



THE CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN KADUNA STATE IN THE FOURTH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Religious conflicts in Kaduna State have been a persistent challenge, particularly in the Fourth Republic. These conflicts have resulted in significant loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of communities, and long-term socio-economic disruptions. Kaduna State, being one of Nigeria's most religiously diverse regions, has experienced recurrent violent clashes between Christians and Muslims, often triggered by deep-seated grievances, political manipulations, and economic disparities. This study explores the root causes of religious conflicts in Kaduna State using the Social Conflict Theory as a theoretical framework. The analysis identifies key drivers such as religious intolerance, fanaticism, media influence, poverty, wrong religious orientation, illiteracy, and external religious influences. Religious intolerance and fanaticism have fueled hostilities, often exacerbated by provocative religious teachings and extremist ideologies. The media, particularly social media, has played a crucial role in escalating tensions through the spread of misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric. Economic deprivation has made young people susceptible to radicalization, while illiteracy and misguided religious teachings have deepened religious divisions. Additionally, external influences, including foreign funding and ideological imports, have contributed to the radicalization of religious groups. The findings of this study suggest that religious conflicts in Kaduna State are the result of a combination of socio-political, economic, and ideological factors. To mitigate these conflicts, the study recommends interfaith dialogue, media regulation, poverty alleviation programs, educational reforms, and policy enforcement. Addressing the root causes through a multi-faceted and holistic approach is essential for achieving sustainable peace and religious harmony in Kaduna State.

Keywords: Religious Conflict, Kaduna State, Social Conflict Theory, Violent Extremism, Religious Intolerance.



Introduction

Religious conflicts in Kaduna State have been a recurring issue, significantly affecting the socio-political and economic landscape of the region. These conflicts, primarily between Christians and Muslims, have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of properties, displacement of communities, and a deepened sense of division and mistrust. The Fourth Republic, which began in 1999, has witnessed some of the most violent religious conflicts in the state, with incidents escalating into large-scale violence, reprisal attacks, and prolonged hostilities. Kaduna State is unique in Nigeria due to its religious demography, being almost evenly divided between Christians and Muslims. The state is often described as a microcosm of Nigeria, reflecting the country's ethno-religious diversity, tensions, and struggles for political and economic dominance. While the northern part of Kaduna State is predominantly Muslim, the southern part has a significant Christian population. This demographic division has historically fueled identity politics and religious-based conflicts, as different groups struggle for control over political power, economic opportunities, and territorial influence.

The 2000 Sharia crisis was one of the most significant religious conflicts in Kaduna State during the Fourth Republic. The proposed implementation of Islamic Sharia law in the state was met with strong opposition from the Christian community, leading to violent clashes that claimed thousands of lives (Angerbrandt, 2011). This crisis set a precedent for further conflicts, such as the Miss World riots in 2002, the post-election violence in 2011, and other localized religious clashes. Each of these conflicts has reinforced existing divisions and created cycles of revenge attacks. Beyond religious differences, several underlying socio-economic and political factors have exacerbated these conflicts. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, political manipulation, and media influence have played a critical role in fueling religious violence. Politicians have often exploited religious sentiments to mobilize support or to create divisions that serve their interests. Additionally, the spread of extremist ideologies, misinformation, and propaganda through social media and religious institutions has intensified hostilities.



The persistent nature of religious conflicts in Kaduna State raises important questions: What are the fundamental causes of these conflicts? Why have peace efforts failed to yield long-term solutions? What strategies can be employed to foster religious harmony and sustainable peace? This study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the root causes of religious conflicts in Kaduna State, particularly in the Fourth Republic. Using Social Conflict Theory as a framework, the study examines how competition for resources, ideological differences, and power struggles contribute to religious violence. Understanding these conflicts is crucial for policymakers, security agencies, religious leaders, and civil society organizations seeking to promote peace and coexistence. Without addressing the underlying causes, Kaduna State will continue to experience periodic eruptions of violence, which negatively impact economic growth, social cohesion, and national security. This paper will provide a comprehensive analysis of the causes of religious conflicts in Kaduna State and propose measures for promoting peaceful coexistence (Olowonigba, 2026).

