Interreligious Perceptions and Coexistence among Christians and Muslims in Wukari, Taraba State (2010-2021)

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Abstract

In Northeastern Nigeria, the relationship between Christians and Muslims has become more complicated throughout time due to the interplay of history, politics, and identity. This has often led to violent conflict and a tenuous coexistence. Wukari, located in Taraba State, exemplifies a significant environment where religious allegiance converges with ethnicity, indigenous-settler relations, and political power conflicts. This study investigates interreligious perspectives and cohabitation patterns between Christians and Muslims in Wukari from 2010 to 2021, focussing on the historical and geopolitical elements that have shaped religious

relations over this timeframe. The research employs a qualitative and historical-analytical methodology, utilising secondary material from academic literature, governmental papers, human rights records, and media sources, augmented by theoretical frameworks from Social Identity Theory and Conflict Transformation Theory. The approach concentrates on pivotal conflict incidents, sociopolitical advancements, religious narratives, and the influence of religious organisations and leaders in influencing interreligious relations. The findings indicate that religious violence in Wukari is mostly a consequence of politicised religious identity stemming from historical grievances, political marginalisation, and contested citizenship, rather than doctrinal disagreement. Frequent disputes, especially in 2014 and 2019, had a big effect on how Christians and Muslims saw each other. They made people less trusting, kept people apart, and kept unfavourable stories going between the two groups. Religious organisations sometimes made things worse, but they also did essential work in humanitarian response and rebuilding. This shows how religion can be both good and bad in countries that are afflicted by violence. The research indicates that enduring interreligious cooperation in Wukari is contingent upon the rectification of structural inequalities, the reformation of social narratives, and the enhancement of inclusive government and interfaith reconciliation frameworks. By contextualising local religious dynamics within extensive sociopolitical frameworks, this study enhances academic discourse on religion and conflict in pluralistic countries and offers pertinent insights for peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria.

Keywords: Interreligious relations, Christian–Muslim coexistence, religious violence, social perceptions; politicization of religion, indigene–settler dynamics and peacebuilding

Introduction

Nigeria is a very diverse country where religion plays a big role in how people interact with one other, how they get involved in politics, and how they define themselves. Christianity and Islam, the two most popular religions, have traditionally coexisted in complicated ways that involve both cooperation and competition. In many regions of the nation, religious identities are linked to ethnicity, the relationship between indigenous people and settlers, and access to political power. This often turns theological disagreements into sociopolitical

disputes (Best, 2011; Kukah, 1993). Taraba State, especially the Wukari Local Government Area, is a good example of how religion, ethnicity, and power all work together in a complicated way.

Musa, John, and Yerima say that Wukari is historically known as the ancestral home of the Jukun people. Their traditional institutions existed before colonial rule, and their identity is closely linked to Christianity because of extensive missionary work in the twentieth century. On the other hand, most of the Hausa-Fulani people in Wukari are Muslim and are commonly thought of as "settlers," even though they have lived there for a long time (Personal Communication 20-12-2025). According to Egwu (2004) and Turaki (1999), this split has affected how groups see one other, how they feel like they belong, and how they feel like they don't belong. Religion has been both a sign of faith and a sign of ethnic and political loyalty.

Before 2010, Christians and Muslims in Wukari lived together in a tenuous way, mostly via informal social connections, trade, and traditional ways of solving problems. But there were still tensions below, caused by disagreements about land ownership, political representation, chieftaincy recognition, and feelings of being left out. These complaints were sometimes expressed in religious terms, which made Christians and Muslims even more suspicious of one other (Mustapha, 2006).

According to Alex and Yerima, Wukari went through a lot of violent conflicts between 2010 and 2021 that changed how people of different religions saw each other and how they lived together. The 2014 crisis was a turning point because violence became more religiously charged, with attacks on churches, mosques, and communities based on faith (Personal Communication 03-01-2026). Even while these fights were usually started by political or community disagreements, framing them along Christian–Muslim lines made religious divisions worse and broke down societal trust that had been there for a long time (Human Rights Watch, 2015). The return of violence in the years that followed, such as the events of 2019, made fear, separation, and unfavourable stereotypes between the two religious communities even stronger.

