

An Insight into the Impact of Religion on Social Cohesion and Conflict Resolution in Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of religious practices on social cohesion and conflict resolution in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data collection, including structured questionnaires. The study covers the period from 2001 to 2024, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of contemporary trends in religious dialogue and conflict resolution. The findings reveal that religion fosters collective identity and moral behaviour, it also contributes to ethnoreligious conflicts. These conflicts have hindered socio-economic development in the region. Furthermore, the study identifies barriers to promoting interfaith harmony, and then emphasizes on the need for strategies to mitigate religious tensions for peaceful coexistence in society. The study thus recommends that the government, in collaboration with religious bodies and civil society organizations, should develop policies that promote religious tolerance and regulate hate speech. These policies should also support community-based conflict resolution mechanisms that leverage traditional and religious peacebuilding strategies.

Keywords: Religion, Social Cohesion, Conflict Resolution, Interfaith Dialogue, Peacebuilding.

Introduction

Religion occupies a central place in human societies, shaping values, identities, and social relationships. Contemporary sociologists such as Furseth and Repstad (2023) emphasize that religion should be understood not merely as a set of theological doctrines but as a social construct produced and sustained by communities. In their view, religion provides symbolic frameworks and institutional structures that regulate behaviour, reinforce collective norms, and ensure social order. This functional role allows religion to operate both as a mechanism for moral guidance and as a tool for sustaining group solidarity. Within this framework, religious institutions influence how individuals interpret social obligations, resolve disputes, and negotiate their place within the wider community.

Nigeria, a multi-religious country with Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous African Traditional Religion as its dominant traditions, exemplifies the dual influence of religion on societal life. These religious traditions contribute positively to national cohesion by promoting moral values such as forgiveness, hospitality, tolerance, and communal responsibility, all of which are essential for peaceful coexistence (Ekpenyong, 2011). Religion in many communities also provides psychological stability and strengthens social

resilience in moments of crisis, as noted by Bano et al. (2025). Moreover, religious narratives, rituals, and institutions often function as bridges across cultural divides, fostering dialogue and encouraging shared commitments to community wellbeing. However, it is essential to recognize that religion can also be manipulated for ulterior motives, contributing to social and political instability. In some cases, individuals or groups may exploit religious sentiments to advance their agendas, inciting violence and exacerbating tensions among communities (Ajayi & Oluwafemi, 2014). This manipulation underscores the necessity of vigilance and critical engagement with religious narratives to ensure that they serve as a force for good rather than division. A critical aspect of this endeavor involves integrating the positive elements of religion such as compassion, empathy, and solidarity, while actively working to abandon negative aspects that lead to division and strife. Such an approach is vital for fostering unity and peaceful coexistence among Nigeria's diverse religious communities (Ottuh & Onimhawo, 2020).

Despite this integrative capacity, religion in Nigeria frequently becomes entangled in conflict dynamics. Scholars have documented numerous instances in which religious identity intersects with ethnicity, politics, or economic inequalities to generate tensions, sometimes escalating into violence (Bodi et al., 2021). In regions such as Taraba State, these tensions have contributed to intergroup mistrust, loss of life, destruction of property, and the disruption of everyday social relations. This paradox—religion as both a force for unity and a catalyst for division—highlights the urgent need to interrogate how religious practices and institutions influence social cohesion and conflict resolution.

While religious institutions in Taraba State possess significant potential to enhance peaceful coexistence, persistent ethnoreligious tensions continue to undermine social harmony. The region has witnessed recurring conflict episodes where religious identity is mobilized to justify hostility, exclusion, or violence. Although religious leaders and institutions are often expected to promote peace, their efforts remain inconsistent and sometimes constrained by political interference, varying doctrinal interpretations, or community biases. Furthermore, existing frameworks for interfaith cooperation have not been adequately institutionalized, leaving gaps in conflict mitigation strategies. This situation raises critical questions about how religious practices actually shape social relationships, how religious leaders contribute to or undermine peacebuilding, and what strategies can effectively strengthen social cohesion in Taraba State.

