Evaluating Peace Journalism Practices in Ethno-Religious Conflict Reporting: Evidence from Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Ethno-religious conflict remains a recurring challenge in Plateau State, Nigeria, raising critical questions about the extent to which journalism practices contribute to conflict escalation or peace-building. Drawing on peace journalism framework, this study investigates residents' perceptions of how Nigerian media apply peace-oriented reporting principles in covering ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State. Using a quantitative descriptive survey design, data were collected from 384 residents through stratified and purposive sampling to ensure representation across key socio-demographic groups. A structured questionnaire assessed four dimensions of peace journalism: prioritisation of conflict root causes, humanisation of parties, amplification of non-elite voices, and coverage of peace initiatives. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests. The findings indicate an uneven application of peace journalism principles. Media coverage moderately emphasises historical context, governance-related explanations, and institutional peace initiatives, reflecting a tendency towards structural and solution-oriented narratives. However, the humanisation of conflict actors and the inclusion of non-elite voices particularly those of ordinary residents and grassroots actors remain comparatively limited. Paired t-test results reveal that reporting on root causes and peace initiatives is significantly prioritised over humanisation and non-elite perspectives, while no significant difference exists between the latter two dimensions, suggesting their shared marginalisation in conflict coverage. The findings underscore the need for more empathetic, inclusive, and community-centred reporting to strengthen journalism's peace-building role in deeply divided contexts.

Keywords: Peace journalism, conflict reporting, ethno-religious conflict, media, peace-building

Introduction

Ethno-religious conflict has remained one of the major challenges bedevilling Nigeria in recent times, persisting with Plateau State emerging as one of the most affected states in the country. Plateau State, the acclaimed "Home of Peace and Tourism", is a multi-ethnic and religious setting with over forty ethno-linguistic groups. Before the 1990s, the state lived up to its name as the home of peace and tourism and served as a choice tourism destination for many people within and outside Nigeria due to the relative peace, beautiful scenery, and cold weather that characterised the state. However, starting from the 1990s, and in particular on April 12, 1994, the harmonious inter-ethnic and religious atmosphere of Plateau relations was interrupted by a confrontation between the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group, mostly adherents of the Islamic religion, and the indigenous ethnic groups such as the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere, mostly adherents of Christianity (Gambo et al., 2025). The recurrent phenomenon of ethno-religious conflict in Plateau

State has led to cycles of killings, mass displacement, and large-scale destruction of livelihoods and property over several decades (Davies et al., 2024). Conservative estimates by the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru, Jos, as cited in Davies et al. (2024), reported that at least 4,000 people have died in Jos and other smaller towns and cities in Plateau State in the last ten years as a result of ethno-religious clashes. The situation has entrenched fear, trauma, and socio-economic disruption, thereby undermining sustainable development in the state. Scholars (Gambo et al., 2025; Davies et al., 2024) have attributed ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State to struggles over land ownership, political power, poor leadership at the state and national levels, as well as gaps in the constitution to adequately address the issue of indigeneity.

Over the years, government, non-governmental, and faith-based actors have implemented numerous initiatives to restore peace and intergroup harmony in Plateau State. For instance, in 2016, the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA) was established with direct executive access and a mandate for conflict mediation and prevention (Darren, 2021). In 2004, the Plateau State Peace Conference was convened in Jos, building on earlier peace summits and extensive stakeholder consultations (Jana, 2010). Complementing state efforts, religious organisations and civil society groups, including CAN, JNI, JIBWIZ, the TEKAN Peace Desk, and the Inter-Faith Mediation Centre, have pursued dialogue and reconciliation initiatives, while CEPID, supported by USAID, employed radio and television campaigns to promote peaceful coexistence and conducted peace education programmes with partner organisations (Krause, 2010, in Gambo et al., 2025). International interventions, such as the 2012 Jos peace dialogue convened by the Canadian High Commission and its partners, further sought to address the roots of violence (Weekly Trust, 2012, in Gambo et al., 2025). Despite these interventions, multiple judicial commissions of inquiry, and continued security deployments, including the Joint Task Force, ethno-religious tensions have persisted in Plateau State, thus underscoring the need for a continuous search for strategies to adequately manage the crisis. This raises critical questions about the role of journalism in either escalating or mitigating ethno-religious tensions.

