Zongo, Nigeria (Michael Madukwe/Mercy Corps)

‘FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN’

Religion, Identity, and Conflict in Northern Nigeria

JULY 2021

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Executive Summary

Intercommunal conflict in northern Nigeria has killed thousands of people, displaced countless others, and wreaked havoc on local markets and livelihoods. These conflicts are animated by multiple overlapping cleavages related to identity – including ethnicity and religion – and livelihood activities, namely farming and pastoralism. In recent years, clashes in the region have become increasingly violent and their possible religious dimensions have garnered greater attention. Religious tensions in the north have existed for decades. Yet some policymakers and journalists suggest that the recent uptick in intercommunal violence is religiously motivated, and that it amounts to a deadly campaign of persecution against Christians in the Muslim-majority north. Others have de-emphasized religion and characterize these conflicts as a consequence of increased banditry and growing resource competition between mostly Muslim herders and Christian farmers.

Addressing violence in northern Nigeria requires a nuanced understanding of its underlying drivers and the role of identity, including religion. This study explores the dynamics of, and motivations for, violent conflict in the region, with a particular focus on unpacking the influence of religious actors, beliefs, and identities. We combine an analysis of violent events data from North West and North Central Nigeria with field research conducted in Kaduna and Kano states. Our field research had two phases. The first phase used 165 in-depth interviews with key informants and local community members to capture qualitative insights into conflict dynamics, processes, and pathways to violence. The second phase used a survey of 750 residents in 15 communities to quantitatively evaluate the factors associated with individuals' support for, and willingness to participate in, political and religious violence. Our findings underscore the complex, multi-faceted nature of violence in the region and challenge emerging narratives regarding the role of religious motivations and the centrality of religious persecution. They also have important implications for government and donor-led efforts to prevent conflict and forge peace in Nigeria.

Key Findings

Only some violence in northern Nigeria has been inter-religious in nature, and Muslims and Christians have been both perpetrators *and* victims.

Conflict data from multiple sources – including ACLED, the Council on Foreign Relations, and Nigeria Watch – indicate that from 2011 to 2020, violence coded as inter-religious made up a fraction of conflict events in the region. Only nine percent of attacks explicitly targeted or were carried out by religious groups, and only 10 percent of fatalities were ascribed to conflicts over a religious issue. Since 2016, deaths from conflicts over religious issues have waned relative to the number of people killed by criminal violence and conflicts over land and cattle grazing. While deaths from inter-religious violence increased in 2020, they still paled in comparison to those caused by crime and resource conflicts. These trends were confirmed in interviews and surveys. Equally important, inter-religious violence has been perpetrated by, and on, both Muslims *and* Christians. Christians appear to have suffered more attacks on average, and likely as a result, they were more likely to report feeling victimized. Yet a majority of Muslim and Christian respondents said that members of both faiths are responsible for violence in their area, as opposed to pinning blame solely on one side.

Violence that falls along religious lines is often driven by other issues.

We find that the more religious people are, the *less* likely they are to support or engage in violence, and the more likely they are to express pro-peace attitudes. In a survey experiment, we also find that identifying the perpetrator of a hypothetical transgression as a religious out-group member has no effect on respondents'

support for more severe forms of retaliation. These results question the notion that intergroup conflict in northern Nigeria is a product of religious discrimination or a clash of religious civilizations. Moreover, there is little evidence that a lack of religious freedom leads people to embrace violence. Rather than religious belief or animus, **we find that intercommunal violence is largely driven by insecurity and a lack of trust between ethno-religious groups competing for political power and control over natural resources.** As these groups contend for access to land and water – which have become increasingly scarce due to climate change and shifts in agro-pastoralist markets – the Nigerian state has not sufficiently arbitrated between them or taken adequate steps to ensure their protection. This has amplified fear and uncertainty and prompted communities to form militias for self-defense, giving rise to security dilemmas, problems of credible commitment, and information failures. Low social trust has exacerbated these strategic dilemmas and heightened the risk of intergroup conflict. As one community leader we spoke with pithily put it, "a major cause of conflict…is **fear of the unknown**." In our survey, an increase in perceived insecurity corresponds with a 25 to 35 percent increase in respondents' support for the use of violence and their willingness to engage in it. Meanwhile, a *decrease* in social cohesion, including intergroup trust, is associated with a 43 to 60 percent increase in respondents' willingness to endorse violence (Figure 1).

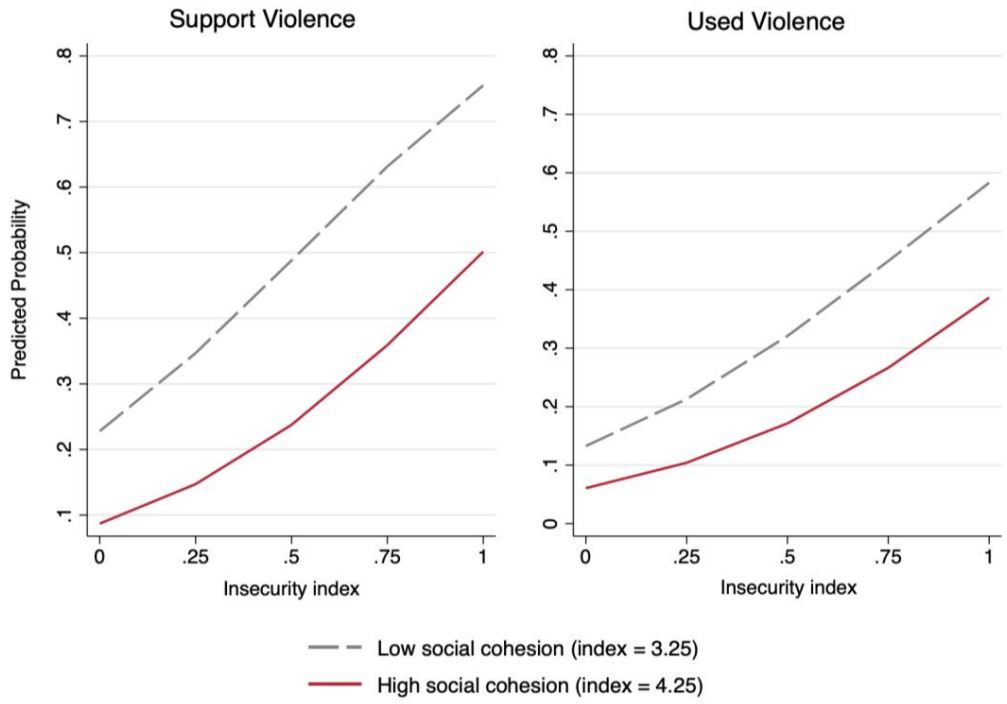

FIGURE 1 | PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF INSECURITY AND SOCIAL COHESION.[1]

Religion in northern Nigeria provides opportunity and motivation for specific actors to mobilize violence in pursuit of political, economic, or personal objectives.

While we do not find that religion is a key driver of conflict in Nigeria, two features of it provide opportunities for violence. The first is its diversity: Muslims and Christians each constitute roughly half of the country's

[1] This figure shows the mean predicted probabilities for indices of insecurity and social cohesion on support for, and willingness to use, violence, based on logistic regression. The relationships depicted are highly statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

population. The second is the overlap between religious and other identities – including ethnicity, livelihoods practices (farmer-herder), and *indigene* (indigenous) status, which provides preferential access to government jobs and land ownership. Since religious differences are reinforced by other parallel differences, it intensifies divisions between groups and allows tensions in one identity dimension to spill over into another. Yet these divisions do not automatically lead to conflict. We found that certain individuals instrumentalize and manipulate these divisions for their own gain. By seizing on fear, uncertainty, and intergroup mistrust, both elites and members of the mass public are able to motivate and mobilize violence. **Political and religious leaders intentionally politicize or enhance the salience of religious identity to spur people to action, while members of the mass public make solidarity claims to co-ethnics or co-religionists to garner support in a quarrel.** These mobilization tactics often transform disputes that are fundamentally political, interpersonal, or criminal into ethno-religious conflict. Elites are particularly prone to activating group identities around elections, which create windows of vulnerability by raising the potential for shifts in power between groups. It is no coincidence, then, that some of the most intense inter-religious violence in northern Nigeria has occurred during elections and political transitions. As one person in Kano told us, "some people just wrap a dispute around religion so they can gain more support, and if you approach the issue with an open mind, most times you will see that what causes the problem has nothing to do with religion at all."

Religious leaders are both spoilers of peace and custodians of it.

Religious leaders play a dual role in intercommunal conflict. On the one hand, both Muslim and Christian leaders have stoked interfaith tensions and inspired violence by engaging in hate speech, fanning fears of other groups, and politicizing religion. Among people we surveyed, those who report that their religious leaders make political sermons are much more likely to endorse violence. On the other hand, they have led conflict mediation and dispute resolution initiatives within and between religious communities. For example, those who say that religious leaders help resolve disputes in their area are significantly *less* likely to support, or say they are willing to use, violence. This finding holds no matter how often people say that religious leaders are actually successful in resolving disputes. Critically, we do not find a similar relationship between attitudes towards violence and the involvement of other key actors in dispute resolution – including traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and local government officials.

Recommendations

Frame identity as a mobilizer of conflict, not a cause. Characterizing intercommunal conflict in northern Nigeria as primarily religiously motivated or the product of discrimination between Muslims and Christians masks the complex nature of conflict in the region and its core underlying causes, which are rooted in governance and security failures, resource constraints, and a lack of social cohesion. Productive approaches to peacebuilding must focus on these issues. An overemphasis on religion or other aspects of identity risks diverting attention away from these core conflict drivers and could ultimately make the situation worse. If certain groups are seen as privileged, or certain perpetrators or victims are singled out, it will only reify group divisions, amplify feelings of persecution, and encourage communities to interpret issues of peace and security through a narrowly religious or ethnic lens. This could directly undermine efforts to improve intergroup relations and promote peace.

Reduce fear and uncertainty by addressing governance failures. Insecurity in northern Nigeria is largely a consequence of inadequate and unresponsive governance. In order to ease communities' fears and provide much-needed security guarantees that can reduce the incentives for violence in the region, local and national authorities need to undertake several measures. First, they should institute power-sharing

arrangements and other inclusive governance processes that ensure the active involvement of different ethno-religious groups and aim to give each group meaningful representation. Second, they should promote and facilitate the sharing of natural resources, especially land, by providing designated grazing areas for herders, supporting community-led mechanisms for mediating land disputes, and ensuring the clear and consistent application of indigene laws. Third, they should focus on improving security by increasing the reach and effectiveness of state security forces (while ensuring they adhere to human rights standards); by professionalizing vigilante groups; and by supporting community policing and the development of early warning and early response systems. Finally, they should ensure that perpetrators of violence and criminality are held responsible in a transparent and impartial manner, without political, religious, or ethnic favoritism. Justice and accountability are essential for deterring further violence.

Forge intergroup trust. We found that respondents who reported more frequent interactions with other ethno-religious groups – and especially those who reported more *positive* interactions – were significantly less likely to express support for violence or a willingness to engage in it. Greater and more positive out-group interactions were also associated with less discriminatory attitudes towards members of other ethnicities and religions. Constructive intergroup contact is crucial for reducing fear of the other and building trust across communities. Mercy Corps' programming in northern Nigeria has demonstrated that people-to-people activities that facilitate close cooperation between conflicting groups through joint community development projects, natural resource management, and violence prevention planning can have a positive, measurable effect on social cohesion and perceptions of security.[2] These types of initiatives should be scaled up in order to ameliorate a key driver – and consequence – of conflict in the region.

Identify and elevate religious peacemakers. This study indicates that incorporating religious leaders into conflict management can positively influence people's attitudes regardless of their effectiveness. But it also cautions against enlisting leaders who are keen to undermine, rather than encourage, peace between different groups. Given the critical role religious leaders play in local peace and conflict dynamics, initiatives aimed at improving intergroup relations should target them as "key people," in addition to targeting members of their communities. Programs should engage in actor mapping to understand the role of local clerics in political and social mobilization and enlist those who have served as peacemakers as partners in conflict prevention and mitigation, while being wary of spoilers. Increasing the peacebuilding capacity of these leaders must continue to be a donor priority in northern Nigeria.[3]

Combat misinformation to stem conflict spillovers. The expansion of information and communications technology in Nigeria – from mobile phones to social media – has been a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has galvanized civil society by providing easily accessible tools for increased dialogue and peaceful mobilization, and given youth in particular a platform to air their grievances and organize collective action. On the other hand, it has enabled the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, which has helped facilitate the spread of conflict in two ways: through *issue* spillover (a dispute over a personal issue becomes intercommunal) and *geography* spillover (rumors enable violence in one area to incite violence elsewhere). Donors and practitioners must work with government and civil society actors to arrest these processes, particularly in the wake of intercommunal clashes or during windows of risk, such as elections. Interventions should include resource media and information literacy education; community-level rumor and myth tracking; and supporting interfaith groups, traditional media, and social media activists in countering false narratives in real time. Given that dis/misinformation often spreads online and offline, initiatives aimed at combating social media harms must encompass both online activists and their offline counterparts.

[2] Dawop et al. 2019; Mercy Corps 2017.
[3] Mercy Corps 2016.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Violence in Northern Nigeria: Growing Religious Overtones

Intercommunal conflict in northern Nigeria has killed thousands of people, displaced countless others, and wreaked havoc on local markets and livelihoods, costing the Nigerian economy billions of dollars a year.[4] These conflicts are animated by multiple overlapping cleavages related to identity – including ethnicity and religion – and livelihood activities, namely farming and pastoralism. In recent years, clashes in the region have become increasingly violent and their possible religious dimensions have garnered greater attention.

Religious tensions in the north – particularly in the Middle Belt, where Nigeria's Muslim-dominated north meets its Christian south – have existed for decades. Current divisions stem in part from the expansion of Islamic law (Shari'a) in the north in the early 2000s, which triggered months of bloodshed between Christians and Muslims and resulted in the segregation of many communities along religious lines. The Salafi jihadist insurgency Boko Haram continues to wreak havoc in the northeast, launching deadly and often indiscriminate attacks on civilians and state security forces. Against this backdrop, some advocates, policymakers, and journalists suggest that the recent uptick in intercommunal violence in the north is religiously-motivated.[5] A report by a UK parliamentary group warns of an emerging "genocide" of Nigerian

[4] Human Rights Watch 2018; McDougal et al. 2015.
[5] Clarke 2020; Egwu 2020; McKay 2020.

Christians by Muslim Fulani militants,[6] while the U.S State Department has designated Nigeria a "Country of Particular Concern" for "engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom."[7] Other observers have de-emphasized religion and characterize these conflicts as a consequence of increased banditry and growing resource competition between Muslim pastoralists and Christian farmers.[8]

Addressing violence in northern Nigeria requires a nuanced understanding of its underlying drivers and the role of identity, including religion. Global research suggests that socioeconomic and political factors better explain the outbreak of armed conflict than ethnic and religious fragmentation.[9] Yet it also indicates that religious restrictions can fuel violence, as grievances over discrimination prompt repressed groups to take up arms.[10] Religious actors and institutions, moreover, can serve as a vehicle for facilitating collective action. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between the use of religious rhetoric by political organizations and violence, and various studies have found that the strategic manipulation of ethnic and religious identities by political entrepreneurs can be a powerful tool of violent mobilization.[11]

This report focuses on northern Nigeria: specifically, the northcentral (the Middle Belt) and northwest regions. But its implications are much broader. Religious discrimination and oppression are on the rise globally,[12] and the share of armed conflicts involving religious issues has increased over the past 30 years.[13] Religious conflicts last longer, are less likely to be resolved through settlements, and are more likely to relapse.[14] More theory-building and evidence regarding the links between religion and conflict is therefore critical to inform policies and programs aimed at preventing violence and forging peace, in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Research Questions

This study explored to what extent, and how, religion plays a role in violent conflict in northcentral and northwest Nigeria. It examined the following research questions:

1. What are the main drivers and motivations for violence in the region, according to those who participate in it as well as those who are affected by it?
2. What are the specific processes by which religious actors, institutions, beliefs, and identities serve as a mobilizing agent or catalyst for violent conflict?
3. What practices and mechanisms have communities used to prevent violence, and how have they mitigated religious tensions or harnessed religious actors to promote peaceful coexistence?

This research is primarily interested in *intercommunal* conflict, which describes organized violence between groups and/or communities in society. It is largely distinct from *anti-state* conflict, such as the insurgency waged by Boko Haram in Nigeria's northeast. Both intercommunal and anti-state conflict in Nigeria overlaps to some extent with *organized criminal* violence, as rebels, community militias, and other armed groups engage in theft, kidnapping, and general banditry. This is explored in greater detail below.