Statement of the Problem

Despite various efforts by the government, religious institutions, and civil society organizations to promote religious harmony, Kaduna State continues to experience violent religious conflicts. These conflicts have resulted in loss of lives, destruction of property, and deep-seated animosities between different religious groups. The recurrence of violent clashes suggests that existing interventions have not effectively addressed the root causes. The complexity of these conflicts stems from multiple interwoven factors, including religious intolerance, economic deprivation, political manipulation, and external influences. The failure to properly address historical grievances, regulate extremist ideologies, and curb hate speech has further worsened tensions.

Without a comprehensive approach to identifying and resolving these underlying issues, Kaduna State will continue to experience periodic religious violence, undermining peace, development, and social cohesion.



Significance of the Study

This study provides valuable insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and security agencies in designing strategies to promote religious tolerance and coexistence. It aims to contribute to scholarly discussions on religious conflicts and provide practical recommendations for conflict mitigation.

Theoretical Framework: Social Conflict Theory

Religious conflicts in Kaduna State can be better understood through Social Conflict Theory, a perspective developed by Karl Marx, which argues that society is fundamentally structured around competition for power, resources, and influence. This theory asserts that conflict arises when different groups struggle for dominance, often leading to prolonged hostilities and systemic inequalities. In Kaduna State, religious conflicts are not just about theological disagreements but are deeply rooted in political struggles, economic competition, historical grievances, and social exclusion (Collins, 1990).

Kaduna State is a microcosm of Nigeria's religious diversity, with the northern part predominantly Muslim and the southern part largely Christian. This division has fueled a longstanding power struggle, where each religious group seeks to control key aspects of governance, economic opportunities, and public policies. Over the years, successive governments have either deliberately or unintentionally favored one religious group over the other, leading to grievances and hostility. For instance, the introduction of Sharia law in 2000 was seen by Christians as a move to impose Islamic governance, leading to widespread protests and violent clashes. Such instances illustrate the fundamental premise of Social Conflict Theory—dominant groups strive to maintain power, while marginalized groups resist, often leading to conflict (Olowonigba, 2026).

Another significant factor contributing to religious violence in Kaduna State is economic inequality. Social Conflict Theory highlights how disparities in resource distribution create social unrest. Many individuals, especially the youth, feel economically marginalized and believe that religious identity determines access to opportunities such as jobs, contracts, and government appointments. The sense of exclusion and deprivation fuels resentment, making individuals more susceptible to radicalization and violence. In many cases, religious conflicts have erupted over



issues such as land ownership, economic privileges, and political appointments, reinforcing the link between economic struggles and religious violence (Olowonigba, 2026).

Political leaders and elites in Kaduna State have also exploited religious identities for personal and political gain, a key aspect of Social Conflict Theory. Politicians often mobilize support along religious lines, deepening divisions and encouraging hostility between groups. During election periods, religious affiliations become a tool for political manipulation, with candidates portraying themselves as defenders of their religious communities against perceived threats. This tactic creates an us-versus-them mentality, further entrenching religious intolerance and making conflict resolution more difficult. Historical grievances also play a crucial role in Kaduna's religious tensions. The colonial administration in Nigeria adopted a divide-and-rule strategy, reinforcing ethnic and religious divisions to maintain control. Post-independence governments continued this pattern by favoring certain groups over others, leading to deep-seated mistrust. These historical injustices remain relevant today, as they shape the way communities perceive each other and respond to conflicts. The cycle of reprisal attacks, communal clashes, and radicalization stems from these unresolved historical grievances, aligning with Social Conflict Theory's assertion that conflicts are driven by past inequalities and unresolved power struggles (Olowonigba, 2026).