Mass media reportage plays a critical role in shaping public understanding of social issues, including ethno-religious conflicts. Drawing on Agenda-Setting Theory, the media may not determine what audiences think, but it powerfully influences what issues are prioritised in public discourse and how they are cognitively framed (McCombs & Shaw, 2017). In conflict settings, sustained media emphasis on particular actors, narratives, or incidents can elevate ethno-religious tensions on the public agenda, thereby shaping perceptions, attitudes, and responses to violence (Salawu, 2009; Nwokedi et al., 2024; Kaur & Arora, 2025). This underscores the relevance of examining journalistic practices within conflict-prone contexts such as Plateau State, where media framing and issue salience may either reinforce polarisation or support peace-oriented discourse. Prior studies (Abubakar et al., 2025; Adisa, 2012; Dunu et al., 2018a) indicate that conventional conflict reporting in Nigeria frequently emphasises violence, blame, casualty figures, propaganda, and elitist manipulation or narration. Such patterns often reinforce stereotypes, deepen mutual suspicion between religious and ethnic groups, and legitimise retaliatory narratives, thereby sustaining cycles of violence rather than fostering understanding. Consequently, communication and media scholars (e.g. Aliyu & Haruna, 2021; Ekeanyanwu & Obia, 2018) have increasingly advocated for alternative journalistic paradigms that can de-escalate conflict and promote peaceful coexistence among groups, including ethnic and religious groups.

Peace journalism has emerged as that alternative journalism practice that challenges dominant war-oriented news frames by prioritising conflict transformation and constructive dialogue. Pioneered by Johan Galtung in the 1960s, peace journalism encourages reporters to focus

on the root causes of conflict, humanise all parties, give voice to non-elite stakeholders, and highlight peace initiatives and solutions. By so doing, peace journalism seeks to reduce hate-laden discourse and promote empathy, understanding, and reconciliation (Ortiz dos Santos, 2021; Lee, 2010). In deeply divided societies like Plateau State, peace journalism positions the media and journalists not merely as reporters of violence but as active peace-builders and promoters. Over the decades, peace journalism has attracted a plethora of studies in Nigeria and around the world. However, empirical gaps remain regarding its application in Plateau State's unique ethno-religious landscape. Recent existing studies (e.g. Nwokedi et al., 2024; Abdullahi et al., 2024; Ogbobe, 2025) on media and ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State have largely focused on content analysis of media coverage and newspaper framing, with limited attention to residents' perceived practice of peace journalism in managing conflict in the state. This study therefore examines peace journalism and ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State through the perspectives of residents of Plateau State.

The Problem

Despite sustained peace-building interventions and extensive scholarly attention to the structural causes of ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State, violence and intergroup tensions have remained recurrent. While prior studies have largely focused on political, economic, and constitutional drivers of the conflict, as well as descriptive analyses of media coverage, insufficient empirical attention has been paid to the practice of journalism as a conflict management tool. In particular, although peace journalism has been widely theorised as a framework for de-escalation and conflict transformation, little is known about how it is understood, applied, and constrained within Plateau State's persistent ethno-religious conflict environment. The absence of residents-based evidence limits the practical relevance of peace journalism scholarship and weakens policy and professional interventions aimed at improving conflict-sensitive reporting. This study addresses this gap by examining how residents perceived the practice of peace journalism in the reportage of ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. assess the extent to which journalists reporting ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State prioritise the root causes of the conflict;
2. examine the extent to which media reports treat all parties in ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State with empathy, dignity, and fairness**;**
3. evaluate the degree to which media reports amplify the voices of non-elite stakeholders in their coverage of ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State; and
4. assess the extent to which media reports emphasise peace initiatives, solutions, and reconciliation efforts in the coverage of ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Ethno-religious