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[6] UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief 2020.
[7] Vellturo 2020. The country of concern status relates to violations of the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act.
[8] International Crisis Group 2017, 2020; Mercy Corps 2016.
[9] Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003.
[10] Klocek and Bledsoe 2020.
[11] Basedau et al. 2016; Brass 1997; De Juan 2009; Fox et al. 2009; Akbaba and Taydas 2011; Wilkinson 2006; Toft 2007.
[12] Pew Research Center 2020.
[13] This only includes state-based conflicts, not intercommunal conflicts. See Svensson and Nilsson 2018; Toft 2007.
[14] Hassner 2009; Svensson 2007, 2012; Walter 2011.

Biu, Nigeria (Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps)

Methodology

This study pairs an analysis of violent events data with field research conducted from October 2020 to January 2021 in Kaduna and Kano states.[15] The field research encompassed 165 key informant and in-depth interviews, along with a survey of 750 residents, in 15 randomly selected communities that differed in their histories of conflict, recent exposure to violence, and ethno-religious demographics.[16] Potential study sites were limited to urban and peri-urban areas, since existing research has focused on farmer-herder conflicts in rural communities.

Violent Events Data

This study analyzed three different sources of violent events in northcentral Nigeria (including the states of Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau) and the northwest (including Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara) over the past ten years (2011-2020).[17] The first source is the Armed Conflict Location and Events Data Project (ACLED), which codes daily incidents of violence, including battles between armed groups, remote violence, and attacks on civilians.[18] Focusing on violence against civilians,

[15] These states were selected in order to capture variation in religious composition and levels of intercommunal violence. Kaduna, the most religiously heterogeneous state in the Middle Belt, has become "the epicenter of violence in Nigeria," including inter-religious clashes (Campbell 2021). Kano, meanwhile, is a predominately Muslim state that has experienced less intercommunal violence.
[16] See Appendix 1 for details.
[17] Some parts of northeast Nigeria, including the states of Adamawa and Taraba, along with the southern parts of Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe states, are also often considered part of the Middle Belt. Including these states in the violent events analysis does not significantly change the findings, except there are many more incidents perpetuated by Boko Haram and ISWA.
[18] Raleigh et al. 2010.

we tallied the annual number of attacks and fatalities across four categories: *religious violence*, meaning an attack targeted or was perpetrated by a religious group (other than Boko Haram and ISWA), *ethno-tribal violence*, meaning religious groups were not targeted and perpetrators were ethnic or communal militias; *insurgent violence* (perpetuated by Boko Haram or ISWA), and *state violence,* meaning an attack was carried out by Nigerian security forces (military or police).

The second source was the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) managed by the Council on Foreign Relations.[19] The NST catalogues political violence based on a weekly survey of Nigerian and international press. Unlike ACLED, it tracks whether particular sites are targeted for violence, including churches, mosques, government buildings, and banks. This is useful because attacks on religious sites, in particular, may indicate a religious motivation. The third and final data source is Nigeria Watch, a database on violence and human security managed by the French Institute for Research in Africa at the University of Ibadan.[20] It also tracks daily violent events distinguished by type (political, ethnic, religious, and military, according to the identity of the perpetrator and victim) and the causes of violence as reported by the press, which includes *religious issues*, *political issues*, *land/cattle grazing issues*, and *crime*.[21]

TABLE 1: RESEARCH DESIGN

Violent Events Data	**Mixed-Methods Field Research**		
	Qualitative	**Quantitative**	
Daily incidents 2011-2020	165 in-depth interviews	Survey of 750 respondents	
Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Attacks on civilians *Nigeria Security Tracker* Type and targets of violence *Nigeria Watch* Causes of violent incidents	*Key informants* Religious leaders Traditional leaders Ward officials Educators Youth representatives Business leaders Vigilante groups *Community members*	*Gender* 61% Male 39% Female *Ethnicity* 37% Hausa 5% Fulani 12% Yoruba 7% Igbo 5% Igala 4% Adara 23% Other	*Religion* 54% Muslim 46% Christian *Age* Median: 39 years 18% 20-29 years 28% 30-39 years 31% 40-49 years 14% 50-59 years

All three sources of violent events rely on media reports of violence, and therefore may be incomplete (due to underreporting or uneven media coverage across communities) or biased (due to potential manipulation of media by political actors). They also define types of violence differently and extract different kinds of details, complicating potential comparisons. Finally, the extent to which motivations for violence can be

[19] Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker, https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483
[20] "Nigeria Watch," http://nigeriawatch.org
[21] *Religious issue* is defined as "incidents justified on religious grounds" whereas a *political issue* describes "incidents related to political events (e.g. elections) or the control of political power in general."

inferred by the identities of perpetrators and victims - or how conflicts are reported by the press - is limited. This is especially true in Nigeria, due to the overlap between people's religious, ethnic, and livelihoods-related identities. Still, examining patterns across these different sources can provide suggestive, triangulated evidence regarding the general nature of violence in the Middle Belt, the cleavages that characterize it, and how it has evolved in the past decade.

Interviews

In order to examine people's perceptions and experiences of violence in the region, Mercy Corps conducted two rounds of key informant interviews and in-depth interviews, followed by a survey. A team of local researchers recruited between 10 and 12 interview subjects in each community using purposive sampling. A diverse cross-section of key informants were sampled, including Muslim and Christian religious leaders, traditional leaders, ward officials, youth representatives, business leaders, and members of vigilante groups. The research team also interviewed randomly-selected community members to ensure a broad range of voices beyond elites. All interviews were conducted in the appropriate local language. They investigated the dynamics and drivers of violent conflict in each community, the details of specific conflict events, the experiences of perpetrators and victims, and the actions of state and non-state actors.

The interviews yielded detailed observations of conflict processes, incidents, and pathways to violence, and how individuals and communities interpret and understand them. Researchers took detailed notes and transcripts were analyzed to identify major themes. The research team also employed process-tracing to explore how religious authorities, institutions, and networks contributed to the outbreak, maintenance, and cessation of violence, both generally and in specific illustrative cases.

Survey

The research team used the qualitative findings to inform the design of a survey that measured respondents' support for and engagement in political and religious violence, along with their religious practices and beliefs; intergroup cohesion and outgroup attitudes; and perceptions of peace, security, and leadership in

their communities. 50 respondents in each of the 15 communities were surveyed through a "random walk" procedure, where researchers started at the center of the community and sampled every third house in a randomly-selected direction.[22] This resulted in a total sample of 750 respondents.

Measures of Violence

For the survey, the primary outcome variables of interest measured self-reported *support* for political and religious violence, along with *willingness to participate* in violence (whether an individual had either engaged in violence previously or would do so if given the chance). Respondents were prompted in the following manner: "Some people think that the tactic of using arms and violence against other people in defense of their religion is justified. Other people believe that, no matter what the reason, this kind of violence is never justified. What do you think?" This was intended to indicate to respondents that either answer was acceptable. In total, 20 percent of respondents expressed support for the use of violence, and 14 percent said they had used violence or were willing to use it. Nearly four times as many people said it was justified to use violence to defend their religion (18 percent) than for a political cause (5 percent).

We also asked about support for violence indirectly through a list experiment, but the wording and instructions of these questions presented some confusion and yielded unreliable responses. Given the sensitivity and potential biases that can result from asking about violence directly, we also examined two measures of *"pro-peace" behavior*. The first indicated whether respondents would commit to peace with their religious out-group even if some of them used violence against their group. The second indicated whether respondents agreed that if there is violence between Christians and Muslims, they should offer support to the other group if members of their religious group are the aggressors.

Survey Experiment

An experiment was embedded in the survey to assess whether hostility towards religious out-groups - potentially driven by discriminatory attitudes - caused respondents to support a more severe form of retaliation or punishment against a hypothetical transgressor.[23] Other experimental research has found that social identity shapes perceptions of justice: out-group members receive harsher scrutiny for potential offenses.[24] In conflict settings in particular, out-group biases become more pronounced.[25] In our study, respondents were presented with the following scenario:

> *Imagine that a local shopkeeper has insulted and threatened some of your friends and told them not to walk or sit near his shop. Now, imagine that your friends are considering responding in the following ways. For each response that I list, rate your support for it from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support).*
>
> a. *Boycott the shopkeeper's store*
> b. *Report the shopkeeper to the authorities and ask that he is fined and ordered to apologize*
> c. *Have the shopkeeper arrested and put in jail*
> d. *Attack the shopkeeper's store*

[22] This sample cannot, therefore, be claimed as representative of these communities, since community-level population data was not available, precluding the construction of a reliable sampling frame.
[23] The transgressor-punishment scenario was used because most people are unlikely to condone violent or repressive acts unless provoked.
[24] David 2014; David and Yuk-Ping 2005; Samii 2013.
[25] Hewstone et al. 2002.

We developed this scenario based on our qualitative research, as it is very similar to an incident that actually triggered a retaliatory attack that escalated into inter-religious violence in one of our study sites. Half of respondents (n = 375) were randomly assigned to receive this version of the scenario (the "control" version). The other half received a "treatment" version, which was identical to the one above except the shopkeeper was identified as a member of the respondent's religious out-group: "a local Muslim shopkeeper" (if the respondent was Christian) or "a local Christian shopkeeper" (if the respondent was Muslim). For both groups, we combine their responses to items a) through d) into an overall "punishment index" that reflected how many types of retaliation respondents supported, and how strongly. The results were substantively the same when looking at each type of punishment in isolation.

Other Measures of Interest

In addition to violence and pro-peace attitudes, survey responses were used to create the following variables:

- *Religiosity:* An index measuring how often people attend religious services, how frequently they pray, whether religion is the most important part of their life, and whether they tolerate other religious ideas and teachings.
- *Religious freedom:* Whether people think that all religious groups have the right to practice freely in their area, and whether they think everyone should be able to express their religious views.
- *Religious politicization:* How often people say that sermons given by their religious leaders discuss politics.
- *Social cohesion*: An index measuring out-group trust, willingness to help members of other ethnic and religious groups, and the quantity and quality of interactions people have had with other groups.
- *Insecurity:* An index that combines respondents' answers regarding a) whether clashes have occurred in their community in the past year (nearly one-quarter of respondents said yes); b) whether they avoid certain areas or have been prevented from working due to insecurity; c) whether the security situation is getting worse in their area; and d) their exposure to violence (e.g., whether they have been displaced, injured, or had friend or family member harmed in an attack).
- *Conflict management:* Who people say resolves disputes and manages conflict in their communities, and how effective they think they are.

A correlation matrix for these variables is provided in Appendix 3.

Limitations

This study analyzes multiple sources of data and uses a mixed-methods approach to corroborate and triangulate findings and reduce the risk of systemic bias. Yet some limitations are worth noting. First, as described above, the violent events data suffers from several weaknesses, from a reliance on media reporting to differing – and sometimes unclear – approaches to defining and categorizing the causes and types of violence. While we compare patterns drawn from different datasets, including the most reputable and widely used sources of violent events, they may not capture all incidents of violence in northwest and northcentral Nigeria.

Second, our field research is based on interviews and surveys from 15 communities in two states. Due to the lack of reliable, community-level population data, we cannot claim that the views of our respondents are representative of these communities as a whole. The median age of our survey sample, for instance (39 years), is much higher than the median age of Nigeria's population (18 years).[26] Even if our findings are representative of these communities, they may not reflect the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of people in Kaduna and Kano broadly – or of those who reside in other states in northern Nigeria. Additional research in other parts of the region will be necessary to overcome the geographical restrictions of this study and assess how generalizable its results are.

Third, with the exception of a survey experiment, our study design is unable to establish direct causality. Although we present statistically significant quantitative relationships triangulated by rich qualitative data, we cannot claim that these associations are causal.

Finally, some of our questions were sensitive in nature, particularly those that asked about people's support for violence and their perceptions of other groups. Respondents may not have been forthcoming about their actual views due to social desirability concerns. Yet as explained above, we worded the questions in ways that were intended to mitigate the risk of social desirability bias, and we used other measures (e.g., pro-peace questions) to conduct sensitivity checks and look for consistency across responses. We also found in interviews that people were generally quite willing to discuss issues of conflict and violence in their area, and to express both positive and negative views of out-groups. Despite the drawbacks of relying on self-reported measures, understanding people's attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs around these issues is crucial to understanding violence. Narrative data, even if its veracity is limited, can still provide important meta-data for informing theories and knowledge about conflict.[27] Moreover, part of the aim of this research is to investigate and capture how people in northern Nigeria themselves actually perceive and interpret violence, and incorporate their lived experience to better understand and explain it.

The next section, which details the findings of this study, is organized around the three primary research questions outlined in the introduction. This reflects the exploratory nature of the research. Still, we do test specific hypotheses about the causes of violence that can be derived either from existing explanations for conflict in northern Nigeria – such as those that emphasize the intensity of religious belief or discrimination – or from the broader conflict literature. In doing so, we highlight where our findings are consistent with previous research, and where they deviate from it.

[26] According to population data from the World Health Organization, https://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.POP2040ALL?lang=en
[27] Fujii 2010; Hoglund and Oberg 2011.

A farmer in Daddare, Nasarawa state, Nigeria (Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps)

Findings

Dynamics and Drivers of Violence

Only some violence has been inter-religious in nature, and Muslims and Christians have been both perpetrators *and* victims.

Conflict data and Mercy Corps' field research indicates that violence in northcentral and northwest Nigeria is complex and multi-faceted – and does not always fall along religious lines. According to ACLED, from 2011 to 2020, only nine percent of attacks on civilians, and 18 percent of fatalities, explicitly targeted or were perpetuated by a religious group (Figure 2). Most of these incidents of religious violence were inter-religious (between Muslims and Christians). Even if attacks by Boko Haram and its offshoots – which have killed far more Muslims than Christians[28] – are considered acts of religious violence, they still comprise only a fraction of violence in the region. The most common type of political violence has been attacks by ethnic or communal militias on non-religious targets.[29] ACLED's data suggests that roughly a third of these were clashes between farmers and herders, but the actual number could be higher. This finding is consistent with an analysis of intercommunal conflict in the north from 1979-2011 by Laura Vinson, who found that ethno-tribal violence was more prevalent than ethno-religious violence.[30]

[28] Campbell 2019.
[29] These trends are similar if military battles are also included.
[30] Vinson 2017. The author found that 49 percent of conflict incidents were ethno-tribal, while 39 percent were ethno-religious (meaning the actors involved on both sides were reported as religious, even if their tribal or communal affiliations were also noted).

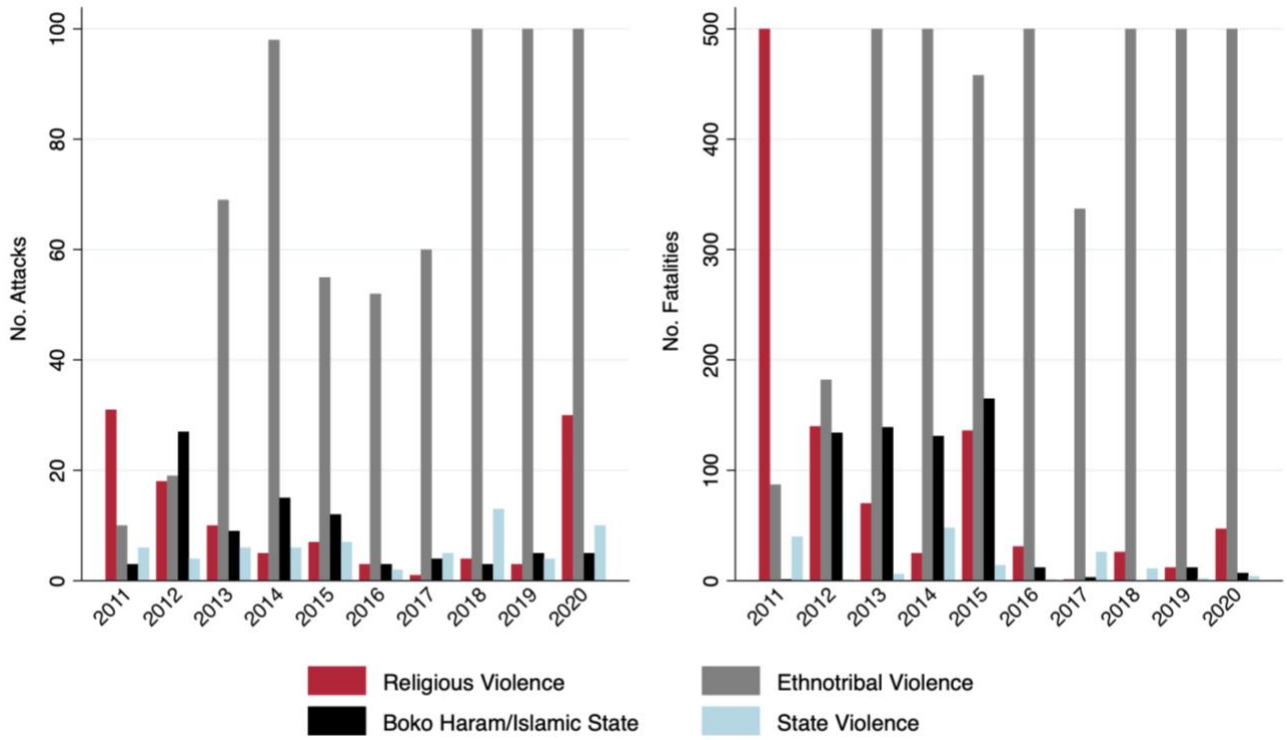

FIGURE 2 | VIOLENT EVENTS IN NORTHCENTRAL AND NORTHWEST STATES (ACLED)

Note: Attacks are capped at 100 and fatalities at 500 to improve readability. For unadjusted annual figures and breakdowns by state, see Appendix 2.

