



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### FAITH TARGETED VIOLENCE AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN NIGERIA

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#### ABSTRACT

The intersection of religious identity with ethnic, regional, and economic divisions has created a complex landscape of violence that defies easy classification, as religious violence in Nigeria is as a result of larger structural problems, such as resource competitiveness, political manipulation of religious identities, historical grievances, and governance failures, rather than just theological differences. Religiously motivated conflicts have escalated due to the emergence of violent non-state actors and extremist organizations like the Boko Haram, who are smaller groups of the Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP). The study adopted a descriptive research approach through the use of secondary sourced data. The research was a qualitative research study as it involved solely the collection of non-numerical data analysis and it also relied on content analysis as its method of data analysis. The findings revealed that faith-based violence has disrupted the long-standing social bonds and weakened the daily relationships that once sustained communal life in many places. It was recommended that the Nigerian government should promote community-based interfaith communication and collaboration by endorsing programs that unites Christians and Muslims.

**Keywords:** Faith-targeted issue, violence, sustainability, peace, religion.

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## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a multi-religious state that is distinguished by its remarkable diversity in ethnic identities, cultural expressions, and religious compositions. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions are the three main religions that predominate in Nigeria, with each religion deeply entwined with the social structure and collective consciousness of communities across the country. This religious diversity should ideally promote peaceful coexistence, mutual tolerance, and national development (Pate et al., 2014; Iweze, 2024). However, faith-targeted violence, which is violence motivated by or in response to religious texts, precepts, or ideological beliefs, has rapidly increased in Nigeria over the past decades and has become a source of violent conflicts that threaten national stability, social cohesion, and development (Oyeyemi, 2025; Turan, 2025).

The intersection of religious identity with ethnic, regional, and economic divisions has created a complex landscape of violence. Religious violence in Nigeria is largely rooted in structural factors such as political manipulation of religious identities, resource competition, historical grievances, and governance failures rather than purely theological differences (Lawal & Dauda, 2023). These conflicts have deep historical roots traceable to the colonial period and the early post-independence era, particularly the entrenchment of Christian–Muslim tensions through electoral mobilisation and party politics (Okpanachi, 2012; Lawal & Dauda, 2023).

These tensions persist in regions such as the Middle Belt and northern Nigeria, where recurring incidents of communal violence, displacement, and destruction of religious property remain prevalent (HART UK, 2018; Coker, 2025). Religiously motivated violence has further intensified with the emergence of extremist groups such as Boko Haram and its affiliate, the Islamic State in the West Africa Province (ISWAP).

The phenomenon of Boko Haram evolved from a small religious movement into a large-scale jihadist insurgency, destabilizing northeastern Nigeria and neighbouring states through attacks on civilians, government institutions, educational facilities, and religious communities (Center for Preventive Action, 2021; Iweze, 2024; Alabi, 2024). Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended), persistent faith-targeted violence raises serious concerns about the state's capacity to protect citizens and manage religious tensions (Nwonwu, 2025).

Beyond the immediate loss of life, faith-targeted violence undermines community relations, socioeconomic activities, national cohesion, and prospects for sustainable peace. If unaddressed, continued religious violence risks entrenching cycles of mistrust, displacement, erosion of public confidence in state institutions, and long-term instability, with significant domestic and international consequences (Alabi, 2024; Welle, 2025; Bello, 2025). Given the aforementioned, a study of this type deserves to be carried out to examine the impact of sustainable peace on faith-targeted violence in Nigeria.

The objectives of this study are to examine the impact of faith-based attacks on community cohesion, inter-religious relations, and national peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria; and to examine the adequacy of the roles of government institutions, security agencies, and peacebuilding actors in addressing faith-targeted violence and promoting sustainable peace in Nigeria.



## **2.0. CONCEPTUALIZATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Violence**

Violence is the behaviour that involves physical force that is intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something. Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in, or has a high likelihood of, resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (World Health Organisation, 2025). According to Jacquin (2025), violence is the act of physical force that causes or is intended to cause harm, and the damage inflicted by violence may be physical, psychological, or both, and it can be distinguished from aggression, which is a more general type of hostile behaviour that may be physical, verbal, or passive in nature.

