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# VIOLENCE, STATE FAILURE, AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: A RELIGIOUS AND ETHICAL ANALYSIS

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## Abstract

*Violence is now a regular occurrence in our present-day society with detrimental effects on human life and dignity. Indeed, the literal definition of violence being the absence of peace is now the experience in the Nigerian society, with vicious attacks here and there. In each region in Nigeria there are groups that are term either terrorist or extremist in bringing about the disturbance, death and destruction of lives and properties. Nigeria is faced with Boko haram in the Northeast, Bandits in the Northwest and North central, farmers herders clash in the middle belt and IPOB in the Southeast, and Oduduwa agitation in the South-south and south east. The study argues that the persistence of violence cannot be explained solely by criminality or religious extremism but is rooted in institutional weaknesses, poor governance, corruption, social inequality, and moral failures among both leaders and citizens. This paper adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology based on documentary analysis of scholarly literature, government reports, and theological and ethical writings. It argues that while the Nigerian state bears the primary constitutional responsibility for ensuring security and justice, moral responsibility for violence extends to political elites, religious institutions, traditional authorities, civil society organizations, and citizens whose actions or omissions either promote or undermine peace. From a religious perspective, the paper contends that every human being possesses inherent dignity grounded in the doctrine of the Imago Dei, thereby making the protection of human life a religious and moral imperative.*

**Keywords: Violence, State Failure, Moral Responsibility, Human Dignity, Religion, and Nigeria.**

## Introduction

Violence has emerged as one of the most persistent obstacles to Nigeria's political stability, national development, and social integration. Despite being Africa's largest economy and one of its most religiously vibrant societies, Nigeria continues to experience multiple forms of violent conflict that have claimed thousands of lives, displaced millions of people, undermined democratic institutions, and weakened public confidence in government. The proliferation of terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping for ransom, communal conflicts, electoral violence, farmer-herder clashes, and separatist agitations illustrates the complex and multidimensional

nature of insecurity within the Nigerian state. All these are signs of a weak governance and the country seating on a time bombed which if not properly managed will lead to another civil, which will be bloody because every region seems to have formed his own army for war.

The persistence of violence raises important questions concerning the effectiveness of state institutions and the moral obligations of individuals and communities. The modern state derives its legitimacy from its capacity to provide security, administer justice, protect fundamental rights, and promote the welfare of its citizens. When these responsibilities are neglected or inadequately discharged, questions concerning state failure inevitably arise. While scholars differ regarding the extent to which Nigeria should be classified as a failed or fragile state, there is growing consensus that persistent insecurity reflects significant institutional deficiencies in governance, law enforcement, judicial administration, and public accountability. It is in the light of this that Odoma (2014) opines that all regions and geopolitical zones in Nigeria have, at different times, experienced substantial losses of human and material resources due to ethnic group conflicts.

At the same time, violence cannot be understood merely as a consequence of governmental weakness. Religious institutions, political elites, traditional authorities, community leaders, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens all participate in shaping the moral environment within which violence either flourishes or diminishes. Political manipulation of ethnic identities, religious intolerance, corruption, hate speech, and the normalization of injustice contribute significantly to the perpetuation of violent conflicts. Consequently, addressing violence requires not only institutional reforms but also ethical renewal rooted in principles of justice, human dignity, and responsible citizenship.

Religion occupies a particularly significant position within the Nigerian context. Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion profoundly influence public morality, political discourse, and communal identity. Religious traditions possess considerable potential either to exacerbate conflicts through exclusivist interpretations or to promote reconciliation, forgiveness, justice, and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, any comprehensive examination of violence in Nigeria must consider the ethical and theological dimensions of public responsibility alongside political and economic explanations. From a religious and ethical perspective, responsibility for this violence extends beyond government to include political elites, religious leaders, traditional authorities, civil society, and citizens. The researchers demonstrates that state institutions bear primary responsibility for protecting citizens, while moral accountability extends to all social actors whose decisions, actions, or negligence contribute to the continuation of violence. Sustainable peace, therefore, requires an integrated approach combining institutional effectiveness, ethical leadership, social justice, and religiously informed peacebuilding initiatives.