Yet ethno-tribal violence could have religious motivations, since ethnic and religious identity closely overlap in Nigeria. Data from Nigeria Watch on the causes of violent incidents – which, unlike ACLED, includes criminal violence – indicates that more people have been killed by fighting over religious issues than ACLED suggests (Figure 3). Yet Nigeria Watch also finds that since 2016, deaths due to conflicts over religious issues have waned relative to the number of people killed by criminal violence and resource-based conflicts (conflicts over land and cattle grazing). While deaths from religious violence increased in 2020, they were still lower than in previous years (e.g., 2011 to 2016) and paled in comparison to those caused by crime and resource conflicts, which have escalated in the region over the past three years. Overall, deaths from religious violence comprised only 10 percent of fatalities recorded by Nigeria Watch between 2011 and 2020. These trends were confirmed in our interviews. People we spoke to tended to express greater concern over criminality and banditry than over ethno-religious conflict, and they were more likely to emphasize cleavages other than religion – such as ethnicity and farmer/herder – when discussing intercommunal violence.

Equally important, in instances of inter-religious violence, Muslims and Christians were perpetrators *and* victims - and houses of worship from both faiths have been targeted, according the Nigeria Security Tracker (Figures 4 and 5). While the data indicate that Christians have, on average, suffered more attacks than Muslims,[31] in some years more Muslims than Christians were killed. Of course, violence that falls along

[31] This is particularly the case considering that the data presented here are absolute numbers of attacks and fatalities, not per capita, and the Christian population of northern Nigeria is smaller than the Muslim population. This finding is similar to the results from the baseline survey for the CIPP program, in which Christian respondents reported experiencing violence more frequently than Muslims (Mercy Corps 2020).

religious lines is not necessarily driven by religion. One thing that is clear is that violence in general, including intercommunal *and* criminal violence, has grown dramatically in northern Nigeria since 2017.

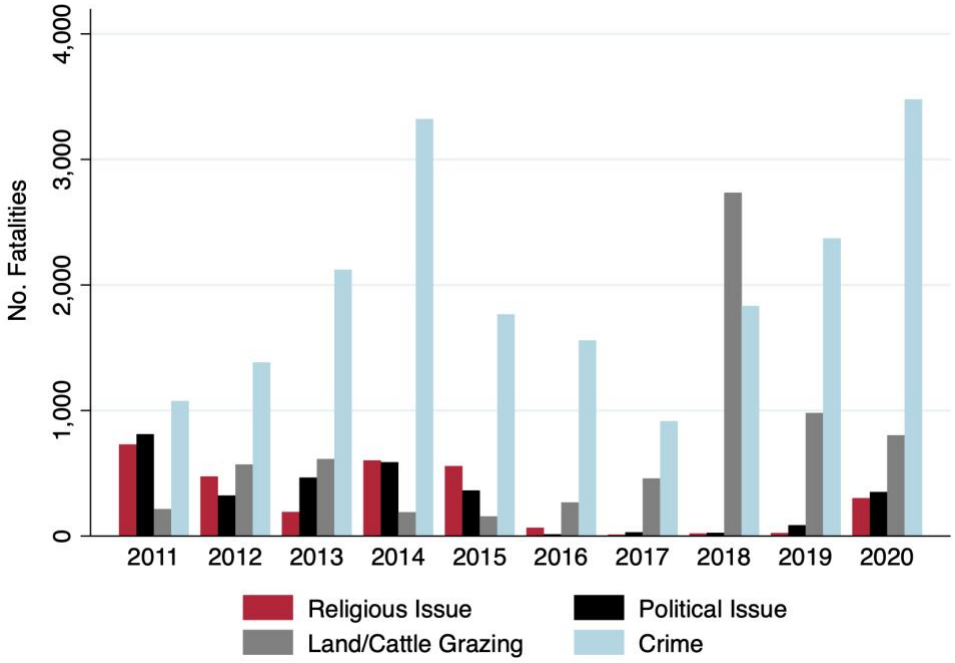

FIGURE 3 | CAUSES OF VIOLENCE IN NORTHCENTRAL/NORTHWEST STATES (NIGERA WATCH)

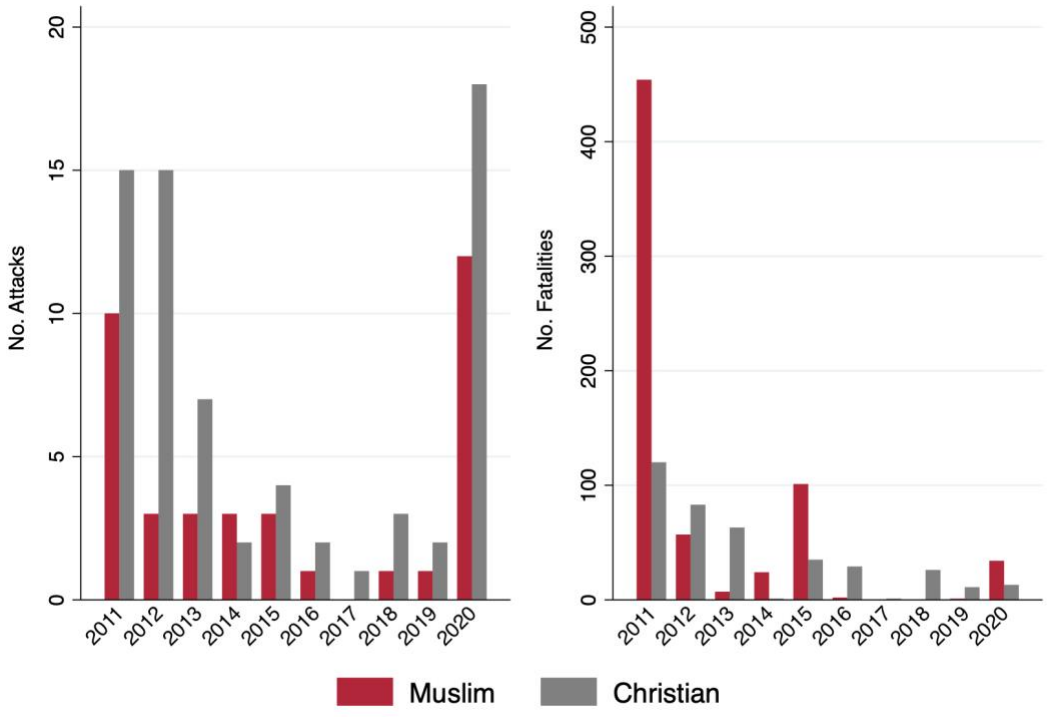

FIGURE 4 | VICTIMS OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE (ACLED)

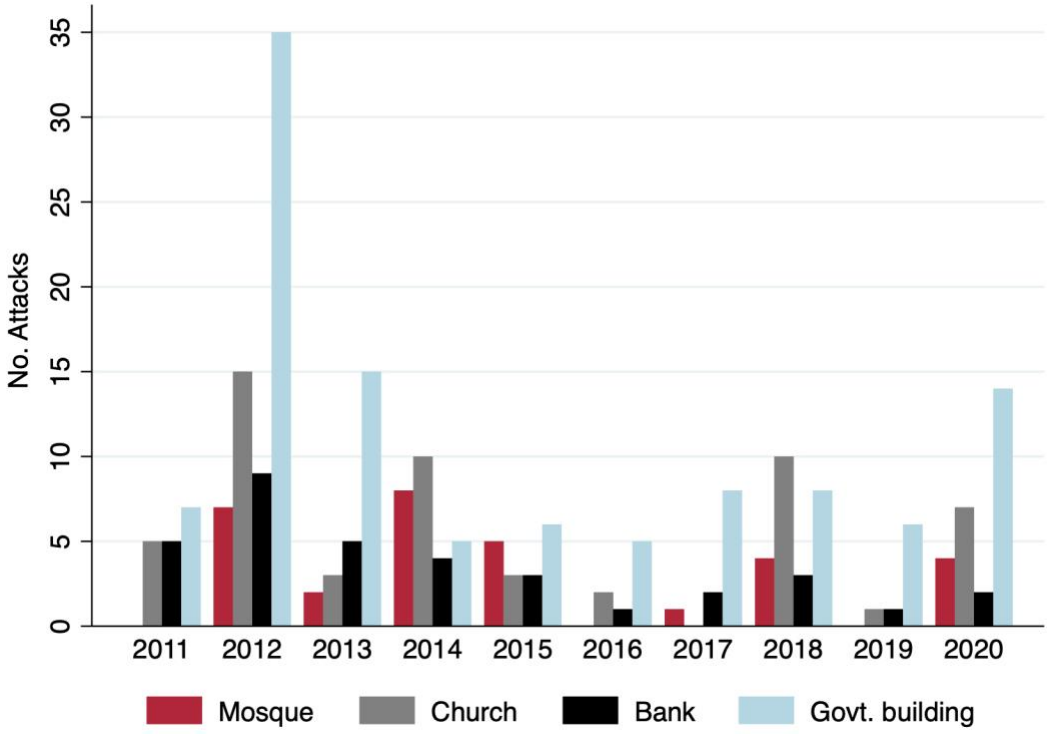

FIGURE 5 | TARGETS OF VIOLENCE IN NORTHCENTRAL/NORTHWEST STATES (NST)

Violence that falls along religious lines is often driven by other issues.

Our field research found that, for those who have observed and been affected by violence in northern Nigeria, the "Muslim-Christian conflict" framing was a point of contention. While people certainly did not discount the role of religion, two main themes emerged. First, religious clashes have not been limited to Muslims versus Christians. In Nigeria, both religions are highly heterogeneous, featuring different sects and denominations with different organizational structures and external influences.[32] Interviewees described tensions within faiths, particularly between Sunni and Shi'a Muslim communities. Sunni and Shi'a respondents alike characterized members of the opposite sect as "more violent" and accused them of causing problems in their communities. In some cases, intra-religious conflict is the result of differences in ethnicity or livelihoods practices. Throughout northern Nigeria, there have been clashes between (Muslim) Fulani herders and (Muslim) Hausa farmers over land and resource access. Many people we interviewed also highlighted friction between Hausa and Yoruba Muslims, attributed not just to differences in sect,[33] but – critically – to who is considered native (or "indigenous") to a particular area. According to a Hausa man in Gama, "if you're a Muslim but not Hausa you are considered non-indigenous and as such you're not one of us." A female resident of Badawa concurred: "the tribe comes first, and once you are not Hausa you remain a stranger to them." Some people noted that when violence has been perpetrated by groups of Hausa youth, both Christians and non-Hausa Muslims have been targeted. The same goes for violence carried out by

[32] Basedau et al. 2013.
[33] Hausa tend to be Sunni (particularly *izalat,* one of West Africa's largest Islamic sects) while most Yoruba Muslims belong to other sects.

other groups. According to a youth leader in Kabala, "whenever there is a crisis in Kaduna state, you will see the Christians burn mosques that belong to the Hausas but not the Yoruba mosques." Thus when members of particular religious groups have been attacked, it is not necessarily because of their faith – but because they are considered outsiders.

Second, it is not religion itself that drives conflict, but the manipulation and instrumentalization of religious identities and ideologies by specific actors.[34] People we interviewed were overwhelmingly consistent that conflicts can "become" religious, but in most cases, they are fundamentally about other issues. As one youth in Dawakin Dakata explained, "some people just wrap a dispute around religion so they can gain more support, and if you approach the issue with an open mind, most times you will see that what causes the problem has nothing to do with religion at all." Both Christians and Muslims expressed this sentiment, even those who expressed hostility or discriminatory attitudes towards members of the other faith.[35] "Any little spark, people will attach it to religion," observed a businesswoman in Sabon Gari. "If a Christian is taking advantage of a Muslim, some will say 'you want to kill my brother because you're a Christian'…before you know it, ordinary conflict will turn into something else."

> *"For centuries people have been using religion as an excuse to justify violence. This does not necessarily mean that religion causes violence, but that people often use religion as a justification for violent actions."*
>
> Christian male, Kabala, Kaduna State

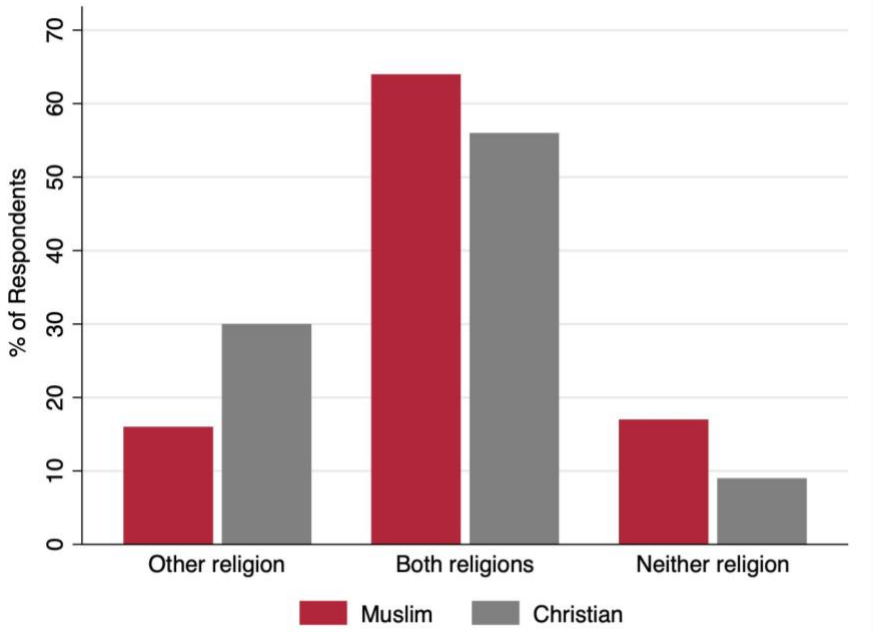

FIGURE 6 | WHO IS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLENCE IN THIS AREA?

There was a tendency, then, to blame members of both faiths for local incidents of violence. In our survey, a majority of Muslim and Christian respondents said members of both religions are responsible for violence in their area (Figure 6). Christians were more likely to pin blame solely on Muslims than Muslims were to blame

[34] This is consistent with other research on religion and conflict (Isaacs 2016; Walter 2017; Huang 2020).
[35] While some respondents may have inherited this framing from donor-funded peacebuilding programs and other members of the international community, there was little difference in how people characterized conflict in communities where Mercy Corps has implemented activities under the USAID-funded Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP) program, and those where it has not.

Christians – a potential consequence of Christians' minority status in the north, and their greater rate of victimization. Yet it is notable that so many respondents declined to attribute culpability to one side.

Root Causes of Conflict

These findings are particularly notable given that they came in response to direct questions about the role of religion as a driver of local conflict. In a recent study in Jos, the capital of Nigeria's Plateau State, Vinson and Peter Rudloff found that simply priming people with religious conflict frames caused them to view religious issues as the primary cause of violence.[36] In this study, even when interviewers primed respondents on religion, many of them characterized it as an ancillary factor that, while important, sometimes masked the root causes of conflict in the region – which according to respondents, include land and resource competition, insecurity, political competition, and poverty.

Land and Resource Competition

Prior studies by Mercy Corps in the Middle Belt have highlighted the central role that land disputes and competition for scarce resources play in fueling intercommunal violence.[37] Food and water shortages spurred by increasing drought and desertification in the Sahel, coupled with changes in local agro-pastoralist markets, have prompted pastoralists from northern Nigeria and neighboring countries to move south outside their traditional grazing routes.[38] At the same time, local farmers have responded to weather-related shocks by expanding their cultivation areas, reducing the amount of fertile land available for pastoralists to graze their herds. Various respondents cited the trampling of farmers' crops by herders, and threats and attacks by farmers on pastoralists' animals, as a regular occurrence that triggers violence between farmer and herder communities. A recent study by the Abuja-based Centre for Democracy and Development in four northern states – Benue, Kaduna, Katsina, and Nasarawa – also found increased incidents of farmer-herder conflict.[39] Since many pastoralists are Fulani Muslims, and many farmers are Christians, clashes over resource and land use sometimes occur along religious lines.