To fully understand these conflicts, you need to look at them in the context of Nigeria's larger social and political changes throughout the time period being studied. The process of democratisation, the fight for local political posts, and the politicisation of being indigenous all made tensions amongst communities in Wukari worse. Religious leaders and institutions, although occasionally serving as proponents of peace, were also implicated in these conflicts, either by silence, party affiliation, or the defensive mobilisation of their adherents (Marshall, 2018). Consequently, Christian identity progressively emerged as a framework for interpreting political grievances and historical injustices.

At the same time, Wukari also saw ongoing initiatives to foster peace and talk amongst different religions. Christian and Muslim clergy, traditional leaders, civil society groups, and government officials all started reconciliation initiatives to rebuild trust and encourage peaceful cohabitation. Interfaith committees, collaborative peace statements, and community dialogues aimed to reframe Christian–Muslim ties beyond narratives of hostility. However, these attempts were generally less effective because of structural problems that had not been fixed, such as land tenure conflicts, inadequate judicial systems, and a lack of inclusive governance (Gofwen, 2004; Imobighe, 2003).

The years 2010 to 2021 are very important for the development of interreligious relations in Wukari. It shows how memories of the past, competition between different groups, and religious identities all work together to shape how people see things and how they get along with each other. Religion has served as a significant cause of division in times of crisis, while it has also offered moral resources for forgiveness, reconciliation, and rebuilding. To create long-lasting ways for Christians and Muslims to live together peacefully, we need to know how they see each other in Wukari, which is a disputed area. This is true not only in Taraba State but also in all of Nigeria.

In light of this context, a scholarly investigation of interreligious attitudes and cohabitation in Wukari is both opportune and essential. This study enhances wider scholarly discussions on religion and conflict in pluralistic societies and offers empirical insights into how local communities navigate identity, diversity, and collective citizenship amidst persistent violence.

Conceptual and Theoretical Clarifications

Interreligious cohabitation is when people from different religions live together in the same social space and respect, tolerate, and work together with each other, even when they have different beliefs. It encompasses not only the lack of violence but also pleasant interaction, shared civic ideals, and collaborative participation in social life (Küng, 1991). Interreligious perception refers to the ways in which religious groups comprehend, interpret, and assess one another, frequently influenced by historical contexts, social narratives, and power dynamics.

This research is grounded in Social Identity Theory and Conflict Transformation Theory. Social identification Theory elucidates the role of religion membership as a significant indicator of in-group and out-group identification, especially within pluralistic cultures facing rivalry for resources and acknowledgement (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Lederach's (1997) Conflict Transformation Theory offers a paradigm for comprehending the transformation of religious conflict via discussion, justice, and reconciliation, rather than simply repression. These views elucidate the reasons for the fluctuations in Christian–Muslim relations in Wukari, ranging from peaceful cohabitation to violent confrontation.

Historical Roots of Christian–Muslim Relations in Wukari

The historical foundations of Christian–Muslim interactions in Wukari are profoundly intertwined with the sociopolitical development of the Jukun polity and the larger area of Nigeria. Wukari has long been known as the traditional home of the Jukun people. Their political system, which is based on the Aku Uka, the highest monarch, goes back before colonial authority. The Jukun Kingdom had a lot of power over the areas around it. It set up systems for land ownership, tribute, and government that still affect how we think about being indigenous and belonging today (Meek, 1931; Vaughan, 1970).

Religious Interactions Before Colonisation

Before Christianity and Islam were organised faiths in Wukari, the Jukun followed African Traditional Religion (ATR), which governed community life, political power, and moral order. Religious activity was inextricably linked to administration, as spiritual legitimacy supported political authority. Initial encounters with Islam transpired via trans-Saharan trade networks and

engagements with Hausa traders and Islamic intellectuals from northern Nigeria. However, Islam did not instantly replace the religious traditions of the people who already lived there; instead, it coexisted with them in small urban and commercial areas (Turaki, 1999).

Islam's first existence in Wukari was predominantly linked to migrant populations rather than the indigenous populace. This historical trend led to the subsequent view of Islam as a "settler religion," which proved important in defining how Christians and Muslims got along after colonialism.