Statement of the Problem

Religion is widely regarded as a fundamental pillar of society, shaping individual values, moral behavior, and collective identity. However, in Nigeria, religious differences have been a major source of tension, leading to periodic conflicts, socio-political instability, and underdevelopment. While religion is meant to foster unity and moral consciousness, its misuse has contributed to social division, discrimination, and violence (Onuorah, 2022).

In Taraba State, Nigeria, the effects of religious influence are particularly pronounced. The area has witnessed recurrent religious conflicts that have led to loss of lives, destruction of property, and mass displacement of people (Ezeanya et al., 2021). The animosity between

different religious groups has undermined efforts to promote peace and economic growth, creating a cycle of hostility and mistrust among community members.

Additionally, religious leaders and institutions have been accused of engaging in political partisanship, sometimes fueling tensions rather than promoting reconciliation. The challenge of religious extremism and radicalization is also evident, as some factions propagate ideologies that incite violence and intolerance. This raises critical questions about the role of religion in contemporary Nigerian society: To what extent does religion contribute to peace and development, and in what ways does it serve as a catalyst for division and conflict?

This study aims to investigate these questions by exploring both the positive and negative impacts of religion in Taraba State Nigeria. It will examine how religious institutions, leaders, and followers influence interfaith relations in the state. Furthermore, the study will propose strategies for mitigating religious conflicts and promoting harmonious coexistence.

Research Objectives

- i. To assess the impact of religious practices on social cohesion and conflict resolution in the Taraba State, Nigeria.
- ii. To determine strategies for promoting interfaith harmony and mitigating ethnoreligious conflicts in Taraba State, Nigeria.
- iii. To suggest other strategies that will increase social cohesion and mitigate conflict in Taraba State and Nigeria at large

Research Methods

Study Design

This study employs a descriptive mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how religious practices influence social cohesion and conflict resolution in Taraba State. The quantitative component consists of structured questionnaires administered to selected participants, while the qualitative component includes open-ended responses and supplementary insights gathered from interviews and documentary sources. Secondary data were drawn from scholarly publications, government reports, and relevant media analyses. This blended design supports triangulation and enriches interpretation of the social dynamics under investigation.

Population of the Study

The study population comprises religious leaders, community elders, government officials, and local residents across various communities in Taraba State. A total of 120 respondents were systematically selected to ensure a balanced representation of viewpoints across the diverse social and religious groups within the state.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Questionnaire for Religion and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria* (QRCRN). The instrument contained both closed-ended items, used to generate quantitative data, and open-ended questions designed to elicit qualitative insights aligned with the study objectives. Items were framed to explore participants' perceptions of religious influence, interfaith relations, and conflict-mitigation strategies.

Validity of the Instrument

To ensure content and face validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in religious studies, sociology, and conflict resolution. Their feedback informed the refinement of item wording, relevance, and conceptual clarity prior to administration.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the appropriate institutional review committee. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions. Informed consent was obtained in writing, and confidentiality of responses was strictly maintained.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a two-phase mixed-methods approach. Quantitative responses from the closed-ended questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to summarize trends and patterns.

For the qualitative component, responses from open-ended questionnaire items and interviews underwent thematic analysis. The process involved:

- i. Familiarization: Reading and rereading the qualitative responses to gain an overall sense of participants' views.
- ii. Coding: Generating initial codes by identifying meaningful units of text related to the study objectives. Codes were developed manually and organized into a structured codebook.
- iii. Theme Development: Grouping related codes into broader themes that captured recurring ideas such as social cohesion, interfaith interaction, conflict triggers, and peacebuilding strategies.
- iv. Review and Refinement: Comparing themes against the raw data to ensure coherence, accuracy, and representativeness.
- v. Interpretation: Synthesizing the themes to draw insights that complement and illuminate the quantitative findings.

This combined analytic approach strengthened the study's capacity to interpret complex socio-religious phenomena and provided a more nuanced basis for addressing the research questions.

Literature Review

Conceptual Definitions

Religion:

Religion is understood as a socially embedded system of beliefs, practices, symbols and institutions through which communities create shared meaning, regulate behaviour, and reproduce moral norms and group identity. From a sociological perspective, religion is not simply private belief but a socially constructed set of practices and organizational forms that shape social roles, power relations, and collective solidarities (Furseth & Repstad, 2023).

