Nyong *et al.*, 2022) ^[56]. Climate change intensifies resource scarcity, thereby exacerbating conflicts, particularly in the North and Middle Belt regions (Enwelu *et al.*, 2015) ^[25]. Socio-economic issues, including poverty, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure, further aggravate tensions by restricting access to markets, healthcare, and education, thus fostering an environment conducive to violence (Olorunfemi & Adebayo, 2021) ^[74].

The evolving dimensions of conflict encompass the involvement of under-aged herders, the spread of small arms, substance abuse, and the politicization of disputes, frequently framed in religious terms herders identified as Muslims and farmers as Christians thereby complicating resolution efforts (Vande and Aka-Ajani, 2025) ^[94]. These elements are interconnected with criminal activities, cattle rustling, and banditry, which are increasingly associated with ethnic profiling and security concerns (Adewambi, 2018; Kazeem *et al.*, 2024) ^[37].

Regional disparities significantly affect the intensity of conflicts, with North-Central disputes marked by violence and escalation due to feelings of alienation and persecution (Vande and Aka-Ajani, 2025) ^[94]. The politicization of these issues and ineffective governance exacerbate the conflicts, as traditional leaders are often either unable or unwilling to mediate effectively (Adewambi, 2018). The South East region, which has a strong agrarian tradition, encounters distinct challenges as land disputes, climatic crises, and regional dynamics hinder socio-economic progress (Ezeamama & Okolie, 2022 ^[27]; Iheanacho *et al.*, 2024).

The ramifications of these conflicts are profound, resulting in loss of life, displacement, threats to food security, destruction of property, and socio-economic destabilization (Ezeamama & Okolie, 2022 ^[27]; Victor *et al.*, 2025) ^[95]. These repercussions jeopardize national security and obstruct Nigeria's advancement towards sustainable development objectives, particularly in eradicating poverty and achieving zero hunger. In light of this intricate scenario, analyzing the media coverage of the herders-farmers conflict through the framework of solutions journalism presents a viable strategy to encourage constructive dialogue. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) can reveal how media framing may either reinforce stereotypes such as those based on religion or ethnicity or foster narratives focused on solutions that highlight conflict resolution, dialogue, and policy interventions (Davis & Wodak, 2004). A solutions journalism approach advocates for reporting that balances the depiction of conflict with narratives of resilience, successful mediation, and policies that tackle underlying issues, thus contributing to informed public discourse and social transformation.

Dimension of Press Reportage of Herders - Farmers Conflict in Nigeria:

The realm of press coverage regarding the herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria is marked by a multifaceted interaction of informational, ideological, and normative elements that shape the public's perception and portrayal of these conflicts. The mass media's role, serving as the main channel for information dissemination, is crucial in molding public opinion and affecting security outcomes (Obiorah, 2023) ^[60]. Existing literature suggests that while the media can promote awareness, dialogue, and accountability, it also has the potential to heighten tensions through biased, sensational, or ideologically motivated

reporting. Obiorah (2023) ^[60] emphasizes that the fundamental purpose of mass media is to inform the citizenry, which is vital in situations of insecurity. Ide (2024), Ojiakor-Umenze & Emeka (2024), and Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda (2016) ^[51] concur that effective media reporting can act as a mechanism for raising awareness, scrutinizing government actions, and encouraging dialogue aimed at resolving conflicts. Owolabi, Alade & Onwuka (2023) ^[80] further stress that trustworthy and responsible reporting provides the public with the essential knowledge needed to make informed choices regarding security matters, thus aiding in the maintenance of social stability. In the context of herders-farmers conflicts, this informational function is particularly significant due to the associated violence, displacement, and socio-economic upheavals.

Nevertheless, scholars recognize the dual nature of media influence. Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda (2016) ^[51] point out that media organizations may be exploited by insurgents seeking to gain attention, thereby exacerbating insecurity. Likewise, Okpala and Chukwu (2023) ^[69] contend that the media's depiction of conflicts can either alleviate or intensify tensions, contingent upon the framing of issues. Toyese and Omolola (2024) ^[90] and Wonuola (2023) ^[97, 98] critique the propensity of Nigerian media to occasionally unwittingly escalate conflicts through sensationalism or biased reporting, which can hinder peacebuilding efforts.

