

# **NEWSPAPER HANDLING OF 2024 ORGANISED LABOUR AGITATION FOR A NEW NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE FOR NIGERIAN WORKERS**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated how three Nigerian newspapers, *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard*, covered the agitation for a new minimum wage between January and June 2024. The research design was content analysis with the population of 540 newspaper issues from which the sample size of 230 was drawn, using the Taro Yamane sampling guide. Data were collected using the structured code sheet. The findings showed that a cumulative of 169 reports was published across the three newspapers with *The Punch* having the highest proportion (47%) of the coverage. The prominence given to the coverage by the newspapers was relatively low with 78% of the articles placed on inside pages. Also, 70% of the coverage was presented as straight news; while the framing of the agitation was predominantly focused on public opinion and general support for the agitation. These findings led to the conclusion that the newspaper coverage of the agitation for a new minimum wage by the organized labour was low, thus justifying, among other things, the need for more intensive media coverage of issues that are important to the reader.

## **Introduction**

In the complex and dynamic world of human communication, the mass media have continued to serve as a vital link among different groups and cultures while disseminating information, influencing public opinion, and shaping society. The mass media, often seen as society's vibrant storyteller, play a crucial role in shaping the way people understand complex and topical issues affecting both their immediate and extended environments. One of such is the concerns expressed by the organized labour about a new minimum wage in Nigeria.

Newspapers, for instance, far from being just messengers, construct narratives that provide context and highlight the implications of these unions' advocacy and problem-solving efforts. In covering the organized labour, the media take on a powerful role in illustrating the underlying issues that drive union actions, such as labour rights, fair wages, and safe working conditions. By selecting which stories, or which aspects of the Union's issues to project the more, and how they are framed, the newspapers help audiences move beyond surface-level perceptions by fostering a deeper understanding of the stakes involved in labour movements and industrial actions (Ukpe and Akarika, 2019). In addition to informing, newspapers play an educational role in demystifying the operations and objectives of labour unions, particularly in a complex economic setting like Nigeria where unemployment, inflation, and policy shifts impact workers' lives profoundly (Bassey, Iwok and Afangide, 2024).

Coverage of organized labour activities brings essential insights to the public, allowing citizens to grasp the connections between labour demands and national socio-economic health. Beyond mere reporting, newspapers engage in agenda-setting where they make decisions on the relative prominence of labour issues within the national conversation.

In such instances where newspapers emphasize workers' strikes or wage negotiation, they drive public awareness of systemic labour challenges and the significance of union advocacy. This visibility not only pressures policymakers but also empowers citizens, and bridges the gap between union actions and broader public interests (Umechukwu, 2019). For these reasons, Oyovbaire (2021) explains that media coverage of national issues can foster a sense of national identity, promote social cohesion, and encourage civic engagement.

Over the years in Nigeria, incessant disagreement between the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) as well as the Trade Union Congress (TUC) with the Federal Government of Nigeria over the national minimum wage has been a recurring issue in the country. The agitation for a living wage has led to numerous strikes, protests and negotiations, impacting the Nigerian society in various ways. The consequences of these disagreements have been felt across different sectors, including education, healthcare, and the economy. These issues have also had strong consequences in Nigeria, including economic instability, social unrest, and political tensions as frequent strikes and protests have disrupted economic activities, affecting small businesses and vulnerable populations. Moreover, the disagreements have created divisions among Nigerians, with some supporting the government's stance and others backing the labour unions.

In the face of these disagreements, the newspapers have been instrumental in information dissemination about these issues in a way that continually shapes public understanding and influences opinions. Through their coverage, national newspapers either amplify or downplay the significance of the national minimum wage agitation through framing, priming, and agenda-setting strategies (Udoudo and Bassey, 2019). For instance, The *Punch* newspaper has been a functional medium through which Nigerians were informed of the issues of the new minimum wage agitation by organized labour which had lingered for many years before attention was given by the current administration.

Given the significance of the national minimum wage agitation, one wonders if newspapers in Nigeria helped in shaping public discourse. For this reason, this study aims to investigate how Nigerian newspapers have covered the agitation by Nigerian national newspapers. Doing this would contribute to the understanding of the complex relationships between the media, labour unions, government, and the public in Nigeria, and thus, fill the knowledge gap in this area of study.

