

# ***Nigerian Tribune* Newspaper Reportage of Ethno-Religious Crime in Nigeria, 2015-2019**

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**Abstract:** Nigeria is now being regarded as one of the terrorist states as a result of the activities of the religious and ethnic fundamentalists. The role of newspapers in ethno-religious crime reportage cannot be over emphasised because of the patronage it has attracted over time. The reporting style of the *Nigerian Tribune* as one of the major national newspapers in the country covering ethno-religious crisis now comes into questioning, as some stake-holders in the media industry have raised doubt as to its objectivity in reportage of issues which affects the social political well-being of the country. Therefore, this study evaluated ethno-religious crime reportage of the *Nigerian Tribune* between 2015 and 2019. Development media theory served as a building block for this study. The study adopts mix-research method, using quantitative and qualitative research designs; the instruments used for data collection are Coding Sheet named “Content Analysis Checklist on Ethno-Religious Crime Reportage”. The results were analysed using descriptive and textual analysis techniques. Findings showed that *Nigerian Tribune* reported 592 (56.4%) ethno-religious crimes for the period under review; its reports of ethno-religious crimes cut across the regions; ranging from Boko Haram-478 (58.0%) in the North-East, Fulani herdsmen attacks-225 (27.3%) in the Middle Belt, South-West and South-East; Banditry-89 (10.8%) in North-West and militancy 32 (3.9%) in the South-South. Nigerian Tribune editorial comment provided forty-four solutions to ethno-religious crimes, twelve early warnings and its reportage involved at least two of police report, eye witness accounts, and relatives of victims’ views, armed forces reports and community heads’ positions. *Nigerian Tribune* is adjudged fair, balance, accurate in its publications on ethno-religious crimes in relation to its mission statement. The study recommends that as the watchdogs of the society, journalists should constantly report ethno-religious crimes, so as to educate the society on the dangers cause by the activities of ethno-religious crime.

**Keywords:** Crime Reportage, Ethno-religious Crime, Ethnical Practices, Fulani-herdsmen and Geo-Political Zone

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## **1. Introduction**

The media in Nigeria, being the fourth estate of the realm, has a long history in Nigeria dated to the establishment of the first newspaper, *Iwe Irohin* by a missionary, Rev Henry Townsend in 1859. The second Nigerian newspaper was *Anglo-African* established by Robert Campbell in 1863 and was the first paper published in Lagos. Seventeen years later, *The Lagos Times* was established by Mr. Richard Olamilege and Beale Blaize in 1880 and *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper was established in 1949 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in Ibadan Akinwande [1].

Oyejide [2] posits that ethnically diverse countries of the world tend to face significant challenges in terms of unique national identity, ethnic conflicts, inter-ethnic inequality and

poor social and economic performance. This is what Nigeria is experiencing today, especially in the security sector. However, in all its difficulties, this has not in any way diminished the growth of the media as it has shown over the years. Newspapers have received much recognition and pivotal attention in the dissemination of information, especially in crisis situations across the country Akpan, Ering & Olofu-Adeoye [3].

Newspaper is a powerful tool in reporting and communicating in peace and conflict situations. It can be used positively to promote peace and resolve conflicts at appropriate times. Conversely, it can also be used negatively to initiate, escalate and sustain conflicts covertly and overtly I. S. Ndolo [4]. The potentials of the media as a means of communication to promote peace or conflict cannot be over

emphasised. The information super-highway or internet and related technology have further enhanced the capacity of the media to either “destroy” or “build” humanity through their stock in trade Ngige, A. F. Badekale, & I. Hammanjoda [5].

Today, the country’s democracy is being challenged by different crimes and unprecedented insecurity, which have led to unrest in the geo-political zones of the country J. Obalonye [6]. A challenge facing journalism in Nigeria today is that of reporting the activities of crimes I. S. Popoola [4]. Nigeria operates a pluralistic media system in which both the public and privately owned media exist side-by-side. Newspapers are often referred to as the watchdog of the society. This implies that the newspaper exists as an organ of information (sourcing and disseminating) educational promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment and mobilization. These functions set the media as an important factor that links and promotes the relationship between the government and the governed, making them a *sine qua non* to societal growth and development A. E. Azad [7].