The paper adopts a qualitative documentary research design, relying on interdisciplinary literature from political science, religious studies, ethics, philosophy, theology, peace and conflict studies, and security studies. The data collected were critically analyzed using ethical, and philosophical established analytical tools. The study seeks to contribute to contemporary discussions on the relationship between violence, governance, religion, and moral responsibility in Nigeria. To do this there will be a general introduction, conceptual

clarification of terms, dynamics of violence in Nigeria, forms of violence perpetrators in the Nigerian geo-political zones, state failure and moral responsibility, moral responsibility: religious, ethical and political implications for Nigeria state and then conclude the paper.

## Conceptual Clarifications

i. **Violence:** Violence extends beyond the mere application of physical force. Direct violence refers to observable acts such as murder, assault, terrorism, and armed conflict. Structural violence exists when political, economic, and social systems systematically deny individuals equal opportunities, thereby producing poverty, inequality, and marginalization. Cultural violence consists of beliefs, ideologies, and social practices that legitimize or normalize acts of violence. In the Nigerian context, violence encompasses physical attacks by insurgents, armed bandits, kidnappers, and communal militias, as well as institutional injustices arising from corruption, unemployment, poor governance, weak judicial systems, and unequal access to public resources. Such structural conditions frequently create environments conducive to radicalization and violent conflict.

ii. **State Failure:** The concept of state failure refers to the inability of a government to perform its essential functions, including maintaining public order, protecting citizens, enforcing the rule of law, delivering public services, and preserving territorial integrity. When armed non-state actors consistently challenge governmental authority and citizens lose confidence in public institutions, the state's legitimacy is significantly weakened. Nigeria is more accurately described as a fragile rather than a completely failed state. Government institutions continue to function, yet recurring insecurity, corruption, judicial inefficiency, and governance deficits reveal substantial institutional fragility that compromises the state's constitutional obligations.

iii. **Moral responsibility:** Moral responsibility concerns the accountability of individuals and institutions for actions that promote or undermine human flourishing. Human beings are morally accountable whenever their actions or their failure to act contribute to the suffering of others.

iv. **Human Dignity**: The fact that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, he has worth, dignity and value. This affirmation establishes the intrinsic worth of every person irrespective of ethnicity, religion, gender, social status, political affiliation, or economic condition. Human dignity is therefore neither conferred by the state nor earned through achievement; it is an inherent gift bestowed by the Creator.

v. **Religion:** This is not a simple concept to define because of the numerous and diversified nature of religion and the place it occupies in a human's life. Religion has always been part and parcel of human life right from time immemorial. Religion plays a major role in everyday life, thought and action. It gives its followers a sense of security, answer their existential question. This does not mean that religion begins with men but with God who invited people to worship him and people responses to him

**Dynamics and Forms of Violence in Nigerian Geo-Political Zones**

Nigeria is known for its multi diversity in culture and religion. The U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs - Population Division (2024 revision) reported that Nigeria is located in West Africa on the Gulf of Guinea, is Africa‟s most populous nation with the current population of 242, 368,744. It is one of the major oil producers. Its geography features a diverse landscape ranging from coastal swamps to northern arid plains and central savannas, bisected by the Niger-Benue river system. It borders Benin (west), Niger (north), Chad (northeast), and Cameroon (east). The country is divided into three main geographic regions; a coastal belt of swamps/mangroves, a central region of wooded savanna and open grassland, and a dry northern region. Nigeria is a highly diverse, multilingual country with over 250 ethnic groups, with the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the South-West, and Igbos in the South-East. English is the official language in Nigeria, with over 500 indigenous languages, mainly Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. Nigeria has abundant natural resources, with petroleum and natural gas being the primary economic drivers, making it the 13th largest producer of oil. It is also known as a major agricultural producer of crops like cocoa, cassava, and palm oil.

Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones. This zoning was introduced primarily for political, administrative, and resource-allocation purposes (it's not an official constitutional structure but is used extensively in practice for power rotation, federal appointments, resource distribution, etc.). These zones comprise of Nigeria's 36 states plus the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Over the years, Nigeria has experienced several overlapping and distinct forms of violence, and the picture has become more complex and severe over the past year. Rotberg (2004), a percipient Afro-pessimist and noted observer of global affairs, has speculated that Nigeria is one of those complex societies where a „dilution‟ or even a „crack-up‟ in the next decade and half is to be expected. Nigeria is no stranger to violence. Since the independence of Nigeria from the United Kingdom, thirty-four years have been spent under various military dictatorship, with over three years spent on a horrible civil war that claimed nearly a million lives.