## Statement of the Research Problem

Over the years, Nigerian newspapers have been actively involved in reporting issues of social consequences, such as political unrest, economic instability and social injustices. A casual observation by the researcher shows that these national newspapers have, individually and recently, been covering the organized labour agitation for minimum wage in the country. On the research side, it is observed that although there may be research studies in the area of coverage of labour unrests in Nigeria, not much has been done in the area of labour agitation for higher wage for Nigerian workers particularly the agitation that took place in 2024. Following this gap, it becomes uncertain how prominent Nigerian newspapers, particularly *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard*, covered the agitation for a new national minimum wage of 2024; particularly in the areas of prominence given to the stories, the depth of the stories, the framing of the stories, and the dominant format for the reports. This uncertainty did not only motivate this study; but also raised the question: how did *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard* newspapers in Nigeria cover the 2024 organised labour agitation for a new national minimum wage for the country?

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. examine the frequency of coverage given to the organized labour agitation for a new minimum wage by *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard* newspapers in Nigeria in 2024.
- ii. find out the prominence of coverage given to the organisedlabour agitation for a new minimum wage by *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard* newspapers in Nigeria in 2024.
- iii. ascertain the depth of coverage given to the organisedlabour agitation for a new minimum wage by *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard* newspapers in Nigeria in 2024.
- iv. examine the frame used by *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard* newspapers in Nigeria in reporting organized labour agitation for a new minimum wage; and
- v. identify the dominant media form used by *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Vanguard* newspapers in covering the organisedlabour agitation for a new minimum wage in Nigeria in 2024.

### Review of Related Literature

According to Mellado, Hanusch, Humanes, and Sparks (2021), newspaper coverage refers to the representation and reportage of events, issues, and occurrences in printed media outlets. It encapsulates the efforts of journalists and editorial teams to gather, verify, and disseminate information to the public. This implies that by highlighting critical developments in politics, society,

and culture, newspaper coverage plays a pivotal role in informing citizens, shaping opinions, and influencing decision-making processes. From the above, one can say that newspaper coverage extends beyond mere reporting; it offers analyses, commentary, and diverse perspectives, enriching public discourse. In this sense, newspapers serve as chronicles of contemporary history, capturing the zeitgeist of each era. The art of coverage lies in its ability to condense complex realities into digestible narratives without compromising on depth or objectivity.

Okoro and Agbo (2020) note that at its core, newspaper coverage represents the editorial framework through which information is shared with the readers. This process entails meticulous journalistic efforts to select stories deemed newsworthy while discarding others less relevant or engaging.

In Abernathy's (2022) opinion, the concept of newspaper coverage encompasses the systematic reporting and portrayal of events, individuals, and issues within the pages of print publications. It is a testament to the role of newspapers as both record-keepers and storytellers in society. Coverage reflects the editorial priorities and the values of the publication, highlighting what it deems most pertinent to its audience.

Oso and Pate (2019) assert that coverage serves as a roadmap for readers, guiding them through the labyrinth of global happenings. It also reflects the editorial philosophy of a publication, with some prioritising human-interest stories while others focus on hard news or political commentary. Importantly, coverage is a dynamic entity, constantly evolving in response to technological advancements, audience demands, and societal shifts. It is both a mirror and a mould, simultaneously reflecting and shaping public discourse.

According to Harcup (2021), newspapers act as society's watchdog, presenting facts and fostering accountability while prioritising impactful stories on politics, the economy, and social welfare. This function aligns with Siebert *et al.*'s (1956) Four Theories of the Press, which position newspapers as vehicles for free expression and public debate. Fundamentally, newspaper coverage mirrors societal priorities, advocates for justice, and meticulously chronicles events, shaping public consciousness. These attributes, foundational to media ethics, affirm newspapers' unique role in capturing and disseminating the pulse of society.

Playroll (2024) describes minimum wage as a mechanism to ensure workers earn enough to meet basic living costs. For example, the "Fight for \$250,000" campaign in the Nigeria recently emerged as a response to economic disparities, advocating for wages that reflect inflation and rising living costs. In this view, minimum wage is not just a protective measure but a strategic tool for enhancing the purchasing power of workers, thereby stimulating economic growth and addressing systemic inequalities.

In terms of studies, Bassey, Okeke, Ugochukwu, and Onoyima (2022) evaluated the frequency of coverage of the 2019 National Minimum Wage Act in the selected newspapers, determine the prominence accorded to the minimum wage issue in terms of placement and length of articles, and analyze the direction of the stories, whether they were favourable, unfavourable, or neutral towards the Act and its implications.

