

Frames in the Nigerian Newspapers' Coverage of Wike and Yerima Confrontation Over Land in Abuja-Nigeria

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Abstract

This study analysed the frames in seven major Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the face-off between Wike and Yerima. The objectives of the study included to ascertain the coverage rate of the Nigerian newspapers' framing of the Wike and Yerima face-off over land and determine the frames used in the coverage of the confrontation between Wike and Yerima over land by selected Nigerian newspapers. The newspapers—*Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, *ThisDay*, *The Nation*, *Punch*, *DailyTrust* and *BusinessDay*—were examined through a narrative analysis. The study's sample size was eleven (11) articles: straight news and editorial. Available sampling technique guided the selection of newspapers contents. The framing theory provided the framework for the study. Findings discovered that *Punch* devoted more space to the coverage of the clash between Wike and the naval officer. The study revealed that *DailyTrust*, *ThisDay*, *Vanguard* and *The Nation* stood out in framing legal issues in their reportage. The study also revealed that *Guardian* and *BusinessDay* devoted their spaces to land grabbing frame. While *Punch* dedicated more spaces to framing the issue of land scam. The study underscored the nuanced framing strategies of Nigerian newspapers in Wike vs Yerima face-off coverage was influenced by audience perception in government policies and information dissemination. Hence, the study recommended that selected Nigerian newspapers should be objective in framing controversial issues that involve public officials.

Key words: Coverage, Frames, Face-off, Land, Nigeria, Newspaper

Introduction

The relationship between civilian authorities and the military institution in any democratic society is delicate and must be governed by mutual respect, discipline, and adherence to the rule of law. In recent times, reports of a serving Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria engaging in a verbal confrontation with a military officer who was under lawful orders to protect and defend a property have generated national concern. The Minister's action in allegedly calling the officer a "fool" and attempting to force entry into the restricted premises

raises fundamental questions about constitutional order, respect for state institutions, and the integrity of Nigeria's civil-military relations (Agi, n.d).

This incident, beyond its immediate drama, has profound implications for the military hierarchy, the credibility of the government, and the authority of the Commander-in-Chief. It also challenges the very fabric of Nigeria's constitutional democracy, which is anchored on separation of powers, accountability, and respect for due process.

According to Arinze (2025), the confrontation that ensued was captured on video and rapidly circulated across social media platforms, generating what can only be described as a national spectacle. Nigerians, it seemed, had found their hero not in the minister attempting to investigate alleged land fraud, but in the military officer who stood in his way. The hoopla was immediate and deafening. On Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, Nigerians celebrated Yerima's defiance with memes, adulatory posts, and commentary that framed the incident as a David-versus-Goliath narrative, with the naval officer cast as the righteous underdog standing up to a bullying minister.

The media's involvement in disseminating political related information, particularly during controversy that involves public figure like a minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is crucial for both informing the public and easing the anxieties that typically accompany the face-off. It is evident that Nigerian newspapers, encompassing both online and print formats, played a prominent role as major news sources during political developments like the confrontation between the Minister Wike and Yerima relative to some media types (TV & Radio). This prominence is attributed to the critical role of newspapers in disseminating comprehensive and in-depth information, fostering public awareness, and providing a reliable source for updates and analyses during times of crisis and significant developments. The enduring nature of newspapers as a traditional and trusted medium contributed to their

widespread utilisation for the dissemination of vital information throughout the period the controversy lasted. Therefore, using a narrative analysis approach, the study seeks to unravel the nuances and patterns in how these frames are portrayed, providing a varied understanding of the media narrative surrounding the Wike vs Yerima face-off across the following Nigerian newspapers-*Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, *Punch*, *DailyTrust*, *The Nation*, *ThisDay*, and *BusinessDay*.

Objective of the study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Ascertain the coverage rate of the Nigerian newspapers of the Wike and Yerima face-off over land in Abuja.
2. Determine the frames used in the coverage of the confrontation between Wike and Yerima over land in Abuja by selected Nigerian newspapers.

Review of Related Literature

Comparative Civil-Military Boundaries

According to Alabi (2025), In the United States and United Kingdom, the use of active-duty personnel for private or political purposes is categorically prohibited. The U.S. Posse Comitatus Act (1878) and the British Armed Forces Act regulate all deployments of military assets. Retired officers cannot lawfully direct serving personnel; any attempt to do so constitutes misconduct and can trigger court-martial proceedings against the active-duty soldiers who obey.