Furthermore, ideological conflicts between religious groups in Kaduna have escalated tensions. Radical religious leaders preach exclusivist doctrines, discouraging interfaith tolerance and coexistence. These ideologies, often influenced by foreign religious movements and extremist groups, intensify the competition for religious and ideological dominance. Social Conflict Theory explains that such ideological conflicts arise when groups struggle to assert their beliefs as the dominant societal norm, leading to violent confrontations when compromise is not possible.

Therefore, the application of Social Conflict Theory offers a structured explanation of why religious conflicts persist in Kaduna State. The theory helps in understanding how political struggles, economic disparities, elite manipulation, historical grievances, and ideological differences contribute to the recurring violence. This is essential for developing long-term solutions, such as promoting interfaith dialogue, addressing economic disparities, and ensuring fair political representation.



Conceptual Clarification

Violent Extremism: Violent extremism is the use of force, intimidation, or terror by non-state actors to achieve ideological objectives (Jones, 2020). It manifests in forms such as terrorism, insurgency, and religious radicalization. Violent extremist groups exploit religious sentiments to recruit followers and justify violent actions.

Religious Conflict: Religion is derived from the Latin words *religare* (to bind or unite) and *religio* (a bond or relationship), signifying a binding relationship between humans and the sacred (Lactantius, cited in Smart, 1996). Religious conflict occurs when individuals or groups clash over religious beliefs, practices, or identities (Juergensmeyer, 2001). These conflicts often lead to violence, loss of lives, and socio-political instability.

Causes of Religious Conflicts in Kaduna State

Religious Intolerance

Religious intolerance refers to an inability to accommodate differing religious beliefs (Balogun, 1988). It manifests in violent outbursts and sectarian tensions. In Kaduna State, religious intolerance has often resulted in deadly clashes and destruction of places of worship. The inability of religious adherents to accept differing views has contributed significantly to conflict recurrence. In several instances, provocative sermons and hate speech by religious leaders have inflamed tensions, leading to violent reprisals. Historical grievances between religious communities have created deep-seated distrust, making it difficult to foster peaceful coexistence. Political actors have also exploited religious intolerance to advance their agendas, further deepening divisions and making conflicts more persistent (Olowonigba, 2026).

A major contributor to religious intolerance is the historical mistrust between different religious groups. Over the years, several violent clashes have been fueled by mutual suspicion, leading to deep-seated animosity. For example, in 2000, violent clashes erupted in Kaduna State following the proposed implementation of Sharia law. Christians in the state opposed its introduction, fearing that it would marginalize them. The opposition led to violent confrontations that left thousands dead and many more displaced (Olowonigba, 2026).



Another factor contributing to intolerance is the role of religious leaders who use provocative language in their sermons. Some religious preachers spread messages that demonize other faiths, portraying them as enemies. This kind of rhetoric increases hostility and makes peaceful coexistence difficult (Olowonigba, 2026).

Religious Fanaticism

Religious fanaticism involves an excessive and rigid adherence to religious beliefs, characterised by intolerance of opposing views and a willingness to justify destructive actions (Hassan, 2016; UNDP, 2018). Religious fanaticism is often driven by the belief that one's faith is superior and must be defended at all costs. In some cases, radical preachers have encouraged followers to see people of other faiths as threats, leading to attacks and counterattacks. Fanaticism has led to the rise of sectarian movements that seek to impose their religious views on others, sometimes through violent means. This has fueled violent confrontations between religious groups (Kamal-deen, 2016). Fanaticism creates an atmosphere of hatred, where followers perceive members of other religions as enemies. In Kaduna State, extremist preachers inciting violence against opposing religious groups have been well documented, leading to loss of lives and property. Some religious sects advocate for an exclusionist ideology, further deepening societal divisions and increasing the likelihood of conflict. Additionally, religious fanatics often use radical teachings to justify their actions, mobilizing young people to engage in violence and disrupt peace efforts.

