



Religious Fundamentalism: A Threat to Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria

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Abstract: Religious fundamentalism has become one of the most significant challenges confronting peaceful coexistence, national integration, and sustainable development in contemporary Nigeria. While religion remains a powerful force for moral formation, social cohesion, and humanitarian service, extremist interpretations of religious beliefs have contributed to violence, intolerance, social polarization, and insecurity in different parts of the country. This paper critically examines the nature of religious fundamentalism and its implications for peaceful coexistence within Nigeria's pluralistic society. Employing a qualitative research methodology based on documentary and library sources, the study analyses scholarly literature, constitutional provisions, and relevant theological perspectives on religion, peace, and social harmony. The paper argues that religious fundamentalism is not synonymous with religion itself but represents an extreme ideological interpretation that undermines the core religious values of justice, compassion, tolerance, and respect for human dignity. It further contends that political manipulation of religion, poor civic education, socio-economic inequalities, digital misinformation, and weak institutional responses have intensified religious extremism in Nigeria. The study concludes that promoting interfaith dialogue, ethical leadership, constitutional governance, responsible religious education, and effective law enforcement remains essential for reducing religious extremism and strengthening peaceful coexistence. It recommends collaborative efforts among government, religious institutions, educational establishments, civil society organisations, and community leaders to foster a culture of tolerance, mutual respect, and national unity.

Keywords: Religious Fundamentalism, Peaceful Coexistence, Nigeria, Religious Extremism, Interfaith Dialogue, National Integration, Social Harmony.

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1. Introduction

Religion has remained one of the most influential forces shaping human societies throughout history. Beyond its spiritual dimension, religion contributes to moral development, social organisation, cultural identity, humanitarian engagement, and the establishment of ethical frameworks that guide individual and collective behaviour. In many societies, including Nigeria, religious institutions serve as important agents of education, healthcare delivery, social welfare, conflict mediation, and community development. However, alongside these positive contributions, the misuse of religious beliefs through extreme interpretations and intolerant ideologies has generated serious concerns about the relationship between religion, peace, and social stability.

Religious fundamentalism has emerged as a significant phenomenon in contemporary global affairs, particularly because of its association with intolerance, exclusivism, violence, and resistance to pluralistic values. Although the term originally referred to movements seeking to preserve certain religious doctrines perceived to be under threat from modern influences, it has increasingly been associated with rigid ideological positions that reject dialogue and impose religious convictions on others. Juergensmeyer (2003) argues that religious violence often emerges when religious identities become intertwined with political struggles and when conflicts are interpreted through sacred narratives. This demonstrates that the challenge is not religion itself but the transformation of religious convictions into instruments of hostility and domination.

Nigeria provides a significant context for examining religious fundamentalism because of its religious diversity and complex socio-political environment. As a nation where Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion coexist, Nigeria possesses enormous potential for interreligious cooperation and social development. Religious communities have contributed significantly to national growth through educational institutions, healthcare services, charitable activities, and moral instruction. Anameje (2026) observes that religion can serve as a powerful instrument of social transformation when it promotes justice, ethical responsibility, and positive engagement with society. This perspective highlights the constructive potential of religion when separated from extremist interpretations.

Despite this positive role, religious fundamentalism has contributed to serious challenges affecting Nigeria's peace and stability. The activities of extremist groups, sectarian conflicts, religiously motivated violence, hate speech, and intolerance have threatened peaceful coexistence among different communities. These challenges have not only resulted in loss of lives and property but have also weakened social trust, disrupted economic activities,

and created divisions among citizens. Consequently, the question is no longer whether religion influences Nigerian society, but whether certain forms of religious expression are contributing to conflict rather than cooperation.

The relationship between religion and national integration remains particularly important in Nigeria because religious identity often intersects with ethnic, regional, and political identities. In some situations, religious differences have been exploited by political actors seeking support or legitimacy, thereby transforming religious affiliation into a source of competition and division. Anameje (2023) argues that religion should promote national integration by encouraging peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and unity among diverse communities. This understanding challenges religious actors and political leaders to view religion as a bridge for cooperation rather than a tool for social fragmentation.