Ethno-religious conflict refers to tensions and hostilities that arise from perceived or real differences rooted in ethnic and religious identities, often intertwined and mutually reinforcing within social and political processes (Dunmoye, 2012). Salawu (2010) defines it as a condition in which relations between members of different ethnic or religious groups in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies are marked by distrust, mutual suspicion, fear, and a propensity toward violent confrontation. In such contexts, ethnicity and religious allegiance can become instruments for asserting cultural autonomy, linguistic identity, religious superiority, and demands for local political self-determination, sometimes resulting in discriminatory practices and social exclusion.

Similarly, Daniel and Ajiyitu (2023) highlight that ethno-religious conflicts are characterised by tensions, hostilities, and violent clashes, where individuals or communities perceive threats to their identities, beliefs, values, and interests. Such conflicts are not merely interpersonal but are embedded in structural and systemic inequalities, which amplify the likelihood of confrontation. Iruonagbe and George (2007) emphasise that in Nigeria and across Africa, ethno-religious conflicts are closely linked to disparities in the distribution of power, wealth, and resources, creating environments where resistance to prevailing socio-political arrangements becomes inevitable.

The consequences of ethno-religious conflicts are profound, often leading to destabilisation at multiple levels, from national to local communities. They disrupt social cohesion, undermine trust among groups, and hinder sustainable development (Salawu, 2010; Daniel & Ajiyitu, 2023; Iruonagbe & George, 2007). The pathetic situation is common in many societies in Nigeria especially Plateau state where clashes between ethnic and religious groups has persisted for many years. Understanding ethno-religious conflict as both a social and political phenomenon provides critical insights into its root causes and dynamics, highlighting the necessity for conflict-sensitive interventions and governance approaches that address both identity-based grievances and structural inequities.

Peace Journalism: The theoretical Lens

Peace journalism (PJ) is the practice whereby editors and reporters make deliberate choices in story selection, framing, and language that enhance the prospects for peace while adhering to core journalistic principles (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). PJ gives peacemakers a voice and highlights non-violent solutions, making peace initiatives more visible and socially viable without journalists openly advocating for one side (Park University Center for Global Peace Journalism, n.d.). It integrates insights from conflict analysis and transformation, updating concepts of balance, fairness, and accuracy, while emphasising journalists' ethical responsibility to consider the consequences of their reporting. PJ situates events within their broader social, historical, and structural contexts. It explores both visible and hidden effects of conflict, such as trauma, resentment, fear, and desires for revenge, while avoiding propaganda and demonising language to create a less tense platform for negotiation and change (Galtung & Fischer, 2013).

According to Galtung and Fischer (2013), PJ traces the causes, effects, and potential resolutions of conflicts, much like health journalism examines disease, its impacts, and preventive measures. It avoids victimising and emotive language, reports on what parties are doing and could do, and highlights coping mechanisms (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). PJ facilitates genuine dialogue and conflict resolution by encouraging journalists to portray disputes in ways that bring latent grievances to the fore, promoting understanding and alleviating intractable conflicts.

Review of Empirical Studies

The role of media in shaping ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria, particularly in Plateau State, has attracted scholarly attention due to the recurring cycles of violence and the media's potential to either escalate or mitigate tensions. This study, therefore, situates itself within the growing scholarship. Abdullahi, et al (2024) investigated how the Nigerian press reported ethno-religious crises in Jos, Plateau State examining newspaper content, synthesizing prior studies, and consulting community and religious leaders. The study found that the press often inflamed tensions rather than facilitating reconciliation and peace-building. Commercial imperatives and political or religious motives influenced reporting practices, leading to selective coverage, sensationalism, and neglect of conflict-sensitive principles. Similarly, Nwokedi, Nwofor, and Nwokedi (2024) explored how *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* framed ethnic, political, and religious conflicts in Jos.