In Nigeria, however, the absence of clear legislation governing retired officers' privileges has created ambiguity. While the constitution affirms civilian supremacy, the legacy of military rule has left a residue of informal hierarchies. It is within this gray zone that abuses

thrive, where loyalty to retired superiors occasionally supersedes loyalty to lawful civilian authority (Alabi,2025).

Newspapers' framing of face-off: Wike vs Yerima

On the 14th November, the editorial of *Punch* titled “*Wike saga: Throwback to military impunity*” was framed along the legal angle which the newspaper posited that the face-off was a clear misuse of power long after the end of military rule as it signaled a gross misallocation of critical national resources. This is seen in the submission by the editorial thus: “for democracy to deepen in Nigeria, military authority must be subordinate to civilian rule, but exercised transparently and lawfully” (*Punch*,2025).

For land scam frame, the Senior Special Assistant on Publicity and Communications to the FCT minister, Lere Olayinka, defended Wike's actions, describing the incident as the outcome of a land scam that misled a former naval chief. According to him “That is why I want to say that the Chief of Naval Staff was scammed. He has realised that he was scammed. Instead of coming out to seek help, he resorted to using military might. (Odeniyi, Oyelakin& Musa 2025, para.28),

On land grabbing frame, Onje (2025) reported that the heated exchange with a military officer over an alleged case of land grabbing, at the Gaduwa District of Abuja showed where the Minister Wike alleged that “man took land because he was the Chief of Naval Staff” (para.4).

These reactions that trailed the coverage of Wike vs Yerima face-off by some Nigerian newspapers' clearly showed the interest this altercation generated both within and outside the country. This interest necessitated the urgent need to examine the different frames the newspapers employed in the coverage of the controversy.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted Framing theory. Erving Goffman and Robert Entman established framing theory, which offers a lens through which to view how the media shapes public perception by highlighting some parts of a problem while downplaying others (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Sociologist Goffman proposed the idea of framing as a symbolic method of information organisation, arguing that people's perceptions of events are influenced by the way they are reported in the media (Goffman, 1974). By highlighting the critical role that the media plays in influencing public opinion through specific framings of topics, Entman expanded on this notion (Entman, 1993).

The foundation of the framing theory is the idea that media frames influence how viewers understand and interpret information by serving as interpretative prisms (Entman, 1993). Frames help people make sense of complex situations by emphasising some aspects while reducing or ignoring others (Goffman, 1974). Understanding how legality, apology, land grabbing and ego or arrogance topics are presented and highlighted within the framework of the current study on the analysis of frames in the Nigerian newspapers coverage of Wike vs Yerima confrontation over land in Abuja is made easier with the help of the framing theory.

This study's focus on examining how media coverage shapes the narrative around the face-off between Minister Wike and Lt. Yerima is in line with Goffman's framing notion. The framing theory is a key theoretical lens in the current study that examines the framing analysis of legality, land grabbing and scam themes in Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the Wike vs Yerima face-off. This approach makes it easier to comprehend how the media affects public opinion and conversation around the controversial issue. The study intends to expose the selective focus on or concealment of legal, land grabbing and scam issues in media narratives by analysing how newspapers presented these reports. By applying the theory, the study aims

to uncover the fundamental frameworks that Nigerian media deploy, providing insight into their impact on public perceptions, actions, and policy reactions. A fuller understanding of the wider influence of media framing on public discourse and decision-making in Nigeria is made possible by this theoretical approach, which permits a detailed investigation of the socio-cultural dynamics incorporated in media depictions of the face-off between Wike and Yerima over land in Abuja.

Hence, framing theory works best for newspaper issues because it indicates how the press shapes stories by highlighting the certain aspects of Wike and Yerima clash and downplaying other issue like the minister's rights as enshrined in The Land Use Act,1978. This influences how the public consume and interpret news. Generally, newspapers use frames to set context, tone, and focus, which affects public perception about the controversial clash.

Methodology

The study of this nature requires an appropriate design. It is on this basis that the study relied on the work of Ntinda (2020) in which the author confirms that "narrative research or inquiry is one of the more recent qualitative methodologies that focuses on life stories as the essence of people-oriented sciences". As a research inquiry, narrative approaches endeavour to attend to the ways in which a story is constructed, for whom and why, as well as the cultural discourses that it draws upon (Bochner 2007; Trahar 2009 as cited in Ntinda,2020). From the author's analysis narrative research is based on the premise that people understand and give meaning to their lives through the stories they tell. Hence, Ntinda (2020) shows that people utilise narratives to compose and order their life experiences. So Bleakley (2000) in Ntinda (2020) indicates that through the use of story forms, people account for and give meaning or significance to their lives.

