



FRAMING THE SECURITIZATION OF MILITARY AERIAL SURVEILLANCE: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN BORNO STATE.

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ABSTRACT: This study analyzes how Nigerian newspapers, Tribune, Punch, and The Guardian frame military aerial surveillance, which refers to the use of aircraft and drones for monitoring and intelligence gathering in counterinsurgency operations, and the Boko Haram insurgency, a violent extremist campaign that began in northeastern Nigeria in 2009 and threatens national security. Through qualitative content analysis of articles published between 2020 and 2025, four key frames emerged: the Positive Security Frame, which presents military surveillance as a crucial national security measure; the Negative Security Frame, which highlights concerns about civilian casualties; the Effectiveness Frame, which focuses on the success of airstrikes; and the Ethical Concerns Frame, which questions the morality of such operations. While Tribune and Punch portray military aerial surveillance as an effective and necessary counterinsurgency tool, The Guardian adopts a more critical stance, acknowledging its effectiveness but emphasizing ethical issues, particularly civilian harm. The study provides insights into how media framing contributes to the securitization of the Boko Haram conflict, influencing public opinion and shaping national security discourse in Nigeria.

Keywords: Boko Haram, counterinsurgency, media framing, military aerial surveillance, securitization

INTRODUCTION

Understanding how the media frames military aerial surveillance in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency involves two important concepts: securitization and media framing. Securitization is the process by which issues are framed as urgent security threats, justifying exceptional measures like military interventions. (McDonald, 2020) explains that securitization involves presenting an issue as an existential threat, which legitimizes actions beyond normal political procedures. In Nigeria, the government has framed the Boko Haram insurgency as a national security crisis, which justifies the use of military aerial surveillance as part of its counterinsurgency efforts. This framing allows for military action, including airstrikes, even when there are concerns about civilian harm (Adeola, 2022). Media outlets, therefore, play an essential role in reinforcing or challenging this narrative.

Media framing refers to how media outlets select and highlight specific aspects of an issue, shaping public understanding and influencing policy decisions. (Entman, 2004) describes media framing as the process of making certain aspects of an issue more prominent to guide public interpretation. In the context of Boko Haram, Nigerian newspapers like Tribune, Punch, and The Guardian have framed the insurgency in different ways, influencing the discourse around national security. These outlets not only report on military actions but also shape how the public

perceives the legitimacy of these actions. For example, media framing can highlight the effectiveness of military operations or emphasize the humanitarian costs, such as civilian casualties and collateral damage, affecting public support for government policies (Ezeani & Nwachukwu, 2022).

The media's framing of military aerial surveillance has been crucial in the securitization of the Boko Haram conflict. According to Bello (2024), media outlets have framed Boko Haram as an existential threat, justifying the government's military actions. While newspapers like Tribune and Punch have framed aerial surveillance positively, emphasizing its effectiveness in neutralizing Boko Haram militants, The Guardian has adopted a more critical stance. It acknowledges the effectiveness of airstrikes but raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding civilian casualties. This difference in framing shows the complexity of the media's role in conflict reporting, where security needs and ethical considerations must be balanced (Onyeukwu, 2024).

Media coverage of military aerial surveillance is also shaped by various constraints, such as government control and journalistic ethics. Media outlets in conflict zones often face challenges like limited access to conflict areas, censorship, and the risk of misinformation (Ajakaiye et al., 2021; Imiti, 2025). These constraints can affect how security issues are reported, sometimes focusing on the government's narrative while omitting or downplaying alternative perspectives. In Nigeria, media outlets like Tribune, Punch, and The Guardian have navigated these challenges in different ways, with some more willing to critique the government's actions than others. Ajibola & Salisu (2023) note that the media's ability to influence public opinion on security policies depends largely on its editorial stance and willingness to engage with both the effectiveness and ethical concerns of military operations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In analyzing how Nigerian newspapers frame military aerial surveillance in the fight against Boko Haram, it is essential to use theoretical frameworks that explain how security issues are represented and communicated. Securitization Theory and Framing Theory offer critical insights into how the media shapes public perception of national security issues. Securitization Theory, as outlined by McDonald (2020), explores how issues are framed as existential threats that justify extraordinary measures, including military interventions. Framing Theory, developed by Entman (2004), helps us understand how media outlets highlight specific aspects of an issue, guiding public opinion and influencing policy. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining the role of the media in legitimizing or challenging military aerial surveillance in Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts against Boko Haram.

