

FOSTERING MULTI-ETHNIC COHESION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE AND CHALLENGES OF ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS

Abdulqadir Sulaiman Muhammad^{1*}, Zara Muhammad Jajere² & Maryam Abba Tamim³

¹ Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja-Nigeria, 900105, P.M.B 117, F.C.T Abuja, Nigeria [ORCID ID [0000-0003-4294-7991](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4294-7991)]

² Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja-Nigeria, 900105, P.M.B 117, F.C.T Abuja, Nigeria [ORCID ID [0009-0002-0640-3479](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-0640-3479)]

³ Department of Islamic Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja-Nigeria, 900105, P.M.B 117, F.C.T Abuja, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: abdulqadir.muhammad@uniabuja.edu.ng

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Abstract

Nigeria is a pluralistic society characterized by over 250 ethnic groups and diverse religious traditions, a multifaceted diversity that simultaneously represents national strength and poses challenges for cohesion. Islamic institutions including mosques, integrated Qur'an schools, Islamic universities, umbrella organizations and faith-based non-governmental organizations occupy a central place in the social life of approximately 242.4 million Nigerians, thereby possessing significant potential to promote multi-ethnic cohesion. This study examines the role of these institutions in fostering multi-ethnic solidarity through education, religious propagation, social welfare, conflict mediation, and interfaith partnerships, while exploring structural challenges such as politicization, economic inequality, gender exclusion, institutional fragmentation, and radicalization. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study employs a documentary research design and thematic content analysis of theological sources, empirical studies, policy documents, and scholarly literature published between 2020 and 2025. Findings reveal that while Islamic institutions contribute significantly to multi-ethnic integration by cultivating shared identities that transcend ethnic boundaries, structural constraints continue to limit their long-term effectiveness. Consequently, the study recommends curriculum reform, capacity building for religious leaders, transparent philanthropic governance, institutional safeguards against political manipulation, and stronger interfaith collaborations.

Keywords: Challenges, Islamic institutions, Integration, Multi-ethnic cohesion, Nigeria



INTRODUCTION

The political and social landscape of Nigeria has long been shaped by an intricate interplay of ethnic plurality and religious diversity. While this heterogeneity is inherently a national asset, it has simultaneously served as a perennial source of tension and conflict, particularly where ethnicity intersects with politics, resource competition, and religious identity. Persisting ethnic conflicts, communal violence, and identity-based grievances continue to destabilize national integration. The endurance of these fractures demonstrates that conventional political and economic interventions alone are insufficient to foster long-term social cohesion (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

Islam constitutes a major religious and social framework in Nigeria, particularly dominant in the northern regions and parts of the southwest. According to data from the Pew Research Center, Muslims comprise approximately 56.1% of Nigeria's population, indicating that Islamic institutions exert a substantial influence on the nation's social, educational, economic, and political domains (Ossai, 2024). Historically, institutions such as mosques, integrated Qur'anic schools, emirate councils, Islamic universities, zakat organizations, and umbrella bodies like the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) have operated far beyond purely ritualistic boundaries. They have routinely functioned as grassroots mediators of communal disputes, providers of social welfare, transmitters of moral values, and facilitators of inter-communal interactions.

Despite their extensive societal footprint, existing scholarship has predominantly examined Nigerian Islamic institutions through political, legal, and governance lenses, largely overlooking their systemic capacity as instruments of social cohesion. For instance, Umar (2006) observed that the empirical impact of these institutions in promoting cohesion remains significantly understudied compared to their political influence. Similarly, recent studies continue this trend; Anyia (2017) focused heavily on the role of Islamic organizations in Shari'ah mobilization, while Salaudeen and Dukawa (2025) restricted their scope to the political contributions of the Nigerian *ulama* (scholars).

Consequently, there is a distinct empirical gap regarding how these institutions actively cultivate and facilitate multi-ethnic integration in a highly polarized society. This study directly addresses this lacuna by examining both the foundational roles and structural challenges of Islamic institutions in fostering multi-ethnic cohesion in Nigeria. To achieve this, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the theoretical and empirical relationship between Islam and social cohesion.
2. To analyse the historical evolution and contemporary roles of Islamic institutions in Nigeria.
3. To explore current societal perspectives regarding multi-ethnic cohesion within the Nigerian context.
4. To identify the critical structural and political challenges confronting the Islamic institutions in promoting social integration.
5. To propose future directions and policy recommendations aimed at optimizing their contributions to national solidarity.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research design employing both documentary research design and thematic content analysis. Bowen (2009) defined documentary research as the systematic collection, evaluation and interpretation of existing documents to generate meaningful insights

and into social phenomena. This is appropriate for this study because it allows for the systematic examination and interpretation of existing documents to generate empirical insights and theoretical explanations regarding the role of Islamic institutions in fostering multi-ethnic cohesion in Nigeria.

