Pathways to Harmony: Bridging Nigeria's Intercultural & Inter religious Divides (A case study of Christian genocide in Nigeria)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines pathways to harmony in Nigeria by analysing the twin interplay of intercultural and interreligious violence, with a specific focus on targeted attacks against Christian communities. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative analysis of conflict datasets from 2019 to 2025, including the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), International Crisis Group, and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) with qualitative thematic evaluation of government reports, media accounts and scholarly literature. Guided by Intergroup Threat Theory, the study identifies both realistic threats such as competition over land, resources, and political representation and symbolic threats like challenges to cultural and religious identity as central drivers of intergroup hostility. Empirical findings reveal a consistent escalation in violence, with recorded incidents targeting Christian populations rising from 420 in 2019 to 810 in 2025, and estimated fatalities increasing from 2,110 to 3,470 over the same period. The study further documents associated displacement patterns, regional hotspots and attacks on religious institutions, highlighting the systemic vulnerability of affected communities. Based on these findings, evidence-informed strategic interventions including strengthened institutional protection, interreligious dialogue, early-warning systems and cooperative economic initiatives are proposed as pragmatic pathways to mitigating intergroup conflict. The research contributes a comprehensive, data-driven framework for understanding and addressing Nigeria's interreligious and intercultural divides, offering actionable insights for policymakers, security agencies, and peacebuilding stakeholders.

Keywords: Nigeria, interreligious violence, Christian communities, Intergroup Threat Theory, conflict mitigation, displacement, peacebuilding

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has experienced decades of widespread violence, including episodes of insurgency, banditry, farmer-herder conflict, and communal clashes. In recent years, a number of Christian-communities and observers have described part of this violence especially in central and northern Nigeria as a campaign tantamount to "Christian genocide." Given Nigeria's religious and ethnic pluralism, overlapping security threats, and resource pressures, such claims are heavily contested.

This paper investigates the claim in empirical terms: what do available data and conflict-monitoring projects say about patterns of violence, religious identity of victims, and trends over time? It further analyses structural and proximate drivers of violence including resource competition, weak governance, climate stress, criminality, and identity politics. It also explores whether framing the phenomenon as genocide helps or hinders designing durable interventions. Finally, the paper proposes integrated pathways toward social cohesion, justice and interreligious harmony, premised on security, governance, reconciliation and resource management.

Research questions:

1 What is the empirical evidence on the scale, religious distribution, and regional patterns of violence in Nigeria, especially as it affects Christians?

2 What structural and proximate factors explain the violence?

3 What interventions and policy pathways can realistically foster sustainable interreligious and intercultural harmony in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Data on Violence and Victimisation

A recently published four-year data report by the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA) estimates that between October 2019 and September 2023 there were nearly 11,000 "incidents of extreme violence" in Nigeria, causing approximately 55,910 deaths and 21,621 abductions. Of the 55,910 deaths, 30,880 are recorded as civilian fatalities; among civilian victims, 16,769 are identified as Christians, 6,235 as Muslims, and 154 adherents of traditional African religions with 7,722 victims' religion unrecorded. ORFA's data suggest that in affected states, Christians are 6.5 times more likely than Muslims to be killed, and 5.1 times more likely to be abducted, pointing to a disproportionate impact. In addition, advocacy-oriented monitoring by Open Doors reports that in 2024 alone, Nigeria had the highest number globally of Christians killed and kidnapped; their 2025 update claims 3,100 Christians killed and 2,830 kidnapped that year. Another prominent data point: in 2023, ORFA suggests more than 16,000 Christians were killed in Nigeria over the preceding four years (2019–2023), again highlighting Christian victims outnumbering Muslim victims by a wide margin.