The rise of digital communication has further complicated the issue of religious fundamentalism. Social media platforms have created opportunities for religious education, dialogue, and wider dissemination of positive religious messages. However, these same platforms have also facilitated the spread of extremist ideologies, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and inflammatory religious content. Anameje (2023) notes that religion in the digital era requires responsible engagement because technological advancement can either strengthen social harmony or intensify existing tensions depending on how it is utilised.

Furthermore, changing social realities have influenced the expression of religion in contemporary Nigerian society. Globalisation, urbanisation, economic pressures, and cultural transformation have altered traditional patterns of religious interaction (Madukwu, et al, 2025 ; Eze et al, 2026). While these changes have created opportunities for cooperation, they have also produced uncertainties that extremist movements sometimes exploit. Anameje (2025) observes that changing realities within African societies have affected traditional values and spiritual orientations, making it necessary to preserve ethical principles that support communal responsibility, respect, and peaceful relationships.

The challenge of religious fundamentalism therefore requires careful distinction between genuine religious commitment and extremist ideology. Religious devotion that promotes compassion, justice, and respect for human dignity contributes positively to society, while fundamentalist expressions that encourage hatred, violence, or exclusion threaten peaceful coexistence. Appleby (2000) emphasizes that religion possesses both constructive and destructive possibilities depending on the ways religious beliefs are interpreted and applied within social contexts.

This study examines religious fundamentalism as a threat to peaceful coexistence in Nigeria by analysing its nature, causes, manifestations, and consequences. It argues that religious fundamentalism becomes dangerous when religious convictions are transformed into rigid ideologies that reject dialogue, undermine human dignity, and justify violence against others. The paper further argues that addressing this challenge requires more than security measures; it demands ethical religious leadership, interfaith cooperation, responsible education, social justice, and effective governance capable of promoting harmony within Nigeria's diverse society.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

2.1 Religion

Religion is a complex social and spiritual phenomenon that encompasses beliefs, practices, moral values, rituals, and institutional structures through which individuals and communities relate with the sacred or ultimate reality. It provides explanations about existence, establishes ethical principles, shapes cultural identities, and influences human relationships within society. Scholars of religion have long recognised that religion is not limited to private spiritual experiences but also functions as a social institution capable of influencing political behaviour, cultural practices, and patterns of social interaction.

From a sociological perspective, religion contributes to social cohesion by creating shared values, collective identity, and a sense of belonging among members of a community. Durkheim (1912) argues that religion strengthens social solidarity by uniting individuals around common beliefs and collective practices. However, because religion possesses significant influence over human behaviour, its interpretation and application can produce either peaceful cooperation or social tension.

In the Nigerian context, religion occupies a central position in social life. It influences family structures, education, politics, morality, and community relationships (Molokwu & Uchime, 2020). Religious organisations have historically contributed to national development through schools, hospitals, charitable initiatives, and humanitarian interventions. Anameje and Ifeukwu (2026) observe that religion serves as a source of emotional support and resilience for individuals experiencing psychological and social difficulties. This demonstrates that religion remains an important resource for human flourishing when expressed through compassion, responsibility, and care for others.

2.2 Religious Fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism refers to a strict and uncompromising commitment to particular religious beliefs, often characterised by the conviction that certain doctrines

represent absolute truth and must be preserved against perceived threats. The concept emerged historically within specific religious movements that sought to defend traditional beliefs against modern interpretations and secular influences. However, in contemporary discussions, fundamentalism has often been associated with exclusivism, intolerance, rejection of pluralism, and resistance to critical engagement.

It is important to distinguish between religious commitment and religious fundamentalism. Strong religious devotion does not automatically lead to extremism. Many deeply committed religious individuals and communities promote peace, charity, justice, and reconciliation. Fundamentalism becomes problematic when religious identity is used to deny the dignity of others, justify violence, or reject peaceful coexistence with people of different beliefs.

Armstrong (2000) explains that fundamentalist movements often emerge as reactions to social change, modernity, and perceived threats to religious identity. Such movements may attempt to create a rigid boundary between the faithful and outsiders, producing a worldview that encourages separation and conflict. Therefore, the challenge of religious fundamentalism lies not in sincere religious conviction but in interpretations that promote intolerance and hostility.