Colonialism and the establishment of religious identity

The British colonial government was a major turning point in how different religions got along in Wukari. Through the concept of indirect control, colonial authorities acknowledged and used pre-existing traditional institutions, such as the Aku Uka, while concurrently promoting missionary endeavours, especially Christian missions. Christian missionaries, particularly from groups like the Sudan United Mission (SUM), built schools, churches, and health centres that helped spread Christianity among the Jukun and other native people (Ayandele, 1966).

The colonial state's disparate treatment of Christianity and Islam facilitated the institutionalisation of religious identity as a socio-political indicator. While Islam continued to be the major religion in the northern emirates, Christianity grew quickly in the south, especially in Wukari, where it became strongly linked to Western education, modernisation, and political progress. This time set the stage for a religious split that was similar to ethnic and regional splits (Kukah, 1993). Post-Colonial Changes and the Divide Between Indigenous People and Settlers After Nigeria gained independence in 1960, religious identity in Wukari grew more and more linked to issues of political representation, land rights, and citizenship. The establishment of the indigene–settler dichotomy formalised social divisions between the mostly Christian indigenous Jukun and the predominately Muslim Hausa–Fulani communities. Many Muslim groups had lived in Wukari for generations, but they were typically left out of conventional power structures and political decision-making (Mustapha, 2006).

These exclusions made people angry and made them even more suspicious of each other. For indigenous Christians, the historical memory of Jukun sovereignty validated assertions of sole ownership and political dominance. On the other hand, Muslim communities saw these kinds of assertions as ways to push people to the outside and treat them unfairly. Religion therefore evolved as a potent symbol for expressing and challenging historical concerns.

Military Rule, the Move Towards Democracy, and Growing Tensions

Military authority from 1966 to 1999 temporarily stopped open violence, but it didn't fix the underlying structural issues. When democracy came back in 1999, the race for political posts become more intense, especially at the municipal level. In Wukari, elections were more and more based on religion and ethnicity, which made the divide between Christians and Muslims even worse (Egwu, 2004).

Religious organisations and leaders emerged as significant entities in galvanising political support, occasionally exacerbating polarisation. Historical narratives—like stories of being a victim or claims of original ownership—were used to support political demands. Over time, these dynamics turned religious differences from a cultural fact into a politically charged identity identifier.

Historical Memory and Current Relationships

Historical memory has a big effect on Christian-Muslim ties in Wukari from 2010 to 2021. Generations passed along memories of being dominated, left out, or in conflict, which shaped how people today see and respond to things. Violent incidents during this time did not occur in isolation; rather, they were deeply entrenched in enduring historical trajectories (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Consequently, the historical foundations of Christian–Muslim interactions in Wukari indicate that current problems are mostly concerned with disputed histories, governmental authority, and social identity rather than theological differences. Religion serves as both an identity framework and a mobilising force, exacerbating past grievances and influencing patterns of cohabitation.

Sociopolitical Dynamics and the Politicization of Religion in Wukari (2010–2021)

From 2010 to 2021, sociopolitical changes in Wukari had a big effect on how Christians and Muslims got along. Religion became a very political identification marker. During this time, there was more rivalry for democracy, more disputes over local government, and more fights over property, traditional authority, and political representation. Religion transitioned from being only a belief system to a mechanism for political mobilisation, border delineation, and the legitimisation of rival power claims.

Democratisation, Electoral Politics, and Religious Mobilisation

After 1999, Nigeria's democratic government became more stable, which opened up new political chances at the local government level, especially in places like Wukari, where holding political office meant having access to state resources and being recognised as important. From 2010 to 2021, people in Wukari commonly saw elections through a religious prism, with politicians often seen as representing either Christian-indigenous or Muslim-settler interests (Egwu, 2004).

Political figures used people's religious beliefs to get support, strengthen group unity, and make their opponents look bad. Campaign rhetoric and informal political speech sometimes depicted elections as contests for religious survival rather than expressions of democratic choice. This politicisation increased religious awareness and intensified the division between Christians and Muslims, particularly during election periods when tensions were most evident.