Exacerbating this problem is the divide between the recognized original inhabitants of an area, or *indigenes*, and so-called "settlers" who supposedly arrived later. Some Nigerians lack ties to the areas they supposedly originate from, while others are considered settlers even if their families have lived in an area for generations.[40] *Indigenes* enjoy preferential access to schools, public jobs, and – critically – land. Yet Nigeria's constitution does not define who is an indigene. State and local governments are empowered to make their own determination and distribute indigeneity certificates as they see fit. The lack of consistent, coherent criteria for distinguishing indigenes from settlers creates openings for contentious land disputes, which can develop an ethnic or religious character when particular groups use indigene status (whether *de facto* or *de jure*) to seize or monopolize their control over specific areas. This dynamic also generates political and economic inequalities that can inspire the disadvantaged to channel their grievances in a violent manner.[41] Some people we interviewed described decades-old disputes over who controls a shared boundary between two communities. Others recounted examples of when competing land claims erupted into violence between different ethno-religious groups. As one community leader in Badawa explained,

[36] Vinson and Rudloff 2021.
[37] Mercy Corps 2016; Nagarajan 2019.
[38] Nagarajan July 2019.
[39] Centre for Democracy and Development. 2021: 1.
[40] Human Rights Watch 2006.
[41] Sayne 2012.

“people are fighting over land. They [the indigenes] want to prove that the land belongs to them and we are foreigners in their land.”

Insecurity

Northern Nigeria is replete with armed groups, including criminal gangs and communal militias that have formed to combat them. Residents referenced various armed gangs that prey on civilians – *yan sulhu, yan ba sulhu, yan sara suka* and *yan dabah* – particularly at night, engaging in theft, kidnapping, and assaults. Such pervasive criminality persists due to the lack of state and security force presence in many parts of the region. Many people lamented the government’s poor response to banditry, which has compelled many communities to arm themselves and entrust their security to militias that are often unregulated, undisciplined, and poorly trained. While these militias (or “vigilantes”) ostensibly seek to protect their villages, some of them have become a further source of insecurity by meting out crude sanctions, competing for community dominance, and engaging in robberies and raids themselves. As a consequence, the region is awash in small arms: a recent report by SBM Intelligence found that civilians in Nigeria possess more firearms than the country’s security forces.[42]

Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps

In Dawakin Dakata in Kano, for example, two vigilante groups are active: one that is recognized by the Nigerian government, and one that is not. According to a community leader, competition for local influence, and attempts by the former group to prevent theft by members of the latter, has meant that the two groups “always clash between themselves, causing problems for the community.” In other instances, acts of banditry by one communal militia have triggered retaliation by a neighboring community, which can escalate into cycles of revenge attacks. When dueling communities differ in their ethnic or religious makeup, these clashes often reinforce or exacerbate divisions between identity groups, illustrating the intersection between criminal and intercommunal violence. Respondents claimed that some government officials refused to arrest perpetrators who shared their ethnicity or religion, which has further stoked intergroup tensions.

Political Competition

Ethnicity and religion constitute two major organizing cleavages in Nigerian politics. Many respondents blamed politicians and other elites for exploiting these cleavages in order to gain votes, distribute patronage, and compete for positions in local and national government. As one businesswoman in Sabon Gari lamented, “instead of a Christian politician campaigning based on [economic] development and his achievements, he will say, ‘vote for me because we are brothers in faith, we are serving the same God, voting for somebody from a different religion is a sin.’” Nigeria’s two main political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), have attempted to appeal to different ethnic and religious constituencies by painting the opposing party as the out-group party so that,

[42] The Guardian 2021.

according to a Muslim man in Dawakin Dakata, “people are told that they should not support the other party if they love their religion.” Politicians activate identity in order to mobilize followers particularly around elections, which create windows of vulnerability by raising the potential for shifts in power between different groups. This mobilization can be quite overt: multiple interviewees reported that during elections, local politicians have enlisted club-brandishing “thugs” to scare people into voting for their candidate.

It is no coincidence, then, that some of the most intense bouts of inter-religious violence in northern Nigeria have occurred during elections and political transitions. Conflict in the early 2000s followed the country’s return to civilian rule in 1999 and the election of Christian President Olusegun Obasanjo, which northern politicians saw as a potential shift in power towards the Christian south.[43] In response, they introduced Shari’a throughout the north, which sparked a massive wave of Muslim-Christian violence that serves as the backdrop for today’s religious divisions.[44] Further religious violence erupted after the 2004 and 2008 elections, and following the election of 2011, at least 350 churches were burned during another surge in intercommunal conflict.[45] Multiple interviewees reported that similar threats of violence marred the 2015 elections, reportedly prompting some Christian residents in religiously-mixed communities to relocate to other parts of the region. In a 2018 public opinion survey, nearly three quarters of respondents (72 percent) in the north said that competition between political parties “always” or “often” leads to violent conflict. 67 percent personally feared becoming a victim of violence during election campaigns – compared to 40 percent who feared being a victim of intercommunal violence and 45 percent who feared being attacked by political or religious extremists.[46]

Poverty and Unemployment

A commonly-cited reason why people, particularly youth, were willing to join gangs, engage in banditry, and perpetuate violence was a lack of economic opportunities. Respondents suggested that the unemployed and the idle have provided a steady supply of recruits for armed groups, along with political and religious leaders seeking to foment discord who, by offering a modest sum of money, “turn the jobless youth into thugs” in the words of one community leader in Kano. Poverty can make financial compensation for participating in violence more attractive and increases demand for illicit economic activities, in which organized banditry thrives. As another interviewee in Kabala explained, violent conflict “occurs because of political reasons, which later take a religious dimension, and the source of this tension is mostly poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy. These people are fighting for self-sustenance.”

Dwindling incomes and limited economic prospects have also intensified competition between communities and livelihoods groups, such as farmers and herders, over increasingly scarce resources. Some Fulani herders, for example, have taken to kidnapping for ransom – of Muslims and Christians alike – in response to their dwindling material circumstances: as one man in Barnawa explained, “Some Fulani have lost their cattle. They start feeling their world has come to an end, since their means of livelihood has been taken from them. With nothing else to do, some of them become a [criminal], just to survive.” Yet poverty is prevalent in Nigeria. 40 percent of citizens live below the poverty line, and most of them do not support or participate in violence.[47] Yet poor economic prospects may still be an important background condition that makes it easier for individuals and organizations to manipulate and radicalize people to perpetrate violent acts.[48]

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[43] ICG 2010; Paden 2008.
[44] The governor of Zamfara first declared a constitutional basis for adopting Shari’a criminal law, and 11 other states eventually followed.
[45] Krause 2020; Sayne 2012.
[46] Afrobarometer Data, Nigeria, Round 7: 2018.
[47] NBS 2019.
[48] Lehmann and Tyson 2021.

How Religion Helps Catalyze Violence

Religion provides opportunity and motivation for specific actors to mobilize violence for political, economic, or personal gain.

To refute the notion that religion is a root cause of conflict is not to claim that it plays no role. If violence in northern Nigeria is not fundamentally *about* religion but instead *becomes* religious, how and why does it do so? Global research on political violence indicates that religion can provide both the *opportunity* and the *motivation* for armed conflict, helping overcome collective action problems associated with organized violence.[49] This section applies this framework to the Nigerian context, and specifies the pathways through which people instrumentalize religion in pursuit of their own goals.

Opportunity

Religion has unique features that provide opportunities for mobilizing violence. It promotes ideas that are legitimized by divine sources and thus limit room for negotiation and compromise; it conveys normative behaviors; and it confers nonmaterial benefits.[50] In Nigeria, two structural aspects of religion – its diversity and overlap with other identities – enhance its mobilizational potential.[51]

First, the country's demographics are characterized by two relatively equally-sized religious groups: roughly 50 percent of the population is Muslim and 48 percent is Christian.[52] This kind of religious polarization tends to strengthen religious identities and maximize the threat faced by both groups, since each one risks becoming a minority.[53] It is also more conducive to collective action than environments with a high level of religious diversity, because a greater number of small groups makes it more difficult to coordinate violence across diverse factions.[54] Nigeria's Middle Belt is where the country's religious polarization is particularly pronounced, as the area where the Muslim north and Christian south converge. According to Vinson, the rapid growth of Christianity in northern Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s, and the increasing engagement of Christian churches in civil society, "opened a space for the politicization of ethnoreligious identity," indicating to the northern Muslim political establishment "an advancing Christianity that is intent on converting Muslims and claiming more political rights and power in the north." For Christians, the rise of radical Islamic sects and groups like Boko Haram, along with the expansion of Shari'a in the north in the early 2000s, has given "the impression that a new Jihad is being waged…pushing south, dominating national politics, and instituting Islamic law in the whole of Nigeria."[55]

Second, religious identity in Nigeria overlaps with other salient social and economic categories, including tribal identity and livelihood practices. Global research has shown that the risk of armed conflict increases when religious differences are reinforced by other differences, such as ethnicity, class, or geography.[56] While cross-

[49] Like Basedau et al. (2016), we connect opportunity with religious *structures* (such as demographics) and motivation to religious *practice*, which comprises aspects related to human agency – such as religious belief, participation, and discourse – that can change rapidly.
[50] Horowitz 2009; McCauley 2019.
[51] These two aspects have been found to increase the risk of armed conflict in cross-national studies (Basedau et al. 2016).
[52] Diamant 2019.
[53] Balcells et al. 2016; Esteban & Ray 2008. Such polarization is also more conducive to collective action than environments with a high level of religious diversity because a greater number of small groups makes it more difficult to coordinate violence across diverse factions (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005).
[54] Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005
[55] Vinson 2017: 53-54; 69; 77.
[56] Stewart 2008; Selway 2011a; Basedau et al. 2013; Basedau et al. 2016.

cutting cleavages can dampen identity-based conflict, parallel cleavages intensify divisions between groups, and tensions in one identity dimension can automatically spill into another dimension.[57] In northern Nigeria, religion unites the Igbo, Adara, Igala, Tiv, and a variety of other smaller Christian ethnic minorities as a counterweight to the Hausa, the majority ethnic group in the region who are also overwhelmingly Muslim.[58] Ethnicity has also been an important feature of identity politics and conflict in Nigeria. These divisions are further reinforced by resource-driven cleavages between herders and farmers – Muslim Fulani dominate pastoralism, while Christians primarily practice agriculture – and between indigenes and settlers. In many states and local government areas (LGAs), religious and ethnic affiliation are used as criteria for granting de jure (through certificates) or de facto indigene status, directly linking these identities to access and control over political and economic resources.[59]

As a result, appealing to these identities can invoke what Benjamin Maiangwa calls "the politics of belonging" in Nigeria and amplify divisions that fundamentally center on "controversies over what group belongs to the state and what group is the foreigner or non-indigenous community."[60] Consider intercommunal conflict in Plateau state in 2008 and 2011 between Christian ethnic groups, who regard themselves as indigenous to the area, against Muslim Hausa settlers. Although the violence had ethnic and religious overtones, according to Jana Krause, it was ultimately rooted "in local elite competition over who qualifies as 'indigenous' and is entitled to political appointments, positions in government offices, and land rights."[61] Our field research in Kujuru, Kaduna state – which became infamous in 2019 and 2020 for a spate of killings that were portrayed as religiously-motivated[62] – revealed similar dynamics. As one respondent in Kujuru explained, "the major issue is the indigene-settler tussle, which is fought along religious lines." Another resident elaborated: "the bone of the contention is the ownership of the entire enclave. The Adara people lay ancestral claim to Kujuru and consider the Hausa as settlers, while the Hausa contend that this place was established by their forefathers." Thus the overlap between ethnicity, religion, and indigeneity enables conflict in one domain to intensify divisions in others, transforming disputes over economic resources into identity conflicts.

Motivation

While these structural aspects of religion offer the opportunity for organized violence, religious practice – including beliefs, participation, grievances, and fear related to one's religious identity – can provide the motivation to engage in violent action. Religious belief in strong in Nigeria. In our survey, more than 90 percent of respondents report attending mosque or church at least once a week, praying daily, and agree with the statement, "my religious belief is the most important part of my life." Other surveys have found similarly high levels of religiosity in Nigeria.[63] It is not this devotion, however, that pushes people towards violence. On the contrary: regression analysis of our survey results finds that the more religious respondents claim to be, the *less* likely they are to support or participate in violence (Figure 7) – especially violence in defense of religion – and the more likely they are to express pro-peace attitudes.[64] In some models, these

[57] Bulutgil 2016; Gubler and Selway 2012; Stewart 2009.
[58] In our survey, respondents identified more strongly with their ethnic group – 84 percent reported feeling "very close" to their co-ethnics – than their religious group (74 percent felt "very close" to their fellow Muslims or Christians).
[59] Human Rights Watch 2006.
[60] Maiangwa 2020.
[61] Krause 2020.
[62] See, for example, Amos Tauna, "Punish culprits behind Kajuru crisis – Christian lawyers tell El-Rufai," *The Daily Post* (Nigeria), 2020 March 26; Hassan John, "Kajuru Killings: stories of murder, rape and government's rhetoric," *Global Christian News,* 2019 March 16.
[63] BBC (2004) found that more than 90 percent of Nigerians said they believed in God, prayed regularly and would die for their belief.
[64] All regression analysis are logistic regressions that use an outcome dummy variable. This means that, for questions about support for violence or peace outcomes, the variable is equal to 1 if respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement, and 0 otherwise. Regression tables are provided in Appendix 4. For all results, the findings were substantively the same when ordinal logistic and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models were used with the original (ordinal) measures as the dependent variables.

results are statistically significant. When controlling for gender, age, ethnicity, and income, there is no significant difference in violence-related attitudes and behaviors between Muslim and Christian respondents.

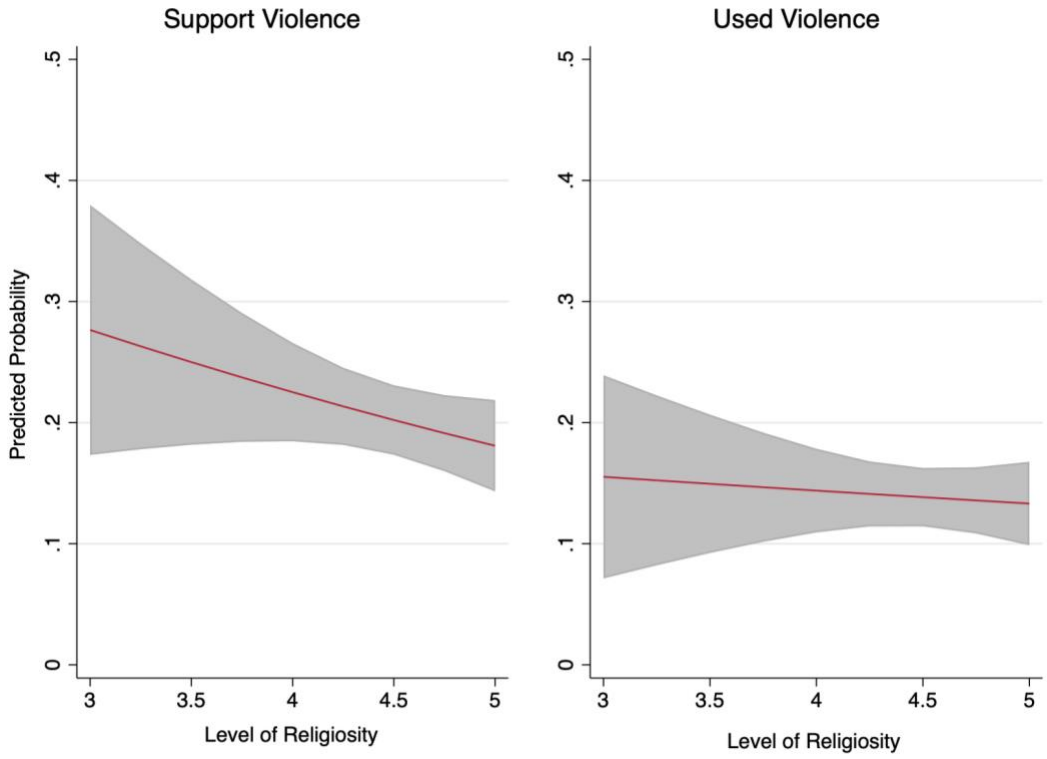

FIGURE 7 | PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF RELIGIOSITY ON VIOLENCE

Note: Mean predicted probabilities of supporting and engaging in violence, based on logistic regression with controls for gender, age, ethnicity, religion, income, and occupation. Shaded intervals represent 95% confidence intervals.

The results of our survey experiment casts further doubt on the notion that inter-religious conflict in northern Nigeria is a product of ancient hatreds or overt discrimination between Muslims and Christians (e.g., a "clash of civilizations").[65] As described in the Methodology section, we devised a hypothetical scenario in order to assess whether randomly manipulating the religious identity of a transgressive shopkeeper affected how people responded. Our results find that **manipulating the religious identity of the transgressor does <u>not</u> cause people to favor a more severe form of retaliation** (Figure 8). Respondents are no more likely to support a harsher punishment for the shopkeeper when he is explicitly identified as a member of their religious out-group (the "treatment" condition) than when his group identity is not mentioned at all (the "control" condition). This finding is consistent across Muslim and Christian respondents. This is not meant to imply that religious discrimination does not exist in the region – we certainly detected some in our interviews – or that it never contributes to violence. But the evidence suggests that in general, discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are insufficient explanations for intercommunal conflict in the region, including conflict that falls along religious lines.