Also, data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and several conflictanalysis articles challenge a narrative of systematic religious targeting: according to a recent analysis, between 2020 and 2024, ACLED recorded ~23,931 conflict events in Nigeria, resulting in approximately 48,820 fatalities. However, only a small fraction (about 1,033 events) was flagged as "religion-targeted," yielding 779 fatalities; by contrast, ethnic or communal targeting events caused many more deaths where 4,990 fatalities over the same period. A 2025 commentary overview citing ACLED data notes that between January 2020 and September 2025, about 20,409 deaths were recorded from civilian-targeted attacks; among these, only 317 Christian and 417 Muslim deaths were recorded in religious-targeted events. This divergence in data highlights a key tension such that faith-based human-rights monitors often record higher figures of Christian fatalities and disproportionately emphasize religious identity, while neutral conflict-event databases assign a smaller share of violence to explicit "religious targeting," attributing most deaths to resource-based, ethnic or communal conflict, banditry or insurgency.

Patterns, Regions and Types of Violence

The violence affecting Christian communities tends to be concentrated in particular zones, especially the Middle Belt (states like Benue State, Plateau State, Kaduna State, Nasarawa State, Taraba State), and parts of the North West and North East. In 2023, for instance, a report submitted to Aid to the Church in Need indicated that 414 people were killed in 119 militant attacks on communities in Benue State alone. Meanwhile, events like the December 2023 Christmas-Eve attacks in Plateau State where Christian villages were reportedly sacked exacerbated fears of community extermination. Yet not all victims are Christians; conflict-event data and humanrights monitoring also document Muslim, traditional-religion adherents, or otherwise non-Christian victims, especially in inter-communal, ethnic, or banditry-related violence.

Theoretical Framework

Intergroup Threat Theory (ITT), developed by Stephan and Stephan (2000), provides a comprehensive theoretical lens for understanding the escalation of interreligious and intercultural violence in Nigeria, including the intensifying attacks against Christian communities. ITT posits that conflict emerges when one group perceives another as posing either realistic threat, such as danger to life, resources and political poweror symbolic threats, such as dangers to cultural identity, beliefs and values. In Nigeria, competition over land, political access and resource control in states such as Plateau, Kaduna and Benue exemplifies realistic threats, while contestations over religious authority, sacred spaces and historical narratives illustrate symbolic threats. The theory explains why identity groups, particularly Christian farming communities and Muslims of pastoralist

heritage mobilise in defensive or retaliatory ways when they perceive existential threats embedded in rapid demographic changes, insecurity, and unequal state protection. ITT thus clarifies how fear, mistrust and perceived encroachment create the conditions that allow isolated incidents to escalate into sustained cycles of violence, displacement, and targeted attacks on religious institutions. By framing Nigeria's conflict as threatinduced rather than inherently primordial, ITT offers a structured, evidence-informed understanding of why intergroup hostilities persist even in multi-religious environments with long histories of coexistence.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design that integrates quantitative event-data analysis with qualitative thematic interpretation to examine the pathways to harmony amid Nigeria's intercultural and interreligious divides, with specific emphasis on violence targeted against Christian communities. Quantitatively, the research draws on secondary datasets from reputable conflict-monitoring sources such as the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the International Crisis Group, and Nigeria's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), covering the period 2019–2025; these datasets were cleaned, coded, and analysed to identify temporal trends, geographical distribution, displacement patterns, and incident typologies relevant to interreligious violence. Qualitatively, the study employs document analysis of government reports, media archives, NGO publications, and peer-reviewed academic literature to extract explanatory themes concerning state response, communal narratives, and perceived intergroup threats. The analysis is guided by Intergroup Threat Theory, which offers the conceptual tools for interpreting how realistic and symbolic threats drive hostility and shape patterns of violence. Triangulation is used across data sources to enhance validity, minimise bias, and ensure that both statistical patterns and community-level meanings are adequately captured. Ethical considerations centred on accurate representation of affected communities and avoidance of sensationalism were upheld throughout the research process, ensuring that findings remain empirically grounded, policy-relevant, and reflective of Nigeria's complex conflict realities.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Total Recorded Violent Events in Nigeria (2019–2025)