Major agitation groups found in the Nigerian geo-political zones termed terrorist by the Nigerian government:

1. **Jihadist Insurgency in The Northeast**

The major sponsors of violence in the Northeast is Boko Haram, officially known as *Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da'wa wa al-Jihad* (JAS) meaning "Group of the People of Sunnah for Dawah and Jihad” and that it is the descendent of the group that in 2002 was referred to as the Nigerian Taliban (Borzello, 2004), with its origin from The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). This group has been in existence since 2002, but gained momentum in 2009 through violent attacks via bomb blast and various forms of attacks, despite counterinsurgent operations by the Nigerian military.

The first phase of the violence, was the direct confrontation with the Nigerian police and military, which culminated in the Nigerian military assault upon Muhammad Yusuf‟s compound, associated mosques, and his judicial murder, videotaped by soldiers. Hundreds of members of the group were killed with him, and it is clear that one of the lessons learned by Boko Haram for its second phase was to avoid having an obvious base (David, 2011).

Coming to the second phase, there is no doubt that the suppression operation of 2009, and the killing of Muhammad Yusuf by Nigerian security forces in July of that year, was a turning point for Boko Haram. In September 2010 (coinciding with Ramadan), however, Boko Haram carried out a prison break (said to have released some 700 prisoners), (BBC, September 8, 2010) and the group began operations again. It is in this light that David, (2011) framed Boko Haram as potentially a homegrown Salafi-jihadi group capable of destabilizing Nigeria for the foreseeable future, tracing its ideological roots back to the 19th-century jihad of Usuman Dan Fodio, who built a caliphate across northern Nigeria between 1802-1812. More than 40,000 people have lost their lives since the insurgency began in 2009, thousands of schools and health centers destroyed, and vast agricultural areas rendered inaccessible, with over two million people still displaced in the northeast alone.

## 2. Banditry Violence and Mass Kidnapping in Northwest/North-Central

This form of violence since 2011 is mostly believe to be between herders and farmers communities over scarce resources. This violence has escalated in northwest and northcentral part of Nigeria. Largely in response to these growing tensions, armed groups and gangs, the so-called "bandits" formed and expanded. Some began as protective vigilante groups: **Lakurawa**, for instance, initially emerged in 2017 as a vigilante group welcomed by rural communities to protect them from bandit violence, before transforming into a serious security threat combining militant Islamist governance perpetrating murder, rape, kidnapping, organized cattle-rustling and plunder, possibly amounting to crimes against humanity (The Soufan Center). This was the reason it was designated as a terrorist group in 2025.

Escalation of violence over the years (2024–2026):

i. Kidnappings for ransom rose sharply from the start of 2024, with hundreds abducted across northern Nigeria in February–March alone. Nextier recorded 2,452 people kidnapped in 2024 with a 31% rise over 2023's 1,878 victims. (EUAA).
ii. Drastically increased in 2025 with a particular target on schools: more than 600 school-related kidnapping cases were recorded in 2025 alone, according to the NGO Global Rights Nigeria (over 2,200 children kidnapped from schools in the past decade overall). (The New Humanitarian, 2026).
iii. In November 2025, at least 402 people, mostly schoolchildren, were kidnapped across four north-central states in a single wave surpassing the scale of the 2014 Chibok kidnapping. (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2026)

vi. In late January 2026, more than 160 worshippers were abducted, and on 3 February 2026, an armed group attacked two Muslim-majority villages in Kwara State, killing over 160 people and abducting dozens more. (Nnamdi Obasi, 2026).

i. Violence across northern Nigeria killed more than 10,200 civilians in the 18 months between early 2023 and mid-2025, according to researcher Onyedikachi Madueke, who

notes insecurity is now reshaping daily rural life families abandoning homes, food supply chains disrupting, school attendance falling. (Africa Defense Forum, 2026).

From the statistics above, schools are easy targets, because they are poorly protected, and mass abductions force state governments under intense public pressure to negotiate with bandits, whose ransom demands are usually paid, knowing that abducting students provides money, visibility, and power, while reinforcing the perception of state failure in politically sensitive regions. Despite Nigeria's Safe Schools Initiative (over $30 million mobilized as of 2021) and a National Plan for Financing Safe Schools proposing over ₦144.77 billion for 2023–2026, mass school abductions have continued largely unabated attributed by critics to corruption and negligence in implementation. (Eurasia Review, 2025).