The study adopted a content analysis methodology to systematically examine the coverage of the agitation. The study's population consisted of 368 issues of *Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers published between July 1 and December 31, 2019. Using composite week sampling, 84 editions were selected (42 from each newspaper). The data for the study were collected using a coding sheet, which captured variables such as story prominence, placement, and direction. The data were analysed quantitatively to assess the patterns of coverage.

The findings showed that the newspapers provided less coverage of the 2019 National Minimum Wage Act than expected, indicating a lack of sufficient media attention to a significant public welfare issue. Also, stories on the minimum wage lacked prominence in terms of page placement and article length, showing a potential undervaluation of the subject. Furthermore, the frequency of reports on the Act was sparse.

As a relevant theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, assumes that while the media cannot dictate what people think, it can strongly influence what they think about. The focus is on salience transfer, where media coverage emphasises certain issues over others, shaping public priorities. Additionally, through attribute agenda-setting, the media defines how these issues are discussed, providing frames that influence perceptions. This assumption underscores the interdependence between media priorities and public discourse.

The theory posits that the media play a critical role in constructing social reality. By prioritising some topics over others, the media affect the visibility and significance of issues in public and political spheres. For instance, during labour disputes like minimum wage agitations, extensive media coverage can amplify the urgency of the issue, pressuring policymakers to respond. This function makes agenda-setting a tool for societal awareness and action.

In examining newspaper coverage of minimum wage agitation, Agenda-Setting Theory is highly relevant. The theory helps analyze how newspapers prioritise wage-related issues and shape public discourse around them.

Framing Theory, which is another related theory, assumes that the way information is presented—or framed—shapes audience interpretation and reaction. Frames highlight specific aspects of reality while excluding others, thus guiding the audience's focus and perception. The

media's framing of events or issue determines the narrative and emotional response they elicit, influencing public opinion and policy-making.

The theory argues that framing is a strategic process through which communicators shape how audiences understand complex issues. For example, in minimum wage agitation, framing the debate as a matter of workers' rights versus economic strain on businesses can evoke contrasting reactions. Such frames affect not only public understanding but also the policy responses that follow, showcasing the media's role in structuring debates.

## Research Design

This study adopted the content analysis research design. Generally, content analysis refers to a systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information. It requires that the content to be analysed is selected according to explicit and consistently applied rules. In communication and media studies, this type of method is used to analyse the manifest contents of communication. The study population consisted of all the issues (weekdays and weekends) of *The Punch*, *The Nation*, and *Vanguard* newspapers published between January 2024 and June 2024, which summed up to a total of 546 editions. This period was chosen because it marked the peak of organized labour's agitation for a new minimum wage in Nigeria, making it most suitable for capturing the intensity and nature of media coverage on the issue. Accordingly, each of the newspapers had a total publication of 182 issues over six months considered for the study, where 31, 29, 31, 30, 31, and 30 issues were published in January, February, March, April, May, and June 2024, respectively.

Given the number of issues (546) which made up the population of the study (for the content analysis), the sample size of 230 issues was determined using the Taro Yamane sampling formula.

## Data Presentation and Discussions

The data for this study are presented and analyzed in the tables below.

**Table 4.1: Frequency of Coverage of the Organised Labour Agitation for a New Minimum Wage**

Newspaper	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	Total	Percentage
The Punch	16	4	9	21	6	23	79	47
The Nation	9	6	9	12	7	8	51	30
The Vanguard	6	4	7	9	3	10	39	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: The Punch, Nation, and Vanguard (2025)*

Table 4.1 shows that the *Punch* newspaper relatively dominated the coverage of the new minimum wage agitation by the organisedlabour, accounting for 47% of the total (169) articles published on the issue across 6 months (January to June, 2024).

**Table 4.2: Prominence given to the Organised labour Agitation for a new minimum wage by Nigerian Newspapers**

Issue Placement	The Punch		The Nation		The Vanguard		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Front Page	14	8	11	7	9	5	34	20
Inside Page	65	38	37	22	30	18	132	78
Back Page	0	0	3	2	0	0	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** *The Punch, Nation, and Vanguard (2025)*

Table 4.2 demonstrates that over  $\frac{3}{4}$  (78%) of Nigerian newspapers' coverage of the agitation for a new minimum wage by OrganisedLabour was presented in inside pages. Only 20% appeared on the front page, signifying a significantly low priority (prominence).