Social Cohesion:

Social cohesion refers to the degree of connectedness and solidarity among members of a community or society, typically expressed through trust, reciprocal obligations, a sense of belonging, shared norms/values, and willingness to cooperate for the common good. Social cohesion is both an attribute of relationships (micro and meso levels) and a social environment that influences collective wellbeing and resilience (Miller et al., 2020).

Conflict Resolution:

Conflict resolution denotes the processes, practices, and institutional mechanisms used to address and settle disputes between parties so that underlying incompatibilities are managed or transformed and further violence is prevented. In peace studies, conflict resolution is often nested within broader peacebuilding efforts that seek not only to resolve immediate disputes but also to address structural drivers of conflict (Öjendal et al., 2021).

Ethno-Religious Conflict:

Ethno-religious conflict describes violent or non-violent contestation that is organized around overlapping ethnic and religious identities, where grievances, mobilization, and claims are framed in terms of both ethnicity and religion. In the Nigerian context this term highlights how identity markers become salient fault lines that link local politics, resource competition, and religion-based mobilization (Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020).

Interreligious / Interfaith Dialogue (and Inter-Religious Peacebuilding):

Interreligious or interfaith dialogue denotes structured and informal encounters between adherents of different religious traditions designed to increase mutual understanding, reduce stereotypes, and create shared norms for cooperation. When dialogue is mobilized toward ending or preventing harm, it forms part of inter-religious peacebuilding: locally rooted strategies that leverage religious institutions, shared rituals, and moral language to transform conflict dynamics and sustain reconciliation. Recent literature stresses the value of locally led, contextualized inter-religious peacebuilding while also noting its constraints and risks such as cooptation or unequal power relations (Kwuelum, 2024).

Religious Leaders as Peacebuilders

Religious leaders and faith institutions function as normative authorities and social brokers whose sermons, networks, and organizational resources can either mitigate or amplify tensions. When mobilized for peace, religious leaders can mediate disputes, legitimize reconciliation, and mobilize grassroots support for non-violent solutions; conversely, their involvement may be limited or problematic if leaders are partisan, politicized, or perceived as unjust by disputing parties (Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020; Kwuelum, 2024)

Impact of Religious Practices on Social Cohesion and Conflict Resolution

Partner–Religion & Development (2023) conducted a multi-state mixed-methods assessment examining how *local faith actors* (LFAs) influence peace outcomes in Nigerian communities. Through interviews, focus groups and community-level incident tracking, the study found that LFAs contribute significantly to mediation, early warning and community dialogue—particularly where religious leaders possess strong social legitimacy and cross-faith networks. However, the authors observed that partisanship and weak institutional capacity among some LFAs undermined cohesion. The findings highlight the need to measure *local trust, inclusiveness, and interfaith collaboration* in Taraba State.

Jatau (2023) analyzed national survey data and qualitative accounts to investigate the relationship between religious participation, democratic attitudes and peacebuilding in Nigeria. The study reported that inclusive religious gatherings and interfaith programs were strongly associated with higher interpersonal trust and reduced hostility across religious boundaries. Conversely, he found that politicized preaching and sectarian mobilisation predicted mistrust and localised conflicts. These insights suggest the importance of differentiating *inclusive* from *exclusive* religious practices when assessing social cohesion in Taraba.

Amadasun et al. (2023), in a case study of Wukari in Taraba State, used interviews, conflict-mapping and archival accounts to show how religious rituals and festivals can either strengthen cohesion or become triggers for conflict. The study revealed that when religious practices are embedded in political grievances or economic competition, they escalate tensions; yet, when mediated by respected elders and interfaith committees, religious events foster reconciliation. The Taraba context therefore requires measuring both festival inclusiveness and elder-led religious mediation.

Strategies for Promoting Interfaith Harmony and Reducing Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Saleh (2022) evaluated an interfaith mediation program using pre/post community attitude surveys, stakeholder interviews and conflict-incident metrics in Bauchi State. He found that structured interfaith mediation, particularly leadership training for clerics, community dialogues, and rapid-response mechanisms, reduced misunderstanding and improved cooperation. The findings underscore the potential of replicating such structured mediation initiatives in Taraba State.