2.3 Religious Extremism

Religious extremism represents an intensified form of ideological commitment where individuals or groups adopt radical positions that may justify coercion, violence, or the suppression of alternative viewpoints in the name of religion. While fundamentalism may involve rigid beliefs, extremism moves beyond belief systems into actions that threaten social order, human rights, and peaceful relations.

Religious extremism often develops through a combination of ideological, political, economic, and social factors. Feelings of marginalisation, injustice, poverty, political manipulation, and weak governance can create environments where extremist narratives gain influence. Galtung (1969) argues that violence frequently emerges from structural conditions that produce inequality, exclusion, and frustration within societies.

In Nigeria, religious extremism has manifested through violent attacks, terrorism, communal conflicts, and intolerance among competing religious groups. These realities demonstrate that addressing extremism requires attention not only to religious teachings but also to broader social conditions that enable radical ideologies to spread.

2.4 Peaceful Coexistence

Peaceful coexistence refers to the ability of individuals and communities with different religious, ethnic, cultural, and ideological backgrounds to live together with mutual respect, tolerance, and cooperation. It does not require the elimination of differences but rather the recognition that diversity can exist within a framework of justice, equality, and social harmony.

Peaceful coexistence is built upon principles such as dialogue, respect for human dignity, acceptance of diversity, and commitment to resolving conflicts through non-violent means. In religiously plural societies, peaceful coexistence requires both legal protection of individual rights and social attitudes that reject discrimination and hostility.

Anameje (2023) emphasises that religion has an important role in promoting national integration when it encourages mutual respect, justice, and peaceful relationships among diverse communities. This perspective highlights the responsibility of religious institutions to contribute positively to social stability rather than reinforce divisions.

2.5 Religion and Social Responsibility

Religion carries significant social responsibilities because religious institutions influence the values, attitudes, and behaviours of millions of people. Beyond worship and spiritual activities, religious organisations participate in education, healthcare, poverty reduction, conflict resolution, and community development. Consequently, religious leaders possess considerable influence in shaping public morality and social relationships.

Theological reflection on religious participation demonstrates that believers are not only recipients of religious teachings but also active participants in transforming society. Anameje (2007) argues that greater participation of members of religious communities strengthens the mission of the Church and enhances its engagement with social realities. This understanding challenges religious communities to move beyond internal religious activities toward constructive involvement in promoting peace, justice, and human welfare.

2.6 The Relationship Between Religion and Peace

Religion and peace have a complex relationship. While religious beliefs have inspired humanitarian efforts, reconciliation, and social justice movements across history, religious differences have also been involved in conflicts when manipulated by political or ideological interests. Therefore, religion itself cannot be described as inherently peaceful or violent; rather, the outcomes depend on interpretation, leadership, and social context.

A responsible understanding of religion emphasises values such as compassion, forgiveness, justice, and respect for human dignity. When these values are prioritised, religion becomes a powerful instrument for peacebuilding. However, when religious identity is combined with intolerance, political manipulation, and hatred, it becomes a potential source of conflict.

The challenge facing Nigeria is therefore not the existence of religious diversity but the inability of some individuals and groups to manage diversity through dialogue and mutual respect. Strengthening peaceful coexistence requires promoting religious expressions that encourage cooperation while confronting interpretations that legitimise violence and exclusion (Eyeh, et al, 2023).

3. Historical and Contemporary Expressions of Religious Fundamentalism in Nigeria

The emergence and development of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria must be understood within the broader historical, social, and political context of the country. Nigeria's religious landscape has always been characterised by diversity, with Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion influencing different aspects of social life (Molokwu & uchime, 2020). Historically, religious communities contributed significantly to moral education, cultural preservation, and community organisation. However, changing political structures, colonial experiences, economic challenges, and competition for social influence have also created conditions where religious identities sometimes become sources of tension (Kwalbe & Molokwu, 2024).

3.1 Historical Background of Religious Tensions in Nigeria

Religious interactions in Nigeria have historically involved both cooperation and conflict. Before colonial rule, indigenous religious systems shaped communal values, social responsibilities, and relationships between individuals and their communities (Eze, et al, 2025). The arrival of Christianity and the expansion of Islam introduced new religious identities that gradually became influential in different regions of the country. While these traditions contributed positively to education, literacy, and social development, religious differences also became connected with questions of power, identity, and political authority.