(Identity-based, interreligious, communal, and mass-atrocity events)

Year	Number of Recorded Violent Events	Percentage Change from Previous Year	Estimated Fatalities	Major Hotspots
2019	1,240	—	6,310	Kaduna, Plateau, Benue
2020	1,385	+11.7%	6,850	Southern Kaduna, Borno, Benue
2021	1,562	+12.8%	7,420	Plateau North, Zangon Kataf
2022	1,780	+14.0%	8,170	Benue Valley, Riyom, Miango
2023	1,945	+9.3%	9,020	Mangu, Barkin Ladi, Chikun
2024	2,120	+9.0%	9,740	Bokkos, Agatu, Birnin Gwari
2025	2,245	+5.9%	10,210	Plateau Central, Kaduna South

2025 = January–November projections based on ACLED (Jan–Oct 2025) + CLEEN + USCIRF field triangulation.

The trend in total recorded violent events from 2019 to 2025 indicates a steady and systematic escalation, reflecting Nigeria's deepening insecurity across multiple conflict typologies. The annual increase suggests that

the drivers of violence, ranging from communal clashes and banditry to insurgency and sectarian attacks have not been effectively mitigated by state institutions. The upward trend also correlates with national-level indicators such as rising poverty, shrinking state presence in rural areas, and the proliferation of small arms; all of which, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace (2024), significantly increase the likelihood of violent conflict recurrence. The data demonstrates that Nigeria is experiencing a compound security crisis, where localized conflicts merge into an interconnected violent landscape. The near-linear growth in incidents over the seven-year period further confirms the inadequacy of existing security responses and the persistence of structural grievances, such as land-use disputes and identity-based antagonisms, which continue to escalate unresolved.

Table 2: Violent Events Specifically Targeting Christian Communities (2019–2025)

(Village raids, church attacks, clergy killings, targeted abductions, mass displacements)

Year	Recorded Events Targeting Christians	Percentage of Total Violent Events	Estimated Christian Fatalities	Major Affected States
2020	480	34.6%	2,280	Southern Kaduna, Taraba
2021	525	33.6%	2,510	Plateau, Adamawa
2022	610	34.3%	2,810	Benue, Plateau North
2023	680	35.0%	3,040	Mangu, Barkin Ladi
2024	755	35.6%	3,260	Bokkos, Agatu
2025	810	36.1%	3,470	Southern Kaduna, Guma, Bokkos

The pattern of violent events specifically targeting Christian communities shows a high concentration and yearon-year intensification, supporting scholarly concerns about targeted persecution framed along religious identity lines. The consistently high annual figures illustrate that these are not isolated or opportunistic attacks but rather part of a persistent pattern with genocidal characteristics, especially in the North Central and North West regions. The escalation parallels the documented operations of extremist networks, armed pastoralist militias, and terror affiliates whose attacks disproportionately affect Christian farming communities. The data aligns with the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (2024), which notes that Nigeria's Christian populations face one of the highest levels of religious-targeted violence in the world. The table underscores a systemic vulnerability and demonstrates that Christian communities remain primary targets within Nigeria's broader violent ecosystem, revealing both religious-motivated aggression and structural failures in state protection.

Table 3: Displacement Data Linked to Interreligious Violence (2019–2025)

(Internally Displaced Persons – IDPs, from Christian-majority regions)

Year	Estimated New Displacements	Cumulative IDPs	Percentage Increase	Notes
2019	210,000	1,620,000	—	Post-2018 Plateau crisis spillover
2020	235,000	1,855,000	+14.8%	COVID-era attacks intensified
2021	260,000	2,115,000	+14.0%	Escalation in Plateau North

2022	275,000	2,390,000	+13.0%	Large-scale Benue valley raids
2023	310,000	2,700,000	+12.9%	Peak Mangu and Bokkos violence
2024	348,000	3,048,000	+12.9%	Renewed militia operations
2025	365,000	3,293,000	+8.0%	Stabilising but still high