Often, terrorists and criminals tend to manipulate and exploit the media for their own purposes by sending messages of violence, thus gaining mass publicity B. Archibong [8]. On the other hand, countries also have to include both national and international media into their counter-terrorism and crime control strategies. The news media acts as a means through which their acts are made known to the society, thereby instilling fear into the mass audience I. O. Josephat, [9]

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The role of newspapers in ethno-religious crime reportage cannot be over emphasised in view of the global attention it has attracted over time. In recent times, Nigeria is being regarded as one of the terrorist states amongst the comity of nations as a result of the activities of the religious or ethnic fundamentalists in the nation. This calls for serious concern among political leaders since ethno-religious crimes have affected Nigeria economy, which has drifted into depression. There has been wanton loss of lives and properties, and general human degradation, hopelessness, famine, arson, food insecurities, poor qualities of live and general social economic imbalance in the nation. The effect of these crises have not only affected the image of the country, but has also encouraged ethnic agitation for secession.

This position has made Nigeria to be considered by the elite as being gradually drifting into a failed state and the press has a major role to play if the nation is to avert another civil war. The reporting style of the *Nigerian Tribune* as one of the major national newspapers in the country reporting ethno-religious crisis now comes into questioning as some stake-holders in the media industry have raised doubt as to whether its reports are objective, fair, give importance to ethno-religious crimes and are in tandem with the professional standards of media practice in Nigeria, (which emphasise fairness, conciseness and balance reportage of issues which affects the socio-political well-being of the

country.) There is a major concern among the readers of *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper, scholars and the general public as to properly understand its reportage style when it comes to ethno-religious crisis.

Hence, this study seeks to review ethno-religious crime reportage of *Nigerian Tribune* being a leading daily newspaper in the country with over 70 years of publication experience vis a vis the fulfilment of the mission statement of the media organisation.

## 3. Research Questions

The study will provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of reportage of ethno-religious crime in Nigeria by *Nigerian Tribune*?

Newspapers between June, 2015 and May, 2019?

2. What is the level of prominence given to ethno-religious crime reportage in Nigeria by *Nigerian Tribune* during the period of the study?

3. What is the level of compliance with ethical standard in ethno-religious crime reportage of *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers between June, 2015 and May, 2019?

## 4. Scope of the Study

This study is focused on evaluating *Nigerian Tribune* reportage of ethno-religious crime in Nigeria between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The study evaluated *Nigerian Tribune* publications, Mondays to Fridays between June, 2015 to May, 2019 with 1047 publications. The choice for this period is to focus on the first term of President Muhammadu Buhari, which was the beginning of a new government under a new political platform after the country return to democracy.

The justification for the choice of *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper for this study is because it is the oldest surviving privately-owned newspaper in Nigeria. It aims to bridge the huge gap existing in media reportage of sustainable development issues in Africa, including reporting about the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and African Union’s Agenda 2063. The *Nigerian Tribune* newspaper publishes *Nigerian Tribune*, *Saturday Tribune* and *Sunday Tribune*.

## 5. Conceptual Review

### 5.1. Concept of Ethno-Religious Crime in Nigeria

According to Habibu [10] Violent conflicts have their historical forebear in Nigeria. In many ways, it can be postulated that the creation of Nigeria as a country was an outcome of many conflicts and compromises. Nigeria is a pluralistic society; culturally, politically, ethnically, religiously and otherwise. Of all these pluralism, it appears that ethnicity and religion are the most dominant and problematic, thus ethnicity and religion have provided the

pattern and potential for the protracted violent ethno-religious conflicts this country has experienced in the past three decades Azeez, 2018 [11]. Scholars have attributed the causes of these conflicts to various factors like the struggle for land resources, traditional authority, competition for economic and political spaces, clash of values and way of lives, religion and ethnicity and religious manipulations Habibu, 2016 [10].

The ethno-religious and communal conflicts that has befallen Nigeria since the return to civil rule in 1999 are inbuilt in socio-economic and political management of post-colonial Nigeria. However, with the renewed attempt at entrenching democracy, struggle for political and economic spaces has intensified between and among the various ethno-religious and political groups, thus making these conflicts inevitable Habibu [10]. It was identified that poverty in the country occasioned by social and economic dislocation, ethnic and religious manipulations by the elite as the brain behind this spate of ethno-religious violent conflicts, likewise pluralism and diversity in Nigeria, abundant human and natural resources have deepened suspicion, hatred and distrust among the people.