#### **Faith Targeted Violence**

Faith-targeted violence is the persecution, hate crime, and violence targeted at specific people, organizations, or groups that are singled out as victims due to their perceived or actual religious identity or beliefs. It requires preparation and is driven by animosity, prejudice, hatred, or discrimination against a specific religion (Litvak et al., 2024). Faith-targeted violence are the violence motivated by or in response to a target's or an attacker's religious texts, precepts, or doctrines. It has to do with acts of violence against religious organizations, individuals, things, or occasions that are frequently planned and targeted at particular people, groups, or places.

Religion is a tool of social harmony that unites people into a cohesive social group when it is genuinely practiced, and can be harmful when used wrongly, which led to it being indicated as a 'double-edged sword' (Ibenwa et al, 2025). Terrorist attacks and other acts of extreme violence in the modern era are often justified as "holy warfare" and since religion has been at the center of the majority of violent confrontations worldwide for several decade, it has gained notoriety as one of the major security issues facing the world as an aftermath of the Cold War. Faith-targeted violence are the violent acts motivated by, framed through, and directed at people and communities based on their religious identity which emerged as one of the most urgent security and humanitarian challenges facing contemporary Nigeria (Lawal & Dauda, 2023).

#### **Terrorism**

Terrorism is the unlawful use or threat of violence, often targeted at civilians to instill fear and achieve political, religious, or ideological goals, and coercing governments or societies to change policies. It involves the creation of terror to pressure a third party, which extends beyond the immediate victims and can be domestic or international (Jenkins, 2025). According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (2023), Terrorism is the violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups who are inspired by, or associated with, designated foreign terrorist organizations or nations (state-sponsored) on the international level; and it is the violent, criminal acts committed by individuals and/or groups to further ideological goals stemming from domestic influences, such as those of a political, religious, social, racial, or environmental nature on the domestic level.



Terrorism is the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear; that is intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022). It is the constitution of the illegitimate use of force to achieve a political objective when innocent people are targeted (Bruce, 2013). It is also the recurrent use or threatened use of politically motivated and clandestinely organised violence, by a group whose aim is to influence a psychological target in order to make it behave in a way which the group desires. Terrorism is the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2022).

### **Sustainable Peace**

Sustainable peace is an holistic idea that goes beyond just the absence of war (negative peace) to actively creating enduring peace by addressing the underlying causes of conflict, promoting justice, equity, human rights, and development, and creating robust societal structures (positive peace) that allows everyone thrive, by ensuring peace endures across generations through inclusive, nationally-owned processes (Bauer, 2019). Sustainable peace involves the prevention of conflict, fostering community reconciliation, strengthening governance, and the promotion of well-being (Sustainability Directory, 2025). Sustainable peace has to do with the intervention, strengthening the rule of law, fostering sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, social development, sustainable development and national reconciliation that are done through inclusive dialogue and mediation, access to justice and transitional justice, accountability, good governance, democracy, accountable institutions, respect for human rights and gender equality (Falusi, 2022). Sustainable peace means more than just ending violence; it is a holistic process of tackling root causes like poverty, injustice, and poor governance through inclusive development, strong institutions, education for tolerance, and active citizen participation to build a society where everyone has security, justice, and opportunities, and fostering lasting harmony and preventing conflict recurrence (Igbuzor, 2021). It involves transforming conflict-ridden systems into peaceful cultures by promoting human rights, equality, dialogue, and good governance, ensuring development benefits all citizens.

### **2.2. Literature Review**

#### **Faith Targeted Violence against the Christian Community in Nigeria**

Faith-targeted violence in Nigeria's Middle Belt has escalated into “a full-blown crisis,” where religious identity intersects with disputes over land and resources between Christian farmers and Muslim herders (International Crisis Group, 2020). Systematic attacks on Christian villages and churches during worship indicate that Christians have increasingly become primary targets of victimisation (Bauer, 2019). The jihadist insurgency led by Boko Haram and ISWAP specifically targets Christians to establish an Islamic state. Founded in 2002 and operational since 2009, Boko Haram has killed and displaced thousands through church bombings, kidnappings, executions, and forced removal of Christian populations, often justifying these attacks as religious warfare (Shekau, 2016; Akinleye, 2025; Kiara, 2026). Beyond jihadist activity, Christian communities in the Middle Belt also face attacks from Fulani militias, involving night raids, killings, burning of homes and churches, and mass displacement (Blog, 2021; Madueke, 2025).