A major incident of religious fanaticism in Kaduna State was the 2002 Miss World riots. The crisis began after a newspaper article made controversial comments about the Prophet Muhammad. Radical Islamic groups responded with violent protests that led to the deaths of over 200 people and the destruction of properties. Fanaticism also manifests in the form of religious processions, demonstrations, and mass gatherings that quickly escalate into violence. Some sects in Kaduna State, such as the Shiite Islamic Movement of Nigeria, have clashed with security forces and rival religious groups, leading to deadly confrontations (Olowonigba, 2026).



Media Influence

The media, both traditional and social, has played a significant role in fueling religious conflicts in Kaduna State. Sensational reporting and biased narratives have often escalated tensions between religious groups. Journalistic irresponsibility, especially in newspapers and radio stations, has sometimes led to violence. For instance, media outlets have been accused of publishing inflammatory reports that exacerbate religious tensions. During the 2002 Miss World riots, a local newspaper article made provocative remarks about Islam, leading to widespread violence. Social media has further worsened religious conflicts by spreading misinformation and hate speech. Fake news, manipulated images, and inciteful posts often go viral, provoking reactions that lead to violence. The anonymity of social media allows extremist groups to spread radical ideologies without accountability (Oyedeji et al, 2022).

The biased portrayal of religious groups in the media has also created a sense of victimhood and persecution among different communities. Some religious groups feel that they are being unfairly targeted, leading to resentment and, ultimately, violent confrontations. Sensational reporting by the press has aggravated religious tensions. Unverified and biased reporting often escalates tensions and incites violence. Social media platforms have also become breeding grounds for religious propaganda, spreading misinformation that fuels conflicts. Inflammatory posts and fake news on social media have contributed significantly to religious hostilities in Kaduna State, with rumors often sparking violent confrontations. Additionally, media bias, where news outlets favor one religious group over another, has worsened tensions, creating narratives of victimhood and persecution.

Poverty

Economic hardship has been a major driver of religious conflicts in Kaduna State. High levels of poverty and unemployment have made young people vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups. Kaduna State has a large population of unemployed youths who struggle to meet their basic needs. Many of these youths are easily lured into religious violence by radical leaders who promise them financial rewards or spiritual benefits. When people lack access to economic opportunities, they become frustrated and more likely to express their grievances through violence. (Kamal-deen, 2016). Desperation and lack of economic opportunities push individuals toward



extremist ideologies that promise economic rewards or divine salvation. The economic divide between different religious communities has also played a role in fostering resentment and animosity, making violence more likely.

The economic divide between Christians and Muslims in Kaduna State has also fueled tensions. In many parts of the state, Muslims dominate the political and business sectors, while Christians feel economically marginalized. This economic disparity has led to resentment, with some Christian communities accusing the Muslim-dominated government of deliberate economic exclusion. In addition, poverty has created conditions where people rely on religious organizations for basic survival. Many religious groups provide food, education, and employment to their followers, which strengthens their influence. Unfortunately, some of these groups use their influence to promote radical ideologies that lead to conflict.

Wrong Religious Orientation

Many religious conflicts in Kaduna State stem from the misinterpretation and misuse of religious teachings. Some religious leaders promote extreme ideologies that justify violence against people of other faiths. Misguided religious teachings contribute to radicalization. Indoctrination in religious schools has led to increased intolerance and violence (Kamal-deen, 2016). Unregulated religious institutions often spread extreme ideologies that justify violence against non-adherents. In Kaduna State, some religious sects preach exclusivity and hostility toward other faiths, increasing the likelihood of conflicts. Religious leaders who emphasize doctrines of supremacy over tolerance fuel animosity, creating an environment where violence is seen as a legitimate means of defending one's faith. Such misguided teachings make dialogue and reconciliation efforts difficult.