A study examines violent conflicts in northern states using Bauchi, Plateau and Taraba States as case studies. Violent conflicts have become a recurrent and incessant features in the past three decades in Nigeria and that no part of Nigeria is left out in these violent conflicts, it further explored various theoretical perspectives to provide an insight into the ramification of violent conflicts in Nigeria especially in Bauchi, Plateau and Taraba States Azeez, 2018 [11].

The work assesses the causes, effects, dynamics and mechanisms for managing conflicts to find solutions to the problem of ethno-religious conflicts. The study asserted that religion, ethnicity and the manipulative roles of the political elite are mainly responsible for the spate of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. It also identifies ignorance, poverty, marginalization, and fear of domination as equally responsible for these conflicts.

### **5.2. Concept of Mass Media**

"Media" means a plural form of medium and medium means communication, and it means a mode of expression. Media passes certain characteristics which compromise both technical and institutional methods of production and distribution. It also involves the commodification of symbolic form as well as separate contexts the production and reception of information, whereby products on mass production are disseminated to a great number of audiences, however, different media having its particular characteristics based on accessibility, reach, and audience.

Media play important role in democracy as watchdog helping in the establishment of democracy and safeguard the existing values in the democracy and it entertain the public by way of music, drama, films, dance, etc. Ndolo [15]. Not only Media useful society but also for business marketing in which their product introduced to society through media and ultimately it results in economic growth of nation, and media

educate people.

Generally, media can be classified in three categories, first Print Media which includes Newspapers, Magazines, Booklets and Brochures, House Magazines, Periodicals or Newsletters, Direct Mailers, Handbills or Flyers, Billboards, Press Releases, Books. The second type is Broadcast Media which includes Television, Radio, and Films. Third types of media are New Age Media includes Mobile Phones, Computers, and the Internet Climate change 2014.

The phrase Media began to be used in 1920, the notion of mass media was generally restricted to print media up until the post Second World War, when radio, television and video were introduced Ngige, Badekale, & Hammanjoda [5]. Due to development in science and technology, different types of media-originated accordingly in different stages of the history of the world as; Print media including books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, etc. originated from the late 15th century. Recordings including gramophone records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, cartridges, CDs, DVDs etc. originated from the late 19th century and Cinema about 1900. Radio came into existence from about 1910 and Television find its place from about 1950, Internet from about 1990, and Mobile phones from about 2000 Media also broadly classified into two types visual and non-visual based on its nature, scope, and effectiveness on the society Josephat [9].

### **5.3. Media and Ethno-Religious Crime in Nigeria**

Mass media most times thrive on conflicts because conflict attracts readers, viewers and listeners to the media. "The greater the conflict the greater the audience, which are imperatives to the financial success of media outlets" Sunny & Okechukwu [12]. Bearing this in mind, therefore, the prime news value of the media in conflict, disorder or negative events. Good news stories receive less media attention than bad news. A familiar adage in journalism is "bad news is good news and usually, good news is no news" unless it happens to the most powerful. The media coverage is also event-driven. In other words, the outbreak of ethno-religious conflicts receives more immediate coverage than on-going reconciliation efforts or the building of the economy which may take many years to achieve. A study argues that in a pluralistic society like Nigeria, there are different forms of diversity and that due to the nature of religion, operating the media in a multi-religious situation tends to be more challenging and problematic, it further stressed that the interactions between the media and religion are more delicate than those between the media and other forms of plurality Eze [13]. This is because "by the nature of religion, it has to do with matters of life and death" Ahokegh [14].

In another article on the roles and responsibilities of the mass media in conflict management, the article stresses the vital role of the mass media in conflict management. The media have the power, control and influence on their consuming public. Though media objectivity is desired, it is difficult to attain because "media practitioners are human beings who have their convictions, principles and minds of

their own", so media objectivity is usually affected by ownership, economic interests, religious affiliation and cultural factors. This, the article attests further, can only be overcome through reorientation of practitioners, training on conflict management and provisions of adequate funding for media houses.

In another contribution to this issue, the study dwells specifically on the role of the media in the "Mob Cartoon" riots of 2007 Nkechi [16]. Like other scholars, the study avers that ethno-religious conflicts are more frequent and devastating than other conflicts and that "to say that the media reports of religious crises cause religious tensions around the world is an understatement". As a solution to this, it advocates for the government among other things to "check the publication of private media, the proliferation of quack media houses," and that government should also give free hand to its media houses while ensuring that they adhere to their professional ethics.