A notable incident occurred on 5 June 2022, when gunmen attacked St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State, during Pentecost Sunday mass, killing at least 40 people, including children, and injuring many others (Odhiambo & Andrew, 2022; Benjamin, 2022). Nigerian authorities attributed the attack to ISWAP, which claimed responsibility through its Amaq news agency (Akinleye, 2025; Ayika & Onwurah, 2025). This attack highlighted the expansion of faith-targeted violence into southwestern Nigeria, previously considered more secure, and occurred shortly before the assassination of Deborah Samuel over alleged blasphemy. It drew condemnation from President Buhari, Pope Francis, the United States, the United Kingdom, and various human rights organisations (Sanni & Adelaja, 2022; Vatican News, 2022). Christian communities in Nigeria have repeatedly faced targeted attacks during religious celebrations and worship.

Examples include the 2011 Christmas bombing at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Madalla, the 2012 Easter attack in Kaduna, the 2014 Chibok schoolgirls' abduction (B.B.C News, 2012; Zenn, 2014), the captivity of Leah Sharibu, the January 2020 execution of Reverend Lawan Andimi (Odinkalu, 2025; ACN Press Team, 2020), the 2016-2021 killings in southern Kaduna, the June 2018 Plateau State massacres, and the January 2018 attacks in Benue State. Individual Christians, including aid workers and midwives, have also been targeted using religious tests before execution (Odhiambo & Andrew, 2022).

### **Faith Targeted Violence against the Muslim Community in Nigeria**

Religious violence in Nigeria has historical roots in British colonial policies, which institutionalized regional and religious divisions, creating structural inequalities and identity-based politics that persisted after independence (Falola, 1998). Post-independence Nigeria has witnessed recurring cycles of religious violence triggered by political events, local disputes, or religious provocations. Major incidents occurred in Kano (1953, 1966, 1980s–2000s), Jos (2001, 2008, 2010), and Kaduna (1987, 1992, 2000, 2002), affecting both Muslim and Christian communities (Obodo & Mbek, 2025). Violence often follows cyclical patterns, with attacks on one community provoking reprisals. For instance, the 2001 Jos riots, sparked by the appointment of a Muslim politician, left around 1,000 dead, displaced populations, and resulted in the destruction of mosques and neighborhoods (Odhiambo & Andrew, 2022). Muslims have also suffered heavily from Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies in northeastern Nigeria, which targeted religious leaders, officials, civilians, and mosques especially those associated with Sufi traditions. Communities resisting insurgent control faced executions, forced recruitment, and widespread destruction (ACN Press Team, 2020).

Security operations against Boko Haram sometimes compounded Muslim suffering through mass arrests, extrajudicial killings, and neighborhood destruction, highlighting the vulnerability of Muslim communities even in counterinsurgency efforts (Alabi, 2024). In the Middle Belt and southern states, Muslims also faced targeted attacks from Christian-dominated militias and vigilante groups. Southern Kaduna experienced coordinated anti-Muslim violence in 2010, resulting in deaths, mass displacement, and destruction of mosques, further entrenching religious segregation in Jos and worsening communal distrust (Daily Trust, 2010; Obodo & Mbek, 2025). Other significant incidents include the 2004 Yelwa Massacre, the 2000 Kaduna Sharia riots, the 2007 assassination of Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam for opposing Boko Haram (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005), the 2002 and 2004 Langtang North farmer-herder conflicts in Anguwan Rukuba (Higazi, 2011), the March 2017 violence



in Mambilla Plateau, killings of Muslim leaders in Borno, and the July 2014 attack on Kano's Central Mosque (Odhiambo & Andrew, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2014). Extrajudicial killings, mob violence, and intra-Muslim conflicts following the rise of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) underscore the widespread and multifaceted nature of violence against Muslims.