**Table 4.3: Depth of Coverage**

Depth in Pages	The Punch		The Nation		Vanguard		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Full	2	1	0	0	3	2	5	3
Half	19	11	22	13	18	11	59	35
Quarter	58	35	29	17	18	11	105	62
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** *The Punch, Nation, and Vanguard (2025)*

Table 4.4 shows that the majority of the Nigerian Newspaper reports on the Organised Labour agitation for a new minimum wage were presented in a quarter page, which indicates a shallow depth of the coverage of the issue by the papers.

**Table 4.4: Frames in the Coverage**

Available Frames	The Punch		The Nation		Vanguard		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Economic Impact	12	7	6	4	4	2	22	13
Labour Rights and Fairness	8	5	7	4	4	2	19	11
Government Response and Policy	11	6	10	6	5	3	26	15
Public Opinion and Support	20	12	14	8	13	8	47	28
Labour Union Strategies and Tactics	6	4	3	2	4	2	13	8
Business and Employer Perspectives	15	9	6	4	6	4	27	17
Social and Humanitarian Aspects	7	4	5	3	3	2	15	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: The Punch, Nation, and Vanguard*

Table 4.6 shows that the relatively predominant frame in the coverage of organised labour agitation for a new minimum wage was *Public Opinion and Support*, with 28% of the total coverage.

**Table 4.5: Media Forms used in the Coverage**

Media form	The Punch		The Nation		Vanguard		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Straight news	59	35	38	22	22	13	119	70
Features	9	5	10	6	5	3	24	14
Editorials	2	1	-	-	3	2	5	3
Opinions	9	5	1	1	3	2	11	7
Interviews	1	1	2	1	4	2	7	4
Cartoons/Satirical	1	1	0	0	2	1	3	2



Pieces								
Total	79	47	51	30	39	23	169	100

Table 4.7 shows that Nigerian newspapers predominantly used the straight news format (70%) in covering the minimum wage agitation, suggesting that they focused mainly on reporting events as they happened rather than providing in-depth analysis or background context.

## Discussions

### Research Question 1: What was the frequency of coverage given to the organisedlabour agitation for a national minimum wage by newspapers in Nigeria?

In answering this research question, the analysis in Tables 4.1 was primarily used. These tables provide key findings related to the frequency and nature of the coverage across three different newspapers in Nigeria. Table 4.1 presents a total of 169 reports on organized labour's agitation for a new minimum wage in Nigeria, as covered by selected national newspapers. Of these, The Punch newspaper accounted for the highest number of reports, contributing 47% of the total coverage across the three newspapers reviewed.

The findings indicate that only 169 reports were given to the issue within the 230 issues by the selected newspapers from January to June 2024. The data also demonstrate that The *Punch* devoted the most substantial portion of its editorial space to the issue of minimum wage. The data shows a clear dominance in coverage by this newspaper, highlighting its significant role in shaping public discourse on the matter. This reflects the paper's editorial stance, its readership base's interest in labour issues, or its commitment to in-depth reporting on economic matters. The total coverage across all newspapers (169 articles) suggests that the agitation was a topic of considerable media focus over the six months.

The findings in Table 4.1 also highlight that *The Nation and Vanguard*, while contributing to the discussion, were relatively less focused on the organized labour agitation, contributing 30% and 23% of the total coverage, respectively. This disparity in coverage points to the differences in editorial priorities or the types of readers each paper serves. While *The Punch* dominated, the substantial share by other newspapers reveals that the minimum wage issue was a significant topic in Nigerian media. This varied attention by different newspapers provides a multifaceted view of how the print media covered labour-related social issues.

The findings align with the Agenda-Setting Theory, which posits that the media influences the public agenda by highlighting specific issues. The Punch's dominant share of coverage (47%) in Table 4.1 is consistent with this theory, as it suggests that this newspaper significantly influenced

the public's focus on the organized labour agitation for a new minimum wage. By dedicating a large portion of its coverage to the issue, The Punch effectively set the agenda for the public discussion on workers' rights and the economic implications of the minimum wage.

**Research Question 2: What was the level of prominence given to the coverage of the organized labour agitation for a national minimum wage by newspapers in Nigeria?**

The distribution in Table 4.2 provided the data with which to answer the research question. Here, the majority of coverage on the organized labour agitation appeared on the inside pages of sampled newspapers, accounting for 78% of the total articles. Of the 169 articles analysed, only 20% were placed on the front page, a clear indication that the issue did not receive significant prominence. Front-page stories are typically reserved for high-priority news, suggesting that the agitation for a new minimum wage was not perceived as urgent or of top priority by the newspapers. The absence of back-page coverage further supports this low prioritisation.