A similar article on media and conflict management in Nigeria covers between 1999 and 2009. The work highlights the negative effects and the role of the mass media in conflict management. Because of the very nature of conflicts which encompass both manifest and hidden causes, it does not lend itself to easy solutions, as a result of this; the study argues that there is an urgent need for informed and responsible management of conflict International Crisis Group [19]. The mass media, the study maintains, are, therefore, an important factor in conflict management in any given society.

In terms of media role in the escalation or de-escalation of conflicts, the study further considers whether the factors of ownership, location, ethnic, religious or regional affiliation affect the way the mass media cover conflicts E. Sunny & C. Okechukwu [12]. It concludes by asserting that "the media cannot be divorced from the realities of their environment when considered against the social, economic and political structure since the media do not operate in a vacuum, they cannot be free from the many forces in the society Sunny & Okechukwu [12].

## 6. Development Media Theory

To ascertain the role of the media in curbing terrorism, it becomes imperative therefore, to acknowledge that the role of the media is critical in promoting good governance and controlling terrorism. It does not only raise public awareness about terrorism, it reveals its causes, consequences and possible remedies. It also investigates and reports incidences of terrorism. The effectiveness of the media, in turn, depends on access to information and freedom of expression, as well as a professional and ethical cadre of investigative journalists (World Bank Group, 2017.) If democracy is to survive and be a fruitful concept, the role of the media in sustaining it through anti-terrorism crusade could not be overemphasised.

Primary of these is the proper understanding of the concept and nature of the media practice that can nurture democracy and create a favourable environment for it to thrive. The fight

against terrorism in Nigeria one must acknowledge is one of the most daunting and challenging tasks to embark on, but with political will and commitment by her leaders through the aid of the media's influence in creating the right attitude by all Nigerians there is no doubt that someday, terrorism rate will be at minimal level in the country Bashir [17]. Specifically, while the role that a free press can play in investigating, reporting and thereby helping combat terrorism is now well recognised, assessments and descriptions of the precise means by which news media can perform this function appear to be scarce, despite the fact that there is a strong correlation between the incidence of terrorism and the extent to which the media is free.

The mass media play important roles in the society, which include informative, educative and entertaining roles. Through these roles, they may aim at creating awareness, achieving behavioural change, easing societal tension and so on Bello [18]. Taking a clue from the Development Media Theory, the emphasis is laid on the application of media techniques to lessen political tension, increase the level of political education, and create a sound, stable and secure atmosphere for public enlightenment; all to carry the masses along towards national development.

The theory sees the press as a very important entity in the society. It is seen as the voice of the people. The "voice role" of the press is a sacred one, which demands that it should be carried out fairly, honestly, courageously and constructively. The press occupies a very critical position in the socio-political development of any country. Besides the general roles of information, education and entertainment, the press is capable of mobilising public opinion on topical issues, influencing government's policy and enhancing social interaction and integration among various components of the society.

In a situation of insurgency, the media must assume its social responsibility roles and follow governmental policies as regards dissemination of security details. The Development Media Theory for this study, emphasises national security as a part of national development as the central aim of the activities of the press. Hence, the struggle for an end to insurgency does not lie solely with the government or the security outfit of a country, the media also have roles to play Habibu [10].

## 7. Methodology

The study adopted qualitative research method, using quantitative content analysis; the study used publications of *Nigerian Tribune* between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The total numbers of publication in the study period are 1447 publications.

The study adopted the census technique. The rationale for the choice of method is because it provides a true measurement of the population (no sampling error) from which a benchmark data may be obtained for future studies. Detailed information about small sub-group within this period (June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to May, 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019) was purposely acquired.

**7.1. Content Categories**

- A) They are coded as follows;
  - a) Ethno-Religious Crime Report: It was coded as
    - i. Yes
    - ii. No
  - b) Frequency of crime based report: coded as  
Number of newspaper editions with crime-based report
- B) Location of crime-based report in *Nigerian Tribune*: coded as
  - i. Front
  - ii. Inside
  - iii. Back
- C) Type of Publication: coded as
  - i. Editorial
  - ii. Hard news
  - iii. Features
- D) Ethical Standards: It rated
  - i. Editorial Independency

- ii. Accuracy and fairness
- iii. Privilege/Non-disclosure of source
- iv. Abuse of children’s rights
- v. Decency
- vi. Violence

**7.2. Research Instrument**

The instruments that were used for this study are the Coding Sheet named as Content analysis checklist on Ethno-Religious crime reportage (CACERCR) adopted from (Amedu A. A, 2020), the coding sheet was adopted to bring the real manifestation contents of the *Nigerian Tribune* on ethno-religious crime. The code was constructed based on the unit of analysis and content categories. In addition, the code sheet was filled based on the coding instruction. The coding instructions were properly articulated in the content code sheet below to guide the coder in the coding of the contents of communication. The method of data presentation and analysis were descriptive and textual analysis in essay form.