Mercy Corps (2021) conducted a mixed-methods study across northern Nigeria that investigated how “fear of the unknown,” misinformation and identity-based suspicions fuel

interreligious tensions. Through household surveys and program trials, the study revealed that joint livelihood activities, shared storytelling sessions and moderated interfaith dialogues improved willingness to cooperate. The evidence supports Taraba-specific interventions that emphasise structured contact and shared economic goals.

Africa Polling Institute (2021) analysed national social cohesion data with over 5,000 respondents. The study found that exposure to interfaith curricula, dialogue forums and participatory governance structures increased tolerance across communities, while exclusionary local governance worsened tensions. These findings point to educational and civic strategies that Taraba can adopt, such as school-based interfaith programs and inclusive peace committees.

Tukura et al. (2025) published an empirical policy analysis showing that transparent land-administration reforms, formalised dispute-mediation structures, and community-level early-warning systems significantly reduce communal clashes in several Nigerian states. The study found that piecemeal, informal approaches often failed, especially where traditional institutions were politically manipulated. However, the conflict resolution strategies employed by the Taraba state government reduced ethno-religious conflicts in the state. This suggests that Taraba needs integrated institutional reforms that complement traditional methods.

Onuorah (2025) conducted an empirical investigation into how religious festivals act as platforms for national unity. Using surveys and observational analysis, he found that when festivals are intentionally designed to be inclusive, featuring joint performances, interfaith symbolism and shared philanthropic activities, participants report higher levels of intergroup trust. Taraba's multi-ethnic setting can leverage such shared festivals to reduce suspicion.

Partner-Religion & Development (2023) and findings from the Africa Polling Institute (2021) both show that peacebuilding becomes more sustainable when multiple stakeholders, youth groups, women's associations, religious leaders, local officials, coordinate around shared development goals. Empirical evidence indicates that communities with multi-stakeholder forums report fewer grievances, reduced youth restiveness and more effective early-warning responses. Taraba can adopt similar coordinated platforms linked to local development planning

Recent studies highlight the importance of various strategies aimed at promoting interfaith harmony and effectively mitigating ethnoreligious conflicts. These strategies encompass a range of approaches, including the implementation of inclusive policies, the promotion of multicultural education, the facilitation of interfaith dialogue, and the active involvement of law enforcement (Karimullah & Sugitanata, 2023).

One of the key components in fostering an environment of peace and understanding is religious education. This educational approach plays a vital role in instilling universal values such as tolerance and respect, which are essential in preventing extremism and promoting a more moderate interpretation of religious beliefs (Hanif, 2025). By equipping individuals

with the knowledge and understanding necessary to appreciate diverse perspectives, religious education can serve as a powerful tool in diminishing the roots of conflict.

In addition to educational initiatives, effective communication strategies are critical in managing conflicts that may arise among different religious communities. Techniques such as face work. Where individuals navigate interpersonal interactions to maintain dignity and respect, and integration strategies are essential in these contexts. The success of these communication approaches, however, often hinges on the specific cultural context in which they are applied, highlighting the need for adaptability and sensitivity to local norms and values (Sutamaji & Hakim, 2024).

In our increasingly digital world, the role of social media platforms and the broader cyber culture has emerged as a significant avenue for fostering tolerance and mutual understanding among diverse religious communities. By leveraging these digital tools, communities can engage in dialogue and share experiences that promote empathy and reduce misconceptions (Sulvinajayanti et al., 2024). This modern approach to communication offers new opportunities for connection and understanding that were previously unavailable.

Furthermore, the collaboration of various stakeholders is crucial for the successful implementation of these strategies. This includes the active participation of religious leaders, government agencies, and community members who all play a role in creating and sustaining interfaith harmony in multicultural societies. By working together, these groups can build a stronger framework for peace and coexistence that addresses the complexities of ethnoreligious relationships (Karimullah et al., 2023; Sulvinajayanti et al., 2024). The multifaceted approaches to promoting interfaith harmony, through education, communication, and collaboration, offer a comprehensive pathway to reducing ethnoreligious conflicts and fostering a more inclusive society.