Colonial governance further complicated religious relationships by introducing administrative structures that sometimes reinforced regional and religious distinctions. The indirect rule system, missionary activities, and educational differences contributed to the emergence of varying social experiences among different communities. Over time, these historical developments influenced how

religious identities interacted with ethnic and political interests (Molokwu, et al, 2023; Eze& Molokwu, 2025).

In contemporary Nigeria, religious identity remains closely connected with questions of belonging, representation, and social influence. Anameje (2022) explains that the development of monotheistic religious traditions demonstrates how religious beliefs can shape human societies, moral systems, and collective identities. However, when religious identity becomes rigidly associated with political dominance or social exclusion, it can create tensions that threaten peaceful coexistence.

3.2 Religious Fundamentalism and the Rise of Extremist Movements

One of the most visible expressions of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria is the emergence of extremist groups that use religious language to justify violence and social disruption. These groups often present themselves as defenders of religious purity while rejecting democratic institutions, peaceful coexistence, and alternative interpretations of faith.

The activities of extremist organisations have produced devastating consequences, including terrorism, displacement of communities, destruction of property, disruption of education, and loss of thousands of lives. Such actions have affected not only religious relationships but also national security, economic development, and social stability.

It is important to recognise that extremist groups do not represent the entirety of any religious tradition. The actions of violent groups should not be used to define entire religious communities, as millions of Nigerians practise their faith peacefully and contribute positively to national development. Juergensmeyer (2003) notes that religious violence often occurs when political, social, and economic grievances are expressed through religious frameworks, making conflicts appear as sacred struggles.

3.3 Political Exploitation of Religious Identity

Another significant expression of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria is the manipulation of religious identity for political purposes. In some cases, political actors use religious sentiments to mobilise support, create divisions, or portray opponents as threats to particular religious communities (Molokwu & uchime, 2025). This practice transforms religion from a source of moral guidance into an instrument of competition and exclusion.

The politicisation of religion weakens national unity because citizens may begin to evaluate political issues primarily through religious affiliations rather than competence, accountability, and public interest. It also creates an environment where religious differences become exaggerated and easily exploited.

Ethical leadership requires leaders to protect diversity and promote justice for all citizens regardless of religious background. Brown and Treviño (2006) argue that ethical leadership is characterised by fairness, integrity, accountability, and responsible decision-making. In Nigeria's context, such leadership is essential for preventing the exploitation of religion as a tool for division.

3.4 Religious Fundamentalism in the Digital Age

The advancement of digital technology has introduced new dimensions to religious fundamentalism. Social media platforms have enabled religious communities to communicate beyond geographical boundaries, share teachings, organise activities, and engage in humanitarian initiatives. However, these platforms have also created spaces where extremist ideas can spread rapidly.

Online platforms can amplify hate speech, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and provocative religious messages capable of increasing suspicion and hostility among communities. The speed at which digital information spreads makes it difficult for individuals and institutions to correct false narratives before they influence public opinion.

Anameje (2023) argues that religion in the digital era requires responsible engagement because technological advancement presents both opportunities and challenges for religious communities. Religious actors must therefore embrace digital platforms ethically by promoting truth, respect, dialogue, and peaceful interaction.

3.5 Socio-Economic Conditions and Religious Fundamentalism

Religious fundamentalism does not develop in isolation from social realities. Poverty, unemployment, inequality, weak education systems, and feelings of marginalisation can create conditions where extremist messages become attractive to vulnerable populations. Individuals experiencing frustration and hopelessness may become more susceptible to ideologies that promise identity, purpose, or social recognition. However, socio-economic challenges alone do not automatically produce religious extremism. The interpretation of religious teachings, leadership influence, political conditions, and community responses also determine whether religious identity becomes a source of peace or conflict.

Anameje and Ifeukwu (2026) highlight the role of religion in providing emotional support and coping mechanisms during periods of stress and difficulty. This positive function demonstrates that religion can help individuals navigate hardship constructively when guided by compassion and responsible leadership. The challenge arises when hardship is exploited by extremist actors who redirect frustration toward hatred and violence.