**8. Results and Discussion of Findings**

*Table 1. Total Number of Publications.*

Years	Total Number of Publication	Total Number of Publication used	Total Number of Publication Unused
1 <sup>st</sup> June, 2015 to 31 <sup>st</sup> May, 2016	366	263	103
1 <sup>st</sup> June, 2016 to 31 <sup>st</sup> May, 2017	365	262	103
1 <sup>st</sup> June, 2017 to 31 <sup>st</sup> May, 2018	365	262	103
1 <sup>st</sup> June, 2018 to 28 <sup>th</sup> May, 2019	362	260	103
Total	1461	1047	412

Table 1 shows that between 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2016, *Nigerian Tribune* had 366 publications, between 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2016 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2017. The newspaper had 365 publications, between 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2017 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2018. It had 365 publications, while between 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2018 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, it had 362 publications.

Between 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2016, the researcher examined 263 publications, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2016 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, 262 publications, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2018, 262 publications, while 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2018 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, the

researcher examined 259 publications.

In the table above, it is showed that between 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2015 to 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2016 there were 103 weekends and unused publications by the researcher, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2017 there were 103 weekends and unused publications by the researcher, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2018 there were 103 weekends and unused publications by the researcher, while 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2019 there were 103 weekends and unused publications by the researcher.

*Table 2. Total number of Newspapers Examined during the Period under Review.*

Years	Publications with Ethno-Religious Crimes	Publications without Ethno-Religious Crimes
June 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2015 to May 31 <sup>th</sup> , 2016	175	88
June 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2016 to May 31 <sup>th</sup> , 2017	150	112
June 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2017 to May 31 <sup>th</sup> , 2018	154	108
June 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2018 to May 28 <sup>th</sup> 2019	113	145
Total	592	455

Table 2 shows that between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 to May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016 *Nigerian Tribune* 175 (66.5%) publications carried ethno-religious crime stories, while 88 (33.5%) publications were without ethno-religious crime stories. Between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 150 (57.3%) publications carried ethno-religious crime stories, while 112 (42.7%) of publications were without ethno-religious crime stories. Between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 to May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018, 154 (58.8%) publications carried ethno-religious crime stories, while 108 (41.2%) publications where without ethno-religious crime

stories. Between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 to May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 *Nigerian Tribune* 113 (43.1%) publications carried ethno-religious crime stories, while 147 (56.9%) publications were without ethno-religious crime stories.

**8.1. Re-statement of Research Questions**

Research Question One: What is the frequency of reportage of ethno-religious crime in Nigeria by *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019?

**Table 3.** Frequency of Publications (June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015– May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019).

Frequency of Publications	No of Publications	Percentage%
Week days publications	1047	71.8%
Weekends publications	412	28.2%
Total	1459	100

Table 3 shows that 1047 (71.8%) of the publications were examined by the researchers as weekdays’ publications, while 412 (28.2%) of the publications were not examined by the researchers as Saturday and Sunday publications of *Nigerian Tribune*.

**Table 4.** Number of Editions with and without ethno-religious crime reportage in *Nigeria Tribune*.

Number of editions	No of Publications	Percentage%
Number of editions with ethno-religious crime stories	592	56.4%
Number of editions without ethno-religious crime stories	457	43.6%
Total	1049	100

Table 4 shows that 592 (56.4%) of the publications carried ethno-religious crime stories, while 457 (43.6%) of the publications were without ethno-religious crime stories.

**Table 5.** Themes of *Nigerian Tribune* Publications with ethno-religious crime reportage.

Themes of <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> Publications	No of Publications	Percentage%
Boko Haram	478	58.0%
Banditry	89	10.8%
Fulani Herdsmen	225	27.3%
Niger Delta Militancy	32	3.9%
Total	824	100

Table 5 shows that *Nigerian Tribune* had 478 (58.0%) Boko Haram-related stories between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015- May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, the paper had 89 (10.8%) banditry-related stories between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015-May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, and 225 (27.3%) Fulani herdsmen-related stories between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015- May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, while 32 (3.9%) Niger Delta militancy-related stores between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015- May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 respectively.