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria present significant challenges to the country's sustainable development and national unity. These conflicts, which have manifested in notable events such as the Jos Crisis and the Boko Haram insurgency, are rooted in a complex interplay of factors, including religious extremism, economic inequality, and political marginalization (Umeh, 2023). The ramifications of these conflicts are extensive and deeply felt across multiple facets of society. Economically, they disrupt trade and investment, leading to diminished economic activities and stunted growth. The ongoing violence and instability can deter foreign investment and cripple local enterprises, exacerbating poverty and limiting opportunities for communities (Umeh, 2023; Onwe, 2014). In the realm of education, the conflicts often result in school closures, hinder access to quality education, and create a generation of youths who are deprived of essential learning opportunities. This educational disruption can perpetuate cycles of violence and poverty, as uneducated youths may become more susceptible to extremist ideologies.

Governance is also severely impacted by ethno-religious conflicts. The constant state of unrest can lead to weakened institutions, corruption, and a lack of public trust in authorities. Infrastructure development suffers as resources are diverted to conflict management rather than community-building projects, further entrenching existing disparities and

grievances (Umeh, 2023; Onwe, 2014). To effectively manage these conflicts, a multifaceted approach is essential. Interfaith dialogue stands out as a critical strategy, providing a platform for different religious groups to engage in meaningful conversations, fostering understanding and cooperation. Inclusive policies that actively involve all ethnic and religious groups in decision-making processes can help to mitigate feelings of alienation and resentment among marginalized communities (Umeh, 2023). Community engagement is equally important; local communities should be empowered to take part in conflict resolution efforts, ensuring that solutions are culturally relevant and widely supported.

Moreover, strategies must address the underlying economic and social policies that reinforce ethnic and religious divisions. This includes promoting inclusiveness in nation-building efforts, ensuring equitable distribution of resources, and creating opportunities for all groups to participate fully in civic life. Identifying potential sources of conflict through comprehensive research can also help policymakers develop proactive measures to prevent violence before it escalates (Onwe, 2014). The frequency of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria has notably increased in recent years, with approximately 40% of such incidents occurring during Nigeria's Fourth Republic. This alarming trend underscores the urgent need for effective management strategies that prioritize both political stability and economic development (Salawu, 2010). Without concerted efforts to address the root causes of these conflicts, Nigeria risks further destabilization, which could have dire consequences for its future as a unified nation. Addressing ethno-religious conflicts in Taraba State Nigeria, requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach that involves dialogue, policy reform, and community participation. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding, Nigeria can take significant steps toward achieving sustainable development and reinforcing national unity amidst its diverse population.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Conflict Transformation Theory of Lederach. Conflict Transformation Theory, advanced by John Paul Lederach, offers a holistic framework for understanding and addressing the deeper relational, structural, and cultural dimensions of conflict. Unlike conflict management (short-term control) or conflict resolution (eliminating immediate incompatibilities), conflict transformation emphasizes enduring change in relationships, social systems, and communal narratives (Lederach, 2015; expanded in later peacebuilding literature). Recent scholarship highlights the theory's applicability to communal, ethnoreligious, and identity-based conflicts across Africa, including Nigeria (Vesga, 2025; Driessen, 2025).

At its core, the theory assumes that conflict is not merely a problem to be solved; it is a dynamic social process that, when engaged constructively, can catalyze positive social change. It therefore advocates multi-level interventions, grassroots, mid-level, and top-level, to rebuild broken relationships, strengthen institutions, and transform hostile social patterns (Lederach, 2015; Vesga, 2025).