### **Effect of Faith Targeted Violence on Nigeria's Economy, Election and Business**

Faith-targeted violence imposes substantial direct and indirect costs on the Nigerian economy and reduces the national GDP by significant margins annually. The Institute for Economics and Peace (2020) estimated that violence, which includes religious violence, cost the economy \$16.1 billion in 2020, equivalent to 3.5% of GDP (Alabi, 2024). Boko Haram insurgency alone reduced economic output in the northeast by approximately 60% between 2009 and 2014, disrupting agricultural and commercial activities in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States (Meagher, 2014). Agriculture, which employs 70% of Nigeria's labor force and contributes 25% of GDP, has been especially affected, leading to displacement, food insecurity, and destruction of infrastructure, schools, and markets, especially in Jos and other Middle Belt cities (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2020; Danfulani & Fwatshak, 2002). The displacement exacerbates economic losses and imposes significant costs on host communities and the government, with the northeast alone losing over \$1.2 billion annually in agriculture, commerce, and services (Eme et al., 2015).

Additional impacts include increased defense spending, disrupted education, transportation challenges, and losses in tourism and the hospitality sector (Education Cannot Wait, 2020; Nwankpa, 2014; Nigerian Hotel Association, 2016). Religious violence is also politically instrumentalized. The 2011 post-election violence targeted Christian communities, including churches, homes, and INEC offices (National Human Rights Commission, 2011). In 2023, the "same-faith" APC presidential ticket triggered opposition from Christian leaders and highlighted ethno-religious voting patterns (Odinkalu, 2025; Premium Times, 2022; Suberu, 2021). Such violence disrupts voter registration, polling operations, and party activities, undermining credible elections and shaping political outcomes (Yahaya & Bello, 2020; Saint, 2025).

### **Effect of Faith Targeted Violence on Nigeria's relation with other States**

Nigeria's struggle with faith-targeted violence has led to sustained international attention which has influenced its diplomatic ties with important global actors. Following the 2014 abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls by the Boko Haram terrorist groups, international pressure was on Nigeria was increased, which led to the increased involvement of Western states and transnational institutions. In order to help Nigeria combat insurgency, the United States, the United Kingdom and France increased their security assistance, intelligence sharing, and equipment support, which strengthened their bilateral relations in the aspect of counterterrorism cooperation (Adebisi, 2020). The United States' concerns about Nigeria's counterterrorism strategy and reported human rights abuses has occasionally strained Nigeria's relations with Washington which led to the withholding of military support in order to demand improved conduct (Iweze 2021), which showcases how faith-targeted violence can complicate diplomatic relations when partners are concerned about governance and civil liberties. Religious insurgency in Nigeria has affected its neighbouring states which has led to multilateral security responses that linked Nigeria's foreign policy to regional diplomacy, with countries like Cameroon, Chad, and Niger who share borders with Nigeria deploying troops as part of



a multinational joint force authorised by the African Union to combat Boko Haram and affiliated groups (Alabi, 2024). This collective security engagement has reinforced Nigeria's role in regional security architectures and also necessitated diplomatic coordination to manage joint operations and refugee flows. The transnational nature of militant groups also led to the recruitment of fighters from neighbouring Sahel states and led to the engagement in complex negotiations and intelligence sharing with its neighbours to manage cross-border threats (Nsaibia, 2025).

Since high-profile attacks on Christian communities or institutions have prompted rhetoric from foreign political actors that Nigeria is failing to protect religious minorities as incidents seen by other countries as an act of faith-targeted violence have influenced international public opinion and foreign policy responses toward Nigeria. The Nigerian President rejected the 2025 threats of military intervention and conditional suspension of United States' aid due to alleged anti-Christian violence by emphasising its commitment to religious freedom and balanced security responses (Demarest et al., 2020). Faith-targeted violence has also indirectly affected Nigeria's economic relations with other states with persistent insecurity that is linked to the Boko Haram insurgency discouraging foreign direct investment (FDI), and the significant decline in investment flows during peak periods of violence (Effiom et al, 2024).

This economic fallout has adverse effects on Nigeria's international partnerships, as diminished investor confidence can strain economic diplomacy and reduce Nigeria's attractiveness as a regional hub for trade and investment. The humanitarian consequences of faith-targeted violence, including large-scale displacement and loss of life, have also engage international organisations and states in relief efforts, with this involvement shaping Nigeria's role in humanitarian diplomacy and the creation of partnerships beyond just security-focused cooperation, expanding into development assistance, peacebuilding initiatives, and intercultural dialogue programs (Ovie, 2025).