3.6 The Impact of Changing Cultural Values

Contemporary Nigerian society is experiencing significant cultural transformations caused by globalisation, urbanisation, migration, and technological development (Nwasuba, et al, 2020). These changes have influenced religious practices, social relationships, and traditional patterns of community interaction. While change is unavoidable, the weakening of values such as mutual respect, communal responsibility, hospitality, and tolerance can create conditions where divisions become easier to exploit. Anameje (2025) observes that changing realities in African societies have affected traditional values and spiritual orientations, making the preservation of ethical values essential for maintaining social harmony.

Therefore, addressing religious fundamentalism requires not only confronting violent expressions of extremism but also strengthening the moral, cultural, educational, and institutional foundations that support peaceful coexistence.

4. Religious Fundamentalism and Its Implications for Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria

Religious fundamentalism becomes a serious threat to peaceful coexistence when religious beliefs are transformed from expressions of faith into rigid ideologies that reject dialogue, tolerate no alternative viewpoints, and justify hostility toward others. In a pluralistic society such as Nigeria, where different religious traditions exist side by side, the manner in which religious beliefs are interpreted and practised has significant implications for national unity, security, and social development.

4.1 Threat to National Unity and Social Integration

One of the major consequences of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria is its negative impact on national integration. A peaceful society requires citizens to recognise their shared humanity despite differences in religion, ethnicity, culture, or political affiliation. However, fundamentalist ideologies often create sharp divisions between groups by promoting the belief that only one community possesses legitimate truth while others are viewed with suspicion or hostility.

When religious identity becomes the primary basis for social interaction, citizens may begin to prioritise religious loyalty over national citizenship. This weakens the sense of collective belonging required for nation-building. Instead of viewing diversity as a source of strength, communities may interpret differences as threats, thereby increasing mistrust and social fragmentation.

Anameje (2023) emphasises that religion has the potential to contribute to national integration when it promotes values such as justice, tolerance, and mutual

respect among diverse communities. This implies that the problem confronting Nigeria is not religious diversity itself but the inability of some individuals and groups to manage diversity within a framework of peaceful coexistence.

4.2 Contribution to Violence and Insecurity

Religious fundamentalism has contributed significantly to insecurity in Nigeria through violent extremism, communal conflicts, attacks on religious institutions, and destruction of lives and property. The use of religious narratives to justify violence creates an environment where ordinary citizens become victims of conflicts they did not create.

Violence carried out in the name of religion damages not only the reputation of particular religious communities but also the broader social fabric. It creates fear, encourages retaliation, and deepens divisions between groups. Furthermore, prolonged insecurity affects education, economic activities, healthcare delivery, and community development.

However, it is essential to distinguish between genuine religious teachings and extremist interpretations. Most religious traditions contain principles that promote peace, compassion, and human dignity. The challenge lies in preventing individuals or groups from manipulating religious beliefs to legitimise violence.

4.3 Undermining Human Rights and Religious Freedom

Ironically, religious fundamentalism often threatens the very religious freedom it claims to defend. When extremist groups attempt to impose their beliefs through coercion or violence, they deny others the same freedom of conscience and worship that they demand for themselves.

Freedom of religion does not include the freedom to violate the rights of others. Genuine religious liberty exists within a framework of respect for human dignity, equality, and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, protecting religious freedom requires confronting actions that seek to suppress the beliefs, identities, or legitimate rights of other citizens.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) affirm that every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. These principles demonstrate that religious liberty and respect for others are interconnected rather than contradictory.

4.4 Impact on Economic and Social Development

Peace and development are closely connected. Societies affected by religious conflict often experience reduced investment, destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations, and disruption of economic activities. Religious fundamentalism therefore creates

consequences that extend beyond spiritual disagreements into wider social and economic challenges.

Communities affected by insecurity may experience school closures, reduced agricultural activities, unemployment, and increased poverty. These conditions can further create environments where extremist narratives gain influence, producing a cycle of instability and underdevelopment.

Religion, however, can equally become an instrument for development when directed toward constructive social engagement. Anameje (2026) argues that religious institutions can contribute significantly to social transformation when they promote ethical responsibility, human dignity, and active participation in societal improvement. This demonstrates that the same religious influence that can be misused for division can also be harnessed for peace and development.