Indigeneity, Citizenship, and Systemic Exclusion

The enduring indigene–settler divide was one of the most important sociopolitical factors that affected how people of different religions got along in Wukari throughout this time. Indigenous Christian communities, notably the Jukun, predominantly governed traditional institutions and local political frameworks, but Muslim Hausa–Fulani inhabitants were frequently classified as settlers, irrespective of their length of presence (Mustapha, 2006).

This institutional exclusion had significant effects on how people of different religions saw each other. Muslim populations often had limited access to political

offices, property ownership rights, and conventional representation. These complaints were expressed in religious terms, which added to the idea that Muslims are being pushed to the edges of society. On the other hand, Christian groups saw Muslim groups' requests for inclusion as challenges to their own identity and historical sovereignty.

Policies of the state and the failure of neutral governance

The failure of state and municipal administrations to stay impartial during times of crisis made religion even more political in Wukari. People often thought that the government's reactions to outbreaks of violence were unfair or selective, depending on which religious organisation was involved. Security deployments, judicial proceedings, and aid distribution were viewed via religious glasses, which made people less likely to trust the government (Imobighe, 2003). The belief that the state was not acting as an impartial judge led religious organisations to rely on self-help groups, such as vigilante groups and religious networks, for safety and support. Consequently, religious identification progressively replaced citizenship as the principal foundation of security and political affiliation.

Religion, Ethnicity, and the Construction of Violence

Between 2010 and 2021, especially during the crises of 2014 and 2019, religion was the main way people understood the violence. Even though the real reasons for the violence were frequently property disputes, political rivalries, and old grudges, it was officially presented as a fight between Christians and Muslims. Attacks on places of worship and religious leaders turned sociopolitical battles into religious warfare in a symbolic way (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

This framing had long-lasting effects on how people of different religions get along with each other. It made the lines between groups stronger, made aggression against others seem normal, and linked religious differences with insecurity. Over time, religious identification became a security issue, with both Christians and Muslims seeing the "religious other" as a threat to their lives.

What religious leaders do in politics?

During this time, religious leaders had complicated roles in Wukari's social and political life. Many clerics spoke out against violence and for peace, but some became involved in politics by supporting politicians, getting their followers to vote, or staying silent when they saw anything wrong. This made the lines between religious authority and political power less clear, which made the politicisation of religion even stronger (Marshall, 2018).

Sermons, religious meetings, and faith-based groups evolved became platforms for political message, occasionally reinforcing themes of victimhood and resistance. These kinds of things made political claims seem more morally right, and in some cases, violence.

Socioeconomic Pressures and Youth Mobilisation

In Wukari, high levels of young unemployment, poverty, and little chances to go to school made sociopolitical tensions worse. Disaffected youngsters were especially vulnerable to religious and political indoctrination, frequently acting as foot soldiers in violent clashes. Religious identity conferred a sense of belonging and purpose, rendering it a potent mobilising instrument in situations of socioeconomic discontent (Best, 2011).

The mobilisation of young based on religion made people of other religions less trusting of each other and made it harder for them to talk to and get along with each other, especially in Wukari's urban and peri-urban regions.

Consequences for Interfaith Relations

From 2010 to 2021, religion became political, which changed the way Christians and Muslims in Wukari interacted with each other. Religion became a stand-in for political power, historical claims, and social exclusion. This made problems worse that could have been handled via politics or the law. During this time, interreligious coexistence depended not only on theological tolerance but also on fair government, fairness, and equal access to resources.

Patterns of Religious Violence and Key Conflict Episodes in Wukari (2010–2021)
From 2010 to 2021, religious violence in Wukari followed clear trends that were influenced by historical grievances, competitiveness in politics, and the politicisation of religious identity. While confrontations were frequently initiated by proximate events, their escalation and severity were indicative of profound structural tensions stemming from indigenous-settler interactions, disputed governmental authority, and the symbolic influence of religion. Over time, violence became cyclical, making negative views of other religions stronger and making it less likely that people would be able to live peacefully together.

Common Patterns of Religious Violence
A prevalent type of violence in Wukari throughout the examined time was the escalation of local disagreements into religious conflicts. Disputes arising from property ownership, political competition, or community discord were swiftly recontextualised along Christian–Muslim lines. This framing made it easier for large groups to get together, made it okay to hit back, and made the violence worse (Egwu, 2004).