### **Effect of Faith Targeted Violence on Sustainability, and Community Cohesion**

Sustainable development involves meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. Faith-targeted violence undermines this principle in multiple ways as religious violence directly destroys human capital and physical infrastructure that are important for development given the repeated attacks on places of worship and civilian areas, such as bombings on churches in Kaduna and the Christmas Day attacks of 2011 which result in death, injury, and community trauma that diverted resources away from productive uses (B.B.C News, 2012). Violence and insecurity disrupt daily livelihoods, agricultural activities, and business operations because conflict leads to economic instability and discourages investment, as insecurity raises the cost of doing business and reduces foreign and domestic capital inflows (Ovie, 2025).

The diversion of public resources also happens as government's spending get diverted towards security and reconstruction rather than towards education, health, and infrastructure projects that promote sustainability. The developments of budgets are regularly redirected toward emergency response rather than long-term sustainability projects due to the frequent property destruction and displacement that emerged as a result of violence with religious overtones (Adebiyi, 2020). Social services and human development are also undermined as ongoing insurgency and conflict deteriorates social outcomes such as increased food insecurity and child health challenges in conflict zones, which



implies that violence hampers efforts to achieve sustainable human development indicators (Vesco et al., 2025).

Community cohesion is the strength of relationships and sense of solidarity among members of a society, and faith-targeted violence deeply damages this cohesion through mutual distrust and fear as recurring violence towards religious identities fosters distrust between faith groups, because the persistent narratives of persecution and retaliatory attacks deepens suspicions and reduces opportunities for interfaith cooperation (Vonhm, 2025). The displacement and fragmentation of communities also damages cohesion as violence frequently displace communities, break down traditional social networks and weakens the bonds that hold communities together. Mass displacement reduces daily interactions between groups, which diminishes the opportunities for shared livelihood activities and social bonding (Posklinsky et al., 2025). Post-conflict reintegration challenges occurs even when violence recedes, as the reintegration of former combatants, displaced persons, and traumatised civilians often fails to restore full social cohesion. In the northeastern Nigeria animosity, and perceptions of injustice about the roles played by different groups in conflict, and the insufficient community involvement in reintegration hinders social cohesion long after active conflict subsides. The historical episodes of religious violence, such as the 2004 attacks in Yelwa, catalysed cycles of retaliation between Muslim and Christian communities reinforces sectarian identities and reduces trust (Obodo & Mbek, 2025).

### **Impact of Faith Targeted Violence on Sustainable Peace in Nigeria**

Nigeria has been plagued by religious conflict for decades, which has had a significant impact on the state and its citizens (Manullang & Wicaksono, 2023), and these conflicts are frequently entwined with ethnic, political, and socioeconomic factors, and they can manifest in different forms, such as through resource-based militancy, separatist agitations, and communal clashes, all of which impede the country's efforts to develop sustainably (Umeh, 2023; Williams, 2023). The rise of Boko Haram and the ongoing conflicts involving Fulani herdsmen, which are frequently framed within religious narratives, has contributed to the widespread nature of faith-targeted violence which has resulted in a substantial loss of life, extensive property destruction, and a profound disruption of social cohesion that directly undermines the prospects for long-term stability and progress (Solomon et al., 2023), this can be traced to the rise of Boko Haram and the persistent clashes involving Fulani herdsmen that is constantly framed within religious narratives, and has exacerbated insecurity, displacing communities, and disrupting agricultural productivity that are of great importance for national sustenance (Adesoji, 2019; Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020).