1. **Relational Transformation:** Lederach places strong emphasis on transforming the quality of relationships among conflicting groups. In contexts like Taraba State, where religious and ethnic identities are deeply intertwined, transforming relationships involves addressing mistrust, stereotypes, and the emotional residues of historical violence. Religious actors, because of their legitimacy and moral authority, play crucial roles as mediators, bridge-builders, and facilitators of reconciliation (Driessen, 2025). Studies show that faith leaders' engagement in dialogue platforms can reduce intergroup mistrust and increase willingness to cooperate (Onapajo, 2022).
2. **Structural Transformation:** Conflict is often sustained by structural injustices, weak institutions, exclusionary governance, and unequal access to resources. Conflict Transformation Theory stresses the need to address these systemic drivers through policy reforms, equitable governance, and locally embedded peace infrastructures (Vesga, 2025). In Nigeria, political actors often instrumentalize religion, reinforcing structural inequalities and feeding cycles of violence (Chidi, 2022). A transformational approach therefore promotes inclusive participation, interfaith councils, restorative justice mechanisms, and development programs designed to strengthen shared institutions.
3. **Cultural and Narrative Transformation:** Cultural beliefs, religious narratives, and collective memories shape how communities perceive "the other." Conflict transformation calls for reinterpreting these narratives to promote coexistence. For example, shared religious values, such as forgiveness, stewardship, hospitality, and the sanctity of life, can be mobilized to challenge narratives of hate and legitimize peace efforts (Appleby, 2020; Driessen, 2025). Religious practices such as joint prayers, peace festivals, interfaith sermons, and storytelling sessions can reshape perceptions and foster long-term social cohesion.
4. **Multi-level and Long-term Engagement:** A distinguishing feature of Lederach's model is its emphasis on vertical integration of peace efforts, linking community actors, mid-level leaders (clergy, civic leaders), and policymakers. Sustainable peace requires synergy between grassroots initiatives (e.g., community mediation committees), mid-level interventions (faith leaders' dialogue platforms), and state-level responses (policy reforms, security governance). Peacebuilding is understood as a long-term, cyclical process rather than a one-time event (Lederach, 2015; Vesga, 2025).
5. **Why Conflict Transformation Theory Fits the Study:** For a study on the impact of religion on social cohesion and conflict resolution in Taraba State, Conflict Transformation Theory provides a comprehensive analytical lens because:
 - It captures how religion can both fuel and heal conflict, aligning with Nigeria's complex ethnoreligious landscape.
 - It emphasizes faith-based mediation, a major feature of conflict resolution in northern and Middle Belt Nigeria.

- It supports the design of strategies for interfaith harmony through dialogue, restorative practices, and cultural reinterpretation.
- It offers guidance for long-term, structural solutions that enhance social cohesion and mitigate conflict.

Thus, the theory not only explains conflict dynamics but also provides a blueprint for developing sustainable peacebuilding interventions involving religious actors.

Results and Discussions

Analysis of Impact of Religious Practice on Social Cohesion and Conflict Resolution

1. Demographic Information

We collected demographic data from our respondents to give an insight to picture of our sample. The key variables we looked at included gender, age range, religion, occupation, education level.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Category		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	101	84.2
	Female	19	15.8
Age Range	18–30 years	2	1.7
	31–45 years	69	57.5
	46–60 years	26	21.7
	60+ years	23	19.2
Religion	Christianity	78	65.0
	Islam	26	21.7
	Traditional Religion	16	13.3
Occupation	Civil Servant	27	22.5
	Business/Trader	36	30.0
	Farmer	30	25.0
	Clergy	5	4.2
	Student	22	18.3
Educational Level	No Formal Education	6	5.0
	Primary	10	8.3
	Secondary	60	50.0
	Tertiary	44	36.7

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The demographic characteristics of the respondents, as presented in Table 1, provide valuable insights into the composition of the study population. The gender distribution shows a significant disparity, with 84.2% of respondents identifying as male and only 15.8% as female. This imbalance may influence the perspectives and experiences shared regarding environmental issues and conservation practices, potentially skewing the findings towards male viewpoints. Understanding this gender dynamic is crucial for interpreting the results

and considering the need for inclusive approaches in future research and community engagement. The age distribution highlights that the majority of respondents (57.5%) fall within the 31–45 years age group, followed by 21.7% who are aged 46–60 years and 19.2% who are over 60. Only 1.7% are aged 18–30 years. This suggests that the participant pool is predominantly composed of middle-aged individuals, who often have more experience and knowledge about local environmental issues. However, the low representation of younger respondents may indicate a lack of engagement or interest among youth, which could have implications for future conservation efforts and sustainability initiatives.