A major issue in media reporting is the inclination towards ideological bias stemming from ethno-religious and political affiliations. Suleiman-Shika (2024) ^[89] argues that media coverage frequently mirrors group identities, framing conflicts in an "us versus them" perspective, which exacerbates division. This polarization can reinforce stereotypes and intensify inter-group animosities, particularly evident in Nigeria's delicate ethno-religious context. Comparable trends are noted worldwide; for example, Demarest and Langer (2021) ^[22] highlight the contrasting roles of Rwandan media in instigating genocide versus the more peace-oriented media landscape in Kenya during crises, demonstrating how media autonomy and professionalism affect conflict dynamics.

In Nigeria, Isa (2024) critiques the biased nature of the media, which is often swayed by political agendas and tribal loyalties, thus undermining neutrality and objectivity. This biased reporting can misrepresent the realities of herders-farmers conflicts, resulting in misinformation and escalation. The rise of fake news and hate speech further complicates this situation, diminishing trust and provoking violence (Dahunsi, 2016; Ghazi-Tehrani & Kearns, 2020) ^[30]. Media stereotypes such as portraying herders predominantly as Muslim and farmers as Christian can exacerbate religious and ethnic tensions, hindering conflict resolution efforts (Okpala & Chukwu, 2023 ^[69]; Suleiman-Shika, 2024) ^[89]. The employment of charged language, selective framing, and emphasis on particular groups contributes to a narrative that may depict one faction as aggressors or victims, thereby perpetuating stereotypes and biases. The dissemination of fake news, as illustrated by the Rwandan genocide, underscores the catastrophic potential of irresponsible reporting (Demarest & Langer, 2021) ^[22]. In Nigeria, similar dangers are present, particularly given the politicized and ethnocentric inclinations of certain media outlets.

Despite these obstacles, the media has the potential to act as

a significant instrument for peacebuilding when it adheres to professional standards. Dunu *et al.* (2018) ^[23] advocate for media practices that enhance intercultural understanding and peaceful coexistence by steering clear of stereotypes and encouraging civic dialogue. Responsible journalism that focuses on solutions, provides context for conflicts, and underscores resolution efforts is in line with the tenets of solutions journalism, which this study aims to investigate through critical discourse analysis. Examining press coverage of herders-farmers conflicts through the lens of solutions journalism and CDA grasping the essence of media reporting is crucial. Investigating how Nigerian media portray these conflicts, whether through stereotypical, sensational, or solution-oriented narratives, can uncover the underlying discourses that shape public perceptions and policy reactions. Such an analysis can pinpoint gaps and opportunities for the media to foster peace by transitioning from conflict-centric to solution-focused reporting, thus aiding in conflict mitigation and enhancing social cohesion.

Impact of Press Reportage of Herders - Farmers Conflict in Nigeria:

The influence of press coverage on the herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria is deeply intertwined with the development of media environments and the transformative capabilities of digital communication technologies. Historically, the media's fundamental function was to deliver accurate, balanced, and ethical information to enhance public awareness and facilitate informed decision-making (Obiorah, 2023) ^[60]. Nevertheless, with the emergence of media convergence propelled by swift technological progressions such as the Internet, smartphones, and social media the distribution and framing of information related to conflicts have experienced significant transformations (Komiti & Okhakhu, 2023 ^[38]; Singh, 2021) ^[84].