Securitization Theory emphasizes the process through which an issue is framed as an urgent national security threat, justifying actions that would normally be seen as exceptional. McDonald (2020) explains that securitization involves the presentation of an issue as an existential threat that demands extraordinary measures, bypassing normal political procedures. In the case of Boko Haram, the Nigerian government has framed the insurgency as an existential threat, thereby legitimizing the use of military aerial surveillance. By framing Boko Haram as a severe national security crisis, the government justifies the use of airstrikes and surveillance as necessary for the protection of the nation, even in the face of ethical concerns regarding civilian casualties. McDonald (2020) further notes that this framing allows the state to implement security measures that may not otherwise be acceptable, effectively positioning military action as the only viable response to the threat.

Framing Theory by Entman (2004) complements Securitization Theory by explaining how media outlets emphasize specific aspects of a security issue to shape public understanding. Framing is the process through which the media selects certain features of an issue and highlights them to make them more salient, influencing how audiences interpret and respond to that issue. In the context of Boko Haram, media outlets like Tribune, Punch, and The Guardian frame the insurgency and military actions in different ways. Some newspapers focus on the effectiveness of military aerial surveillance, emphasizing its role in neutralizing insurgent threats and protecting national security. Others, like The Guardian, raise ethical concerns, focusing on the unintended consequences of such actions, such as civilian casualties. Entman (2004) argues that the media's framing of security issues has a profound effect on how the public perceives the legitimacy of government actions and the balance between national security and human rights.

While Securitization Theory helps explain how national security threats are framed to justify extraordinary measures, Framing Theory highlights the media's role in shaping the narrative around those measures. McDonald (2020) emphasizes that securitization can lead to the neglect of ethical considerations, as security measures become normalized and justified in the name of national protection. However, Entman (2004) adds that media framing can offer a more nuanced perspective by highlighting the ethical dilemmas involved in security interventions. In the case of military aerial surveillance, media outlets play a dual role: they can both support the government's security narrative and challenge it by raising questions about the moral costs of such interventions. This tension between the securitized narrative and media framing forms the foundation of this study, which seeks to analyze how these theories play out in the portrayal of military aerial surveillance in Nigerian newspapers.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to examine how Nigerian newspapers Tribune, Punch, and The Guardian frame military aerial surveillance in their coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency. The research focused on articles published between 2020 and 2025, analyzing how these media outlets portrayed military actions, the threat posed by Boko Haram, and the role of aerial surveillance in counterinsurgency efforts. The selection of these three newspapers was based on their significant readership and influence on public opinion regarding national security issues in Nigeria.

Data were collected by identifying relevant articles from the selected newspapers, focusing on those that discussed Boko Haram and military aerial surveillance. A thematic analysis approach was used to code and categorize key frames within the articles, guided by Securitization Theory and Framing Theory. This method allowed the identification of recurring themes, such as the legitimacy of military aerial surveillance, the effectiveness of airstrikes, and the ethical concerns related to civilian casualties. The articles were examined to understand how military surveillance was framed as a necessary response to national security threats, and how these frames contributed to the securitization of the conflict.

The coding process involved the identification of specific words, phrases, and narratives used to frame the insurgency and military surveillance. The research focused on the language used by the newspapers to describe Boko Haram, the military, and aerial surveillance, noting whether the coverage presented these elements positively, negatively, or neutrally. Additionally, attention was given to the ethical dimensions raised in the coverage, particularly with regard to the impact of airstrikes on civilian populations.

The findings were analyzed to explore the influence of media framing on public perception of military aerial surveillance and its role in the fight against Boko Haram. By examining how different frames were employed by the newspapers, the study aimed to understand the role of media in legitimizing or questioning the Nigerian government's use of military interventions in counterinsurgency operations. The research also explored how media outlets contribute to the broader discourse on national security and the ethical implications of military surveillance.

Findings and Discussion

The content analysis of Tribune, Punch, and The Guardian from 2020 to 2025 revealed distinct patterns in how each newspaper framed military aerial surveillance in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency. The table below shows the frequency of key frames used in each newspaper's coverage. These frames Positive Security, Negative Security, Effectiveness, and Ethical Concerns help to understand how the media outlets portrayed the use of military aerial surveillance and the broader national security discourse.

Table 1: Frequency of Frames in the Coverage of Military Aerial Surveillance (2020–2025)

Frame Type	The Punch	The Guardian	The Tribune
Positive Security Frame	4	2	4
Negative Security Frame	0	2	0
Effectiveness Frame	4	3	4
Ethical Concerns Frame	0	5	1

From the table, it is evident that The Punch and The Tribune predominantly used the Positive Security Frame and the Effectiveness Frame, with 4 occurrences each. This suggests that both newspapers are aligned with the government's narrative of military aerial surveillance as a necessary and effective tool in the fight against Boko Haram. In these newspapers, the use of aerial surveillance was framed positively, with frequent references to the success of airstrikes in neutralizing Boko Haram militants and securing national borders. This framing supports the view that military actions, including surveillance, are critical to the success of counterinsurgency operations.