This increases ethnic fractionalisation, especially in northern Nigeria where Islamic identity is predominant, and hinders economic growth and entrepreneurial enthusiasm by inducing fear in young, productive populations (Solomon et al., 2023). By taking resources and attention away from important societal needs, the protracted insecurity and the ensuing humanitarian crises in the country's north led to the accomplishment of sustainable development goals as well as those on poverty alleviation, education, and health (Awotayo & Akinrinde, 2022). Additionally, Boko Haram's destruction of churches and attacks on Christian communities can be linked to the distortion of religious narratives by extremist groups (Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020), the Kwara State church attack by gunmen that killed at least two people and the kidnapping of the church pastor and some worshippers (Kingimi, 2025)



further intensifies the inter-religious animosity and mistrust (Al Jazeera, 2025). This manipulation is often rooted in narrow-mindedness and a parochial interpretation of religious beliefs that transforms religion from a potential force for social cohesion into a weapon for fomenting trouble (Adegbami & Adeoye, 2021), which has given the country's multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition, where religion was a unifying factor, become a catalyst for widespread destruction (Aladire, 2021; Solomon et al., 2023).

### **2.3. Theoretical Framework**

This study was underpinned by Adam Curle (Peace and Conflict Studies), Johan Galtung, Louis Kriesberg, Kumar Rupesinghe, Raimo Väyrynen), John Paul Lederach, and Diana Francis' Conflict Transformation Theory, which was proposed through their various works which addressed the underlying structures, cultures and institutions that encourage and condition violent political and social conflict. The theory views conflict not simply as a problem to be stopped but as a deep social process that must be transformed at its roots (Lederach, 2003), and that violent conflict emerges from long-standing issues such as structural inequality, identity differences, historical grievances, damaged relationships, and weak institutions, and rather than treating conflict as a temporary disruption that can be managed or resolved through negotiation alone.

Conflict Transformation Theory sees conflict as an opportunity for constructive change capable of reshaping societies, institutions, and interactions between groups. The core tenets of the theory are that conflict is natural and can be constructive; violence is a symptom, not the root problem; need for long-term structural change; and the promotion of local ownership and multi-level engagement. These dynamics are especially evident in the systemic tackling of inequities and governance shortcomings, as widespread Christian kidnappings and murders occurs in places with weak or nonexistent states, and security agencies' inability to protect vulnerable communities leads to trauma, fear, and marginalization. The theory also tackles systemic inequities and governance shortcomings, as widespread Christian kidnappings and murders occur in places with weak or nonexistent states, and security agencies' inability to protect vulnerable communities.

### **3.0. METHODOLOGY**

In order to make findings and arrive at conclusions, the conceptual research approach to locate, analyze, infer, and present systematic reasoning relevant data was used for the study by the researcher. Snyder (2019) describes this strategy as “including identifying and locating relevant material in secondary sources, assessing what you find, and then developing and expressing your thoughts”. As a result, this study relied on descriptive research approach and the use of secondary sourced data (information from textbook, journals, eBooks, magazines, newspaper reports, scholarly submissions, reports from the International Crisis Group, human rights watch/Amnesty International reports, government publications, peacebuilding project reports, religious dialogue reports, etc. that are related to the subject matter) to carry out a qualitative analysis.

The study adopted the use of articles and journals from past scholars found on the internet. This research article is dependent solely on the adaptation of secondary sources of data. This research shall be seen as a qualitative research study as it would involve solely the collection of non-numerical data analysis and this research work would rely on content analysis as its method of data analysis. Through



this method of analytical presentation, the study was then able to confirm the areas, nature, impact and implication of faith targeted violence on sustainable peace in Nigeria.

#### 4.0. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the impact of faith targeted violence on sustainable peace in Nigeria. The discussion is hereby organized according to the major findings from the two research objectives in the study.

##### **What impact do the faith-based attacks have on community cohesion, inter-religious relations, and national peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria?**

Faith-based violence in Nigeria has profoundly reshaped social structures, weakened community cohesion, and complicated long-term peacebuilding efforts (Oyeyemi, 2025). Attacks have forced Christians and Muslims into areas where their faith is dominant, creating religious enclaves, as exemplified by the 2004 Yelwa attacks in Plateau State, which emptied villages and destroyed intercommunal coexistence. Collective memories of violence, such as the 2001 and 2008 Jos riots and Boko Haram's 2012 church bombings in Kaduna and Zaria, reinforce mistrust and vulnerability, enabling rapid mobilisation along religious lines, particularly when conflicts involve socioeconomic marginalisation, political competition, or land disputes (Obodo & Mbek, 2025).