Using content analysis of 290 newspaper editions, the study demonstrated that coverage was predominantly religiously framed, emphasized negative tones of violence, and appeared on front pages in straight news formats. The findings highlighted the limited application of peace-oriented storytelling and the need for media to diversify narratives to support constructive dialogue. In the same vein, Ogbobe (2025) examined media representation in Plateau State, employing mixed methods that included content analysis and stakeholder interviews. The study revealed that sensationalist language, selective sourcing, and overemphasis on violent events reinforced ethnic and religious divisions, underscoring the necessity of ethical and solution-focused journalism.

Extending beyond Plateau, Tsado (2016) investigated the Nigerian press's mediation of ethno-religious conflicts since the return to democratic governance in 1999. Using content and discourse analysis alongside interviews, the study evaluated the press's role in escalating or mitigating conflicts. Findings showed that mainstream media often glamorized violence, prioritized elite perspectives, and contributed to polarized narratives, thereby weakening conflict resolution efforts. Adekunle (2014) examined public perceptions of peace journalism in Nigeria, focusing on the media's role in promoting peace during crises. The study revealed that most practitioners conflated biased and propagandistic reporting with conflict-sensitive journalism, demonstrating a gap between theoretical peace journalism principles and actual practice. Bukar,et al (2024) conducted quantitative content analysis of *Daily Trust* and *The Punch*, documenting pervasive use of war-related lexical indicators, particularly demonizing language, which illustrated how linguistic choices can exacerbate tensions. Demarest and Langer (2021) also highlighted structural and resource constraints that limit Nigerian journalists' capacity to investigate underlying causes of conflicts, resulting in superficial coverage that rarely advances reconciliation or solution-focused narratives.

The import from the prior studies is that a consistent pattern in Nigerian media reporting of ethno-religious conflict which is often sensationalized, selective, and skewed toward elite or violent narratives, undermining peace building efforts and entire tenets of peace journalism. However, despite a number of studies on media and reportage of ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State, studies that specifically examined how residents of the state perceived media adherence of peace journalism principles remain inadequate, creating a gap that necessitate the conduct of the current study.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine perceptions of peace journalism and its application in reporting ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State. The population comprised all residents of Plateau State, projected at 4,433,501 (https://www.nipc.gov.ng/nigeria-states/plateau-state/). A sample of 384 respondents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1975) sample size determination table**,** ensuring statistical representativeness. To guarantee inclusive representation, the study employed a combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques**,** stratifying respondents by ethnicity, religion, gender, and age. This ensured representation of major indigenous groups, including Berom, Anaguta, Afizere, as well as the Hausa and Fulani populations, predominantly within Jos, the state capital. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire**,** designed based on previously validated scales (Neumann & Fahmy, 2016) in peace journalism studies. However, the items were modified to captured four dimensions of peace journalism: prioritization of conflict root causes, humanization of parties, amplification of non-elite voices, and coverage of peace initiatives which were the key variables investigated. Respondents rated items on a five-point Likert scale. For data analysis, descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means,

and standard deviations were computed to summarize responses across the four dimensions. To examine differences in the emphasis placed on each dimension of peace journalism, a paired sample t-test was conducted. The paired t-test was appropriate because each respondent provided ratings for all four dimensions, allowing within-respondent comparisons**.** This analysis enabled the identification of patterns in media coverage, revealing which peace journalism principles were more or less emphasized, and whether differences between dimensions were statistically significant. All analyses were performed using SPSS version 25**,** and findings were interpreted at a 0.05 significance level.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Classification	*N*	*%*
Sex	Male	198	51.6
	Female	186	48.4
Age gap	18–25	92	24.0
	26–35	114	29.7
	36–45	88	22.9
	46–55	60	15.6
	56+	30	7.8
Ethnicity	Berom	102	26.6
	Anaguta	54	14.1
	Afizere	48	12.5
	Hausa	90	23.4
	Fulani	30	7.8
	Others	60	15.6
Religion	Christianity	198	51.6
	Islam	156	40.6
	Traditional / Others	30	7.8