Another important trend was the symbolic targeting of places of worship. Churches and mosques were often assaulted, not just because they were important for military reasons, but also because they were important for community identity. The demolition of these landmarks exacerbated communal suffering and solidified the belief that religious identity was being attacked (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Violence also followed a pattern of revenge, where one act led to counterattacks, frequently against those who weren't involved. This cycle of retaliation made people afraid and made violence seem like a natural way to protect religious and community values.

The years 2010 to 2013: Tensions rose and fights broke out from time to time.
There wasn't a lot of violence in the early years of the time being studied. Instead, there were little fights and building tensions. Political rivalry in local administration and disagreements over customary authority increased mistrust between Christians and Muslims. Even though there wasn't much bloodshed during this time, it set the stage for eventual conflict by strengthening religious barriers and mutual distrust. During this time, rumours, aggressive language, and

unanswered complaints built up, making the situation unstable and making it easy for small events to turn into big fights.

The 2014 Crisis: A Change Point

The 2014 war was a very important turning point in the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Wukari. What started as a disagreement between neighbours rapidly turned into a lot of violence with clear religious undertones. Churches and mosques were set on fire, neighbourhoods were separated, and hundreds of people were forced to leave their homes. The dispute became a national issue, making Wukari a well-known place of religious violence in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

This event has a big impact on how people of different religions view one other. Christians increasingly regarded Muslims as existential threats to indigenous identity and territorial sovereignty, whilst Muslims felt Christians as dominant entities employing political power and traditional authority to impose exclusion. The psychological effects of the brutality lasted long after the fighting stopped.

Interlude and Fragile Peace (2015–2018) After the incident in 2014, things in Wukari calmed down again, mostly because of a strong police presence and peace efforts organised by traditional authorities, religious leaders, and civil society groups. But this peace was weak and shallow because the real problems that caused it were still not tackled.

During this time, societies came up with ways to deal with the situation, such separating people by religion and limiting interactions between people of different religions. Even if open violence went down, the social barrier between Christians and Muslims grew, which made hatred and distrust even stronger.

The Violence That Came Back in 2019

Violence came again in 2019, when elections were held at the national and state levels. Political competitiveness and religious identity clashed again, just like they had in the past. Attacking religious leaders and symbols again showed how religious the fight was. The bloodshed in Wukari in 2019 showed that religious strife happens again and over again. It also showed that current peace processes

aren't very efficient since they focus more on dealing with crises than on changing conflicts in the long run (Imobighe, 2003).

Effect on Interreligious Coexistence

The cumulative impact of these violent occurrences resulted in a significant decline in interreligious harmony in Wukari. Christians and Muslims lost a lot of trust in each other, and fear and suspicion made social relationships more difficult. There was a big drop in economic cooperation, friendships between people of different religions, and communal events that everyone might enjoy. Violence also changed how people remembered things and who they were, with people often using previous conflicts to explain how they feel and act now. This historical accumulation of violence sustained a cycle wherein each subsequent battle raised the probability of future clashes.

Interreligious Perceptions and Social Narratives in Wukari (2010–2021)

From 2010 to 2021, people's views on religion in Wukari were mostly moulded by memories of the past, ongoing warfare, and being left out of politics and society. These beliefs did not arise in a vacuum; rather, they were formulated and perpetuated by prevailing societal narratives that depicted Christians and Muslims as rival factions within a contentious sociopolitical arena. Consequently, religious identity emerged as a major framework for negotiating trust, fear, and belonging.

Building the Religious "Other"

During this time, one of the most important things that happened between Christians and Muslims in Wukari was that they saw the other religion as a danger. Muslims were commonly seen as intruders who wanted to take over politics and expand their territory by Christians, especially the native Jukun. This belief came from stories about Jukun sovereignty from the past and was made stronger by recollections of violent events in which Christian communities lost lives and property.