The finding that most of the reports were placed inside the newspaper rather than on the front page speaks to the relative importance newspapers placed on this issue. By placing it mostly inside, the media likely saw it as relevant but not urgent enough to merit prime space. The low percentage of front-page coverage (20%) reinforces this low prioritisation.

A similar study conducted on political content in newspapers found that certain topics, such as labour movements or social issues, often receive less prominent placement unless tied to immediate political or economic crises (Miller, 2017). This aligns with the findings in this study, where although the minimum wage agitation is a significant social issue, it was not considered urgent enough for front-page placement.

The findings align with the *Agenda Setting Theory*, which posits that the media play a critical role in determining the salience of issues by placing them in prominent positions. According to this theory, issues that receive front-page coverage are perceived as more important by the public. The findings also align with *Framing Theory*, which asserts that the way media present a story shapes public perception..

**Research Question 3: How in-depth was the coverage given to the organisedlabour agitation for a national minimum wage by newspapers in Nigeria?**

The insights that addressed the research question were drawn from Table 4.5 which examined the types of media forms used in the coverage (i.e. straight news, features, editorials, and opinions) to further reflect the depth of the coverage. This question was necessary to determine whether the issue received comprehensive journalistic treatment or was merely reported in passing, which can shape public understanding and policy discourse.

According to Table 4.5, there was significant dominance of straight news reportage, constituting 70% of the entire coverage across the three sampled newspapers. While this suggests consistent attention to the event, the implication is that most of the stories were treated in a routine, fact-based style without deeper journalistic investigation or analytical engagement to identify and portray their depth. Only 17% of the reports were features, which typically allow for more in-depth exploration of issues. Editorials and opinion articles, which provide context, critique, and insight, accounted for a mere 3% and 10% respectively. This lopsided pattern indicates that the newspapers primarily prioritised reporting the "what" of the agitation, with little effort to probe the "why" and "what next".

The dominance of straight news reflects editorial constraints or a journalistic orientation that privileges daily news cycles over long and interpretative reporting. This approach limits readers' access to the broader socio-economic implications of the agitation and the structural conditions surrounding wage debates in Nigeria. The Punch, for example, published the highest number of straight news stories (59), with only 9 feature stories and 9 opinion pieces. This imbalance mirrors the overall media trend where straight news is often preferred due to cost, time, and space limitations. However, it inadvertently downplays complex labour issues that deserve multidimensional coverage to inform public discourse and policy reform. In the light of agenda-setting theory, the findings here partly support the theoretical assumptions.

#### **Research Question 4: What frames did newspapers in Nigeria use in their coverage of organized labour agitation for a new national minimum wage?**

The answer to this research question was provided by Table 4.4, which examined the distribution of various frames applied by The Punch, The Nation, and Vanguard in their reporting. Table 4.4 shows that the most frequently used frame across the newspapers was Public Opinion and Support, which appeared in 28% of the total reports. This suggests that Nigerian newspapers sought to foreground societal responses to the agitation, giving space to the voices of ordinary citizens, civil society organisations, and possibly even non-unionised workers. This frame positions the agitation not merely as a union-government matter but as a broader public concern. The prominence of this frame could also indicate media efforts to build legitimacy for the agitation by aligning it with public sentiment. The Punch led the coverage here with 20 reports out of 47, showing its editorial inclination to capture and represent the pulse of the people.

The next most frequently used frame was Business and Employer Perspectives (17%), followed by Government Response and Policy (15%). These frames reflect an institutional orientation, presenting reactions from employers, private sector representatives, and government

agencies. While this demonstrates an attempt to balance perspectives, it also subtly shifts the narrative from labour justice to economic practicality and political feasibility. By foregrounding business concerns, newspapers may unconsciously reinforce neoliberal narratives that frame wage increases as threats to profitability or national economic stability. Similarly, the focus on government policy responses shows the media's tendency to legitimise official actions, which could either support or undermine labour demands depending on the tone of coverage.

These findings are corroborated by previous research. For example, Ojebuyi and Edewor (2020) found that Nigerian newspapers often apply frames that highlight elite reactions and public sentiment more than those focusing on the rights or welfare of workers. Similarly, Oso and Pate (2019) observed that Nigerian media frequently avoid conflict-driven or justice-based frames to remain politically neutral or avoid antagonising powerful actors. These studies validate the current research by confirming that media framing in Nigeria tends to shy away from deep labour advocacy, preferring a more neutral or reactionary tone.