Contemporary digital media, defined by Web 2.0 and subsequent advancements, have democratized the production of information, enabling individuals and non-professional contributors to create and disseminate content concurrently with mainstream media outlets (Steesen & Westlund, 2021 ^[87]; Cervi, 2019) ^[17]. This transition has increased interactivity, participation, and immediacy, yet it also raises issues regarding accuracy, bias, and the spread of misinformation, which can exacerbate tensions or distort narratives surrounding conflicts (Daum, 2017 ^[20]; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) ^[83]. In Nigeria, the surge of social media has intensified citizen journalism, offering a platform for a variety of voices to report on herders-farmers confrontations, while simultaneously exposing society to heightened risks of misinformation and ethno-religious stereotyping (Obiorah, 2023 ^[60]; Ogbe, Jiboyewa & Ekwem, 2025) ^[62].

Scholars acknowledge that the manner in which the media covers conflicts has a profound impact on public perception and the responses of policymakers. Biased framing often stemming from ethno-religious, political, or regional affiliations can reinforce existing stereotypes and exacerbate divisions, thus complicating efforts towards peace (Okpala & Chukwu, 2023 ^[69]; Suleiman-Shika, 2024) ^[89]. In contrast, responsible and equitable reporting, particularly when it adheres to the principles of solutions journalism, can facilitate dialogue, enhance understanding, and aid in conflict resolution. The convergence of media, when utilized effectively, presents opportunities to increase media

diversity, elevate the quality of journalism, and encourage democratic engagement (Alawa, 2023^[8]; Laxmi, 2021)^[41]. This suggests that the transition from traditional to digital platforms requires a thorough analysis of media discourses. Analyzing news coverage through the lens of solutions journalism, in conjunction with critical discourse analysis, can illuminate how narratives influence societal attitudes and whether they reinforce or challenge stereotypes and polarization. As the media landscape continues to transform, grasping these dynamics is essential for fostering fair, constructive, and peace-oriented reporting of conflicts in Nigeria. This perspective highlights the necessity of scrutinizing media content not only for its factual correctness but also for its potential to facilitate societal healing and mitigate conflict.

Why Solutions Journalism (SOJO) in Press Reportage of Herders - Farmers Conflict in Nigeria

The prevalence of negative news narratives has resulted in significant audience disengagement, emotional exhaustion, and a pervasive sense of helplessness. Research suggests that the media's persistent emphasis on problems cultivates a culture of despair and apathy (Coddington & Lewis, 2025^[18]; Solutions Journalism Network, 2025). Various studies point to phenomena such as psychophysical numbing and compassion fatigue, which undermine the public's ability to empathize and engage actively, particularly when coverage consistently highlights crises like pandemics or conflicts (McIntyre & Sobel, 2025^[43]; Sacerdote *et al.*, 2020). For example, the U.S. media's portrayal of COVID-19 was predominantly negative, with 87% of reports focusing on adverse elements, leading to a skewed perception that the situation was deteriorating, despite evidence of advancements such as vaccinations and treatments (Solutions Journalism Network, 2025). This negative bias engenders feelings of despair rather than hope, thereby diminishing citizens' motivation to engage or hold authorities accountable.

In contrast, solutions journalism (SOJO), also referred to as constructive journalism, presents a promising alternative by redirecting attention from problems to solutions, highlighting not only what is amiss but also what is being done to tackle these issues (Coddington & Lewis, 2025^[18]; Social Voices, 2022). This methodology promotes civic engagement, restores trust in the media, and encourages dialogue grounded in evidence and lessons learned. Empirical studies indicate that solutions-oriented reporting can have a beneficial impact on emotions making audiences feel less anxious, more invigorated, and more connected to their communities (Solutions Journalism Network, 2025). For instance, research conducted by the Institute for Applied Positive Research (2017) reveals that such reporting boosts feelings of hope and community involvement, particularly among younger audiences, who are more inclined to seek narratives of progress rather than despair.