Abdullahi and Hussaini On the other hand, Muslim groups, mostly Hausa-Fulani, made Christians out to be politically dominating natives who used traditional institutions and governmental structures to keep people out (Personal

Communication 06-01-2026). This story made Muslims look like they were victims of unfair treatment, being pushed to the outside, and not being given full citizenship privileges. These conflicting interpretations engendered mutual distrust and validated defensive and, at times, hostile stances (Mustapha, 2006).

How Collective Memory Affects How We See Things

Collective memory significantly influenced interreligious views in Wukari. Family tales, community talks, and religious meetings helped keep memories of past conflicts alive, especially the ones that happened in 2014 and 2019. These recollections were typically selective, focussing on being a victim and suffering while downplaying the violence that their own group did.

This kind of selective memory made Christians and Muslims see each other in a harsher light and made them feel more distant from each other. Past grievances served as moral benchmarks for contemporary views, complicating healing and sustaining cycles of distrust (Lederach, 1997).

Religious narratives provide moral frameworks for the interpretation of social experiences. Sermons, religious teachings, and informal religious conversation often contextualised disputes in moral and spiritual dimensions, depicting one's society as virtuous and the opposing one as unjust or antagonistic. While some religious leaders advocated for peace, certain narratives subtly perpetuated dichotomous divisions between "us" and "them."

This moral framing heightened interreligious polarisation by sanctifying social borders and portraying conflicts as battles between good and evil instead of as socio-political disagreements amenable to discussion (Kukah, 1993).

Media, Gossip, and Unofficial Communication

During times of stress, informal ways of talking to each other, such rumours, social media, and stories told by word of mouth, had a big impact on how people saw things. Without reliable sources of information, unconfirmed stories of assaults or threats spread quickly, frequently making people angry and causing them to act before or after the fact.

These stories did well in places where people were scared and unsure, which reinforced prejudices and made religious differences even bigger. Over time, hearing these kinds of stories over and over made people suspicious and made them feel that it was okay to stay away from others and separate themselves from them (Best, 2011).

Routine Interactions and Social Proximity

The combined effect of unfavourable views and unfriendly stories made it clear that Christians and Muslims in Wukari were becoming further apart. People of different religions didn't contact as much in schools, marketplaces, and neighbourhoods, and people started to live in more religiously divided areas.

Limited collaboration was often necessary for economic reasons, but confidence was still weak. Social avoidance took the place of ordinary friendliness, showing a change from living together in harmony to living together with caution.

Counter-Narratives and Attempts to Change How People See Things

Even while stories that focus on conflict were the most popular, stories that promote coexistence and common humanity also came out. Interfaith talks, collaborative peace projects, and comprehensive religious teachings aimed to confront prejudices and reshape interreligious perspectives. These initiatives focused on ideals that both Christians and Muslims believe in, such as justice, compassion, and living together peacefully. But the effects of these counter-narratives were typically restricted by ongoing insecurity, unsolved complaints, and the absence of institutional support.

Interreligious views and social narratives in Wukari indicate that conflict is perpetuated not just by material complaints but also by meanings, memories, and moral interpretations. Negative impressions acted as self-reinforcing processes, influencing behaviour and diminishing the efficacy of peacebuilding efforts.

To have long-lasting interreligious harmony, we need to understand and change these stories. Structural improvements alone are unlikely to bring about enduring peace unless there are intentional initiatives to address perception, memory, and narrative.

Role of Religious Institutions and Leaders in Wukari (2010–2021)

Between 2010 and 2021, religious groups and leaders had a big yet mixed effect on how Christians and Muslims got along in Wukari. Churches and mosques served as guardians of moral authority and communal identity, acting as stabilising factors in times of stress and as centres of mobilisation that occasionally exacerbated religious polarisation. Their impact beyond spiritual mentorship to include social organisation, political involvement, and peacebuilding efforts.

Religious Institutions as Focal Points of Identity and Mobilisation

In Wukari, religious organisations were the main places where people built and strengthened their sense of community. Churches and mosques provide spiritual services as well as social assistance, education, and community support. During times of crisis, these places were safe havens for those who had to leave their homes and places to share information and get help.

But this primacy also made religious institutions easy to use for political purposes. During times of heightened tension, religious places served as focal areas for collective action, occasionally bolstering in-group unity to the detriment of interreligious trust. This dual function highlights the intricate status of religious organisations as both defenders and possible exacerbators of conflict (Kukah, 1993).