[65] Huntington 1996. For an example of the use of the "clash of civilizations" framing in Nigeria, see Lenshie and Inalegwu 2014.

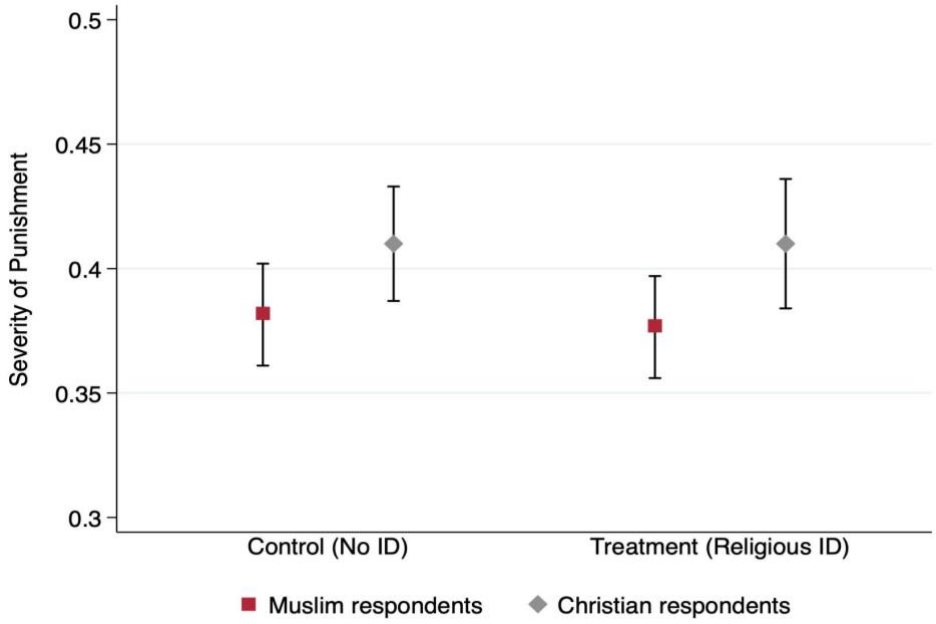

FIGURE 8 | IMPACT OF TRANSGRESSOR'S RELIGION ON DESIRED PUNISHMENT

Note: Difference in mean values of respondents' support for four types of punishment (boycott, fine, arrest, attack) across treatment and control groups, indexed between 0 and 1 so that a higher value indicates support for more severe punishments. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

We also do not find strong evidence that a lack of religious freedom directly causes people to embrace violence. 90 percent of survey respondents report that all religious groups have the right to practice their faith freely in their area, while 92 percent agree that "it is important that individuals be able to express their religious views, even though other people may not agree with them."[66] Global research has found that restrictions on religious freedom can motivate repressed religious minorities to rebel against their governments.[67] Among individuals we surveyed in northern Nigeria, however, we find that those who claim that people lack the right to practice their religion are actually *less* likely to support the use of political or religious violence.[68] In interviews, several Christian respondents did report that they felt their religious freedom has been curtailed – not as a result of formal government restrictions, but due to fear of being attacked by Muslim residents. As one man in Badawa explained, "we the Christians cannot worship the way we like because of fear. Whenever the Christians are carrying out service on Sundays there will be security officers outside the church protecting us."

Thus for a minority of northern residents we consulted for this study, religious freedom remains a concern. Yet to the extent that a lack of religious freedom actually contributes to conflict in the region, it appears to do so indirectly. Instead of provoking members of an aggrieved group (e.g., Christians) to violently rebel against state repression, it exacerbates tensions and mistrust *between* religious groups – the primary pathway to intercommunal conflict in the north.

[66] Including 95 percent of Christians and 92 percent of Muslims. For the religious freedom statement, 87 percent of Christians and 93 percent of Muslims agreed.
[67] Klocek and Bledsoe 2020.
[68] People who disagreed with the statement, "it is important that individuals be able to express their religious views, even though other people may not agree with them" were more likely to support religious (but not political) violence. Yet these views on religious expression were also predicted by indicators of social cohesion (explained in more detail below), and likely reflect general intolerance and out-group attitudes.

Fear of the Unknown

Rather than religious belief or hatred, violence is typically driven by insecurity and a lack of trust between ethno-religious groups competing for power and resources – which are instrumentalized by both elites and members of the mass public.

Fear and uncertainty – not religious belief or animosity – lie at the root of intergroup conflict in northern Nigeria. According to David Lake and Donald Rothchild, when different groups in society begin to fear for their security, strategic dilemmas arise that heighten the risk of conflict.[69] Such "collective fears of the future" emerge as states become unable or unwilling to effectively arbitrate between groups or to ensure their protection. In the context of intergroup competition over power and resources, these governance failures breed insecurity, amplifying group anxieties regarding their survival and relative status. Enhanced threat perception leads people to cling more tightly to their group identities and motivates groups to prepare for potential violence – which then makes violence increasingly possible. [70]

> ***"I call it 'fear of the unknown' because people know they can be attacked if there is a crisis. A major cause of conflict in Kaduna is the fear of the unknown."***
>
> — Community leader, Kabala

As described in the previous section, insecurity in the north is rife. Many communities have resorted to supplying their own protection and preparing for violence by forming militias and vigilante groups. "I call it 'fear of the unknown,'" explained a community leader in Kabala, "because people know they can be attacked if there is a crisis." In divided societies, fear and uncertainty amplifies the likelihood of conflict in three ways. First, it creates a **security dilemma**, in which any action a group undertakes to ensure its security – such as arming vigilantes – can be perceived by other groups as a hostile act, incentivizing them to engage in pre-emptive attacks.[71] Second, **commitment problems** arise: even if one group agrees to refrain from violence, it has no guarantee that others will not exploit it. A Muslim man in Kujuru effectively captured this challenge: "a Muslim cannot move freely in [Christian-] dominated areas or else he will be harmed. When we realized that, we started doing the same [to Christians]. We were then called by our religious leaders and advised to stop. We stopped, but they never stopped." Commitment problems are particularly acute when the balance of power between groups shift, as the declining side may opt to fight rather than risk being dominated by the other side in the future.[72] This can help explain why intergroup violence in Nigeria has been particularly intense around elections, when the stakes are high. "There is this popular saying, *'na mu, na mu ne,'* meaning, 'our own is our own,'" a Christian man in Narayi told us. "A Muslim would prefer a Muslim to lead no matter how bad or incompetent he is, and a Christian would prefer the same."

Finally, **information failures** can stoke conflict when individuals act on faulty or incomplete information about the intentions and capabilities of other groups. As one farmer in Kabala explained, "many farmers are

[69] Lake and Rothchild 1996.
[70] Research has shown that in highly polarized societies, insecurity encourages "ingrouping" - or the belief that one's social identity is a source of strength, security, and even superiority, and that other groups are inferior and/or can be blamed for problems in society (Bonikowski 2016).
[71] Posen 1993; Rose 2000.
[72] Fearon 1995.

always in fear because of Fulani [herdsmen] who will feed their cattle on their farms. The most annoying part [is] that we don't know where they are coming from; we can't locate their leader." When information is scarce, rumor and speculation can fill the void. The expansion of mobile phone technology, along with the rise of social media, has enabled disinformation and misinformation to spread more easily and rapidly, stoking tensions and helping trigger clashes between groups and communities. Thus according to one woman in Tudun Wada, intercommunal conflict "has to do with the way people react to rumor…fake news spreads very fast." Even if the information people receive is accurate, they may easily misinterpret its meaning or misjudge what it indicates about the behavior or objectives of other groups and communities.

These strategic dilemmas are exacerbated by intergroup inequalities and mistrust, which further magnify the likelihood of conflict. In northern Nigeria, horizontal inequalities – or inequalities between different groups, which several studies find to be a primary cause of civil conflict – cut in different directions.[73] While the predominately Muslim Hausa have dominated state and local governments, economic data suggests that Christian residents on average possess greater wealth than Muslims.[74] This means that members of *both* groups can be motivated to fight either to preserve their relative privileges or to channel their political or economic grievances to change what they see as an unequal and unjust situation.

Moreover, the history of ethno-religious conflict in the region, along with its demographic consequences, has eroded intergroup trust. In multiple areas, entire communities have segregated along religious lines. People described how previous waves of violence and unrest in northern Nigeria, such as the Shari'a crisis, prompted these reconfigurations. "Because of such incidents, people prefer to stay together with other people from their religion," explained a shop owner from Kabala. The concentration of different groups into separate ethnic and religious enclaves has transformed formerly mixed communities, reducing positive intergroup interactions and, consequently, trust. As a woman in Barnawa told us, "We used to live together but religious violence led to the segregation of Muslims and Christians…the separation of the community promotes distrust between the people." Indeed, as Figure 9 shows, our survey detects high levels of out-group mistrust – more than 60 percent of respondents agree that other religious and ethnic groups are likely to take advantage of them.[75] In addition to heightening tensions, this mistrust further encourages religious groups to organize politically to defend themselves, deepening identity-based divisions.[76]

Regression analysis of our survey data reinforces the link between insecurity, lack of intergroup trust, and violence. The more people report feeling insecure – and the lower they score on indicators of social cohesion, including out-group trust – the more likely they are to endorse violence (Figure 10) and the less likely they are to express pro-peace attitudes (Table A3, Appendix 4), even when controlling for gender, religion, ethnicity, and other key demographics. An increase in insecurity corresponds with an increased probability of respondents both supporting violence and being willing to use it by between 25 and 35 percent. An increase in social cohesion, meanwhile, is associated with a *decreased* probability of supporting violence by between 43 and 60 percent – and of using violence between 40 and 54 percent.

[73] Akbaba and Taydas 2011; Cederman et al. 2011.
[74] According to Nigeria's 2018 Demographic and Health Survey, the wealth index for respondents from Christian households in northern states was a median of 3 compared to a median of 2 for Muslim households. See NPC and ICF (2019).
[75] Christian respondents reported slightly higher levels of mistrust than Muslim respondents. This is consistent with baseline survey results from the CIPP program (Mercy Corps 2020).
[76] Vinson 2017: 79.

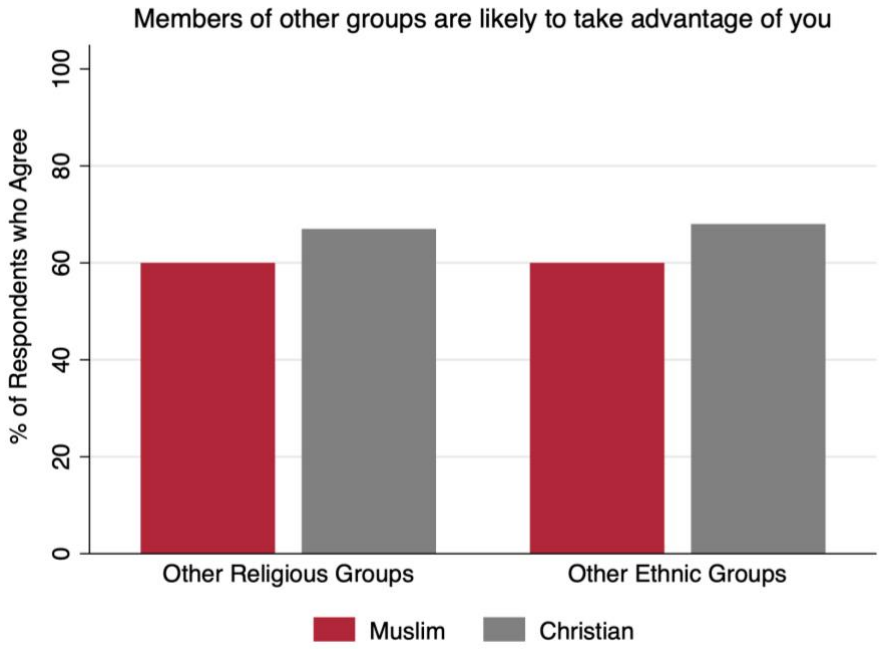

FIGURE 9 | MISTRUST OF OTHER GROUPS, BY RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

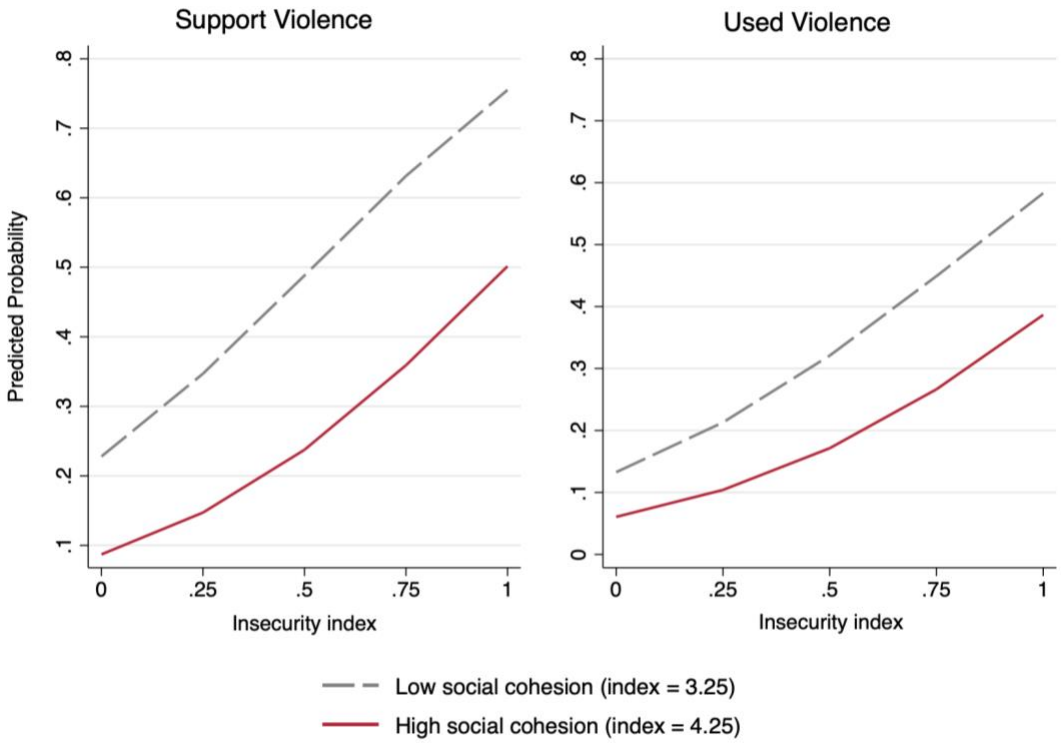

FIGURE 10 | PREDICTED PROBABILITY OF INSECURITY AND SOCIAL COHESION

Note: Mean predicted probabilities for indices of insecurity and social cohesion, based on logistic regression with controls for gender, age, ethnicity, religion, income, and occupation (regression tables in Appendix 4). To improve readability, 95% confidence intervals are omitted.