The primary unit of analysis of this study consists of Islamic institutions operating within Nigeria. These include: Mosques, Integrated Qur'anic schools, Islamic universities, Shari'ah councils, almsgiving (*zakat*) and charitable endowments (*waqf*) institutions, Islamic non-governmental organizations, Umbrella organizations such as Nigeria supreme council for Islamic affairs (NSCIA), Federation of Muslim women's association in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) and the Islamic student organizations like the Muslim students society (MSS).

Sources of Data Collection

The study relied on data obtained exclusively from secondary sources. Primary theological sources like the Qur'an and Hadith collections, Academic literature like scholarly literature, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference papers, policy documents on Islamic institutions in Nigeria. Policy and historical documents like Government reports, Institutional publications, Publications from NSCIA, JNI, FOMWAN and Islamic Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were also used. Priority was given to publications produced between 2020 and 2025 to ensure contemporary relevance while older foundational texts were utilized for historical and theoretical explanations. All sources are acknowledged in the references section.

The documents utilized in this study comprise primary theological texts including the Qur'an (Abdel Haleem, Trans.), *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, and *Musnad Ahmad*, alongside key scholarly literature and empirical studies such as Anyia (2017), Falola and Heaton (2008), Kamali (2008), Hallaq (2009), Ashafa (2024), Azubuike (2024), Lateef (2024), Ossai (2024), Rahman (2024), and Salaudeen and Dukawa (2025). All additional sources are duly cited and acknowledged in the references section.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The analysis involved familiarization with collected documents, coding recurrent themes, categorization of findings and interpretation within relevant theoretical frameworks. The study adopted two complementary theories i.e Putnam's Social Cohesion Theory by (1993) and Etzioni's Religious Mediation Theory (1993) as both theories explain how Islamic institutions generate bridging social capital and facilitate peaceful intergroup relations.

Research Theories

1. Social cohesion theory (structural and relational dimensions)

This theory was propounded by Robert David Putnam in 1993 in his work "Making democracy work" which defines social capital as networks, norms and trust that enable cooperation within and across groups. It argues that cohesion entails both institutional arrangements like inclusive policies, shared public institutions and social relations of which religious institutions can influence both. Islamic schools, mosques and organizations act as bridging social capital because they bring Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Nupe, Kanuri and other groups together in shared spaces. Religious gatherings, prayers and study circles strengthen trust between members of different ethnic backgrounds. Joint participation in Islamic rituals such as Ramadan, Eid, Qur'an study circles and Islamic propagation programs acts as a bond that reduces suspicion and fear. Islamic leadership structures like the emirates and scholars/ulama councils also reinforce cross-ethnic networks of communication and cooperation. In essence, Islamic institutions create bridging social capital that fosters unity beyond ethnicity.

2. Religious mediation theory

This theory was propounded by Amitai Etzioni in 1993 and it argues that strong moral communities create social order through shared values, norms and collective identity. Religious authorities exercise normative influence in communities when committed to non-sectarian messages as they can act as mediators, norm entrepreneurs and service providers. This theory is also known as the communitarian theory. Islamic institutions promote shared ethical values such as justice (*adl*), compassion (*rahmah*) and peaceful coexistence (*Silm*). These shared values create a moral community that transcends ethnic divisions and Islamic identity which provides a collective sense of belonging stronger than ethnic identity in many Muslim majority regions. Communitarian emphasis on social responsibility aligns with Islamic teachings on almsgiving/*zakat*, brotherhood, reconciliation and community welfare. This strengthens social cohesion by reducing ethnic rivalries and emphasizing one *Ummah* or community of believers.

Islamic doctrinal resources provide normative backing for these roles. The Qur'an's admonition that humanity was created in diverse nations and tribes "*so that you may know one another*" (Q49:13) frames diversity as an ethical good rather than a point of exclusion. Similarly, Prophetic teachings urging equality and brotherhood offer moral authority for inclusive social action as both texts legitimize institutional interventions aimed at bridging ethnic divides.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Islam and Social Cohesion

The philosophical foundations of Islamic institutions are rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah which establish principles of Oneness of God, justice, consultation and social welfare as the basis of institutional governance (Esposito, 2011). These principles collectively shape Islamic institutions as moral and socio-political structures aimed at promoting unity, equity, charity and peaceful coexistence.