Religious Leaders as Moral Figures and Political Figures

Religious leaders had a lot of moral power over their followers, which affected how they felt about people of different religions. A lot of Christian pastors and Muslim clerics in Wukari preached lessons of peace, restraint, and forgiveness all the time. They did this by using teachings from the Bible and the Qur'an that stress justice and living together. These kinds of lessons were especially clear during interfaith gatherings and efforts to make peace after a conflict.

However, some religious leaders became involved in local political fights by supporting politicians, making community demands seem more legitimate, or staying quiet when they saw injustice. This engagement blurred the line between religious authority and political power, which made religion more political and, in some circumstances, made combative stories seem more real (Marshall, 2018).

How to respond to violence and help those in need

During times of conflict, religious groups did important humanitarian work. Churches and mosques helped people in need by organising relief activities, giving them a place to stay, and working with non-governmental organisations to give food, medical care, and emotional support. These actions made religious organisations more socially important and made people more devoted to their communities.

However, many people thought that humanitarian reactions were just for those of the same faith, which was not true. These views, regardless of their veracity, intensified interreligious distrust and perpetuated narratives of bias, constraining avenues for cross-religious unity.

Interfaith Initiatives and Roles in Building Peace

In Wukari, religious leaders were very important to efforts to create peace. Christian and Muslim leaders met to talk about their problems, promote peace, and make public demands for peace through interfaith councils, combined prayer sessions, and conversation forums. These efforts showed how religious leaders may help people get along and work together by focussing on common moral principles (Lederach, 1997).

Even while ecumenical programs had a lot of symbolic meaning, they weren't very effective because of a number of problems, such as not getting enough financing over time, not being institutionalised well enough, and not reaching enough people at the grassroots level. Additionally, ecumenical initiatives have faced challenges in attaining enduring reform without confronting fundamental structural inequities.

Teaching Religion and Making Stories

Religious institutions also had a big impact on social narratives through religious instruction. Sermons, catechism classes, Qur'anic schools, and youth programs shaped how followers saw other religions. Inclusive teachings fostered tolerance and empathy, but exclusivist interpretations perpetuated prejudices and fear.

Because there were no standardised frameworks for interreligious education, messages were very different depending on the leaders' beliefs and the political and social climate at the time. This variety led to variations in how people of different religions saw each other in different communities.

The function of religious organisations and leaders in Wukari exemplifies the dual essence of religion in countries impacted by war. Religious actors have a lot of power to promote peace, but when their goals are mixed with political and community ones, they may also make tensions worse. To make interreligious cohabitation last, we need to make religious organisations better at promoting peace and keep them safe from partisan political influence.

Efforts to create peace and talk between different religions

Between 2010 and 2021, a number of peacebuilding tools were put in place, such as traditional mediation by the Aku Uka of Wukari, peace committees funded by the government, and interfaith dialogues organised by civil society. The goal of these projects was to repair trust, fix social ties, and encourage peaceful cohabitation.

Even while these initiatives had some success, it was still unclear whether they would last because the government wasn't always committed, peace accords weren't always enforced, and violence kept happening. Still, they show how important it is to have open conversations and use local methods to deal with problems between religions (Lederach, 1997).

Effects on Wukari's Interreligious Coexistence

The Wukari experience illustrates that interreligious cooperation is significantly shaped by historical grievances, political marginalisation, and socio-economic disparities. Religious differences do not inherently incite conflict; instead, they offer a significant framework for the interpretation and contestation of more extensive disputes.

To achieve sustainable coexistence, we must fix structural inequities, support inclusive government, establish interfaith institutions, and change how people see

other religions via education and conversation. Peace in Wukari is likely to stay fragile without these kinds of actions.

Conclusion

This study investigated interreligious perspectives and cohabitation between Christians and Muslims in Wukari, Taraba State, from 2010 to 2021, contextualising current interactions within their historical, social, and religious frameworks. The results indicate that Christian–Muslim relations in Wukari cannot be fully comprehended solely through theological differences; instead, they are the result of a complex interplay among historical memory, political rivalry, indigene–settler dynamics, and the politicisation of religious identity.