The evidence also supports the notion that threat perception is the primary mechanism linking insecurity and mistrust to violence-related attitudes and behavior. The indices for insecurity and social cohesion are strong predictors of the extent to which respondents see members of the opposite faith as a threat to their community.[77] And those who perceive their religious out-group as a threat are more than twice as likely to endorse violence (Figure 11). This finding echoes past research in political psychology, which identifies threat perception as one of the most robust predictors of support for violence, particularly against out-groups.[78] The results hold even when controlling for potential confounding factors in a multivariate analysis, though the relationship is stronger for Christian respondents, who are nearly three times more likely to say Muslims are a threat than vice versa.[79]

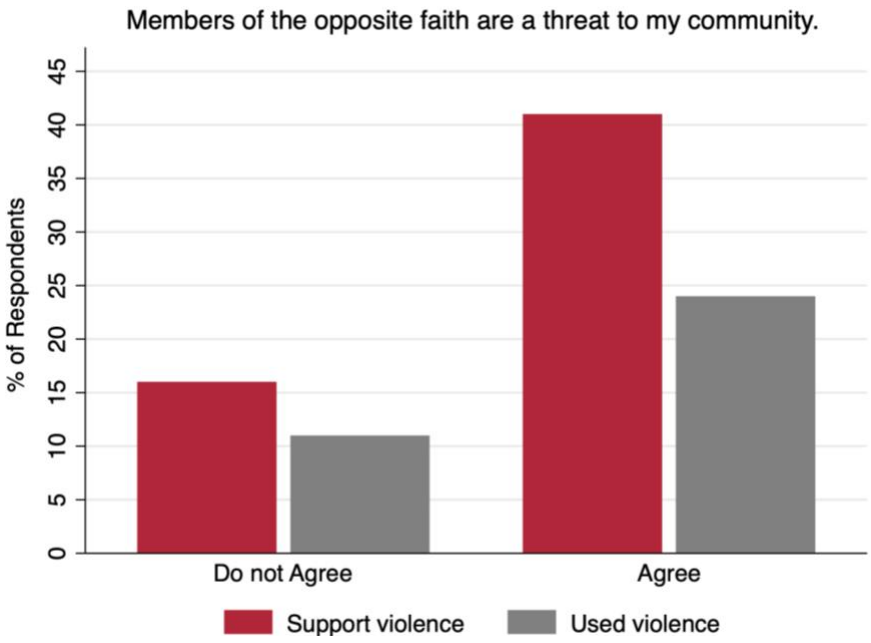

FIGURE 11 | THREAT PERCEPTION AND USE OF VIOLENCE

Case Study: Zango-Kataf, Kaduna State

The outbreak of inter-group conflict in Zango-Kataf in 2018 demonstrates how insecurity and mistrust can motivate ethno-religious violence in the context of competition over contested resources. Hausa Muslim traders began migrating to Zango-Kataf centuries ago, settling in the town while those who consider themselves natives to the area – mostly Christians from the Atyap ethnic group – resided on farms in the surrounding countryside. In recent decades, the segregation of these communities became more pronounced and deeply entrenched, particularly after a dispute over a new market location devolved into severe violence between Hausa and Atyap in 1992. Both groups have also made competing claims to land ownership in the area, which one resident told us remains "an underlying and unresolved problem." More broadly, both groups harbor grievances over perceived injustices. The Hausa, regarded as non-indigenous to Zango-Kataf, have felt politically excluded due to their lack of representation in local government (Angerbrandt 2016). The Atyap have resented the perceived dominance of the Hausa over the local trading economy as well as their control over fertile farmland surrounding Zango town. It was against this backdrop that the community leader, Kasuwan Magani, died in late 2018. Hausa residents lobbied for a Muslim successor; a move that was fiercely opposed by the Christian Atyap, who comprise the majority group in the area. While the former sought to rectify their perceived marginalization from power, the latter saw this as a threat. Lacking assurances of protection, "Christians feared that a Muslim leader might favor his fellow Muslims," according to another resident we interviewed. Rioting ensued, with killings of members of both groups and the burning of homes, mosques, and churches. Despite being organized around ethnic and religious identity, violence in Zango-Kataf was ultimately driven not by ethnic discrimination, or by religious difference or belief, but by fear and uncertainty related to a broader struggle over land and political authority.

[77] The correlation between *outgroup threat* and *insecurity* is 0.45 and between *outgroup threat* and *social cohesion* is -0.32.
[78] Canetti et al. 2015; Canetti-Nisim et al. 2009; Huddy et al. 2007
[79] This is also consistent with the CIPP program's baseline survey results (Mercy Corps 2020).

Mechanisms of Religious Instrumentalism

Fear and uncertainty in divided societies can provide a powerful motivation for intergroup violence, which is key to understanding intercommunal conflict in northern Nigeria. But it is specific individuals – political elites, ethnic activists, and religious entrepreneurs – who amp up this motivation by building upon groups' fears and further polarizing society. This helps transform disputes that are fundamentally political, interpersonal, or criminal into ethno-religious conflict.

Elite-led Mobilization

In Nigeria, political and religious leaders instrumentalize religion to induce violent action through two kinds of tactics.[80] The first are **salience tactics**, which activate and amplify religious identities relative to other identities. The second are **boundary tactics**, which manipulate religious group boundaries to redefine its membership along sectarian, ethnic, or economic lines. For politicians attempting to build cohesive, loyal constituencies, religious identity provides a conspicuous social cleavage that invokes transcendent values, contains easily transmissible national and transnational networks, and is buoyed by historical memories of inter-religious conflict that can be seized on to exaggerate the hostility of others. Religious leaders, meanwhile, infuse political or economic conflict with moral meaning, selectively interpreting religious ideas to sanction hostile acts as theologically justified – or even necessary – and making it harder to gain support for political compromise. By enhancing the salience of faith, these elites leverage the intensity of religious belief and participation in Nigeria to spur people to action.

Indeed, various scholars have highlighted the tendency for Nigerian politicians to exploit religious divisions for political gain, at both the national and local level.[81] This was a common refrain from our research participants as well. Consider the End SARS protests against police brutality that rippled across Nigeria in late 2020.[82] According to respondents, some officials sought to impose a religious frame on the demonstrations in order to divide the participants and deflect blame. As one woman in Kabala explained, "some [leaders] came out and started saying the protest is not about ending SARS; it is about unseating the president [who is Muslim]. They said Muslims should withdraw from the protests." Another respondent in Sabon Gari claimed that some state officials "went to mobilize Muslim youth to come out and fight for their religion…when violence started in Sabon Gari, we later realized it was incited by [the officials]." Others reported collusion between politicians and local religious leaders, who, at politicians' urging (and sometimes in return for financial compensation) "use the pulpit to mobilize violence indirectly." In addition to using salience tactics to mobilize people, elites have shifted the boundaries of group identity by strictly aligning religious and ethnic identities. "They say, 'the real Muslims are Hausa Muslims,'" claimed a man in Kujuru, which has helped legitimize attacks against non-Hausa Muslims during episodes of intercommunal conflict.

Similar to our interviews, surveys revealed a link between religious politicization by faith leaders and people's attitudes about violence. Those who reported that their leaders "sometimes" or "regularly" made political sermons during religious services were much more likely to support, and be willing to engage in, violence than those who did not (Figure 12), and the results were statistically significant (Table A2, Appendix 4).[83] This is consistent with broader, cross-country research that finds a strong correlation between religious leaders' calls

[80] These tactics come from Huang (2020).
[81] Basedau et al. 2013; Falola 1998; Kwaja 2011; Vinson 2017.
[82] The protests called for disbanding the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian police with a notorious history of abuse.
[83] This relationship could also run in the opposite direction: those who are more inclined towards violence may opt to attend places of worship with more politicized leaders, or leaders may politicize their sermons in response to the demands of their congregations.

for violence and armed conflict.[84] In northern Nigeria, both Muslim and Christian clerics have engaged in hate speech, vilified leaders who practice the opposite faith, and stoked fears of the religious other.[85] A Muslim man from Gama summed up the sentiment of most of our respondents: "it is a known fact that Kano people are very religious…So if you want to win a Kano man over, use religion as a cover up and the task is done. This is what most of our leaders are using against us. Using religion as a tool to stir up conflict."

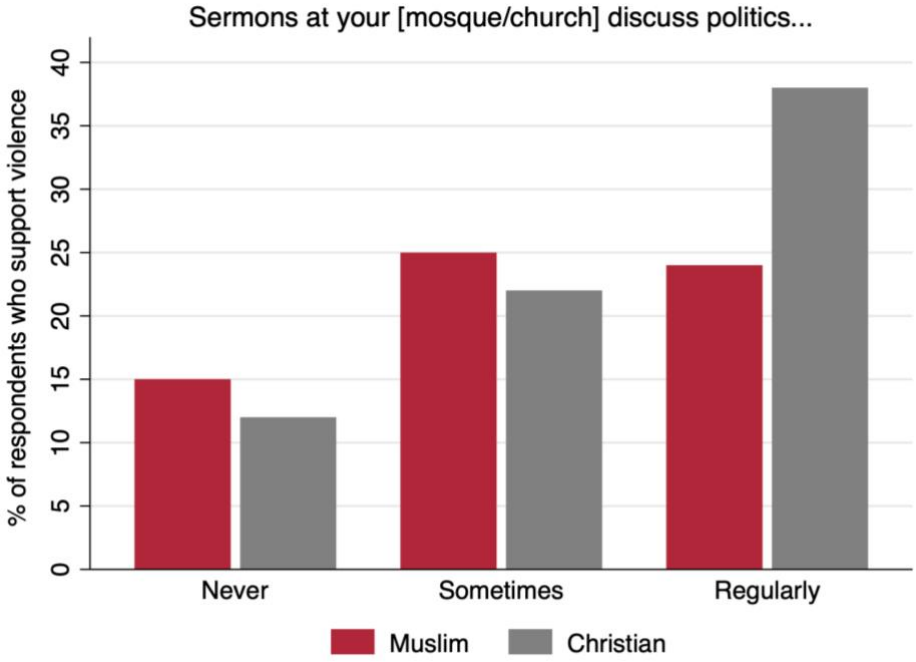

FIGURE 12 | LEVEL OF RELIGIOUS POLITICIZATION

Mass-led Mobilization

While elite-led mobilization describes the top-down instrumental use of religion to fuel violence, members of the mass public can also incite mobilization by making **solidarity claims** to appeal to co-ethnics or co-religionists in order to secure support in a dispute. We found that disputes that start between a small number of people often escalate into broader ethno-religious violence through two kinds of spillover. The first, *issue spillover*, is when an individual quarrel over an isolated issue draws in members of associated identity groups, broadening the points of contention. As a Hausa-Fulani man in Barnawa explained, "conflict starts with something as little as a misunderstanding between two people of the opposite religion, but later turns into religious violence so the perpetrators can get backup." A common act of criminality, if it occurs between different group members and is framed as such by perpetrators, victims, or observers, spills over into the realm of identity, and an interpersonal conflict then becomes intercommunal. In Barnawa, one man explained that kidnappings in the region are common, with both Christian and Muslim perpetrators abducting members of their own faith. "But when a Muslim kidnapper takes a Christian, they suddenly say, 'Muslims are kidnapping Christians,' and it results in religious conflict."

[84] Basedau et al. 2016; De Juan 2009; Toft 2007.
[85] Vinson (2017: 77), for example, illustrates how Christian leaders in the north have emphasized "the role of churches in doing battle against the spread of Islam and Islamic political power in the country."

Similarly, other respondents explained that when there are disputes over land and grazing areas between Muslim herders and Muslim farmers, they remain confined to the particular individuals involved. But if the dispute pits a Muslim herder against a Christian farmer, "this gets heated and often results in a religious crisis." A man from Kujuru elaborated: "after the farmers are attacked by the herders, since most of the herders happen to be Muslims, the Muslims tend to support them. But since the Christian communities are being attacked, they would like to be even and hence there is a reprisal attack, which leads to group conflict." Even a personal disagreement can quickly escalate into a larger conflagration. "Some people twist the issue to make it look like a religious dispute," observed a man in Kabala, "so that they can attract sympathy from their brethren who, much of the time, blindly support them without question."

The second type of spillover is *geographical,* where conflict in one area inspires violent mobilization elsewhere. Aided by the rapid spread of information – and misinformation – through social media and other technologies, reports of attacks or atrocities by one group against another have inspired members of the victimized group in another location to retaliate out of fear or revenge. For instance, a man in Barnawa recounted being told last year "that there were killings of some Muslims in Rivers state. The rumor spread and spread, and people got angry. This resulted in some attacks on Christians in the area." A Muslim trader in Dawakin Dakata told a similar story. "We heard that many of our people [in a part of southern Nigeria] had been killed mercilessly," he said. "In order to retaliate, people in Kano decided to attack Christians who are based here. So it is in the process of this retaliation that the Christian community was attacked and burnt to the ground." According to the trader, this was not a unique case. "Whenever there is crisis elsewhere and the news of [it] gets to Kano, it always triggers a reaction. We don't just start [conflict] on our own, it always starts elsewhere before it spills over to Kano."

FIGURE 13 | HOW INSECURITY, MISTRUST, AND RELIGIOUS INSTRUMENTALISM FUEL VIOLENCE

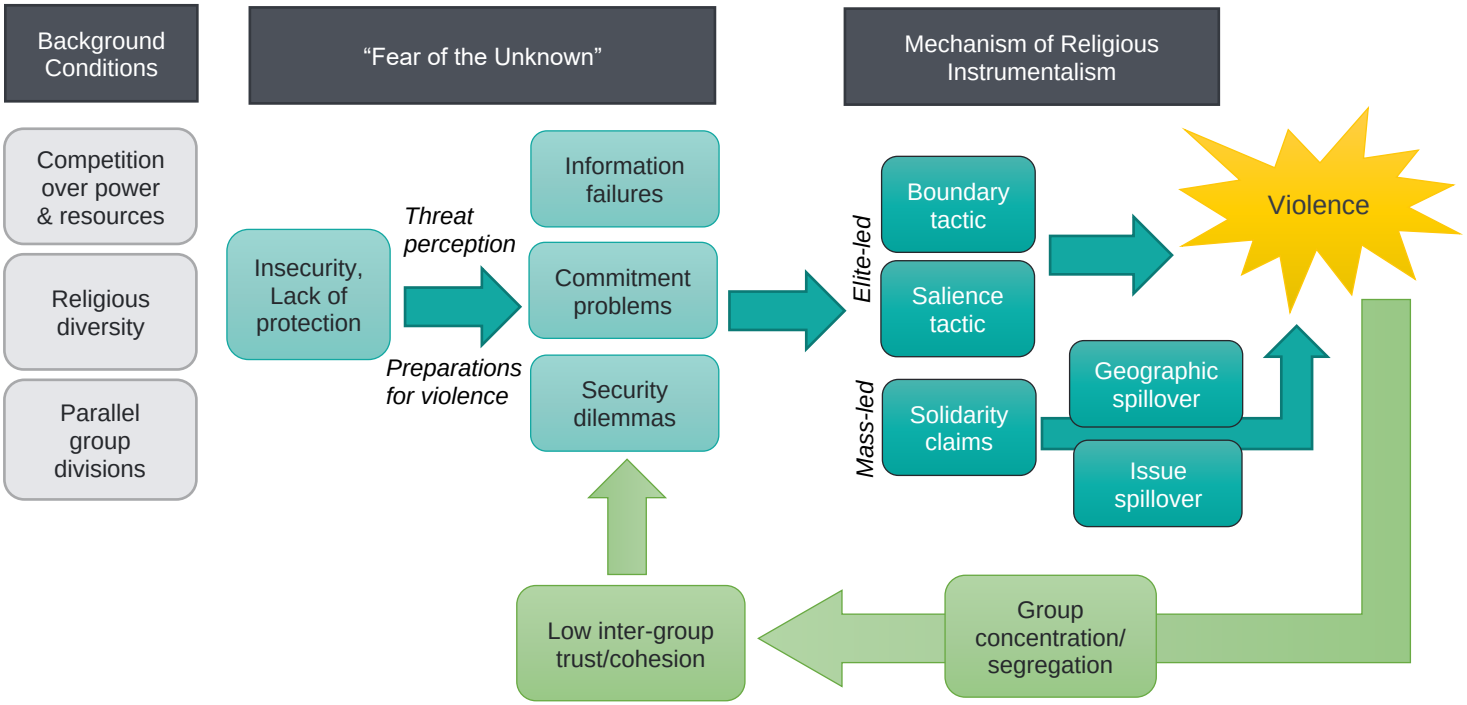

Figure 13 illustrates the pathways through which insecurity and mistrust fuel intercommunal conflict in northern Nigeria, and how religion, while it does not fundamentally *cause* conflict, provides opportunity (as a background condition) and motivation (as a mobilization instrument) for violence. Nigeria's religious divides – and the fact that they are reinforced by parallel group divisions, such as ethnicity and livelihoods – create an environment conducive to inter-religious conflict. In a society organized around these group divisions, and experiencing intense intergroup competition over power and resources, each group needs assurances of its security and survival. The Nigerian state has failed to consistently and credibly provide these assurances. Threatened by the lack of protection, different ethno-religious communities have responded by preparing for violence, organizing and arming their own militias. This has stoked fear and uncertainty among their rivals and produced difficult-to-resolve strategic dilemmas – including information failures, credible commitment problems, and security dilemmas – that have been shown to significantly elevate the risk of conflict. Compounding these risks is a lack of cohesion (particularly trust) between ethno-religious groups, which is partly a consequence of previous episodes of violence and the resulting segregation of communities along ethnic and religious lines. Both elites and members of the mass public seize on fear, uncertainty, and mistrust through specific tactics of religious instrumentalization. By manipulating the salience or the boundaries of religious identity, and making solidarity claims so that non-religious conflicts spill into the religious domain, these individuals are able to mobilize violence.

Mechanisms to Reduce Violence

Communities in northcentral and northwest Nigeria are using multiple mechanisms to reduce conflict, mitigate intergroup tensions, and promote the rights of different ethno-religious groups. These mechanisms are grouped into three general categories: conflict management, intergroup cohesion, and confidence-building measures.