These recurring attacks challenge national peacebuilding, forcing governments to balance structural conflict resolution with immediate security responses, while international narratives risk oversimplifying Nigeria's complex religious tensions and reinforcing polarization (Lawal & Dauda, 2023; Coker, 2025). Nevertheless, interfaith dialogue, peace committees, and community mediation as seen in the 2012 Kano Covenant which showed that religious identity can promote reconciliation. Communities with strong institutions and inclusive norms have maintained peace amid national tensions (Welle, 2025; Iweze, 2021; Bello, 2025). Faith-targeted violence thus affects not only lives and property but also settlement patterns, social perceptions, governance, and Nigeria's position in global debates on religious freedom (Iweze, 2022).

##### **How adequate are the roles of government institutions, security agencies, and peacebuilding actors in addressing faith-targeted violence and promoting sustainable peace in Nigeria?**

The effectiveness of Nigerian government institutions, security agencies, and peacebuilding actors in addressing faith-targeted violence remains widely debated. In late 2025, the federal government declared a nationwide "security emergency" in response to increasing attacks on churches, mosques, and public gathering spaces. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu emphasised expanded intelligence operations, mass recruitment of police and army personnel, and deployment of elite security officers to conflict zones (Okere, 2025; Odinkalu, 2025). Directives to schools following armed attacks, such as the incident in Kwara State, underscore the reactive approach of government interventions. Agencies like the National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and inter-agency initiatives, including multi-stakeholder summits, reflect an emerging recognition of the need for integrated and preventive strategies (News Agency, 2025). Non-state actors, especially faith-based organizations (FBOs) and community networks, fill critical gaps in local peacebuilding.



Faith-based Organisations engage in deradicalisation through grassroots education, counter-ideological messaging, and livelihood projects, especially in northeastern Nigeria, though their impact is limited by structural challenges like poverty and unemployment (Ishaku et al., 2021; Emmanuel, 2025). Local defence groups, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), have supported military operations against Boko Haram by providing intelligence and community protection (Bamidele, 2020). At the sub-national level, peace commissions in Plateau, Kaduna, and Adamawa states have facilitated dialogue forums and early warning systems to prevent escalation of violence (Ohazurume: Ayika & Onwurah, 2025), and while government interventions through military operations, reforms, and inclusive summits demonstrates the willingness to address faith-targeted violence (Nwachukwu, 2025), efforts often remain fragmented, reactive, and insufficiently connected to long-term social and economic strategies that tackle underlying causes such as marginalisation, poverty, and identity grievances (Ardovino, 2025).

## **5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Conclusions**

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that faith-targeted violence in Nigeria is expressed through the killing of Christians, abductions, destruction of churches, and repeated attacks on religious communities which poses a serious threat to national stability and the pursuit of sustainable peace, as the persistence of these attacks reveals serious structural issues such as inadequate security systems, poor governance, social inequality, and longstanding religious mistrust, which constantly fuels hostility and widen divisions between faith communities.

Through the use of the Conflict Transformation Theory, the study concludes that short-term security measures cannot be achieved alone through meaningful and lasting peace, as sustainable peace necessitates changing the underlying social structures, mending strained relationships, fostering interfaith trust, and addressing the injustices and inequalities that fuels violence. The study explains that Nigeria cannot achieve sustainable peace without the adoption of comprehensive, people-centred, and transformative approach to addressing faith-targeted violence, as the breaking of the cycle of fear, destruction, and retaliation requires deliberate efforts to rebuild trust between religious communities, strengthen justice and security institutions, and safeguarding vulnerable populations, and sustainable peace will only be possible when every citizen irrespective of their faith can live in a society based on dignity, security, mutual respect, and shared national commitment to peaceful coexistence.

### **5.2. Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. The Nigerian government should strengthen the capacity and coordination of security agencies, government institutions, and peacebuilding actors to respond effectively to faith-targeted violence, which includes the improvement of intelligence systems, rapid response mechanisms, and proactive strategies to prevent attacks, rather than relying solely on reactive interventions;



2. The Nigerian government should promote community-based interfaith communication and collaboration through the endorsement of programs that unite Christians and Muslims through joint activities, as it will help restore trust, rebuild social bonds, and mitigate the long-term effects of faith-based violence.

### Conflict of Interest

The author declares that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

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