One of the key issues is the lack of proper religious education. Many individuals rely on informal religious teachings that do not emphasize tolerance and coexistence. In some cases, religious leaders teach their followers that violence is a legitimate way to defend their faith. This distorted interpretation of religion has fueled numerous conflicts. For example, some extremist Islamic sects reject Western education and view secular governance as an attack on their faith. This belief has led to violent attacks on schools, government institutions, and individuals perceived as enemies of their religion. Similarly, some Christian groups have adopted a confrontational approach toward



Islam, promoting an ideology of religious superiority. This has resulted in aggressive evangelism campaigns that provoke Muslim communities, sometimes leading to violent clashes. The spread of radical religious ideologies from foreign sources has also contributed to conflicts in Kaduna State. Some religious organizations receive funding and ideological support from foreign extremist groups, further deepening sectarian divisions (Olowonigba, 2026).

Illiteracy

Illiteracy is another critical factor fueling religious conflicts in Kaduna State. A lack of proper education makes individuals more susceptible to radicalization and extremist ideologies. According to UNESCO (2023), Kaduna State has an illiteracy rate of 29.3%, which is significantly high. Many people, especially in rural areas, have little to no formal education. Without proper education, individuals are more likely to accept misleading religious interpretations that promote division and violence. Illiteracy also affects critical thinking and the ability to discern between genuine religious teachings and radical propaganda. Many people rely on oral teachings and informal religious schools, where extremist ideologies can spread unchecked.

Moreover, low literacy levels make individuals more vulnerable to manipulation by political and religious elites. Politicians and religious leaders exploit this vulnerability by spreading misinformation and using religious sentiments to mobilize followers for violent purposes. Low literacy levels hinder critical thinking, making individuals more susceptible to radical teachings. Without proper education, people are more likely to accept misleading religious interpretations that promote division and violence. The absence of religious literacy programs increases the chances of miscommunication and radicalization, making it easier for extremist ideologies to spread unchecked (Olowonigba, 2026).

External Influence in Religion

Religious conflicts in Kaduna State have been exacerbated by foreign influences. External actors, including foreign governments, international religious organizations, and extremist groups, have played a role in promoting sectarian violence. Islamic radicalization is often linked to foreign funding and external actors (Alao, 2013). The influx of foreign religious doctrines has increased sectarian divisions, leading to violent conflicts between groups with differing interpretations of



faith. Religious organizations with external backing often promote rigid doctrines that clash with indigenous religious practices, further escalating hostilities. Additionally, foreign influences sometimes support extremist factions, providing financial and logistical support to radical groups, which intensifies religious conflicts in Kaduna State.

Similarly, foreign Christian evangelical movements have also contributed to religious tensions by promoting aggressive missionary activities in predominantly Muslim areas. These missionary efforts are often seen as attempts to convert Muslims, leading to resistance and, in some cases, violence. In addition, foreign-funded religious NGOs sometimes engage in activities that deepen religious divisions. Some organizations provide financial and logistical support to religious groups with hardline views, further escalating conflicts. The presence of transnational terrorist organizations, such as Boko Haram and ISIS-affiliated groups, has also influenced religious conflicts in Kaduna State. These groups exploit local grievances and recruit members to carry out attacks against perceived enemies (Olowonigba, 2026).

Findings and Discussion

The study finds that religious conflicts in Kaduna State are driven by deep-seated grievances, economic deprivation, political manipulation, historical injustices, and ideological extremism. These factors have created a volatile environment where small incidents can quickly escalate into widespread violence.

One of the most significant findings is the role of economic disparities in fueling religious tensions. Many individuals, particularly youths, feel economically marginalized and perceive that access to resources, jobs, and government contracts is influenced by religious affiliation. This economic frustration makes them vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups, further escalating conflicts.

Another major finding is the manipulation of religious identities by political elites. Politicians frequently exploit religious sentiments to gain political leverage, particularly during elections, deepening religious divides and fostering an us-versus-them mentality. The study also highlights how historical grievances, stemming from colonial-era policies and post-independence governance, continue to shape religious hostilities today.