1. Oneness of God as the foundational principle

The concept of oneness of God establishes that all authority, law and social order ultimately belong to Allah. Islamic institutions therefore operate as trustees implementing divine principles which are designed to preserve unity, moral order and collective responsibility. The Qur'an emphasizes submission to divine governance: "*Surely this Islam is your religion, one religion (only) and I am your Lord therefore serve me.*" (Q21:92).

2. Community cohesion and unity

Islam constructs society as a single moral and spiritual community transcending ethnicity, race and class. Allah says in the Qur'an: "*O humankind, we created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another*" (Q49:13). This verse is a comprehensive injunction that emphasizes unity in Islam.

The Qur'an's admonition that humanity was created in diverse nations and tribes "*so that you may know one another*" (Q49:13) frames diversity as an ethical good rather than a point of exclusion. Similarly, Prophetic teachings urging equality and brotherhood offer moral authority for inclusive social action as both texts legitimize institutional interventions aimed at bridging ethnic divides. Some of these teachings include:

The Prophet (PBUH) farewell sermon when he stated: "O people! Your Lord is one and your father (Adam) is one. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab nor of a white over a black nor of a black over a white except by piety (*Taqwa*)". (Musnad Ahmad and Bayhaqi)

The statement above aligns with the principle of *"Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you"* Q49:13.

Institutions such as mosques, Islamic councils and *zakat* bodies function to maintain unity and reduce fragmentation including ethnic divisions. Allah advises Muslims in the Qur'an by stating: *"And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided"* (Q3:103).

3. Justice as a governing principle

Justice is a core objective of Islamic institutional governance. Allah emphasizes this by stating: *"Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence..."* (Q16:90). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also emphasized justice by stating: *"Help your brother whether he is an oppressor or oppressed..."* (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Islamic institutions must ensure equity in social, legal and economic relations thereby reinforcing cohesion in the society. The Prophet (PBUH) established a deep sense of brotherhood among Muslims especially during the migration (*Hijrah*) to Madinah where he paired Migrants with the Helpers. He also stated: *"The Muslim is the brother of another Muslim. He does not wrong him nor abandon him..."* Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 2442) and Sahih Muslim (Hadith 2580).

Another famous hadith of the Prophet (PBUH) emphasizes empathy: *"None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."* Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 13) and Sahih Muslim (Hadith 45). The Prophet (PBUH) actively condemned racism and tribal pride. A notable incident involving Bilal ibn Rabah, a formerly enslaved African companion depicts this. When another companion insulted him, the Prophet (PBUH) said: *"You are a man in whom there is ignorance (jabiliyyah)."* Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 30).

The Prophet (PBUH) described the Muslim community as one body: *"The believers in their mutual love, mercy and compassion are like a single body. when one part aches, the whole body responds with sleeplessness and fever."* Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 6011) and Sahih Muslim (Hadith 2586).

Equality in Islam also extends to justice regardless of status. This shows that no one is above the law in Islam. To this accord, the Prophet (PBUH) said: *"By Allah, if Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad were to steal, I would cut off her hand."* Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 6788).

4. Mercy and social welfare

Islamic governance is grounded in compassion and welfare-oriented ethics. Institutions like Almsgiving systems and charitable endowment structures exist to reduce inequality and strengthen social solidarity across groups. Allah says in the Qur'an: *"And we have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds"* (Q21:107). The Prophet (PBUH) emphasized the sanctity of life, property and honour by stating *"Your blood, your property and your honour are sacred..."* Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 1739).

5. Consultation and participatory governance

Islam strongly advocates for collective decision-making, a principle deeply rooted in the Qur'an: *"And those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation (shura)"* (Q42:38). Guided by this mandate, Islamic institutions are expected to champion inclusive governance, thereby fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among diverse social and ethnic groups.

6. Public interest

Although developed by classical jurists, Public good is rooted in Qur'anic and Prophetic objectives. Islamic institutions must prioritize societal harmony, stability and welfare.