The Guardian presented a more balanced approach. While it acknowledged the operational success of airstrikes, it also incorporated Ethical Concerns about civilian casualties. The Negative Security Frame was prominent in The Guardian, which raised ethical questions regarding the unintended consequences of airstrikes, particularly civilian harm. For example, The Guardian highlighted incidents where airstrikes, intended for militant targets, resulted in civilian casualties. This more nuanced view reflects Framing Theory (Entman, 2004), which posits that media outlets shape public perception by selectively emphasizing certain aspects of an issue. The Guardian framed military surveillance as effective but underscored its ethical costs, thus presenting a critical perspective that contrasts with the other newspapers.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicate a significant difference in the way The Punch, The Guardian, and The Tribune framed military aerial surveillance. The predominant use of Positive Security and Effectiveness Frames in The Punch and The Tribune suggests that these newspapers align closely with the government's narrative, presenting military aerial surveillance as a necessary response to the Boko Haram threat. This framing reinforces the Securitization Theory (McDonald, 2020), which asserts that when an issue is framed as an existential threat, extraordinary measures such as military interventions become justified. By portraying Boko Haram as an urgent national security crisis, these newspapers contribute to the normalization of military surveillance as a routine and acceptable security measure.

The Guardian offers a more complex perspective. While it acknowledges the Effectiveness Frame, recognizing the role of aerial surveillance in neutralizing Boko Haram militants, it also raises Ethical Concerns about the impact of airstrikes on civilian populations. The Negative Security Frame in The Guardian underscores the potential for collateral damage and civilian casualties, questioning the moral implications of military tactics that prioritize security at the cost of civilian lives. This critical framing aligns with Framing Theory (Entman, 2004), where media outlets selectively highlight aspects of an issue to shape public opinion. The Guardian's more balanced approach challenges the dominant security discourse, suggesting that media plays an important role in introducing ethical considerations into the national security debate.

The differences in framing between the newspapers reflect broader editorial stances. The Punch and The Tribune, with their focus on Positive Security and Effectiveness, appear to support the government's approach to counterinsurgency, which is aligned with the securitized narrative of national defense. The Guardian, however, through its focus on the Ethical Concerns Frame, introduces a counter-narrative that questions the long-term consequences of such military operations, urging for a more balanced approach that weighs both security needs and humanitarian concerns. This complexity in media framing shows that while the media plays a role in the securitization of security threats, it also has the power to critique and question the ethical implications of government actions.

The study illustrates the critical role that the media plays in the securitization process, as described by McDonald (2020). By framing the Boko Haram insurgency as an existential threat, the media outlets reinforce the legitimacy of military surveillance and airstrikes. However, the ethical concerns raised by The Guardian suggest that securitization is not a one-dimensional process. The media's framing of military aerial surveillance shapes public opinion and can either support or challenge government policies, influencing the broader discourse on national security and human rights.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study analyzed how Tribune, Punch, and The Guardian framed military aerial surveillance in their coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency between 2020 and 2025. The findings revealed significant differences in the framing of military aerial surveillance across these newspapers. Tribune and Punch predominantly used Positive Security and Effectiveness Frames, portraying military aerial surveillance as a necessary and legitimate response to the Boko Haram threat. These newspapers framed the government's use of military force positively, emphasizing the operational success of airstrikes and their role in ensuring national security. On the other hand, The Guardian took a more nuanced approach, incorporating Effectiveness Frames while also raising Ethical Concerns, particularly focusing on civilian casualties and the moral implications of military operations.

The analysis illustrated how the media contributes to the securitization of national security issues, as discussed in Securitization Theory (McDonald, 2020), where framing an issue as an existential threat justifies extraordinary security measures, such as military aerial surveillance. However, the findings also reflect the critical role of media in shaping public opinion, as Framing Theory (Entman, 2004) emphasizes the media's power to selectively highlight aspects of an issue, thus influencing how the public perceives government actions. While Tribune and Punch reinforced the securitized discourse around national security, The Guardian raised ethical concerns, highlighting the tension between security and human rights in counterinsurgency operations.

These findings contribute to a broader understanding of the media's role in shaping national security discourse, particularly regarding the ethical implications of military interventions. While Tribune and Punch largely supported the government's security agenda, The Guardian provided a more balanced perspective, suggesting that a focus on both the effectiveness of military interventions and their ethical implications is essential for responsible reporting.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are made: media outlets should strive for more balanced coverage that considers both the effectiveness of military aerial surveillance and the humanitarian costs. The Nigerian government should enhance transparency regarding the ethical implications of military operations, fostering a more informed public discourse. Additionally, journalists should be trained in ethical reporting, particularly in conflict zones, to ensure their coverage is both responsible and objective. Public awareness campaigns should also be launched to educate citizens on the ethical challenges of military surveillance, helping to balance national security concerns with human rights considerations.

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