Conflict Management

The most prominent approach to addressing intercommunal conflict in the region encompasses a diverse array of mediation, negotiation, and dialogue forums led by community-based organizations and local leaders, with the support of international donors. Through these initiatives, communities aim to identify and intervene in disputes before they can escalate into violence and facilitate non-violent solutions. Faith-based groups have spearheaded many of these efforts. Respondents applauded the work of multiple Christian and Muslim organizations in dispute resolution – including Jama'au Nasril Islam, Rahaml-Islam Wal Hajj, Alfarcare, the Justice and Peace Development Commission, and the Christian Association of Nigeria – along with interfaith groups such as the Women Inter-Faith Council, Inter-Faith Mediation Center in Kaduna, and the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council. Faith-based peacebuilding has been credited with improving intercommunal relations and reducing levels of violence in some parts of northern Nigeria.[86]

These initiatives demonstrate that religious leaders and institutions can act as key vectors for mitigating and managing conflict. They therefore play a central role in peace outcomes, as they have the potential to both fuel violence and to help extinguish it. Previous Mercy Corps research in Plateau state has shown that religious leaders carry significant influence because their authority, status, and social capital enables them to shape people's attitudes and behavior towards other groups.[87] Several studies outside of Nigeria also

[86] Nwaka 2020.
[87] Mercy Corps 2016.

indicate that religious institutions can have a dampening effect on intercommunal conflict by strengthening networks and contacts within and across communities.[88]

Our survey results lend further support to these claims, and the promise of harnessing religious actors as agents of peace. When asked who resolves disputes between ethno-religious groups, 90 percent of respondents say traditional leaders or Ward Heads; 70 percent say religious leaders; 55 percent say law enforcement, nine percent say local government officials; and five percent say civil society organizations (non-faith-based groups). Yet it is the involvement of religious leaders that is most strongly associated with less violent attitudes and behaviors. Those who report that religious leaders resolve disputes are less likely to support or engage in violence, and the results are highly statistically significant (Figure 14). Crucially, this finding holds no matter how often respondents say that these leaders are actually successful in dispute resolution. This suggests that incorporating religious leaders into conflict management can influence people's attitudes regardless of the outcome.

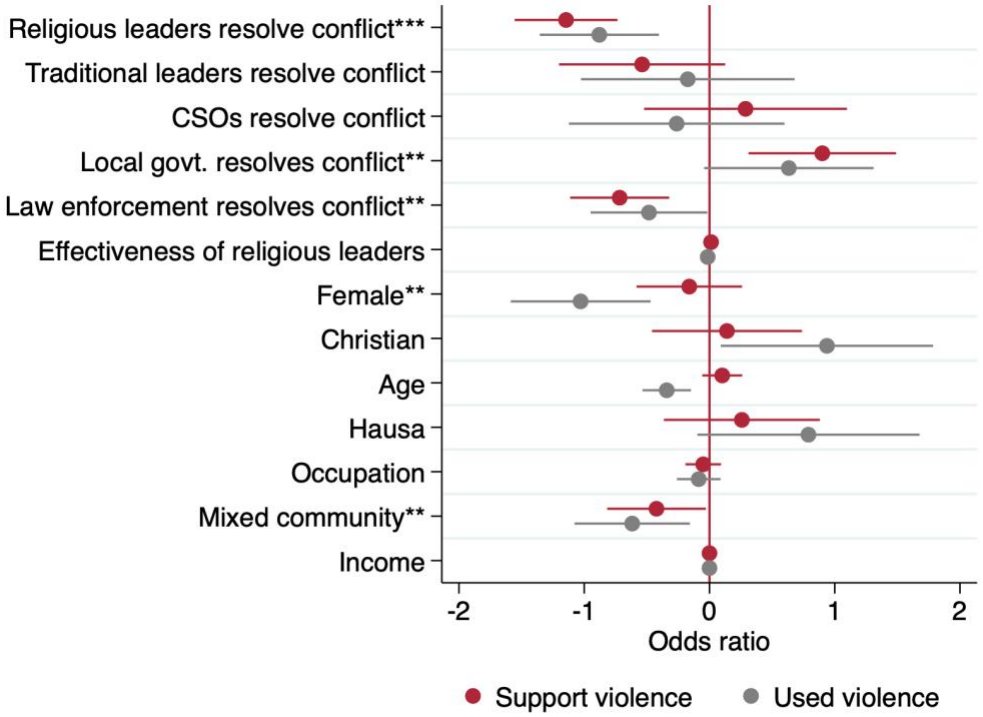

FIGURE 14 | LOGISTIC REGRESSION RESULTS: VIOLENCE

*Note: Coefficient plot for logistic regressions. Point estimates greater than 0 indicate more support for violence (positive relationship with the variable in question) and estimates less than zero indicate less support (negative relationship). Bars represented 95% confidence intervals. Stars denote statistically significant results with *p< 0.10; **p< 0.05; ***p< 0.01.*

We do not find a similar relationship between violence and the involvement of traditional leaders, CSOs, or local government.[89] Although the results are somewhat weaker, those who report the involvement of law enforcement are also less likely to endorse violence – which could reflect the importance of security

[88] Cao et al. 2018; De Juan et al. 2015.

[89] While statistically significant, the relationship between local government and support for/participation in violence was positive, indicating that those who reported the involvement of these actors were more likely to endorse violence.

provision in ameliorating the fear and uncertainty that helps motivate conflict. Overall, these findings suggest that religious actors can play a particularly influential role in peacebuilding in northern Nigeria. Yet this role is neither assured nor ubiquitous, as we demonstrate above in our description of elite-led violent mobilization. Just as we heard examples of local clerics contributing to peace, we were also told about some who sought to actively undermine it through the use of hate speech and violent rhetoric. Other religious leaders were simply complacent. As a woman in Sabon Gari remarked, "they [religious leaders] are not doing enough. They mixed with politicians which makes them biased. They prefer to keep mute than to tell the truth."

Intergroup Cohesion

A lack of intergroup cohesion is both a cause and a consequence of violence in the north. In response, individuals and communities have sought to mend relations between different groups by promoting peaceful interactions through increased contact and collaboration. Multiple respondents claimed that both formal activities, including some of the negotiation and mediation efforts described above, along with informal activities, such as intergroup trading and commerce, have eased tensions and helped repair social trust. For example, a randomized control trial of Mercy Corps' USAID-funded Engaging Communities for Peace in Nigeria (ECPN) program, which took place between 2015 to 2019 in Benue and Nasarawa, found that activities that brought farmers and pastoralists together regularly improved intergroup contact and trust, along with perceptions of security.[90] Other donor- and grassroots-led programs have adopted similar approaches in multiple northern states.

Muslim youth on their way to present a ram to Christians for Easter as part of an interfaith dialogue event in Gama, Kano state, Nigeria, April 2021

Photo credit: John Mutum/Mercy Corps

Our research indicates that the logic underpinning these approaches is sound, as we found a strong link between intergroup contact, more positive perceptions of out-groups, and greater support for peace. In interviews, people who reported working or socializing with members of other ethnicities and religions generally tended to express more tolerant and less hostile views of out-groups. This was moderated, however, by the nature and quality of these engagements. Some interviewees described negative interactions with community members from other faiths, which they extrapolated to the group as a whole.

[90] See Dawop et al. 2019.

The survey results reinforced this pattern. Respondents who reported more frequent interactions with other ethno-religious groups – and especially those who reported more *positive* interactions – were significantly less likely to express support for violence or a willingness to engage in it. Greater and more positive out-group interactions were also associated with less discriminatory attitudes towards out-groups. Intergroup contact is crucial for reducing fear of the other, building trust, and altering perceptions of out-group members as a threat.[91] As one man from Sabon Gari observed, "if there is mutual understanding, tolerance, and acceptance between Christians and Muslims, such [violence] will not happen."

Governance Measures

A final set of mechanisms for reducing violence focus on addressing governance gaps in northern Nigeria. We identified several types of confidence-building measures that aim to reduce uncertainty and provide guarantees to different groups. The first is resource-sharing. In some areas, authorities have established grazing reserve areas for herders to prevent them from destroying farmland and to set clear expectations regarding land use. This is far from straightforward, however: when herders have been granted the use of land that other groups consider to be their ancestral home, it has only deepened tensions.

Second, local communities have appealed to government authorities to actually enforce property rights – and criminal laws more broadly. To reduce uncertainty, people require both clear guidelines and confidence that violators will be held accountable. One farmer in Kajuru voiced the sentiment of many others: "there need to be laws in place to prevent [herders] from destroying people's farmland, and when it happens, a fair judgement should be passed." There was a general feeling among respondents that these appeals had little effect: they claimed that pastoralist communities continued to damage crops – usually inadvertently, but still with impunity. Gangs and banditry groups also tended to evade accountability. Many respondents said they continued to lobby both traditional leaders and, where possible, government officials to punish criminal acts fairly and consistently. Without accountability, some people have resorted to reprisal attacks, feeding into ongoing cycles of violence. As a Fulani man in Kujuru explained, "if a Fulani goes out to pasture with his cattle and the cattle feeds on a Christian farm, instead of reporting the case [to authorities], they then decide to take the law in their hands by either beating the boy or poisoning the cattle. This results in the revenge attack by the Fulanis…they will in turn gather their people and invade the Christians too." Some organizations have worked with local authorities to promote the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, and to encourage religious freedom, but the enforcement of these rights ultimately depend on the Nigerian state.

Third, communities have provided security guarantees to different groups through power-sharing and inclusion. During the rise of Christianity in northern Nigeria, some communities responded by granting local representation to ethnic and religious minorities, while others did not. Ensuring the meaningful inclusion of all groups in local government sends a signal that their interests are represented and assuages concerns over being exploited or disadvantaged by those in power. This addresses a core lament we heard from many respondents: a lack of adequate representation. As one Christian man in Narayi explained, "there is no balance [in the leadership]…most of the people in power are Hausa-Fulani and this has created tension." Indeed, there is evidence that incorporating members of different ethno-religious groups in local institutions has helped communities in northern Nigeria ward off intergroup violence.[92] This is consistent with broader research on post-conflict peace, which finds that the more power-sharing institutions included in settlements to end civil wars, the lower the risk of conflict recurrence.[93]

[91] Lake and Rothchild 1996.
[92] Vinson 2017.
[93] Hartzell and Hoddie 2007.

A pastoralist in Daddare, Nasarawa state, Nigeria (Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps)

Recommendations

This study demonstrates that the recent increase in intercommunal conflict in northern Nigeria is not simply a consequence of systematic religious persecution. Rather, **it is a continuation of a decades-long cycle of inter-group violence that is a consequence of pervasive insecurity, declining trust between ethno-religious communities, and the manipulation and instrumentalization of identity by opportunistic actors.** In the face of increasing resource scarcity, communities vying for control over land and other livelihoods assets, and competing for influence in local and national politics, have armed themselves for self-protection, creating strategic dilemmas that have increased the risk of violent conflict. Resolving these dilemmas will require better governance and social trust. For policymakers and practitioners seeking to support evidence-based programming that will help prevent, mitigate, and resolve conflict in northern Nigeria, we recommend they consider the following:

Frame identity as a mobilizer of conflict, not a cause of it. Characterizing intercommunal violence in northern Nigeria as religiously motivated is not only misleading, it is dangerous. Different ethnic and religious communities have peacefully coexisted in the region for many years, and conflicts have cut across, not just along, identity lines. Attributing violence to ethno-religious differences or discrimination between Muslims and Christians masks its core underlying causes, which are rooted in governance failures and a lack of social cohesion. Productive approaches to peacebuilding must then focus on these issues. An overemphasis on religion or other aspects of identity risks diverting attention away from these central conflict drivers and could ultimately make the situation worse. If certain groups are seen as privileged, or certain perpetrators or victims are singled out, it will only reify group divisions, amplify feelings of persecution, and encourage local communities to interpret issues of peace and security through a religious or ethnic lens.

This could directly undermine efforts to improve intergroup relations and promote peace. There are concerns that it may already be happening: according to a recent report by the Centre for Democracy and Development on farmer-herder conflict in the Middle Belt, "this ethno-religious interpretation of the conflict is gradually gaining ground and making an indelible dent on the existing fragile Muslim-Christian relations."[94]

Reduce fear and uncertainty by addressing governance failures. Insecurity in northern Nigeria is largely a consequence of inadequate and unresponsive governance. In order to ease communities' fears and provide much-needed security guarantees that can reduce the incentives for violence in the region, local and national authorities can undertake several measures, including:

1. *Power-sharing arrangements:* inclusive governance processes, particularly at the local level, must ensure the active and meaningful involvement of members from different ethno-religious groups in the community. Adequate representation is key to assuaging groups' concerns over being exploited or attacked. These arrangements should be part a broader effort to ensure the political and economic rights of ethnic and religious minorities in each community.

2. *Resource-sharing mechanisms:* negotiating designated areas for cattle grazing with all affected parties can help mitigate the encroachment of herders on farmland and reduce clashes over resources. Authorities should also facilitate resource-sharing by supporting community-led mechanisms for mediating and resolving land disputes. Such disputes may be more easily addressed if local governments clearly and consistently apply indigene laws and standardize their eligibility criteria for indigene certificates, providing greater certainty over land rights and access.

3. *Security provision:* the most straightforward way to provide security guarantees to communities in northern Nigeria is to increase the reach and effectiveness of government security forces, while ensuring they adhere to human rights standards. Some states have started to formally sponsor vigilante groups and community militias and incorporate them into the state security apparatus. If security continues to be entrusted to these groups, then there should be a concerted effort to train and professionalize them. There should also be greater investments in community policing and the development of early warning and early response systems.

4. *Justice and accountability:* to deter individuals from engaging in violence and criminal activities, perpetrators must be held responsible in a transparent and impartial manner. If people see that there is accountability for violence without political, religious, or ethnic favoritism, it will also give communities greater confidence in non-violent solutions to disputes and disagreements.

Forge intergroup trust. Mercy Corps' programming in northern Nigeria has demonstrated that people-to-people activities that facilitate close cooperation between conflicting groups can have a positive, measurable effect on social cohesion and perceptions of security. Our ECPN program, which gave opportunities for farmers and herders in Benue and Nasarawa to collaborate on quick-impact projects and natural resource management initiatives, had a positive effect on intergroup trust – not only for program participants, but on the wider community.[95] Our U.K.-funded Community-Based Conflict Management and Cooperative Use of Resources (CONCUR) program took a similar approach, integrating conflict mitigation and joint development projects to address the underlying drivers of conflict in four Middle Belt states. Like ECPN, CONCUR had a positive and significant impact on intercommunal relations, reducing tensions in intervention sites by 43

[94] Centre for Democracy and Development 2021: 12

[95] Dawop et al. 2019.

percentage points (relative to comparison sites) and improving trust by a total of 49 percentage points.[96] Donors should scale up these proven interventions in northern Nigeria in order to ameliorate a key driver – and consequence – of conflict in the region.

Religious leaders at a preventing violent extremism training in Kaduna, September 2020.

Photo credit: Zara Maccido/IMC-Mercy Corps

Identify and elevate religious peacemakers. This study indicates that incorporating religious leaders into conflict management can influence people's attitudes regardless of their effectiveness. But it also cautions against enlisting leaders who are keen to undermine, rather than encourage, peace between different groups. Given the critical role religious leaders play in local peace and conflict dynamics, initiatives aimed at improving intergroup relations should target them as "key people," in addition to targeting members of their communities. Programs should engage in actor mapping to understand the role of local clerics in political and social mobilization and enlist those who have served as peacemakers as partners in conflict prevention and mitigation, while being wary of spoilers. As Mercy Corps has indicated in previous research on religious leaders in Nigeria, increasing the peacebuilding capacity of these leaders should be a donor priority.

Combat misinformation to stem conflict spillovers. The expansion of information and communications technology in Nigeria – from mobile phones to social media – has been a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has galvanized civil society by providing easily accessible tools for increased dialogue and peaceful mobilization, and given youth in particular a platform to air their grievances, draw attention to an issue, and organize collective action. On the other hand, it has enabled the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, which has contributed to violence by feeding misperceptions of other groups, distorting the nature of intercommunal disputes, and encouraging retaliation or escalation. Donors and practitioners must work with government and civil society actors to arrest these processes, particularly in the wake of intercommunal clashes or during windows of risk, such as elections. Interventions should include resource media and information literacy education; community-level rumor and myth tracking; and supporting interfaith groups, traditional media, and social media activists in countering false narratives in real time. Given that dis/misinformation often spreads online and offline, initiatives aimed at combating social media harms must encompass both online activists and their offline counterparts.

[96] Mercy Corps 2017.