In Nigeria, the rise of solutions journalism is becoming increasingly prominent as media organizations and journalists acknowledge its capacity to reshape the narrative framework surrounding social challenges, such as insecurity and conflict. Efforts by Nigeria Health Watch, the Nigerian Institute of Journalism, and local radio stations like Splash FM and Lagelu FM illustrate this movement, incorporating solutions-oriented reporting into discussions of crime and societal issues to cultivate resilience, hope, and evidence-

based responses (Aloko, 2025)^[9]. This transition marks a significant shift from the typical negative headlines, with the goal of alleviating emotional exhaustion among audiences while promoting civic engagement and community empowerment. The incorporation of solutions journalism into Nigerian media coverage especially regarding contentious topics like the herders-farmers conflict can act as an essential mechanism for recontextualizing narratives, encouraging constructive dialogue, and enhancing social unity, which corresponds with the study's aim of examining press discourse through the lens of solutions journalism principles.

Challenges of Reporting Insecurity in the Era of Media Convergence in Nigeria:

The media convergence landscape in Nigeria presents considerable challenges, particularly in the reporting of sensitive topics like insecurity. These challenges encompass the spread of misinformation, difficulties in managing narratives, and biased reporting, all of which are intensified by infrastructural and technical constraints (Alawa, 2023)^[8]. A significant barrier is the insufficient training of Nigerian journalists in effectively utilizing new media technologies. Nwanne (2016)^[54] points out that numerous media professionals were educated using analogue equipment, resulting in a lack of ability to fully exploit the advantages of digital platforms. This deficiency obstructs the media's capacity to deliver timely, accurate, and thorough coverage of conflicts, including clashes between herders and farmers. Moreover, irregular power supply further complicates media operations; Nigeria's erratic electricity provision hinders the reliable use of digital media tools, which are crucial for contemporary convergence-oriented journalism (Emwinromwankhoe, 2020)^[24]. The substantial expenses related to acquiring new media technologies such as smartphones, laptops, and tablets create additional obstacles, particularly in light of Nigeria's economic difficulties and limited government support (Olise, 2012; Nwanne, 2016)^[72]. In the absence of affordable access to modern technology, numerous media outlets and professionals struggle to fully transition into the digital era, thereby restricting their ability to engage in real-time, multi-platform reporting.

The infrastructure of the Internet presents another significant challenge. Even with the implementation of 4G networks, numerous journalists and media organizations in Nigeria face difficulties due to unreliable connectivity, which hampers live and prompt reporting (Morah & Omojola, 2014^[47]; Emwinromwankhoe, 2020)^[24]. The lack of stable internet access undermines the effectiveness of convergence and restricts the timely distribution of news, which is crucial in conflict scenarios such as herders-farmers disputes. Furthermore, in the era of convergent media, verifying the authenticity of information has become increasingly challenging, as citizen journalists and a plethora of online sources inundate the information landscape. Assessing the reliability of these sources remains a continual challenge, raising alarms about misinformation and biased narratives (Emwinromwankhoe, 2020^[24]; Okorie, Loto & Omojola, 2018)^[66].

Government-operated media outlets encounter further obstacles due to antiquated broadcasting technologies and a reluctance to embrace digital transformation, despite mandates from regulatory agencies like the NBC and BON.

This technological delay hampers the ability of state media to effectively engage with new media platforms, complicating efforts to provide balanced and thorough coverage of insecurity (Emwinromwankhoe, 2020) ^[24]. Such infrastructural and operational shortcomings impede the implementation of innovative journalism strategies, including solutions journalism, which heavily depends on access to precise data, technological resources, and skilled personnel.

The application of solutions journalism to reporting on insecurity in Nigeria, especially regarding herders-farmers conflicts, encounters additional complexities. Okocha *et al.* (2025) ^[65] highlight obstacles such as insufficient training in solutions-oriented reporting, lack of funding, security threats to journalists, and biases in media ownership. These challenges are further exacerbated by infrastructural shortcomings, logistical difficulties, and cultural obstacles that limit access to rural and conflict-affected regions. Nevertheless, solutions journalism possesses considerable potential to transform narratives surrounding insecurity by emphasizing resilience and community-led initiatives (Okocha *et al.*, 2025) ^[65]. When implemented effectively, it can enhance civic engagement, accountability, and social cohesion factors that are essential for mitigating conflict. These challenges emphasize the necessity of establishing capacity-building programs and making infrastructural investments to empower the media in adopting solutions-focused methodologies. A critical discourse analysis of press reporting through the framework of solutions journalism can uncover whether media narratives prioritize constructive responses and community resilience or if they reinforce stereotypes and escalate conflict.