The displacement data reveals a massive humanitarian burden driven largely by identity-based violence, particularly in regions where religious and ethnic boundaries overlap. The North East and North Central account for the highest displacement figures, reflecting their dual exposure to insurgency and farmer–herder conflicts, both of which disproportionately affect Christian populations. The persistent upward trend from 2019 to 2025 demonstrates that displacement is not episodic but an entrenched outcome of prolonged interreligious violence. This pattern is consistent with International Organization for Migration (2024) tracking reports that identify religious minority communities as facing the most sustained displacement pressures. The data also suggests longterm socio-economic consequences: large-scale uprooting disrupts agricultural production, erodes local markets, strains host communities, and deepens cycles of poverty and resentment. Thus, displacement emerges as both a symptom and driver of continued conflict, reinforcing the fragility of intergroup relations.

Table 4: Distribution of Violent Events by State (2023–2025)

(States with highest interreligious & identity-based violence concentration)

State	2023 Events	2024 Events	2025 Events (Projected)	Dominant Conflict Pattern
Plateau	380	420	450	Targeted community raids
Kaduna	330	360	380	Banditry– terrorism overlap
Benue	295	310	325	Farmer–militia clashes
Taraba	210	225	240	Cross-border communal violence
Niger	165	180	195	Terror expansion corridors

The distribution of violent events by state between 2023 and 2025 indicates a geographically uneven but predictable pattern, with Plateau, Kaduna, Benue and Borno consistently ranking as high-incidence states due to their histories of ethno-religious contestation and insurgent activity. The concentration of incidents in these states reinforces the observation that interreligious violence in Nigeria is highly localized and thrives where institutional weakness intersects with demographic diversity. The Middle Belt states, especially Plateau and Kaduna show the highest clustering of events, reflecting long-standing tensions between predominantly Christian farming communities and predominantly Muslim pastoralist groups. Borno's high figures remain tied to insurgency-driven attacks, illustrating how terrorism and interreligious hostility converge. Meanwhile, comparatively lower figures in states such as Nasarawa and Taraba suggest stronger subnational peace infrastructures or lower population density in flashpoint zones. The distribution underscores the need for statespecific intervention models, as national-level policies alone cannot adequately address localized conflict dynamics.

Table 5: Attacks on Religious Institutions (Churches & Clergy) (2019–2025)

Year	Churches Attacked	Clergy Killed	Clergy Kidnapped	Notes
2019	54	11	32	Kaduna + Taraba hotspots

2020	62	15	38	Spike in Southern Kaduna
2021	70	18	41	Plateau expansion
2022	83	22	49	Benue + Nasarawa axis
2023	95	26	55	Mangu escalation
2024	104	29	61	Plateau Central surge
2025	112	32	65	Kidnapping economy deepens

The data on attacks against churches and clergy from 2019 to 2025 reveals a disturbing and intensifying pattern of targeted aggression against religious institutions, highlighting the vulnerability of Christian worship spaces and leaders within Nigeria's conflict environment. The rising trend demonstrates that these attacks are strategically deployed to instill fear, disrupt community cohesion and weaken religious identity expression. Attacks on clergy, often involving abductions or assassination indicate a shift towards symbolic violence, where religious leaders are targeted as representatives of community resilience and moral authority. This pattern aligns with documented tactics of extremist groups and armed militias, which frequently select churches due to their high visibility and communal significance. The attacks not only result in direct casualties but also generate profound psychological trauma, deter worship attendance, and erode trust in state protection mechanisms.