The demographic profile of respondents, as presented in Table 1, reveals a balanced and representative sample across key socio-demographic variables, which enhances the reliability of the study findings. Gender distribution was nearly equal, with males accounting for 51.6% and females 48.4%, ensuring that perspectives from both sexes were adequately captured. The age composition shows a predominance of younger adults, particularly those aged 26–35 years (29.7%) and 18–25 years (24.0%), suggesting that the sample largely comprises individuals likely to actively consume media and engage with news content. Ethnic representation reflects the major indigenous and settler groups in Plateau State, with Berom (26.6%), Hausa (23.4%), Anaguta (14.1%), Afizere (12.5%), Fulani (7.8%), and other groups (15.6%), indicating that diverse cultural perspectives on ethno-religious conflict are included. Religious affiliation shows that Christians constitute the majority (51.6%), followed by Muslims (40.6%) and Traditional/Other faiths (7.8%), which aligns with the state's religious composition. Collectively, these demographics suggest that the study effectively captures the views of a heterogeneous population, providing a solid foundation for analyzing perceptions of peace journalism and its role in mediating ethno-religious conflict, and implying that findings can be generalized across major socio-cultural groups in Plateau State.

Table 2. Prioritization of Root Causes in Media Reports

No.	Questionnaire Item	N	Mean (X)	SD	Decision
1	News reports about ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State often provide background information on historical factors contributing to ethno-religious conflicts.	380	3.12	0.78	S

2	Journalists frequently highlight political, economic, or social structures that influence the outbreak of ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State.	382	2.87	0.84	NS
3	Media coverage ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State often explains the roles of local leadership and governance in either mitigating or exacerbating conflicts.	381	3.05	0.80	S
4	News stories ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State often include analysis of systemic issues, such as land disputes or resource allocation that underpin conflicts.	379	2.92	0.86	NS
5	Reports of ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State often go beyond immediate violent events to explore the underlying causes of tension between ethnic and religious groups.	380	3.18	0.77	S

The data in Table 2 indicate that journalists in Plateau State partially prioritize root causes in their coverage of ethno-religious conflicts. Reporters tend to provide historical background information (Mean = 3.12, SD = 0.78), explain the role of local leadership and governance (Mean = 3.05, SD = 0.80), and explore underlying tensions between ethnic and religious groups (Mean = 3.18, SD = 0.77), suggesting that there is some effort to contextualize conflicts beyond immediate events. These practices align with the principles of peace journalism, which emphasize understanding structural and historical factors in conflict reporting. However, the coverage of systemic issues such as political, economic, or social structures (Mean = 2.87, SD = 0.84) and land or resource disputes (Mean = 2.92, SD = 0.86) was found to be less consistent, indicating these aspects are often neglected in reporting. This pattern reflects a partial adherence to peace journalism principles, with media still favoring observable events over deeper structural analysis. Such selective reporting may limit audiences' ability to fully comprehend the root causes of conflicts and could inadvertently sustain cycles of tension.

Table 3. Humanization of Parties in Media Reports

No.	Questionnaire Item	N	Mean (X)	SD	Decision
1	News reports in Plateau State avoid portraying any ethnic or religious group as inherently "evil" or "barbaric."	382	2.95	0.81	NS
2	Media coverage represents the experiences and perspectives of all parties involved in the conflict.	380	2.10	0.76	NS
3	Journalists use language that respects the dignity of individuals from all communities involved in the conflict.	381	3.05	0.79	S
4	Reports highlight the human consequences of the conflict for all affected parties, not only for a single group.	379	3.20	0.75	S
5	Media stories avoid demonizing or stereotyping any ethnic or religious group involved in the conflict.	380	2.88	0.83	NS
6	Journalists make efforts to explain the motivations and concerns of all parties fairly.	381	2.82	0.77	NS
7	Coverage encourages audiences to empathize with the experiences of all communities affected by ethno-religious conflict.	380	2.08	0.78	NS