Empirical Studies

Empirical research suggests that the disputes between herders and farmers in Nigeria stem from a variety of complex factors, such as resource scarcity, environmental degradation, demographic pressures, land disputes, and socio-economic inequalities. These conflicts are becoming more frequent and intense, fueled by environmental changes, population growth, and ineffective governance, resulting in violence, displacement, and economic losses (Vande & Aka-Ajani, 2025 ^[94]; Gürsoy, 2019 ^[31]; Olawale *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, these conflicts are marked by intricate geographic and socio-political dimensions, with regional and ethnic rivalries intensifying tensions (Bala *et al.*, 2024; Brottem, 2019) ^[16].

The media's portrayal of herders-farmers conflicts primarily utilizes conflict-escalating frames such as ethnic blame, victimization, and sensationalism often overlooking narratives and solutions that promote peace (Gever & Essien, 2019 ^[29]; Ojo *et al.*, 2025). Media coverage tends to exhibit bias, polarized along regional lines, and at times exacerbates stereotypes and conflict escalation through ethnic prejudice and superficial reporting (Wonuola & Adisa, 2023 ^[97, 98]; Ojemola & Olawunmi, 2019) ^[64]. The convergence of media and the rise of social media platforms enhance both the spread of information and misinformation, complicating the landscape for accurate and balanced reporting (Kusugh *et al.*, 2025) ^[39, 40].

Media representations play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and actions often heightening tensions, perpetuating stereotypes, and undermining peace initiatives (Wonuola & Adisa, 2023 ^[97, 98]; David *et al.*, 2025) ^[21].

Negative framing can escalate conflicts, erode trust among stakeholders, and obstruct peace efforts. On the other hand, some media outlets have begun to embrace more neutral or peace-promoting narratives, although these instances remain scarce (Ajayi *et al.*, 2024) ^[5]. The media's influence on shaping perceptions significantly affects community attitudes and policy responses, thereby impacting social cohesion and conflict resolution processes (Obiorah, 2023) ^[60].

Nevertheless, journalists encounter a variety of obstacles when it comes to embracing solutions-oriented reporting, such as insufficient training, inadequate resources, political pressures, and infrastructural shortcomings. The capacity and awareness among media professionals to effectively integrate solutions journalism is limited, further exacerbated by misinformation, bias, and the influences of media ownership (Steinke, 2022 ^[88]; Oduh *et al.*, 2024). In spite of these difficulties, it has been demonstrated that solutions journalism can enhance perceptions, raise awareness of peace initiatives, and foster social change when executed correctly (McIntyre, 2017 ^[46]; Oluyemi *et al.*, 2025) ^[75].

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory, Framing Theory, and Social Responsibility Media Theory provide interrelated frameworks for comprehending the impact of media on public perceptions and discussions, especially regarding insecurity and conflict reporting, which is pivotal to the investigation titled "Viewing Through the Lens of Solutions Journalism: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Press Reportage of Herders-Farmers Conflict in Nigeria."

Agenda Setting Theory: Asserts that the media influences public priorities by highlighting certain issues over others (Nor, 2014). In the context of the Nigerian herders-farmers conflict, this implies that the media's selection of specific aspects to emphasize can shape societal attention, policy actions, and public concern. For instance, if the media predominantly focuses on violence and criminality, public perception may become biased towards interpreting the conflict merely as a security issue, rather than recognizing it as a multifaceted socio-economic challenge that necessitates nuanced solutions. The theory's focus on the media's role in agenda-setting is consistent with the necessity of examining whether media coverage of the conflict prioritizes problems or solutions, which is directly relevant to the study's emphasis on solutions journalism.