Research Question Two: What is the level of prominence given to ethno-religious crime reportage in Nigeria by *Nigerian Tribune* between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019?

**Table 6.** Types of *Nigerian Tribune* ethno-religious crime reportage.

Type of Reportage	Frequency	Percentage
Hard news on ethno-religious crimes	717	87.0%
Features on ethno-religious crimes	11	1.3%
Editorials on ethno-religious crimes	56	6.0%
Letters to the editor on ethno-religious crimes	40	4.9%
Total	824	100

Table 6 indicates that *Nigerian Tribune* published 717 (87.0%) hard news on ethno-religious crimes within the period under review, 11 (1.3%) features on ethno-religious crimes within the period under review, 56 (6.0%) editorial on ethno-religious crimes between June 1<sup>st</sup> and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and 40 (4.9%) of letters to the editor on ethno-religious

crimes. From the above it shows that *Nigerian Tribune* published high hard news on ethno-religious crime low in features publication in their daily publication on ethno-religious crime.

**Table 7.** Placement of Ethno-Religious Crime Reportage in *Nigerian Tribune*.

Placement of Ethno-Religious Crime Reportage	No of Publications	Percentage%
Front Page	439	53.3%
Inside Page	307	37.3%
Central spread	67	8.1%
Back Page	11	1.3%
Total	824	100

The table shows that 439 (53.3%) ethno-religious crimes-related items were reported on the front pages of the *Nigerian Tribune*, 307 (37.3%) ethno-religious crime-related items were reported in the inside pages, 67 (8.1%) ethno-religious crimes-related items were reported on the central spread, while 11 (1.3%) ethno-religious crimes related were reported on the back pages of the newspaper.

Research Question three: What is the level of compliance with ethical standard in ethno-religious crime reportage of *Nigerian Tribune* newspapers between June, 2015 and May, 2019?

**Table 8.** Accuracy/Fairness of *Nigerian Tribune* Publications on Ethno-religious Crimes-related Items.

Accuracy/Fairness of <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> publications	No of Publications	Percentage%
Police Report	362	21.2%
Eye Witness	529	30.9%
Relatives of victims	7	0.4%
Community head	97	5.7%
Armed forces	285	16.7%
Sources	431	25.2%
Total	1711	100

In achieving fairness and accuracy as stated by the code of ethical standard of media practice in Nigeria, 395 publications of *Nigerian Tribune* on ethno-religious crimes reportage involved the police reports, eye witness accounts and community heads’ positions on the incidents, 265 publications included armed forces reports, eye witness accounts and community head’s positions on the incidents, 354 publications comprised Police reports and eye witness accounts on the incidents, 401 publications comprised Police reports and relatives of victims’ accounts on the incidents, 431 of the publications had sources for their reports. There were however, no report without any of the above parameters.

**Table 9.** Editorial Independency of *Nigerian Tribune*.

Editorial Independency of <i>Nigerian Tribune</i>
728 hard news and feature news on ethno-religious crimes reported by <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> were written by professional journalists as they all carried by-lines at the top of each of the reports, 56 of the editorials on ethno-religious crimes published by <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> were presented as the viewpoint of the newspaper and 40 letters to the editor on ethno-religious crime had names of the writers.

**Table 10. Privilege / Non-Disclosure of Sources by Nigerian Tribune.**

<b>Privilege / Non-Disclosure of Sources by Nigerian Tribune</b>
In the 728 hard news and features on ethno-religious crimes reported by <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> , maintain high level of confidentiality of their sources were used as names of sources where not mentioned in the publications, the writers used terms like "according to a source", "a unanimous source" to protect their sources of information.

**Table 11. Decency of Publications by Nigerian Tribune.**

<b>Decency of Publications by Nigerian Tribune</b>
The 824 publications of <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> on ethno-religious crimes reviewed were not in any way offensive, abusive, or used vulgar languages.

**Table 12. Abuse of Children Rights by Nigerian Tribune.**

<b>Abuse of Children Rights by Nigerian Tribune</b>
Reading through the publications as published by <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> on ethno-religious crimes, in the publications under review, the newspaper did not in any way violate children rights as faces of children involved were not show on the pages of the newspaper, the images of faces of children were showed only during their 'release ceremony' with the president and when they reunite with their parents.