Conclusively, Prophetic teachings on equality and brotherhood reject all forms of racial, ethnic and social-superiority, they establish universal human dignity rooted in faith and piety, promote deep emotional and social bonds among believers and enforce justice equally across all members of society. Islamic institutions as agents of social integration promote these values in their applications.

The History and Role of Islamic Institutions in Nigeria

The history of Islam in Nigeria spans centuries (1068-1817 CE). It was introduced in the 11th century through the trans-Saharan trade networks and was later consolidated through the scholarly and political institutions of the Hausa–Fulani states and the Sokoto caliphate in the 18th century. These historical processes created ethnic Islamic scholarly networks that transcended narrow tribal identities by establishing ritual, legal and educational linkages across ethnic lines (Falola et al 2008).

During the colonial (1900-1960) and postcolonial periods (1960-present) in Nigeria, Islamic institutions adapted to new political environments whereby Madrasas and mosque networks coexisted with modern Islamic schools and umbrella organizations such as the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI) which sought to coordinate Muslim responses to political and social challenges. This institutional evolution left a mixed legacy where many religious structures served as channels for cross-ethnic co-operation and others have been co-opted into local patronage networks or ethnically inflected politics (Rahman 2024). Islamic institutions adapted to changing political structures while retaining significant social influence. In Nigeria, Islamic institutions are well established and operate across religious administration, education, welfare and national coordination. Today, they function across three levels:

- a) National and regional institutions such as the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) which is the highest Islamic body in Nigeria. It coordinates Muslim affairs nationally, represents Muslims in government discussions, announces moon sighting for Ramadan and Eid, promotes unity among Islamic organizations and it is widely regarded as the central public Islamic authority in Nigeria. Other influential bodies are the council of Ulama in various states, Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) which is very active in education, health and advocacy.
- b) Educational and legal institutions such as the Islamic universities, Arabic and Islamic colleges, Integrated Qur'anic schools, state-level Shari'ah and religious councils that operate in several northern states such as the Shari'ah courts that apply Islamic personal law in states like Kano, Sokoto and Zamfara, State Muslim Councils and Boards of Islamic Affairs. They play distinct roles such as marriage and inheritance cases, dispute resolution and Islamic legal guidance. In Islamic educational institutions such as Bayero University Kano, the faculty of Islamic studies is very influential. Other Nigerian universities that have strong Islamic studies departments include Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, University of Ilorin, University of Abuja and so on. Arabic and Islamic colleges (AICs) across northern Nigeria and Integrated Islamic schools combining Qur'anic and Western education are other examples.
- c) Community institutions like the Mosques, Almsgiving/Zakat foundations and Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Islamic welfare and charity organizations also provide public humanitarian services such as Zakat and Sadaqah collection bodies (state and private), orphan and widow support organizations, food and healthcare outreach groups. Some examples in Nigeria include Zakat Foundations in Kano, Lagos and Kaduna state, Islamic medical associations and NGOs all of which play a major role during Ramadan and emergencies.

Mosques are also public Islamic institutions in Nigeria such as the Abuja National Mosque (FCT), central mosque of Kano and Lagos central Mosque. They provide sermons (*khutbahs*), public religious guidance, charity distribution and community dispute mediation. Islamic media and Islamic propagation institutions shape public religious

discourse and include Islamic radio stations in Nigeria (e.g., Radio stations in Kano, Sokoto and other state), Islamic TV stations, Online Islamic scholars and organizations in Nigeria also help to spread religious education and public moral guidance.

Current Perspectives of Multi-ethnic Cohesion in Nigeria

Cohesion in this work refers to the social condition in which diverse ethnic groups maintain patterns of mutual respect, trust, shared civic identity and cooperative institutions that minimize violent conflict and encourage collective action for public good (Ossai 2024). Multi-ethnic cohesion in Nigeria is shaped by the interaction of identity, governance, economic inequality and institutional trust. While ethnic diversity remains a defining feature of Nigerian society, cohesion depends on the ability of institutions to create inclusive identities that transcend ethnic divisions (Rahman 2024).

Islamic institutions foster multi-ethnic cohesion in several ways in Nigeria. These include:

1. Educational integration and socialization

Islamic educational institutions from Qur'anic schools to modern Islamic universities bring together students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The shared religious curriculum also contains Islamic values such as brotherhood, justice and compassion which create socialization spaces where identities are restructured away from ethnicity and tribalism. Reforming curricula to include civic education, human rights and conflict resolution significantly increases the cohesion dividend. Recent studies like that of Lateef (2024), Rahman (2024) and Azuibuike (2024) call for curricular reforms and enhanced teacher training in Islamic education to improve its contribution to national integration. Practical examples include university Islamic centers and Muslim Student Societies (MSS) that host interethnic events, debates and joint community projects practices to reduce stereotypes and build networks of trust across ethnic lines.