Applying framing theory, it is evident that the media strategically selected particular angles that shape readers' interpretations of the agitation. By focusing heavily on Public Opinion, Government Response, and Business Perspectives, the press set the tone for how the agitation was understood either as a public cause, a political challenge, or an economic threat.

#### **Research Question 5: What is the dominant media form used by the newspapers in covering the organized labour agitation for a new minimum wage in Nigeria in 2024?**

To answer this research question, the data in Table 4.5 were used. The data reveal that the straight news format was overwhelmingly dominant, with 70% (119 out of 169) of the total coverage presented in this issue. This heavy reliance on straight news suggests that the newspapers focused more on relaying facts and immediate developments, perhaps to maintain objectivity or timeliness. In contrast, interpretive forms like features and opinions were less prioritised, comprising 14% and 7% of coverage respectively. This reveals a possible gap in critical engagement or background analysis, which are often necessary for unpacking complex socio-economic demands such as wage restructuring.

Also, the sparse use of editorials (3%), interviews (4%), and cartoons/satirical pieces (2%) is telling. Editorials and interviews typically carry institutional and personal perspectives that could guide public interpretation or galvanise support for the labour movement. Their limited use tends to suggest a conservative editorial stance or a deliberate effort to avoid controversy. Moreover, the near-absence of satirical pieces underscores a lack of creative or symbolic framing, which might have added emotive or cultural context to the agitation. Altogether, the data show a lean towards procedural reporting over analytical or interpretive journalism.

The pattern that emerges from the table is one of uniformity across the newspapers. All three outlets leaned heavily on the straight news format, with *The Punch* contributing 59 such stories, *The Nation* 38, and *Vanguard* 22. Meanwhile, opinion pieces, features, and editorials were marginal across the board. This consistency suggests a shared editorial culture or a common journalistic response to politically sensitive labour issues. It also highlights a trend where newspapers prioritise real-time updates over reflective content during social protests or union actions.

These findings directly answer the research question by confirming that the dominant format used in covering the 2024 minimum wage agitation was straight news. The predominance of this format indicates that newspapers focused largely on delivering real-time updates and factual coverage, with minimal analytical engagement. This aligns with the study's broader objective of identifying how format choices reflect media framing and editorial priorities during socio-political events. It underscores the role of format in influencing public understanding and media agenda-setting.

Framing Theory also offers a compelling explanation. The minimal use of opinion and editorial formats, which are the key for applying interpretive frames, suggests that newspapers avoided strong framing angles that could appear partisan. Instead, the use of straight news allows for neutral framing that highlights the "what" rather than the "why" or "how." This restrained approach fits the theory's claim that media frames shape how audiences interpret information. In this case, the frame was largely structural and factual, subtly guiding audiences to perceive the agitation as an unfolding event rather than a moral or socio-economic imperative.

## Conclusion

This study has provided important insights into the nature and impact of newspaper coverage of the organized labour agitation for a new national minimum wage in Nigeria. While the newspapers, *The Punch*, *The Nation*, and *Vanguard*, devoted some attention to the issue, the overall frequency of coverage was modest, with *The Punch* providing the most reports. However, this quantitative presence did not translate into qualitative prominence, as most reports were buried in inside pages and lacked analytical depth. The data suggest that although the issue was newsworthy, it was not treated as a central or agenda-setting topic by the newspapers during the period studied, thereby limiting its media salience.

The predominance of straight news formats and brief report lengths reveals a tendency towards episodic reporting rather than thematic coverage that interrogates the structural and socio-economic dimensions of labour agitations. Furthermore, the framing of the issue leaned heavily toward public opinion and business perspectives, with inadequate emphasis on labour rights,

fairness, or equity. This implies that Nigerian newspapers reflect elite discourses more than the lived experiences and fundamental rights of the working class. Such editorial choices are likely to influence public understanding and possibly undermine the moral legitimacy of workers' struggles in the eyes of the wider public. Therefore, the conclusion is that although newspapers continue to serve as essential channels for labour-related discourse, their prevailing reliance on straight news and elite-framed narratives suggests a limited commitment to critically engaging with the deeper structural issues underpinning workers' agitations.

## Recommendations

From the findings, it is, among other things recommended that: newspaper organisations should give more prominence to labour-related stories and diversify formats beyond straight news. In doing this, more features, editorials, and opinion articles should be integrated into coverage of labour agitations.

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