The data in Table 3 indicate that media coverage in Plateau State shows limited humanization of parties involved in ethno-religious conflicts. Journalists moderately demonstrate respect for individual dignity (Mean = 3.05, SD = 0.79) and highlight the human consequences of conflicts for all affected groups (Mean = 3.20, SD = 0.75), suggesting some efforts to move beyond sensationalism and incorporate human-centered reporting. These practices partially align with peace journalism principles, which prioritize empathy and fairness in representing all parties. However, the majority of items, including avoiding portrayal of groups as "evil" or "barbaric" (Mean = 2.95, SD = 0.81), representing experiences and perspectives of all parties (Mean = 2.10, SD = 0.76), avoiding demonizing language (Mean = 2.88, SD = 0.83), explaining motivations fairly (Mean = 2.82, SD = 0.77), and encouraging audience empathy (Mean = 2.08, SD = 0.78),

were found to be not significant**.** This indicates that reporters frequently fail to fully humanize all parties, and the coverage often lacks balance, with limited inclusion of the perspectives of marginalized or affected groups.

Table 4. Amplification of Non-Elite Voices in Media Reports

No.	Questionnaire Item	N	Mean (X)	SD	Decision
1	Coverage highlights the voices of market women and other small-scale business owners impacted by violence.	381	3.02	0.78	S
2	Ordinary residents, such as farmers and artisans, are given space to share their experiences and suggestions for peace.	380	2.94	0.82	NS
3	Media reports actively avoid relying solely on politicians or elite sources when reporting conflicts.	382	2.88	0.85	NS
4	Journalists incorporate grassroots religious leaders' viewpoints in conflict coverage.	381	3.08	0.79	S
5	News stories balance elite narratives with insights from ordinary community members directly affected by the conflict.	380	2.05	0.77	NS

The results in Table 4 suggest that media coverage in Plateau State moderately amplifies the voices of non-elite stakeholders in ethno-religious conflict reporting. Journalists show some effort in highlighting the perspectives of market women and small-scale business owners (Mean = 3.02, SD = 0.78) and incorporating grassroots religious leaders' viewpoints (Mean = 3.08, SD = 0.79), indicating a partial alignment with peace journalism principles that advocate for giving voice to non-elite actors and promoting inclusive reporting. On the contrary, most other items, including providing space for ordinary residents such as farmers and artisans (Mean = 2.94, SD = 0.82), avoiding reliance solely on elite sources (Mean = 2.88, SD = 0.85), and balancing elite narratives with insights from affected community members (Mean = 2.05, SD = 0.77), were not significant**,** demonstrating that non-elite voices are still underrepresented. This selective inclusion limits the potential for conflict-sensitive reporting and may perpetuate elite-dominated narratives that overlook grassroots experiences and perspectives.

Table 5. Coverage of Peace Initiatives and Reconciliation Efforts

No.	Questionnaire Item	N	Mean (X)	SD	Decision
1	Media reports highlight the activities of the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA) in conflict resolution.	381	3.10	0.79	S
2	Journalists often report on the mediation efforts of local community leaders in promoting reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups in Plateau State.	380	2.95	0.82	NS
3	Media often report peace initiatives by religious organizations such as CAN, JNI, JIBWIZ, and the TEKAN Peace Desk aimed at fostering peaceful coexistence among ethno-religious groups.	382	3.08	0.81	S
4	Media stories showcase the involvement of market women, youth groups, and other grassroots actors in peace-building activities.	379	2.90	0.84	NS
5	Media reports often emphasize ongoing dialogue forums, workshops, and trainings organized by civil society groups like CEPID, CLO, and CEPA to reduce tensions ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State.	380	3.05	0.78	S
6	Journalists in Plateau State often report international interventions that aim to restore harmony and prevent recurrence of ethno-religious conflict.	381	3.12	0.77	S
7	News stories about ethno-religious conflict in Plateau State often present practical solutions and strategies for sustainable peace rather than only reporting violent incidents.	380	2.88	0.83	NS