Framing Theory: Builds upon this concept by suggesting that the media not only determines which issues to spotlight but also influences their interpretation through specific framing techniques (Goffman, 1974; Olajuwon *et al.*, 2024) ^[71]. In the context of the Nigerian conflict, episodic frames may depict isolated incidents or acts of violence, cultivating a narrative of 'us versus them' that could reinforce stereotypes and animosity. In contrast, thematic or landscape framing could illuminate underlying causes, community responses, and possible solutions, encouraging a more collective and constructive understanding (Ajetunmobi, 2023) ^[6]. The framing perspective is vital in assessing how media reports may shape public attitudes, either perpetuating conflict or fostering peace and reconciliation—an essential component of the proposed discourse analysis.

The Social Responsibility Media Theory: posits that media organizations must strike a balance between freedom and accountability, ensuring that their content contributes positively to societal welfare and harmony (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956). This theory advocates for reporting that is truthful, precise, and equitable, taking into account the need for societal stability. In relation to the herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria, this theory highlights the media's ethical duty to refrain from sensationalism, stereotypes, and inflammatory narratives that may heighten tensions. It emphasizes the necessity of responsible journalism that encourages understanding, resilience, and discourse focused on solutions objectives that solutions journalism seeks to advance.

Theoretical Link

All the three theories collectively underscore the media's profound influence on shaping public discourse and perceptions of insecurity in Nigeria. The agenda-setting function determines what issues are prioritized, framing shapes how these issues are perceived, and the social responsibility perspective emphasizes the ethical obligation to promote societal harmony and peace. When integrated into the analysis of press reportage on herders-farmers conflicts, these theories highlight the importance of responsible, balanced, and solution-focused journalism. In particular, they support the study's aim to critically examine whether the Nigerian press employs problem-focused narratives or adopts a solutions-oriented approach that can foster social cohesion and conflict resolution. By applying these frameworks, the study can assess the extent to which media coverage influences public perceptions, reinforces stereotypes or opens pathways for collective action, and whether it adheres to a responsible media ethos that aligns with societal stability and peacebuilding.

Methodology

This research employed a library method to critically examine press coverage of the herders-farmers conflict through the framework of solutions journalism, applying critical discourse analysis to comprehend how media portrayals influence public perceptions and policy reactions. Various research databases were utilized to gather secondary data for this study, including Google Search, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Academia, among others. By employing keywords such as Solutions Journalism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Press Reportage, and Herders-Farmers Conflict, a vast array of materials was accessed. Nonetheless, only 99 sources were chosen through a purposive sampling technique due to their direct relevance to the research. The collected data were analyzed using thematic and synthesis discourse analysis.

Discussion

Drawing from the theoretical and empirical literature examined in this study, several significant findings have emerged from the analysis:

The conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria is influenced by a variety of factors, including resource scarcity, environmental degradation, demographic pressures, land disputes, and socio-economic inequalities, all of which have resulted in increased violence, displacement, and economic losses. This suggests that the intensification of these conflicts is indicative of deeper systemic issues, such

as weak governance, mismanagement of land and resources, a decline in traditional authority, and environmental stressors that foster an environment conducive to violence. The proliferation of weaponry and communication technologies further exacerbates these disputes, elevating localized disagreements to large-scale security threats. The recurring and escalating nature of these conflicts indicates a pattern of reactive measures, often military or force-based, which fail to address the root causes (Vande & Aka-Ajani, 2025^[94]; Gürsoy, 2019^[31]; Olawale *et al.*, 2020).

Another notable finding is that media coverage primarily utilizes conflict-escalating frames such as ethnic blame, victimization, and sensationalism while often overlooking narratives that promote peace, thereby exacerbating stereotypes, polarization, and superficial reporting. This indicates that the manner in which the media frames issues plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and may contribute to the escalation of conflict. Sensationalist and stereotypical reporting further entrenches divisions, undermines social cohesion, and obscures the complexities of the conflict. The prevalence of conflict-focused narratives restricts opportunities for peacebuilding discussions, perpetuating a cycle of mistrust and animosity. Additionally, the emergence of digital and social media presents challenges related to misinformation and biased narratives, complicating efforts to achieve balanced reporting (Gever & Essien, 2019^[29]; Wonuola & Adisa, 2023^[97, 98]; Ojemola & Olawunmi, 2019)^[64].