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Appendix 1: Sample Communities

State	LGA	Community	Religious Composition
Kano	Nassarawa	Badawa	Mixed Muslim/Christian
Kano	Nassarawa	Dawakin Dakata	Predominately Muslim
Kano	Nassarawa	Gama	Mixed
Kano	Nassarawa	Gwagwarwa	Mixed
Kano	Nassarawa	Rimin Kebe	Predominantly Muslim
Kano	Nassarawa	Wudun wada (Tudun wada)	Predominantly Muslim
Kano	Fagge	Sabon Gari	Predominantly Christian
Kaduna	Kaduna South	Barnawa	Mixed
Kaduna	Kaduna South	Kakuri	Mixed
Kaduna	Kaduna South	Nassarawa	Mixed
Kaduna	Kaduna South	Tudun wada	Predominately Muslim
Kaduna	Kaduna North	Kabala	Mixed
Kaduna	Kujuru	Kajuru	Mixed
Kaduna	Igabi	Mando	Mixed
Kaduna	Chikun	Narayi	Predominately Christian

Appendix 2: Violent Events Data (ACLED)

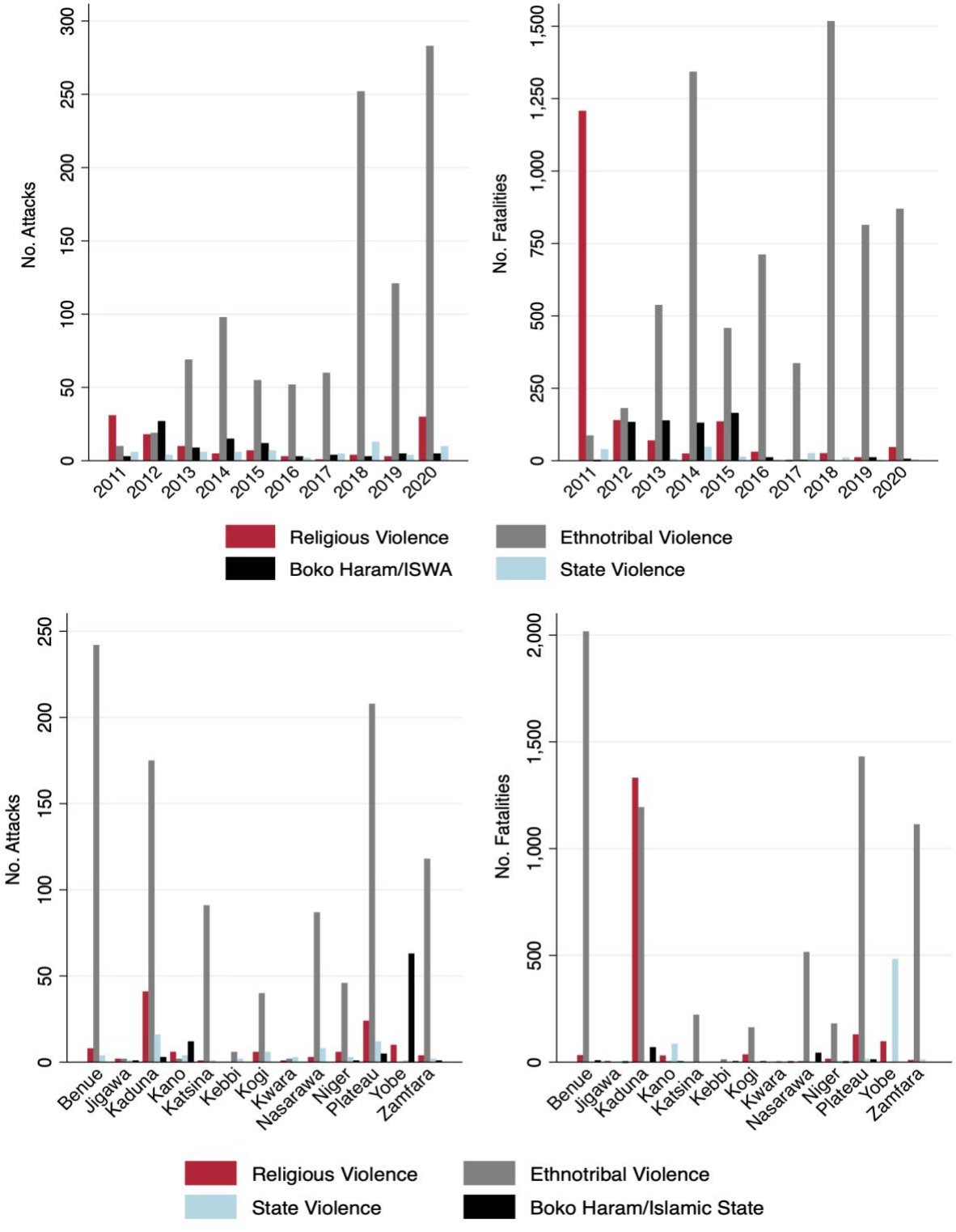

FIGURE A1 | VIOLENT EVENTS IN NORTHCENTRAL AND NORTHWEST STATES (ACLED)

Appendix 3: Correlation Matrix

	Insecurity index	Social cohesion index	Religious politicization	Religious freedom	Resolver: religious leaders	Resolver: traditional leaders	Resolver: govt.	Resolver: law enforcement
Social cohesion index	-0.16	——	——	——	——	——	——	——
Religious politicization	0.12	0.04	——	——	——	——	——	——
Religious freedom	-0.15	0.34	-0.12	——	——	——	——	——
Religious expression	-0.05	0.36	-0.06	0.27	——	——	——	——
Resolver: religious leaders	-0.05	0.17	0.03	0.06	0.18	——	——	——
Resolver: traditional leaders	-0.05	0.07	0.11	0.04	0.01	0.10	——	——
Resolver: government	0.18	-0.10	0.08	-0.04	-0.04	-0.17	0.04	——
Resolver: law enforcement	-0.08	0.03	-0.17	0.05	0.07	-0.05	0.01	——
Resolver: civil society orgs	0.08	0.01	0.05	0.07	-0.02	-0.06	-0.02	-0.11

Appendix 4: Regression Tables

TABLE A1: LOGISTIC REGRESSION, PEACE AND VIOLENCE OUTCOMES

	Model 1 (Support Violence)	Model 2 (Used Violence)	Model 3 (Support Religious Violence)	Model 4 (Support Political Violence)	Model 5 (Support for other groups)	Model 6 (Peace w/ other groups)
Religiosity	−0.31∗	−0.13	−0.33∗	−0.26	0.60 ∗ ∗∗	0.04
	(0.17)	(0.22)	(0.18)	(0.31)	(0.16)	(0.19)
Female	−0.04	−0.80 ∗ ∗∗	−0.07	−0.53	−0.32∗	−0.08
	(0.19)	(0.25)	(0.21)	(0.38)	(0.17)	(0.22)
Christian	0.01	0.63∗	−0.27	0.96∗	−0.53 ∗ ∗	0.23
	(0.26)	(0.37)	(0.27)	(0.54)	(0.23)	(0.26)
Age	0.04	−0.37 ∗ ∗∗	0.00	0.17	0.07	0.06
	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Hausa	0.19	0.60	0.25	−0.72	−0.52 ∗ ∗	0.12
	(0.26)	(0.38)	(0.27)	(0.67)	(0.25)	(0.28)
Occupation	−0.09	−0.10	−0.05	−0.27 ∗ ∗	0.09	−0.02
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Mixed community	−0.22	−0.45 ∗ ∗	−0.36∗	0.56	−0.15	0.45 ∗ ∗
	(0.18)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.37)	(0.16)	(0.20)
Income	−0.00	−0.00 ∗ ∗	0.00	−0.00	−0.00 ∗ ∗	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	0.30	0.62	0.39	−1.63	−1.92 ∗ ∗	0.75
	(0.92)	(1.17)	(0.98)	(1.75)	(0.85)	(1.04)
Observations	750	750	732	731	750	750
Pseudo R^2	0.011	0.069	0.020	0.097	0.033	0.017

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

TABLE A2: LOGISTIC REGRESSION, SUPPORT FOR VIOLENCE

	Model 1 (Any Violence)	Model 2 (Any Violence)	Model 3 (Any Violence)	Model 4 (Any Violence)	Model 5 (Religious Violence)	Model 6 (Political Violence)
Insecurity index	2.30 * **		2.40 * **		2.72 * **	1.40 * *
	(0.36)		(0.37)		(0.39)	(0.61)
Social cohesion index	−1.11 * **		−0.93 * **	−1.00 * **	−0.91 * **	−1.38 * **
	(0.19)		(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.36)
Exposure to violence				1.12 * **		
				(0.27)		
Religious politicization	0.24 * *		0.23 * *	0.27 * **	0.30 * **	0.22
	(0.10)		(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.18)
Religious freedom		−0.14	0.11	0.06	0.14	−0.02
		(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.17)
Freedom of expression		−0.63 * **	−0.52 * **	−0.51 * **	−0.69 * **	0.25
		(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.28)
Female	−0.08	0.05	−0.04	−0.08	−0.05	−0.59
	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.38)
Christian	−0.34	0.15	−0.20	−0.02	−0.59*	0.63
	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.33)	(0.55)
Age	0.06	−0.01	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.10
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.14)
Hausa	0.20	0.27	0.30	0.25	0.42	−0.78
	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.30)	(0.30)	(0.33)	(0.65)
Occupation	−0.03	−0.10	−0.02	−0.05	0.04	−0.24*
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.12)
Mixed community	0.06	−0.18	0.09	0.03	−0.06	0.92 * *
	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.43)
Income	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	0.00	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	1.80*	2.16 * **	2.64 * **	3.49 * **	2.70 * *	0.58
	(0.92)	(0.75)	(0.99)	(0.97)	(1.09)	(1.57)
Observations	745	750	745	745	728	727
Pseudo R^2	0.137	0.059	0.159	0.126	0.194	0.187

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

TABLE A3: LOGISTIC REGRESSION, USE OF VIOLENCE

	Model 1 (Any Violence)	Model 2 (Any Violence)	Model 3 (Any Violence)	Model 4 (Any Violence)	Model 5 (Religious Violence)	Model 6 (Political Violence)
Insecurity index	2.30 * **		2.36 * **		2.36 * **	1.31 * *
	(0.42)		(0.43)		(0.45)	(0.61)
Social cohesion index	−0.86 * **		−0.76 * **	−0.86 * **	−0.51 * *	−0.80 * *
	(0.21)		(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.34)
Exposure to violence				1.38 * **		
				(0.30)		
Religious politicization	0.30 * **		0.30 * **	0.33 * **	0.26 * *	0.37*
	(0.11)		(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.19)
Religious freedom		−0.16	0.10	0.06	0.15	−0.09
		(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.17)	(0.20)
Freedom of expression		−0.40 * **	−0.30*	−0.30*	−0.30*	−0.69 * **
		(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.22)
Female	−1.00 * **	−0.73 * **	−0.97 * **	−0.99 * **	−1.08 * **	−0.60
	(0.28)	(0.25)	(0.28)	(0.27)	(0.30)	(0.45)
Christian	0.43	0.73 * *	0.51	0.66	0.57	−0.15
	(0.43)	(0.37)	(0.41)	(0.41)	(0.45)	(0.53)
Age	−0.39 * **	−0.41 * **	−0.41 * **	−0.41 * **	−0.39 * **	−0.46 * **
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.16)
Hausa	0.75*	0.64*	0.78*	0.75*	0.72	0.29
	(0.43)	(0.38)	(0.41)	(0.41)	(0.45)	(0.56)
Occupation	−0.05	−0.13	−0.04	−0.06	−0.02	−0.21
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.15)
Mixed community	−0.15	−0.40*	−0.14	−0.15	−0.07	−0.34
	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.41)
Income	−0.00 * *	−0.00 * *	−0.00 * *	−0.00 * *	−0.00 * *	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	1.84	2.52 * **	2.23*	2.99 * *	0.85	4.63 * *
	(1.14)	(0.93)	(1.21)	(1.19)	(1.27)	(1.92)
Observations	745	750	745	745	738	745
Pseudo R^2	0.182	0.092	0.189	0.169	0.168	0.202

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

TABLE A4: LOGISTIC REGRESSION, PEACE OUTCOMES

	Model 1 (Support for other groups)	Model 2 (Support for other groups)	Model 3 (Peace w/ other groups)	Model 4 (Peace w/ other groups)
Insecurity index	−0.31		−0.46*	
	(0.34)		(0.43)	
Social cohesion index	0.52***	0.51***	0.68***	0.70***
	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Exposure to violence		−0.25		−0.55*
		(0.27)		(0.32)
Religious politicization	−0.28***	−0.28***	−0.02	−0.02
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Freedom of expression	0.24**	0.23**	0.76***	0.77***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Religious freedom	0.04	0.04	0.24*	0.25**
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Female	−0.39**	−0.40**	−0.08	−0.08
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Christian	−0.56**	−0.55**	0.23	0.24
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.30)	(0.30)
Age	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.10
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Hausa	−0.44*	−0.44*	0.01	0.02
	(0.25)	(0.24)	(0.30)	(0.29)
Occupation	0.09	0.09	−0.03	−0.04
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Mixed community	−0.13	−0.13	0.26	0.22
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Income	−0.00*	−0.00*	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	−2.03**	−1.93**	−5.50***	−5.60***
	(0.88)	(0.86)	(1.19)	(1.20)
Observations	745	745	745	745
Pseudo R^2	0.058	0.058	0.137	0.139

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

TABLE A5: LOGISTIC REGRESSION, PERCEPTION OF OUT-GROUP THREAT

	Model 1 (DV: out-group threat)	Model 2 (DV: Support for any violence)	Model 3 (DV: Used any violence)	Model 4 (DV: Support for religious violence)	Model 5 (DV: Support for political violence)
Insecurity index	3.81 * **				
	(0.41)				
Social cohesion index	−1.36 * **				
	(0.24)				
Out-group threat		1.23 * **	0.78 * **	1.50 * **	1.19 * **
		(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.39)
Religious politicization	0.16	0.25 * **	0.33 * **	0.32 * **	0.20
	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.17)
Freedom of expression	−0.14	−0.56 * **	−0.32 * *	−0.68 * **	0.12
	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.24)
Religious freedom	−0.21	−0.02	−0.07	0.03	−0.15
	(0.15)	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.15)
Female	0.23	−0.03	−0.88 * **	−0.04	−0.50
	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.27)	(0.23)	(0.37)
Christian	0.89 * **	−0.13	0.60	−0.55*	0.68
	(0.34)	(0.29)	(0.38)	(0.32)	(0.56)
Age	0.15	−0.02	−0.44 * **	−0.07	0.08
	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.14)
Hausa	−0.02	0.25	0.64	0.34	−0.74
	(0.37)	(0.30)	(0.39)	(0.32)	(0.66)
Occupation	−0.11	−0.05	−0.11	0.01	−0.26 * *
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.13)
Mixed community	0.31	−0.15	−0.38	−0.30	0.56
	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.37)
Income	0.00*	−0.00	−0.00 * *	−0.00	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	3.02 * **	0.50	0.94	0.52	−3.09 * *
	(1.13)	(0.85)	(1.07)	(0.91)	(1.38)
Observations	745	746	746	729	728
Pseudo R^2	0.306	0.108	0.127	0.146	0.139

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

TABLE A6: LOGISTIC REGRESSION, INVOLVEMENT OF LEADERS IN DISPUTES

	Model 1 (Support Violence)	Model 2 (Support Religious Violence)	Model 3 (Support Political Violence)	Model 4 (Used Violence)	Model 5 (Used Religious Violence)	Model 6 (Support for other groups)	Model 7 (Peace w/ other groups)
Religious leaders resolve conflict	−1.16 * **	−1.17 * **	−0.81 * *	−0.92 * **	−0.92 * **	0.41 * *	0.22
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.37)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.18)	(0.22)
Traditional leaders resolve conflict	−0.20	−0.09	−0.15	0.21	0.19	−0.53*	−0.09
	(0.34)	(0.35)	(0.63)	(0.44)	(0.46)	(0.29)	(0.33)
CSOs resolve conflict	0.21	0.36	−1.19	−0.35	−0.09	−0.33	−0.52
	(0.41)	(0.39)	(1.13)	(0.43)	(0.43)	(0.34)	(0.39)
Local government resolves conflict	0.81 * **	0.54*	0.99 * *	0.61*	0.54	0.31	0.01
	(0.29)	(0.31)	(0.45)	(0.33)	(0.36)	(0.30)	(0.36)
Law enforcement resolves conflict	−0.71 * **	−0.83 * **	−0.14	−0.44*	−0.36	0.16	−0.46 * *
	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.40)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.16)	(0.21)
Female	−0.04	−0.02	−0.67*	−0.85 * **	−0.92 * **	−0.46 * **	−0.21
	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.37)	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.17)	(0.20)
Christian	−0.01	−0.33	0.87	0.65*	0.73*	−0.54 * *	0.25
	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.56)	(0.38)	(0.43)	(0.23)	(0.27)
Age	0.06	0.04	0.15	−0.36 * **	−0.34 * **	0.08	0.05
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Hausa	0.14	0.16	−0.73	0.56	0.56	−0.41*	0.10
	(0.29)	(0.30)	(0.71)	(0.39)	(0.44)	(0.24)	(0.28)
Occupation	0.57*	0.42	1.07 * *	0.59	0.45	−0.73 * *	−0.27
	(0.33)	(0.37)	(0.47)	(0.36)	(0.39)	(0.29)	(0.35)
Mixed community	−0.39 * *	−0.54 * **	0.34	−0.63 * **	−0.55 * *	−0.10	0.39 * *
	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.39)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.16)	(0.20)
Income	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00 * *	−0.00 * *	−0.00 * *	
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	
Constant	−0.30	−0.17	−3.04 * **	0.20	−0.07	1.27 * **	1.34 * *
	(0.48)	(0.51)	(0.81)	(0.67)	(0.72)	(0.45)	(0.52)
Observations	750	732	731	750	742	750	750
Pseudo R^2	0.094	0.098	0.139	0.110	0.104	0.034	0.023

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

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