2. Moral instruction

Religious sermons promote unity, discourage tribalism and emphasize ethical governance and social responsibility. Mosques and Islamic propagation organizations have an extensive reach in the society. Friday sermons (*Khutbahs*) and popular religious programs that emphasize the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah about human dignity and the immorality of tribal hatred shift public norms and reduce tensions.

3. Social welfare

Economic inequality often fuels ethnic tension in Nigeria. Islamic institutions use mechanisms for redistribution like obligatory alms, voluntary charity and charitable endowments which when mobilized reduce local inequalities and provide shared goods such as (schools, health clinics, and water projects) that serve multiple ethnic communities. When welfare distribution is transparent and non-discriminatory, it builds reciprocity and weakens grievances that feed identity-based conflict. Recent policy analyses emphasize the untapped potential of religious institutions to further sustainable development goals through such fiscal and philanthropic mechanisms just as Azubuike (2024) emphasized in his work titled "Harnessing religion in pursuit of sustainable development goals in Nigeria".

4. Conflict mediation and peace-building

Religious leaders often serve as trusted mediators in communal disputes. In many Nigerian localities, religious leaders are first responders in conflict situations. Their social standing allows them to convene disputing parties, broker reconciliation (*sulh*) and craft locally acceptable settlements. Religious mediation is often faster and perceived as more legitimate than court processes. Documented cases across Nigeria show how clerical mediation averts escalation in

communal clashes particularly where mediators possess credibility across rival ethnic groups. Nonetheless, success depends on the neutrality and capacity of the mediators.

5. Interfaith partnerships

Islamic institutions collaborate with Christian organizations to address common societal challenges. They engage in joint initiatives with Christian and traditional leaders thereby promoting national unity. These mechanisms align with Putnam's concept of bridging social capital.

These coalitions can jointly deliver humanitarian aid, organize peace marches and advocate for policies protecting minorities' actions that publicly model cooperation and lower multi-ethnic mistrust. Recent regional reports document the effectiveness of joint religious initiatives in reducing local tensions.

The following case studies demonstrate how the findings from the literatures adopted in this study illustrate how the mechanisms above function in practice.

- a) Umbrella organizations and national campaigns. Umbrella bodies such as the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) and Jama'atu Nasril Islam operate at national and state levels by coordinating moral messaging, humanitarian responses and advocacy for Muslims across ethnicities. Their national campaigns on issues such as COVID-19 safety, anti-radicalization and social welfare have demonstrated capacity to mobilize diverse Muslim constituencies for common causes thereby reinforcing an ethnic Islamic identity that coexists with ethnic affiliations in Nigeria.
- b) University Islamic centers and student societies. Islamic studies departments and Muslim Student Societies (MSS) at Nigerian universities provide forums for multi-ethnic mixing. Student-led interfaith and inter-ethnic initiatives such as community service, debate competitions and joint *iftars* create durable multi-ethnic friendships and leadership pipelines for cooperative civic action. Empirical studies of higher-education settings note a reduction in intergroup prejudice when students participate in shared community projects under the umbrella of religious societies as depicted in previous works like "Interfaith dialogue and peace-building" by (Smock 2002) and "Conflict, conflict resolution and peace-building: The role of religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia" by (Haynes 2009).
- c) Local Mosque-led reconciliation in communal clashes. At local levels, mosque committees and respected Imams have mediated land and resource disputes between neighboring ethnic groups by producing negotiated settlements that prevented cycles of revenge. Documented fieldwork across Nigeria indicates mediation success when religious leaders are included as they are perceived as neutral in their processes and their outcomes deliver tangible restitution or shared resources.
- d) Zakat and community development projects. Some Islamic non-governmental organizations and philanthropic individuals have established charitable endowments funded schools and clinics intentionally serving multiethnic communities. These projects demonstrate how well administered Islamic philanthropy provides shared public goods and a practical basis for cooperation across ethnic lines.

Challenges of Islamic Institutions in Fostering Multi-ethnic Cohesion in Nigeria

Despite the positive potentials, several structural and practical constraints hinder Islamic institutions contribution to multi-ethnic cohesion in Nigeria.