The religious affiliations of respondents indicate that Christianity is the most prevalent religion (65.0%), followed by Islam (21.7%) African Traditional Religion (13.3%). This distribution can shape community values and practices related to environmental stewardship, as religious beliefs often influence individuals' attitudes towards nature and conservation. Understanding the religious context is essential for tailoring conservation messages and initiatives that resonate with the community. In terms of occupation, business/traders (30.0%) and farmers (25.0%) constitute the largest groups, followed by civil servants (22.5%) and students (18.3%). The presence of a significant number of farmers highlights the potential impact of agricultural practices on the local ecosystem and biodiversity. Engaging this demographic in conservation efforts is vital, as their livelihoods are directly connected to land use and environmental health.

The educational background of the respondents shows that 50.0% have attained secondary education, while 36.7% have complete tertiary education. Only a small percentage (13.3%) have no formal education or have completed primary education. This relatively high level of education among respondents may facilitate better understanding and acceptance of conservation concepts and practices. Educated individuals are often more likely to participate in environmental initiatives and advocate for sustainable practices.

2. The Impact of Religious Practices on social Cohesion, and Conflict Resolution in Taraba State, Nigeria

Table 2: The Impact of Religion on social cohesion and conflict resolution

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Religious teachings promote peace and social harmony in Taraba State, Nigeria.	19	40	40	21	2.5	1.0
Religious groups in Taraba State have mechanisms for resolving conflicts.	29	26	30	35	2.4	1.1
Religious intolerance has contributed to social divisions in Taraba State.	22	57	22	19	2.7	1.0
Religion has been a key factor in fostering community development initiatives.	47	31	15	27	2.8	1.2

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The findings presented in Table 2 provide insights into the role of religion in promoting social cohesion and resolving conflicts in Taraba State. The mean score of 2.5 suggests a neutral stance, indicating that while some respondents acknowledge the impact of religious teachings in fostering peace, others are skeptical. The standard deviation of 1.0 shows moderate variation in responses, suggesting that opinions are somewhat divided. This could reflect the fact that while religion teaches peace, real-life religious interactions do not always lead to harmony. With a mean of 2.4, responses indicate a slightly lower level of agreement regarding the effectiveness of religious groups in conflict resolution. The standard deviation of 1.1 reflects a higher dispersion of opinions, meaning that some respondents strongly agree while others disagree. This mixed perception may stem from the effectiveness of religious mediation efforts in some cases but not in others. This finding is in tandem with the result of Ekpenyong (2011) where it was reported that religion possesses the potential to serve as a powerful force for peace, embodying core values such as love, forgiveness, and tolerance. These values have the capacity to unite individuals and communities, fostering an environment conducive to harmony and mutual respect.

This statement "religious intolerance has contributed to social divisions" received a higher mean score (2.7), suggesting that more respondents agree that religious intolerance has been a factor in dividing the community. The relatively lower standard deviation (1.0) indicates a general consensus on this issue. This finding aligns with broader discussions on religious conflicts in Nigeria, where religious differences have often been sources of tension. The highest mean of 2.8 among the responses for "religion fosters community development initiatives" suggests that a significant number of respondents believe religion plays a positive role in community development. However, the standard deviation (1.2) is the highest in this set, showing that while many see religion as a driver of development, there are notable disagreements. This could be due to variations in how different religious institutions contribute to education, health, and infrastructure. The finding is in contrast with the view of Bodi et al. (2021) that religion has emerged as a significant source of conflict and violence, resulting in tragic consequences, including loss of life, destruction of property, and deepening societal divisions.

3. The Strategies for Promoting Interfaith Harmony in Taraba State, Nigeria

Table 3: Strategies for promoting interfaith harmony

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Interfaith dialogue should be promoted to enhance peaceful coexistence.	34	27	33	26	2.6	1.1
Government should engage religious leaders in conflict resolution strategies.	27	24	28	41	2.3	1.2
Religious institutions should discourage hate speech and religious extremism.	29	42	30	19	2.7	1.0

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
Policies promoting religious tolerance should be enforced in Taraba State, Nigeria.	29	32	37	22	2.6	1.1