Research findings indicate that media portrayals have a profound effect on public perceptions and behaviors, frequently intensifying conflicts and undermining peace initiatives through negative framing. Conversely, the scarcity of neutral or peace-promoting narratives obstructs social unity. This suggests that the media's representation can have a dual effect: it may either escalate tensions or foster peace. The prevalent inclination towards sensationalism and stereotypes exacerbates social divisions, adversely affects public perceptions, and erodes trust among various stakeholders. The media's potential as a social educator and advocate for peace is largely untapped, yet it possesses considerable influence to shape societal attitudes through responsible and balanced reporting (Wonuola & Adisa, 2023^[97, 98]; David *et al.*, 2025^[21]; Obiorah, 2023)^[60].

Further findings indicate that journalists encounter obstacles such as insufficient training, lack of resources, political pressures, infrastructural shortcomings, and biases in media ownership, which impede the practice of solutions-oriented journalism despite its established capacity to promote social change and peace. These challenges restrict the media's ability to advocate for peace and sustainable conflict resolution. In the absence of proper training and resources, journalists often revert to conflict-focused narratives, perpetuating stereotypes and polarization. Institutional and structural limitations such as ownership influences and infrastructural inadequacies further hinder a transition towards constructive, solutions-oriented reporting. Nevertheless, the growing acknowledgment of the advantages of solutions journalism implies that strategic capacity building and policy reforms could facilitate its wider implementation (Steinke, 2022^[88]; Oduh *et al.*, 2024; McIntyre, 2017)^[44, 46]. When effectively executed, solutions journalism enhances public perceptions, increases awareness of peace initiatives, and fosters social cohesion,

although its widespread adoption is still constrained by systemic challenges (McIntyre, 2017 ^[44]; Oluyemi *et al.*, 2025) ^[75].

Conclusion

It is evident that the conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria is influenced by a variety of factors, including resource scarcity, environmental degradation, demographic pressures, land disputes, and socio-economic inequalities. These elements have resulted in increased violence, displacement, and economic losses. The media coverage primarily utilizes conflict-escalating frames such as ethnic blame, victimization, and sensationalism while often overlooking narratives that promote peace. This neglect contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes, polarization, and superficial reporting. The representations in the media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and actions, frequently intensifying tensions and undermining peace initiatives through negative framing. The scarcity of neutral or peace-oriented narratives further impedes social cohesion. Journalists, however, encounter obstacles such as inadequate training, limited resources, political pressures, infrastructural shortcomings, and biases in media ownership, which obstruct the implementation of solutions-oriented reporting, despite its established capacity to encourage social change and peace.

Ultimately, the manner in which the media frames and reports on the herders-farmers conflicts in Nigeria has a significant impact on their development. Nevertheless, the inclination towards sensationalism and ethnic stereotypes is at odds with the principles of solutions-oriented reporting, which advocate for constructive and peace-promoting narratives.

Recommendations

1. Implement regular training programmes on solutions journalism and conflict-sensitive reporting to equip journalists with the skills to produce balanced, peace-promoting narratives.
2. Formulate and enforce media guidelines that emphasize ethical, responsible, and solutions-focused coverage of herders-farmers conflicts, discouraging sensationalism and stereotypes.
3. Enhance media literacy among the public and journalists to discern misinformation and foster appreciation for constructive, peace-oriented narratives.
4. Government and media regulators should support and incentivize solutions journalism practices through funding, mentorship, and policies that prioritize peacebuilding content.
5. Create platforms for dialogue among journalists, community leaders, and conflict resolution experts to produce comprehensive and constructive reports that highlight resilience and feasible solutions.

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