Historically, religion in Wukari became interwoven with ethnicity and political authority, notably via the identification of Christianity with indigenous Jukun identity and Islam with migrating Hausa–Fulani populations. This historical construction established the foundation for reciprocal distrust and exclusion. From 2010 to 2021, these underlying tensions were exacerbated by democratic competition, ineffective administration, and disputed access to property and political power, therefore converting religion into a mobilising and legitimising factor in communal disputes.

The research further indicated that the patterns of violence in Wukari adhered to cyclical and retaliatory trajectories, with pivotal conflict episodes—particularly in 2014 and 2019—profoundly altering interreligious beliefs. These events made people more afraid, strengthened negative societal stories, and made the divide between Christians and Muslims even bigger, both physically and mentally. Interreligious attitudes were perpetuated by selective collective memory, moral framing within religious discourse, and informal communication routes that exacerbated rumours and stereotypes.

The survey also showed that religious groups and leaders were in a mixed situation. Churches and mosques occasionally helped to keep people apart, but they also performed important roles in helping those in need, mediating conflicts, and promoting peace. Interfaith projects showed that religion may be a source of peace, but their effects were frequently hampered by systemic inequalities and uneven backing from institutions.

The study finds that interreligious cohabitation in Wukari is still weak, and that unsolved sociopolitical issues are more to blame than fundamental religious divides. To achieve lasting peace, it is essential to change the structural factors that lead to conflict and the social stories and beliefs that keep interreligious distrust alive.

Recommendations

This study's results led to the following suggestions:

1. Making governance and citizenship more inclusive

State and municipal governments should deal with the structural causes of conflict by changing laws that keep indigenous people and settlers apart. All citizens of Wukari, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, should have the same rights to participate in politics, own land, and use public services. Inclusive governance will lessen the inclination to exploit religion as a tool for political survival.

2. Making interfaith peacebuilding tools part of the system

Interfaith councils and conversation platforms have to be institutionalised instead of being regarded as temporary solutions to emergencies. These groups should have traditional leaders, Christian and Muslim leaders, women, and young people as members. They should also have legal assistance and long-term funding. To re-establish trust, there has to be ongoing conversation instead of only talking when there is a problem.

3. Making the Peace Role of Religious Leaders Stronger

Religious leaders ought to get training in conflict-sensitive preaching, mediation, and peace education. Faith-based organisations should create rules that prevent partisan political activity and aggressive language. Religious leaders may actively change how people of different religions see each other by focussing on shared moral ideals like justice, compassion, and human dignity.

4. Talking about how vulnerable young people are and how they are left out of the economy

Programs that focus on young unemployment, education, and civic involvement should be given top priority. Because jobless and marginalised young people are often involved in conflicts, giving them more influence in the economy and society will make them less likely to be used for religious and political purposes.

5. Supporting education between religions and stories that go against the mainstream

Schools, religious groups, and civil society groups should all support interreligious education that helps people understand each other and learn about history. Schools, the media, and religious groups should all work to spread counter-narratives that focus on common experiences, peaceful cooperation, and interdependence.

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Appendix A
LIST OF INFORMANTS

S/N	NAME	GENDER	AGE	OCCUPATION	L.G. A	DATE
1	Ahmad Musa	Male	40	**I**mam	Wukari	20/12/2025
2	Agabus John	Male	45	Clergy	Wukari	20/12/2025
3	Bulus John Yerima	Male	49	Clergy	Wukari	20/12/2025
4	Abubakar Abdullahi	Male	58	Imam	Wukari	06/01/2026
5	Maxwell Alex	Male	50	Civil Servant	Wukari	06/01/2026
6	Matthew Musa	Male	40	Civil Servant	Wukari	06/01/2026
7	Dahiru Musa	Male	53	Imam	Wukari	03/01/2026
8	Danjuma Bishi	Male	40	Clergy	Wukari	06/01/2026
9	Ubamdoma Kezia	Female	30	Civil Servant	Wukari	03/01/2026
10	Sa'adatu Hussaini	Female	50	Civil Servant	Wukari	03/01/2026