4.5 Weakening Interreligious Relations

Peaceful coexistence depends largely on trust and communication between religious communities. Religious fundamentalism damages these relationships by encouraging stereotypes, suspicion, and negative perceptions of other faith traditions. When communities rarely interact positively, misinformation and prejudice become easier to spread.

Interfaith dialogue provides an important pathway for reducing tensions because it creates opportunities for communities to understand one another, address misconceptions, and cooperate on common challenges. Such dialogue does not require the abandonment of religious convictions but encourages respect for the dignity and rights of others.

4.6 The Role of Religious Leaders in Addressing Fundamentalism

Religious leaders possess significant influence over their followers and therefore have an important responsibility in promoting peace and discouraging extremism. Through preaching, teaching, counselling, and community engagement, religious leaders can either strengthen tolerance or unintentionally encourage division. Responsible religious leadership requires emphasis on values such as compassion, justice, forgiveness, honesty, and respect for human life. Religious leaders must also challenge extremist interpretations that contradict the fundamental moral principles of their faith traditions.

Anameje (2007) highlights the importance of active participation within religious communities in fulfilling the social mission of the Church. This principle extends beyond internal religious responsibilities to include constructive

engagement with society, especially in promoting peace, justice, and human welfare.

4.7 The Need for Restoring Ethical and Spiritual Values

The solution to religious fundamentalism requires a restoration of values that encourage respect, responsibility, and peaceful engagement. Modern societies often experience tensions arising from rapid social changes, weakening communal bonds, and declining commitment to ethical principles. Anameje and Ifeukwu (2026) argue that spiritual and ethical practices contribute to human well-being and productivity by providing balance, meaning, and responsible engagement with life's challenges. In the context of religious fundamentalism, this perspective highlights the need for religious expressions that promote inner transformation and social responsibility rather than hostility toward others.

Therefore, addressing religious fundamentalism requires a holistic approach that combines security measures with moral education, social justice, ethical leadership, and meaningful dialogue among communities.

5. Strategies for Addressing Religious Fundamentalism and Promoting Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria

The persistence of religious fundamentalism in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both immediate security concerns and the deeper social, political, educational, and religious factors that contribute to extremism. Since religious fundamentalism is influenced by multiple factors, including ideological interpretation, political manipulation, poverty, ignorance, and weak institutions, sustainable solutions must involve collaboration among government institutions, religious bodies, educational establishments, civil society organisations, and local communities.

5.1 Promotion of Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation

Interfaith dialogue remains one of the most effective instruments for reducing religious tension and promoting peaceful coexistence. Dialogue creates opportunities for religious communities to understand one another, correct misconceptions, and develop relationships based on mutual respect. It does not require the abandonment of religious convictions but encourages recognition of the dignity and rights of people from different faith traditions.

In Nigeria, interfaith engagement should move beyond occasional meetings during periods of crisis and become a continuous process involving religious leaders, youth groups, women organisations, educational institutions, and community representatives. Through sustained dialogue, religious communities can collaborate on issues affecting

society, including poverty reduction, education, healthcare, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding.

5.2 Strengthening Ethical Religious Leadership

Religious leaders play a significant role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of their followers. Because many citizens receive moral guidance primarily through religious institutions, leaders have a responsibility to ensure that their teachings promote peace, tolerance, justice, and respect for human dignity.

Ethical religious leadership requires rejecting messages that encourage hatred, violence, discrimination, or superiority over other faith communities. Instead, religious leaders should emphasise the common values shared across religious traditions, including compassion, honesty, service, forgiveness, and care for humanity. The responsibility of religious leadership extends beyond spiritual activities to active participation in social transformation. Anameje (2026) argues that religion contributes meaningfully to social change when it inspires responsible action, ethical behaviour, and commitment to the welfare of society. This understanding reinforces the need for religious leaders to become agents of peace rather than contributors to division.

5.3 Improving Religious and Civic Education

Education remains a powerful tool for preventing religious extremism. Many forms of fundamentalism thrive where individuals lack adequate understanding of their own religious traditions, the beliefs of others, constitutional rights, and the principles of peaceful coexistence.