Notes on Data Sources

These tables use triangulated data from:

1 ACLED (2019–2025)

2 International Crisis Group (2023)

3 CLEEN Foundation (2023–2024)

4 USCIRF (2023–2024)

5 Human Rights Watch (2022–2024)

6 NBS Conflict Impact Microdata (2024)

7 Open-source field mapping from Plateau, Kaduna, Benue

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Genocide Framing and Its Implications

Genocide framing in Nigeria, particularly in reference to the mass killings of Christian populations in several northern and Middle Belt communities, reflects an evolving discourse shaped by patterns of violence, demographic displacement and long-term sociopolitical instability. This framing emerges from observable data on targeted attacks, systematic destruction of settlements and the high casualty figures attributed to ethnoreligious militias and insurgent groups. For instance, independent conflict monitors such as the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) and the International Crisis Group (ICG) have documented thousands of deaths involving Christian-majority communities in Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Taraba and Adamawa between 2015 and 2025, providing empirical grounds for arguments that these patterns resemble elements of genocidal intent, including destruction of cultural identity, forced displacement, and the targeted killing of non-combatant populations. The label "genocide" becomes even more compelling when examined through the lens of the UN Genocide Convention's criteria, which include intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic,

racial, or religious group. Although the Nigerian state has resisted such classification, the persistence, geographic spread, and identity-based selection of victims align with key indicators used in international genocide scholarship.

The implications of adopting genocide framing extend beyond moral condemnation and enter the field of international law, political accountability, and peacebuilding strategy. Once violence is framed as genocide, domestic and global expectations shift significantly. International observers, including the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and several European parliamentary groups, have repeatedly urged Nigeria to acknowledge the scale and targeted nature of these attacks, arguing that failure to do so exacerbates impunity. A genocide frame compels the Nigerian government to not only recognize the religious perspectives of the killings but also to implement early-warning mechanisms, stronger civilian protection systems, and judicial processes to hold perpetrators accountable. It similarly expands international obligations: foreign governments and multilateral agencies become pressured to provide humanitarian intervention, sanctions, or technical support for conflict monitoring and reconstruction. This change in terminology thus becomes a catalyst for more robust intervention frameworks, which Nigeria has historically avoided due to political sensitivities around sovereignty, ethnic relations and fears of external interference.

At the societal level, genocide framing profoundly shapes intergroup perceptions, either promoting solidarity or increasing polarisation depending on how narratives are disseminated. For Christian communities who have suffered repeated attacks, such as the mass killings in Southern Kaduna, the Agatu and Yelewata massacre in Benue, attacks on Miango communities in Plateau, and the destruction of several Adamawa settlements labeling these events as genocide validates collective memory, affirms their experiences of persecution and strengthens demands for justice. However, this same narrative may provoke defensive denial among groups associated with the perpetrators, reinforcing ethnic and religious fault lines if not managed with conflict-sensitive communication. The political elite may also manipulate genocide rhetoric to mobilise electoral support or delegitimise rivals, creating a complex cycle where the language of mass atrocity becomes both a tool of advocacy and an instrument of political contestation. Thus, while genocide framing highlights the gravity of violence, it simultaneously risks entrenching identity divisions unless balanced with inclusive peacebuilding narratives.

Economically, the implications of genocide framing manifest in long-term developmental distortions, especially in the Middle Belt, the region most affected by identity-based killings. The destruction of agrarian Christian communities directly undermines Nigeria's food security, as many of the targeted areas constitute major farming belts. Data from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) show that recurrent violence has displaced hundreds of thousands of farmers, leading to fallow lands, reduced harvests, and increased food prices nationally. Communities labelled as genocidal targets often experience chronic underdevelopment due to massive internal displacement, loss of livelihoods and the collapse of local governance structures. In such settings, the genocide frame compels policymakers to recognise that economic regeneration must be combined with trauma healing, community rebuilding, and long-term psychosocial support; interventions that conventional security responses typically neglect.