According to Ntinda (2020) among the early proponents of narrative research include Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who proposed to put the person back to the center of research inquiry ensuring that:

people's voices are not lost in translation. The two main elements comprising this approach are participants' account of a particular experience and the exploration of meaning embedded in the participants' stories. The focus on particular experiences is from the presumption that lives are bounded by events which vary in significance to the people involved. Exploration of personal meaning refers to the fact that meanings are evolving and persons may recognise some meanings and not others. (p.1)

It is on this basis that the study employed the narrative research design. This is because narrative research helps us make sense of our experiences through the exploration of stories told. Chase (2005) as cited in Agberu and Odebiyi (2021), explains the uniqueness of this design thus:

Unlike a chronology, which also reports events over time. A narrative communicates the narrator's point of view, including why the narrative's worth telling in the first place. In addition to describing what happened, narratives pay attention to emotions, thoughts and interpretations. (p.65)

To ascertain the newspapers to be selected, the available sampling technique was used. Hence, the online editions of the selected newspapers (*Vanguard, The Guardian, Punch, DailyTrust, The Nation, ThisDay, and BusinessDay*) were examined based on their availability and access. A total population of fourteen (14) stories were harvested from the selected newspapers for analysis, but a sample of eleven (11) stories were used for presentation and analysis. The stories were downloaded from the websites of the selected newspapers and were carefully perused and the stories were selected because they helped to achieve the objectives of the study. The unit of narrative analysis were manifest contents of the online newspapers which are straight news and editorial. The period of coverage was November, 2025, the period

the face-off between Wike and Yerima occurred in Abuja. The content category includes: legal, land grabbing, and scam frames.

Data presentation and analysis

Objective one: Ascertain the coverage rate of the Nigerian newspapers' framing of the Wike and Yerima face-off over land in Abuja.

Table 1: Coverage rate per newspapers

Newspaper	Sample size	Percentage
Vanguard	2	18
The Guardian	1	9
The Nation	1	9
Punch	3	27
DailyTrust	2	18
BusinessDay	1	9
ThisDay	1	9
Total	11	100

The data in table 1 pronounce that *Punch* had the highest coverage with (27%), while *Vanguard* and *DailyTrust* had (18%) each and other newspapers recorded (9%) each of coverage rate on the face-off between Wike and the naval officer. This coverage rate aligns with the media landscape and audience reach of each newspaper, allowing for a nuanced analysis of Wike vs Yerima face-off coverage.

Objective two: To determine the frames used in the coverage of the confrontation between Wike and Yerima over land in Abuja by selected Nigerian newspapers.

Table 2: Legal framing forms across newspapers

Newspaper	Report	Percentage
Punch	2	25
DailyTrust	2	25
ThisDay	1	12.5
Vanguard	2	25
The Nation	1	12.5
Total	8	100

The data in table 2 provide a nuanced insight into how five prominent newspapers frame their coverage of Wike vs Yerima clash over land issue in Abuja, pointing torch to their distinct editorial stances and priorities. The *Punch*, *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* for instance, stand out with high emphasis on legal angle to the clash with (25%) each of their coverage devoted to the legal frame. This suggests a concerted effort by The *Punch* *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* to highlight issues of legality which both Wike and the naval officer should have explored. *ThisDay* and *The Nation* followed closely to the *Punch* with (12.5%) each in the coverage of the controversial clash which shows the need to adopt the legal means to resolve the controversy instead of the face-off. Cumulatively, the table indicates that the legal means is the best option for the FCT Minister to use as against the physical visit to the disputed land.

Table 4: Land grabbing framing forms across newspapers

Newspaper	Report	Percentage
The Guardian	1	50
BusinessDay	1	50
Total	2	100

The data in table 3 provide equal attention of (50%) each to land grabbing frame from *The Guardian* and *BusinessDay* newspapers. This suggests the clash between Wike and Yerima is all about the desire for the FCT Minister to engage in land grabbing.

Table 6: Scam framing forms across newspaper

Newspaper	Report	Percentage
Punch	1	100
Total	1	100

The data in the table confirms that *Punch* (100%) dedicated this report on the issue of fraud or scam in the ownership of the land. This shows that the process of acquiring the disputed land in Abuja is fraudulent.