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3. Presents the findings on community perceptions regarding strategies for promoting interfaith harmony in Taraba State, Nigeria. The statement "Interfaith dialogue should be promoted to enhance peaceful coexistence" received a mean score of 2.6 and a standard deviation of 1.1. With 34 respondents strongly agreeing and 27 agreeing, a majority recognize the importance of dialogue in fostering understanding and cooperation among different faiths. However, the presence of 33 respondents who disagreed and 26 who strongly disagreed indicates that there may be barriers to implementing such dialogue, possibly due to entrenched beliefs or mistrust among religious groups. This underscores the need for structured and facilitated dialogue initiatives that can effectively address concerns and build bridges between communities. The result aligns with the finding of Karimullah and Sugitanata (2023) which highlights the importance of various strategies aimed at promoting interfaith harmony and effectively mitigating ethnoreligious conflicts, including the implementation of inclusive policies, promotion of multicultural education, facilitation of interfaith dialogue, and active involvement of law enforcement.

The perception that "Government should engage religious leaders in conflict resolution strategies" received a mean score of 2.3 and a standard deviation of 1.2. The results show that 27 respondents strongly agreed, while a significant 41 disagreed. This indicates skepticism about the effectiveness of involving religious leaders in government-led conflict resolution efforts. The mixed responses suggest that while some see value in leveraging the authority and influence of religious leaders in managing conflicts, others may doubt their ability to remain impartial or effective in political contexts. This highlights a potential area for further exploration—understanding the community's expectations of religious leaders in conflict resolution roles. The finding is in line with the opinion of Umeh (2023) that inclusive policies that actively involve all ethnic and religious groups in decision-making processes can help to mitigate feelings of alienation and resentment among marginalized communities.

The statement that "Religious institutions should discourage hate speech and religious extremism" had a higher mean score of 2.7 and a standard deviation of 1.0. With 29 respondents strongly agreeing and 42 agreeing, there is a strong consensus on the need for religious institutions to take a proactive stance against harmful rhetoric and extremist ideologies. This suggests a recognition of the role that religious leaders and organizations can play in promoting tolerance and peace, reinforcing their responsibility to foster a culture of respect and understanding within their communities. The statement regarding the enforcement of policies promoting religious tolerance had a mean scored of 2.6, with a standard deviation of 1.1. The responses indicate a balanced view, with 29 strongly agreeing and 37 disagreeing. This reflects a desire for formal mechanisms to support interfaith

harmony, yet it also points to concerns about the effectiveness or enforcement of such policies. The presence of disagreement suggests that some respondents may feel that existing policies are inadequate or poorly implemented, indicating a need for greater advocacy and action in this area. This result echoes the views of Hanif (2025) which highlighted the importance of religious education as a vital role in instilling universal values such as tolerance and respect, essential in preventing extremism and promoting a more moderate interpretation of religious beliefs. Similarly, the finding aligns with the view of Umeh (2023) that interfaith dialogue stands out as a critical strategy, providing a platform for different religious groups to engage in meaningful conversations, fostering understanding and cooperation.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the impact of religious practices on social cohesion, and conflict resolution. While religion serves as both a unifying and divisive force in the community, religious teachings promote peace and development initiatives, while religious intolerance continues to challenge social harmony. The study also underscores the preference for grassroots and community-led initiatives such as interfaith dialogue and discouraging hate speech over government-led interventions in conflict resolution. This suggests a need for context-specific, locally driven strategies to promote interfaith harmony and mitigate religious tensions.

Ultimately, fostering a more inclusive and peaceful society in Taraba State, Nigeria requires a balanced approach that leverages the strengths of religious institutions while addressing their limitations. Collaboration among religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society is essential to ensuring that religion remains a force for unity rather than division.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The government, in collaboration with religious bodies and civil society organizations, should develop policies that promote religious tolerance and regulate hate speech. These policies should also support community-based conflict resolution mechanisms that leverage traditional and religious peacebuilding strategies.
- ii. Religious leaders and community stakeholders should intensify efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and peace building programs. By fostering open discussions between different religious groups, misconceptions can be addressed, and mutual understanding can be enhanced, ultimately reducing religious intolerance.
- iii. Religious organizations should expand their contributions beyond spiritual matters to include more structured interventions in education, healthcare, and social welfare. This will reinforce their positive societal impact and ensure they remain relevant in addressing contemporary challenges within the community.

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