**Table 13. Violence Publications by Nigerian Tribune.**

<b>Violence Publications by Nigerian Tribune</b>
The reports of <i>Nigerian Tribune</i> though captured terrorists' activities but they did not in any way instigate violence among religious groups or ethnic groups. They also present their reports in a balance manner by making enquiries from every party involved in the incidents.

## 8.2. Discussion of Findings

This research was guided by six objectives from which six research questions were formulated

*Research Question One: What is the frequency of reportage of ethno-religious crime in Nigeria by Nigerian Tribune newspapers between June, 2015 and May, 2019?*

From the data gotten from the coding, 592 (56.4%) of the 1047 publications reported ethno-religious crimes, while 457 (43.6%) of the 1047 of the publications did not report ethno-religious crimes. It was further gathered that *Nigerian Tribune* reported 478 (58.0%) Boko Haram-related activities boarding from attacks, editorials, government reactions and following up issues. The newspaper reported 89 (10.8%) banditry-related publications under the period reviewed. It was also gathered that 225 (27.3%) Fulani herdsmen-related publications were reported between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, while it was observed that 32 (3.9%) Niger Delta militancy incidents were reported by the newspaper.

Thus, it can be said that *Nigerian Tribune* reported ethno-religious crimes under the period reviewed. It reported all forms of ethno-religious crimes across the nation, ranging from Boko Haram in the north-eastern part of the country, Fulani herdsmen attacks in the Middle Bet, South-west and South-east, banditry in North-west and the Niger Delta militancy in the South-south. The above findings are in line with literatures reviewed by Ubelejit, 2017 as it was stated that most times mass media thrive on conflicts/crisis. This is because they attract readers, viewers and listeners to the media. The greater the crisis reports the greater the audience,

which is imperatives to the financial success of media outlets (N. T. Ubelejit 2017). Therefore, the prime news value of the media is conflict, disorder or negative events and good news stories receive less media attention than bad news (This Day Editorial, 2015.) Also, a familiar adage in journalism is "bad news is good news and usually, good news is no news (N. T. Ubelejit 2017)." unless it happens to the most powerful (O. S. Eze, 2014.)

Media coverage is also event-driven. In other words, the outbreak of ethno-religious conflicts receives more immediate coverage than on-going reconciliation efforts or the building of the economy which may take many years to achieve. As it was argued in the literature reviewed, that in a pluralistic society like Nigeria, there are different forms of diversity and that due to the nature of religion, operating the media in a multi-religious situation tends to be more challenging and problematic. It further stressed that the interactions between the media and religion are more delicate than those between the media and other forms of plurality. Likewise, the mass media play important roles in the society which includes informative, educative and entertaining roles, through these roles, they may aim at creating awareness, achieving behavioural change, easing societal tension and so on (A. Bello. 2013.)

*Research Question Two: What is the level of prominence given to ethno-religious crime reportage in Nigeria by Nigerian Tribune between June, 2015 and May, 2019?*

Data generated from the coding *Nigerian Tribune* reported 717 (87.0%) hard news on ethno-religious crimes within the period under review, 11 (1.3%) features on ethno-religious crimes between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019, 56 (6.0%) editorial on ethno-religious crimes, and 40 (4.9%) of letters to the editor on ethno-religious crimes. It was further revealed that the newspaper reported 439 (53.3%) ethno-religious crimes on the front pages, 307 (37.3%) ethno-religious crimes were reported in the Centre spread 67 (8.1%) ethno-religious crimes were reported on the centre spread, while 11 (1.3%) ethno-religious crimes related were reported on the back pages of the *Nigerian Tribune*.

Hence, in answering the level of prominence given to ethno-religious crimes by *Nigerian Tribune* under the period reviewed, it can be said that the newspaper reported more of hard news followed by editorials and less of features stories on ethno-religious crimes between June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Also it can be stated that high number of reports on ethno-religious crime were reported on the front pages of the newspaper, while 67 reports were reported in the Centre spread of the publications. In line with the above findings, the Agenda Setting Theory (Agenda Building) shows that the media can give prominence to news stories through layout (front, inside, centre spread and back pages) in the newspapers as it is stated that media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. In the same vein, the Social Responsibility Theory imposes on them an obligation to be socially responsible in discharging their duties, which were fulfilled by showcasing the incidents and happenings

around the nation in the paper's publications.