The findings from Table 5 indicate that media reports in Plateau State moderately highlight peace initiatives and reconciliation efforts, though the coverage is uneven across different

dimensions. Items such as reporting on the activities of the Plateau Peace Building Agency (PPBA) (Mean = 3.10, SD = 0.79), peace initiatives by religious organizations (Mean = 3.08, SD = 0.81), ongoing dialogue forums and workshops organized by civil society groups (Mean = 3.05, SD = 0.78), and international interventions aimed at restoring harmony (Mean = 3.12, SD = 0.77) were all rated significant (Mean ≥ 3.00). This suggests that journalists in Plateau State are relatively consistent in foregrounding formal institutional and organizational efforts that aim to mitigate ethno-religious conflict and promote social cohesion. In the other hand, coverage of mediation by local community leaders (Mean = 2.95, SD = 0.82), the involvement of grassroots actors such as market women and youth groups (Mean = 2.90, SD = 0.84), and the presentation of practical solutions for sustainable peace (Mean = 2.88, SD = 0.83) were rated as not significant (Mean < 3.00). These findings imply that while institutional and elite-driven peace efforts receive attention, the contributions of local actors and actionable community-based strategies are often underreported, reflecting a partial adherence to the tenets of peace journalism.

Table 6. Paired t-Test Comparisons of Peace Journalism Indicators

Comparison	Mean Difference (X)	SD of Difference	t-value	p-value
Root Causes – Humanization	0.311	0.45	9.82	0.000
Root Causes – Non-Elite Voices	0.234	0.41	7.78	0.000
Root Causes – Peace Initiatives	0.014	0.40	0.51	0.610
Humanization – Non-Elite Voices	-0.077	0.42	-1.73	0.085
Humanization – Peace Initiatives	-0.297	0.44	-7.34	0.000
Non-Elite Voices – Peace Initiatives	-0.220	0.43	-5.95	0.000

The paired t-test analysis in Table 6 demonstrates distinct patterns in the application of peace journalism tenets within Plateau State media reports. the respondents perceived that journalists significantly prioritize reporting on the root causes of ethno-religious conflict over the humanization of parties involved (Mean Difference = 0.311, t = 9.82, $p < 0.001$), indicating a stronger focus on structural, historical, and political factors than on empathy, dignity, and fairness in representing all groups. Similarly, coverage of root causes significantly exceeds the amplification of non-elite voices (Mean Difference = 0.234, t = 7.78, $p < 0.001$), reflecting limited inclusion of grassroots perspectives such as market women, farmers, and local religious leaders. Additionally, there is no significant difference between coverage of root causes and peace initiatives (Mean Difference = 0.014, t = 0.51, p = 0.610), suggesting that journalists moderately balance structural analysis with reporting on reconciliation efforts, civil society interventions, and strategies for sustainable peace. Humanization and non-elite voices were not significantly different from each other (Mean Difference = -0.077, t = -1.73, p = 0.085), highlighting a shared underreporting of these dimensions. However, peace initiatives are significantly more emphasized than both humanization (Mean Difference = -0.297, t = -7.34, $p < 0.001$) and non-elite voices (Mean Difference = -0.220, t = -5.95, $p < 0.001$), indicating that while media moderately highlight structural and solution-focused reporting, they still insufficiently foreground empathetic representation and grassroots participation.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that journalists in Plateau State partially prioritize the root causes of ethno-religious conflict**,** as evidenced by significant coverage of historical context (Mean = 3.12), the role of local governance (Mean = 3.05), and underlying tensions between ethnic and religious groups (Mean = 3.18). However, structural factors such as political, economic, and social determinants, as well as land and resource disputes, were inconsistently reported. This pattern mirrors the observations of Demarest and Langer (2021), who noted that resource and structural constraints limit journalists' ability to engage with complex conflict drivers, often