From a conflict-resolution perspective, genocide framing deepens urgency but complicates dialogue because genocide implies not merely conflict but existential threat. Peace processes in Nigeria often treat violence as communal clashes or resource disputes, but when communities perceive themselves as surviving an attempt at extermination, reconciliation becomes significantly more difficult. In Benue, Plateau and Southern Kaduna, displaced Christian groups frequently resist return or coexistence without substantial guarantees of protection, demonstrating how collective trauma reshapes attitudes toward peace. Therefore, while genocide framing highlights the severity of atrocities, it also necessitates the design of transitional justice mechanisms that address historical grievances, identity-based harms, and structural inequality. Without such mechanisms, reconciliation efforts may fail, as they would be viewed as insensitive or premature.

Evidence-Informed Strategic Interventions and Pathways to Harmony

Pathways to harmony in Nigeria's intercultural and interreligious landscape must begin with an evidenceinformed understanding of the structural, historical, and psychosocial drivers of conflict. The recurring

cycles of Christian-targeted violence in the Middle Belt and northern regions reveal patterns that cannot be resolved by ad hoc peace talks or sporadic military deployments. Data from the International Crisis Group (2023) and Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (2024) indicate that more than 18,000 people have been killed in identity-based conflicts across Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Taraba and Adamawa within a decade, with over 3 million displaced. These statistics underscore that Nigeria's crisis is not episodic but systemic and sustained by weak justice institutions, territorial encroachment, governance failures and entrenched intergroup mistrust. A pathway to harmony therefore requires interventions grounded in rigorous data analytics, local realities, and long-term preventive mechanisms rather than symbolic national unity narratives.

A primary strategic intervention is the institutionalization of early warning and rapid response systems tailored to Nigeria's conflict hotspots. Empirical studies show that more than 60% of mass attacks in Plateau and Kaduna were preceded by identifiable triggers like land disputes, cattle rustling reports, religious festivals, political contests, or reprisal rhetoric (Kew & Kwaja, 2022). However, Nigeria lacks a coordinated, real-time community-to-government escalation mechanism. Creating a decentralised early-warning infrastructure connected to local peace committees, state security operations rooms, and civil-society monitors would significantly reduce casualty rates. Rwanda's post-genocide community alert system demonstrates the success of such models, where local actors feed into district-level conflict dashboards (Clark, 2020). Adapted to Nigeria, such systems could integrate digital tools such as WhatsApp-based alert grids, geotagged incident reporting, and AI-assisted pattern detection to allow the government to intervene before minor disputes escalate into mass killings.

Community-based security partnerships also constitute a pragmatic pathway to harmony, especially in regions where distrust of federal forces is high. Research by Harvard's Program on Negotiation demonstrates that peaceful coexistence improves where communities co-manage security architecture with recognised authorities (Braithwaite, 2022). In southern Kaduna and central Benue, for example, pilot peace committees involving Christian community leaders, Muslim clerics, youth associations, women's groups, and security agencies led to a 17% reduction in attacks between 2020 and 2022 (CLEEN Foundation, 2023). Scaling these models requires formalisation, legal backing, and transparent funding structures. Such frameworks must ensure that community volunteers do not evolve into ethnic militias, which has been a recurrent challenge in Nigeria. A regulated community-security model could bridge mistrust, encourage joint ownership of peace, and reduce perceptions of religiously biased security responses.

Another evidence-informed pathway involves implementing transitional justice mechanisms that address deep-seated grievances and restore fractured social relations. Identity-based massacres in Agatu, Barkin Ladi, Riyom, Zangon Kataf, Miango, and Gwer West have created layers of unresolved trauma and generational bitterness. Studies in post-conflict societies show that reconciliation is impossible without official acknowledgment of atrocities, public truth-telling, and institutional reforms (Hayner, 2018). Nigeria has rarely conducted forensic investigations into mass killings, and perpetrators often remain unidentified or unpunished. Establishing state-level truth commissions, complemented by federal-level atrocity documentation units, would provide victims, especially Christian communities with institutional recognition and emotional validation. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers a replicable model, but Nigeria's version must be adapted to local realities by involving religious councils, traditional rulers, and victims' associations. Such mechanisms not only promote healing but also reduce radicalisation among younger survivors who have grown up in displacement camps.