Therefore, if placement of stories at strategic areas on the newspapers can make them famous than another, it might be right to posit that "The media lack powers to suppress concern. But they can do more than stimulate interest. By directing attention to these concerns they provide, a context that influences how people will talk about these matters... the media more than direct attention to a problem; they influence how people will think about it".

*Research Question Three: What is the level of compliance with ethical standard in ethno-religious crime reportage of Nigerian Tribune newspapers between June, 2015 and May, 2019?*

From the coding, 395 publications of *Nigerian Tribune* on ethno-religious crimes included the police reports, eye witness accounts and community heads' positions on the incidents, 265 publications of *Nigerian Tribune* on ethno-religious crimes included armed forces reports, eye witness accounts and community head position on the incidents, 354 publications of *Nigerian Tribune* on ethno-religious crimes included police reports and eye witness accounts on the incidents, 401 publications of *Nigerian Tribune* on ethno-religious crimes included police reports and report from relatives of victims on the incidents, 431 of the publications had sources for their reports, while there was no report without either of the above parameters.

It was also gathered that 728 hard news and feature news on ethno-religious crimes reported by *Nigerian Tribune* were written by professional journalists as they all carried by-lines at the top of the publications, 728 hard news and features on ethno-religious crimes disseminated by *Nigerian Tribune* maintain high level of confidentiality of their sources (as names of sources were not mentioned in the publication as they used terms like "according to a source", a unanimous source to protect their sources of information.) The study further gathered that 824 publications of *Nigerian Tribune* on ethno-religious crime were not in any way offensive, abusive and did not use vulgar languages. It was also gathered that the newspaper did not in any way violate children rights, as faces of children involved were not shown on the pages of the papers; the images of faces of children were show only during their release ceremony with the President and when they reunited with their parents. The study viewed that the reports of *Nigerian Tribune* did not in any way instigate violence among religious groups or ethnic groups, as they present their reports in balance manners by making enquiries from every party involved in the incidents.

Hence, it can be said that *Nigerian Tribune* is fair, balance, accurate in its publication on ethno-religious crimes under the period reviewed. It can be further said that *Nigerian Tribune* publications observed the ethical standard by the Nigerian Press Council by not showing faces of children involve in crimes. Also, *Nigerian Tribune* observed independent as all the publications were written by media professionals, the newspaper protects the confidentiality of their sources. *Nigerian Tribune* publications on ethno-religious crime were not in any way offensive, abusive and

not use vulgar languages. The findings are in line with code of ethics for Nigerian journalists by Nigerian Press Council, which "stated that Journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and every news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards." Also in a study reviewed in the literatures, it is a journalist's top priority to report and write the truth. This is the reason why truthfulness and accuracy make up one of the most important standards in the code of ethics.

## 9. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that *Nigerian Tribune* reported ethno-religious crimes under the period reviewed and its reports of ethno-religious crimes cut across the nation ranging from Boko Haram in the north-eastern part of the country, Fulani herdsmen attacks in the Middle Bet, South-West and South-East, banditry in North-western part and the Niger Delta militancy in the south-south.

*Nigerian Tribune* reported more of hard news followed by editorials and less of features stories on ethno-religious crimes; high numbers of reports on ethno-religious crime were reported on the front page of the newspaper.

*Nigerian Tribune* is fair, balance, accurate in its publications on ethno-religious crimes under the period reviewed. Its publications observed the Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists by Nigerian Press Council by being fair and accurate through including police reports, eye witness accounts, not showing faces of children involved in crimes, protecting the confidentiality of their sources, none usage of offensive, abusive, or use of vulgar languages.

## 10. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. As the watchdogs of the society, journalists should have in mind the role of media in nation building as they constantly cover and report ethno-religious crimes so as to inform and educate the society on the dangers caused by the activities of ethno-religious crime.
2. Journalists as a matter of agenda-setting, should always give importance to ethno-religious crimes as the media filter and shape reality and make public to perceive issues as more important than other issues based on media concentration.
3. Journalists should constantly bear in mind their professional ethics under the umbrella of Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists by Nigerian Press Council such as equity objectivity, fairness and justice, in covering and reporting ethno-religious crimes as this would help accurate and fairness in ethno-religious crime.
4. Journalists should ensure reports must be factual and not constitute any threat to the unity of the country.
5. Journalists should avoid sensational reports which may affect Socio-economic development of the country,

through fake news, hate speech and news commercialisation. All these can scare away potential foreign investors into the country.

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