1. Politicization

Political actors frequently exploit religious institutions for electoral gains. When mosque leadership or umbrella organizations become entangled in politics, their neutrality and therefore their capacity to mediate multi-ethnic disputes becomes compromised. This weakens public trust and transforms religious authority into an instrument of divisive politics.

2. Institutional fragmentation

Differences among Islamic organizations often undermine collective action. Coordination failures limit the scale and coherence of peace-building initiatives. Moreover, many local institutions lack training in conflict resolution, human rights and inclusive governance which also reduces the effectiveness of mediation and social service delivery.

3. Radicalization

Extremist ideologies weaken public trust. A minority of actors promote violent or exclusionary interpretations that exacerbate distrust and undermine the reputation of mainstream Islamic institutions in Nigeria for example Boko Haram. Countering extremist narratives requires sustained theological, educational and socio-economic strategies areas where many institutions are still building capacity.

4. Economic inequalities

Poverty and unemployment continue to exacerbate ethnic tensions. Ethnic tensions often reflect deeper socio-economic inequalities such as competition over land, resources and jobs. While Islamic social welfare can alleviate local deprivation, broader macro-economic and political reforms are necessary to address structural root causes in Nigeria. Religious institutions alone cannot substitute for state policies that ensure equitable development.

5. Gender exclusion and capacity limitations

Women are often underrepresented in formal religious leadership and mediation structures in Nigeria thereby limiting the inclusiveness and resilience of peace processes. Including women and youth in religiously anchored peace initiatives strengthens legitimacy and outcome durability. Many religious leaders lack professional peace-building training.

Future Directions and Recommendations

In order to strengthen the positive role of Islamic institutions in fostering multi-ethnic cohesion, the paper proposes the following measures:

- a) Curriculum reform through the integration of civic education, peace studies and human rights into Islamic education and university curricular.
- b) Capacity Building: Training Imams and scholars in mediation, governance and communication at the national and state level with certification awarded at the end of the course.
- c) Transparent governance: Strengthening accountability in zakat and waqf systems through the development of standards such as the publication of accounts and auditing system. The encouragement of public-private-faith partnerships to scale charitable endowments-funded schools and clinics that serves multiethnic communities.
- d) De-politicization through the establishment of safeguards that protect religious institutions from political interference. For instance, the introduction of internal governance reforms like term limits for leadership, ethics codes and participatory election processes in umbrella organizations to reduce elite capture and maintain neutrality.
- e) Inclusive leadership: promotion of women and youth participation in decision-making.
- f) Interfaith cooperation: expansion of joint humanitarian and peace initiatives in Nigeria.

- g) Research and monitoring: The Government should support research initiatives and evidence-based frameworks for evaluating institutional impact.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria has long been shaped by its rich ethnic plurality and religious diversity, which simultaneously serves as a national asset and a contributing source of tension. This friction is particularly evident where ethnicity intersects with religion, politics, and competition for resources, thereby threatening national integration and social stability. This study has demonstrated that Islamic institutions play a critical role in fostering multi-ethnic cohesion through moral education, welfare distribution, conflict mediation, and interfaith engagement. Grounded in Islamic ethical principles, they possess both the normative legitimacy and organizational capacity necessary for promoting unity. Nevertheless, their effectiveness is often constrained by challenges such as politicization, fragmentation, inequality, gender exclusion, and limited institutional capacity. Ultimately, it concludes that Islamic institutions can serve as sustainable agents of multi-ethnic cohesion in Nigeria if supported through deliberate reforms and strategic partnerships among religious, state, and civil society actors.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed to the conceptualization, development and preparation of this manuscript. Abdulqadir S. M provided the primary research idea and the overall supervision of the study. Zara M. J. contributed to literature review development, sourcing of relevant scholarly materials and the initial drafting of sections of the manuscript. Maryam A. T contributed to the restructuring of the entire manuscript, refinement of arguments and the editing of the final draft.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. The research was conducted without any commercial, financial or personal relationships that could be interpreted as influencing the findings or interpretations of the study.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study did not involve human or animal subjects. All data were obtained from publicly accessible sources and did not include any personally identifiable information. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) GENERATED TEXT DECLARATION

ChatGPT was used for structural refinement specifically in the arrangement of the references in accordance with APA 7th edition standards. However, the author's retain full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity and originality of the content as no AI tools were used to fabricate data or findings.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary materials, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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