Additionally, the study finds that the spread of extremist ideologies, fueled by foreign influences and unregulated religious teachings, has contributed to radicalization and sectarian violence. The lack of strong government intervention and ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms has further exacerbated tensions. Addressing these root causes is crucial for achieving long-term peace and religious harmony in Kaduna State.

Conclusion

This study examined the causes of religious conflicts in Kaduna State during the Fourth Republic, situating the phenomenon within the broader socio-political and economic dynamics of Nigeria's plural society. Drawing on Social Conflict Theory, the paper demonstrates that religious conflicts in Kaduna State are not merely the outcome of doctrinal disagreements but are deeply embedded in struggles over power, resources, identity, and historical grievances. Religion, rather than being the sole cause, often serves as a mobilizing instrument through which underlying socio-economic and political tensions are expressed and intensified.

The analysis reveals that religious intolerance and fanaticism play a central role in sustaining cycles of violence, particularly when reinforced by provocative religious teachings, historical mistrust, and the politicization of faith. The study further establishes that poverty, unemployment, and economic marginalization, especially among youths, create fertile ground for radicalization and violent mobilization. These conditions are compounded by illiteracy and wrong religious orientation, which limit critical engagement with religious teachings and increase susceptibility to extremist ideologies. The influence of the media, especially social media, has also emerged as a critical factor, as misinformation, hate speech, and sensational reporting have repeatedly escalated tensions and triggered violence. Additionally, external religious influences and foreign ideological imports have contributed to the hardening of sectarian identities and the spread of extremist doctrines within the state.

The application of Social Conflict Theory underscores how competition for political dominance, economic opportunities, and ideological supremacy continues to fuel religious violence in Kaduna State. The persistence of these conflicts highlights the failure of previous interventions to adequately address the structural and historical roots of the problem. As long as grievances related to exclusion, inequality, and perceived injustice remain unresolved, religious conflicts are likely to recur, undermining social cohesion, development, and national security.



In conclusion, achieving sustainable peace in Kaduna State requires a holistic and multi-dimensional approach that goes beyond reactive security measures. This will demand deliberate efforts to promote interfaith dialogue, regulate media practices, alleviate poverty, reform education, and ensure fair governance and justice. These would ensure a lasting religious harmony and peaceful coexistence in the Fourth Republic and beyond.

Recommendations

Addressing religious conflicts in Kaduna State requires a comprehensive and strategic approach that targets the root causes while fostering long-term peace and coexistence. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance programs. Religious leaders from both Christian and Muslim communities should engage in continuous dialogue, emphasizing the shared values of peace, unity, and mutual respect. Establishing community-based peace initiatives that encourage interactions between different religious groups can help break the cycle of mistrust and hostility.

Another critical recommendation is media regulation and responsible reporting. The role of the media in shaping public perception cannot be ignored, as biased or inflammatory reporting often escalates religious tensions. The government, in collaboration with media regulatory bodies, should monitor and penalize media outlets that spread misinformation, hate speech, or religious bias. Social media, which has become a breeding ground for fake news and religious propaganda, should also be regulated to prevent the spread of content that fuels violence.

Poverty alleviation and youth empowerment are also crucial in preventing religious conflicts. Many young people in Kaduna State feel economically marginalized, making them vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups. The government and private sector should implement job creation programs, skill acquisition initiatives, and business grants to provide economic stability. Ensuring an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities among different religious groups will help address economic grievances that often fuel conflicts.

Educational reforms are also necessary to combat religious extremism and promote tolerance. Schools should integrate peace education and religious literacy programs into their curricula, teaching students the importance of diversity, coexistence, and conflict resolution. Additionally,



religious institutions must be monitored to prevent the spread of extremist ideologies, ensuring that religious teachings align with principles of peace and respect for other faiths.

Lastly, the strict enforcement of laws and conflict resolution mechanisms is essential. The government must hold accountable individuals and groups that engage in hate speech, incitement, and violent extremism. Strengthening local peace committees and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms will help prevent minor disagreements from escalating into full-blown violence.

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