Discussion of findings

The research carried out a framing analysis of the coverage of Wike vs Yerima face-off over in land in Abuja by selected Nigerian newspapers. As a result, specific objectives were designed in order to guide the rest of the research process and focus. These findings have been reviewed and are hereby discussed within the context of the reported stories about the clash between Minister Wike and the naval officer.

Findings discover that *Punch* devoted more space to the coverage of the clash between Wike and the naval officer, while *Vanguard* and *DailyTrust* were on equal level in terms coverage of the controversial face-off. Other newspapers did not pay much attention to the coverage of the face-off between Wike and the naval officer. This coverage rate aligns with the media landscape and audience reach of each newspaper, allowing for a nuanced analysis of Wike vs Yerima face-off coverage. This analysis reveals that while all the newspapers covered the clash between Wike and the naval officer, their emphasis varied, reflecting differing editorial priorities and possibly targeting diverse readerships with tailored messages.

Findings further highlighted the legal framing strategies employed by Nigerian newspapers in their coverage of the face-off between Wike and Yerima. The *Punch*, *DailyTrust* and *Vanguard* stood out in framing legal issues in their reportage. This shows that the controversy would have been settled through legal means not physical confrontation as exhibited by the FCT minister Nyesom Wike. Hence, one report said “*FCT minister should not have exchanged words with the officer, but ought to have channeled his concerns through the appropriate superior officers.... the naval officer’s actions were lawful and professional*”. This corroborates with the submission of Alabi (2025) who revealed that the absence of clear legal instrument on retired officer’s privileges has created ambiguity on the deployment of serving officers by retired general to do certain assignment.

The study also reveals the issue of land grabbing in which *Guardian* and *BusinessDay* extensively covered indicated that the face-off was driving by personal or selfish desire to acquire lands. This implies that the minister’s action was born out of the desire to avoid land grabbing by the retired military officer. Hence, “*Wike described the development as a clear case of “land grabbing,” vowing that the administration would not succumb to intimidation by*

any group, no matter how powerful". This is aligning with the report of Onje (2025) wherein the Minister alleged that man took land because he was the Chief of Naval Staff.

On scam frames, *Punch* dedicated some part of the newspapers pages to the frame in their coverage of the face-off. The implication of these reports suggested that the process of acquiring the disputed land was a scam, thus "*That is why I want to say that the Chief of Naval Staff was scammed. He has realised that he was scammed*" (Odeniyi et al, 2025).

Conclusion

The study emphasises the significance of media framing in determining public attitudes and perception on the face-off between Wike and the naval officer, with considerable differences seen across the *Vanguard*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, *Punch*, *Thisday*, *BusinessDay*, and *DailyTrust* newspapers. The observed disparities in frequency, legal, land grabbing and scam framing highlight the importance of comprehensive and complete media study. Insufficiently balanced and fully informed reporting can have an impact on public trust in controversial issues that involved public official(s), thereby impacting the way and manner the citizens react to such event. When reporting such event, public officials need to be mindful of these framing details because the media is a major source of information for the general public. Addressing these disparities and maintaining equal coverage across several media outlets are critical to building a well-informed public and instilling trust in government programmes initiatives. Equally, the study underscores the nuanced framing strategies of Nigerian newspapers in Wike vs Yerima face-off coverage was influenced by audience perception in government policies and information dissemination. This enriches understanding of media's role in public communication within the Nigerian context.

Additionally, acknowledging how media framing affects public attitudes emphasises the necessity of cooperation between public institutions, media organisations, and legislators. It is possible to have a better informed and balanced conversation about military and civilian relationship by encouraging open communication, giving accurate information, and supporting a variety of viewpoints. In the end, a successful inter government agencies collaboration with the military institutions results depend on this cooperative approach to establishing and preserving public confidence.

However, while this study contributes significantly to the understanding of how the selected newspapers framed the controversial clash between Wike and Yerima in their news coverage, it is essential to acknowledge key limitation. The analysis focuses solely on seven major newspapers (*Vanguard, The Guardian, The Nation, Punch, ThisDay, BusinessDay* and *DailyTrust*), which may not fully represent the diversity of media outlets in Nigeria, hence, the findings cannot be generalise as the representations of entire media industry in the country.

Recommendation

The study makes the following recommendations:

1. Selected Nigerian newspapers should be objective in framing controversial issues that involve public officials.
2. The selected newspapers should emphasise the Minister's rights as enshrined in The Land Use of Act,1978 in their coverage.
3. The selected newspapers should educate public officials and the general public on the need to adhere to the relevant provisions of the 1999 Constitution as amended.

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