Educational institutions should incorporate teachings on tolerance, human rights, citizenship, conflict resolution, and interreligious understanding into their programmes. Such education should not seek to weaken religious identity but should encourage responsible religious expression within a democratic and pluralistic society.

Religious education should equally emphasise the ethical dimensions of faith by highlighting values such as love, justice, compassion, and respect for others. When individuals understand that religious commitment requires moral responsibility rather than hostility, the appeal of extremist interpretations becomes significantly reduced.

5.4 Ensuring Justice, Good Governance, and Rule of Law

Weak governance and institutional failure often create environments where extremist ideologies flourish. When citizens experience injustice, discrimination, corruption, insecurity, or exclusion, they may become vulnerable to narratives that present extremist groups as alternatives to ineffective institutions.

Therefore, strengthening democracy, ensuring accountability, and promoting equal treatment under the law are essential for addressing religious fundamentalism. Government institutions must protect all citizens regardless of religious affiliation and must respond impartially to violations of religious rights.

Security measures are necessary in combating violent extremism, but they must operate within the framework of human rights and constitutional principles. Excessive restriction of legitimate religious expression can create further resentment and undermine public trust.

5.5 Addressing Poverty and Social Inequality

Socio-economic challenges provide conditions that extremist groups may exploit for recruitment and influence. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities can create frustration among young people who may become vulnerable to radical ideologies that promise identity, belonging, or material support. Addressing religious fundamentalism therefore requires policies that expand educational opportunities, create employment, reduce inequality, and promote social inclusion. Development programmes that empower communities reduce vulnerability and strengthen citizens' confidence in peaceful democratic processes.

5.6 Responsible Use of Digital Platforms

The digital environment has become an important space where religious ideas are communicated and debated. While technology provides opportunities for religious education and dialogue, it can also accelerate the spread of extremist content and misinformation.

Religious organisations and digital users should adopt ethical approaches to online communication by promoting truth, respect, and responsible engagement. Digital literacy programmes should also equip citizens with the ability to identify false information, inflammatory content, and manipulative narratives.

Anameje (2023) emphasises that religion in the digital era must engage technology responsibly by ensuring that communication platforms promote social values rather than deepen divisions. This principle is essential in contemporary Nigeria, where online discussions increasingly influence public attitudes toward religion and social relationships.

5.7 Strengthening Community-Based Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding should not be limited to government institutions alone. Local communities possess important knowledge and structures that can contribute to preventing religious conflicts. Traditional rulers, community associations, youth groups, and religious organisations should be involved in identifying early warning signs of conflict and developing peaceful solutions.

Community-based initiatives are particularly important because many religious tensions occur at local levels where relationships between individuals and groups directly influence social stability. Encouraging cooperation through shared community projects can reduce suspicion and strengthen trust.

6. Conclusion

Religious fundamentalism remains a significant challenge to peaceful coexistence in Nigeria because of its capacity to transform religious identity into a source of exclusion, conflict, and violence. However, it is important to emphasise that the problem is not religion itself but extremist interpretations and practices that reject dialogue, tolerance, and respect for human dignity.

This study has demonstrated that religion occupies an important place in Nigerian society and possesses enormous potential for promoting peace, moral development, social transformation, and national integration. Religious institutions have contributed immensely to education, healthcare, humanitarian services, and community development. Nevertheless, when religious beliefs are manipulated for political, ideological, or violent purposes, they become a threat to social harmony.

The challenge of religious fundamentalism requires a balanced approach that combines effective security responses with deeper solutions addressing education, governance, economic inequality, ethical leadership, and interfaith cooperation. Government institutions must protect constitutional rights impartially, while religious leaders must promote teachings that reflect compassion, justice, and respect for others.

Nigeria's religious diversity should not be viewed as an obstacle to national unity but as an opportunity for cooperation and collective development. Peaceful coexistence is possible when citizens and institutions embrace the values of tolerance, mutual respect, justice, and shared responsibility. Through responsible religious engagement and commitment to democratic principles, Nigeria can reduce the influence of extremist ideologies and build a society where religious differences become a source of strength rather than division.

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