resulting in superficial reporting. The partial adherence to peace journalism principles suggests that while reporters attempt contextualization, media coverage still favors observable events over deeper analytical narratives, potentially constraining public understanding of conflict causality. In relation to the humanization of parties**,** the study reveals limited application, with only moderate emphasis on respecting individual dignity (Mean = 3.05) and highlighting the human consequences of conflict (Mean = 3.20). The majority of items, including avoiding demonizing language and encouraging audience empathy, were not significant, indicating an underrepresentation of empathetic and fair reporting. These results resonate with earlier studies by Abdullahi et al. (2024) and Ogbobe (2025), which documented selective coverage, sensationalist language, and limited conflict-sensitive reporting in Plateau State. Collectively, these findings highlight that media often underutilize humanization strategies, which are critical for fostering audience understanding and mitigating intergroup tensions.

Regarding the amplification of non-elite voices, the findings show that journalists moderately include perspectives of market women and grassroots religious leaders (Means = 3.02 and 3.08, respectively), but largely neglect ordinary residents such as farmers, artisans, and community members directly affected by conflict. This selective inclusion reflects patterns noted by Tsado (2016) and Bukar et al. (2024), where elite-dominated narratives and reliance on official sources prevail, limiting the media's capacity to provide inclusive, bottom-up perspectives. Consequently, the underreporting of non-elite voices curtails the media's potential to foster participatory peacebuilding and fully represent community experiences, perpetuating hierarchical and polarized narratives. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that coverage of peace initiatives and reconciliation efforts is uneven**.** Journalists consistently report institutional efforts, such as those of the Plateau Peace Building Agency, religious organizations, and civil society forums (Means $\geq$ 3.05), but underreport the involvement of grassroots actors and practical community-based solutions (Means < 3.00). The paired t-test analysis further confirms that peace initiatives are significantly more emphasized than humanization and non-elite voices. These findings align with Nwokedi, Nwofor, and Nwokedi (2024) and Adekunle (2014), who observed that Nigerian media tend to foreground formal, elite-driven interventions while largely neglecting local, participatory approaches.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The observed patterns in media coverage of ethno-religious conflicts in Plateau State suggest that the current reporting practices may inadvertently reinforce structural inequalities and limit community engagement in peacebuilding processes. By prioritizing root causes and institutional peace initiatives while underrepresenting humanization and non-elite voices, media narratives risk creating a disconnect between formal conflict interventions and the lived experiences of affected communities. This imbalance may hinder audience understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions of conflicts and reduce the efficacy of local reconciliation efforts, potentially perpetuating cycles of tension and mistrust among ethnic and religious groups. Therefore, it is recommended that media organizations institutionalize conflict-sensitive reporting frameworks that explicitly integrate humanization and community voices alongside structural and institutional analyses. Journalists should receive targeted training on ethical, solution-focused, and inclusive reporting to ensure that coverage empowers rather than marginalizes affected populations. Additionally, collaboration between media, civil society, and conflict resolution agencies can foster participatory reporting mechanisms that amplify grassroots perspectives, encourage dialogue, and strengthen public trust in media narratives.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study provides insights into the application of peace journalism principles in Plateau State, it is not without limitations. First, although the sample of 384 respondents ensured representation across gender, age, ethnicity, and religion, it was drawn primarily from Jos and may not fully capture perspectives from more remote or conflict-affected communities within the state. This geographic concentration could limit the generalizability of the findings to all Plateau State residents. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported perceptions of media coverage through structured questionnaires, which may be subject to respondent bias and may not fully reflect actual journalistic practices on the ground. Future research could address this limitation by combining audience surveys with systematic content analysis of media outputs to triangulate findings.

AI Use and Disclosure

The authors affirm that artificial intelligence (AI) tools particularly Grammerly and ChatGPT were used solely to assist with language editing, structuring, and clarity of the manuscript. All intellectual content, data analysis, interpretation of results, and conclusions were independently conducted and authored by the researchers. The use of AI did not influence the study design, data collection, analysis, or reporting of findings.

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