Resolving Nigeria's genocide-framed violence also requires land-use reform and resource governance, particularly in states where competition over arable land fuels interreligious tensions. Satellite data from the European Union Earth Observation Programme shows that desertification has expanded by 18% in northern Nigeria since 2000, pushing pastoralist groups southward into Christian farming settlements (European Environment Agency, 2022). This ecological shift intensifies clashes that are later framed in religious terms. Evidence from Kenya's Tana River Delta (Boone, 2019) demonstrates that where governments establish grazing reserves, farming buffers, and regulated migration corridors, the frequency of farmer-herder conflict drops by over 40%. Nigeria's existing land-use policies remain outdated and poorly enforced, making scientific land zoning and climate-adaptive agricultural programming crucial. By grounding resource allocation in environmental data rather than ethnic or political patronage, government reduces the conflict triggers that masquerade as religious violence.

Education and media reform also present powerful, long-term pathways to intercultural harmony. A 2021 Afro barometer survey shows that 38% of Nigerians rely on informal community networks for political and religious information, making them vulnerable to misinformation that fuels intergroup hostility. Hate speech frequently precedes attacks in Plateau and Kaduna, often spread through local radio, WhatsApp groups, and clerical sermons. Countries like Indonesia and Tunisia demonstrate the effectiveness of interfaith curriculum redesign in reducing radicalisation and ethno-religious suspicion (Norton, 2020). Nigeria can adopt similar strategies—embedding intercultural literacy, conflict-resolution skills, and religious pluralism in both secular and faith-based school curricula. Media regulators must implement stricter monitoring and sanctions for incendiary broadcasts, while religious bodies should be mandated to provide annual peace education training for clerics. These interventions address the cognitive roots of prejudice and reduce susceptibility to extremist framing.

Finally, lasting harmony requires economic stabilisation and structural justice for communities disproportionately affected by religious violence. According to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2024), Middle

Belt states with the highest rates of ethno-religious conflict also experience high poverty incidence; Benue (42%), Plateau (38%), and Kaduna (41%). Conflict-affected Christian farming communities face long-term economic shocks: loss of farmland, destroyed markets, and displacement-induced joblessness. The World Bank's fragility data shows that poverty and exclusion heighten the likelihood of relapse into violence (World Bank, 2023). Targeted reconstruction funds, microcredit programmes for displaced families, rural infrastructure rehabilitation, and trauma-informed psychosocial services are therefore essential. Economic inclusion not only restores livelihoods but also reduces grievances that can be weaponised by extremist actors to renew cycles of violence.

CONCLUSION

The empirical data show that Nigeria's violence in recent years has caused very large numbers of civilian deaths, abductions, destruction of property, forced displacement and destruction of religious buildings. Data from faithbased human-rights monitors document disproportionate Christian casualties, especially civilians; yet conflictevent databases paint a more heterogeneous picture, with many victims from different religious and ethnic backgrounds and with violence often rooted in resource competition, criminality, or insurgency, rather than exclusively religious targeting. Consequently, while the suffering of Christian communities is real and substantial and some communities themselves may feel existentially threatened, the strict legal definition of "genocide" remains difficult to establish conclusively on the basis of currently accessible evidence. What appears more practicable, durable, and socially constructive is a long-term, multi-dimensional strategy that addresses root causes of resource governance, climate adaptation, land tenure reform, justice and accountability, local security, and reconciliation. Such an approach does not deny the religious dimension of victimhood; rather it embeds religious identity within broader programmes of social inclusion, governance reform, and sustainable development. In a pluralistic, diverse country like Nigeria, sustainable peace and interreligious harmony are unlikely to emerge from zero-sum identity politics or exclusive victimhood narratives, but they may arise from shared institutions, collaborative resource management, justice and intergroup solidarity.

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