### 3. Intercommunal or Farmer-Herder Violence in the Middle Belt.

In the middle belt mostly the north central part of Nigeria, there has been a long-running series of disputes over arable land between Fulani herders and non-Fulani farmers (indigens). These conflicts have been especially prominent in the Middle Belt (North Central) since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, and have deteriorated over time into direct attacks on farmers by Fulani herders. Once governed by seasonal cooperation between farmers and pastoralists, competition over land and water has intensified amid population growth, erratic rainfall, and the southward movement of herders from drought-affected northern areas.

The conflict has taken on ethnic and religious dimensions: many farmers are Christians of various ethnicities, while most herders are Muslim Fulani though attacks have also hit Hausa Muslim farmers in the Northwest, and Fulani farming communities have themselves been attacked by Fulani bandits and other militias (Salkida Ahmad, 2020). Analysts caution against oversimplifying this as purely religious, most especially in the northern part of Nigeria, where the population is largely Muslim, most farming communities targeted in similar attacks are also predominantly Muslim.

Scale of the violence over the years

i. The Middle Belt region recorded roughly 1,800 deaths from herder-farmer conflicts in earlier tracking periods, with over 7,000 fatalities in Benue State alone between 2015 and 2020. (Taylor & Francis, 2021).
ii. Since 2018, this violence across Central and West Africa has killed more than 15,000 people, with most conflicts and casualties concentrated in

iii. Nigeria. (Akinwotu, 2021)
iv. Between 2023 and May 2025, over 6,800 people were murdered in Benue State alone, while over 2,600 were killed in Plateau State in coordinated assaults attributed to suspected armed groups, including herders. (*Africa at LSE.* 2025)
v. Since 2021, at least 930 people have died in farmer-herder violence in Benue State, with more than half a million residents displaced. In Plateau, more than 1,100 deaths have been recorded since 2021. (The Authority News, 2026).

The most key flashpoints of these attacks are in Benue State, Plateau Sate and Southern part of Kaduna state. Benue State over the years has suffered some of the worst attacks recorded, due to its fertility and Nigeria's fertile "breadbasket" region. For example, in June 2025,

coordinated night raids on five villages in Guma Local Government Area (the Yelwata massacre) killed around 200 people overnight. Attackers were armed with rifles, machetes, and fuel struck as families slept, one of the deadliest incidents in recent memory. Also in May 2025, coordinated night-and-dawn assaults across Benue communities killed 42 people. (Businessday NG, 2026).

Plateau State has long experienced recurrent intercommunal violence rooted in tensions over land, political representation, and the contested "indigene" versus "settler" divide, often framed along ethnic and religious lines between Christian farming communities and Muslim pastoralist groups. In April 2025, gunmen killed at least 52 people in the Mwaghavul Chiefdom, sending nearly 2,000 residents fleeing (*The Authority News, 2026*). Also, on the 30 of March 2026, motorcycle-mounted gunmen killed at least 20 people at Angwan Rukuba in Jos North. (The Authority News, 2026).

Southern Kaduna and Nasarawa have also emerged as recurring sites of violence, with attacks in Kahir village (Southern Kaduna) killing 13, wounding 10, and leading to 28 abductions in one recent raid. In all of these clashes, the active debate over the years has been whether "farmer-herder clash" is even the right term. Local leaders in Benue, notably Professor James Ayatse, the Tor Tiv has rejected that framing outrightly, describing the violence as a "full-scale genocidal invasion and land-grabbing campaign" aimed at displacing farming communities from valuable, fertile land rather than resolving grazing disputes. (*Africa at LSE,* 2025). Attacks follow a consistent pattern: attackers arrive by motorcycle at night in coordinated waves, heavily armed, then burn homes so survivors can't return sometimes hitting the same districts repeatedly across seasons.

### b. Separatist Violence in The Southeast

The emergence of The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) can be traced back to the Nigerian Civil War, when the southeast, homeland of the Igbo ethnic group, attempted to secede as the Republic of Biafra in 1967, triggering a three-year civil war that killed more than 1 million people. This group traces its roots to the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which was founded in 1999 by Chief Ralph Uwazurike (Abba, Ani, Ayatse & Agullah, 2023). **Nnamdi Kanu**, a British-Nigerian dual citizen born in 1967 in Umuahia (within the claimed Biafran territory), began his activism as director of Radio Biafra in 2009, broadcasting calls for an independent Igbo state from London, which led to him forming IPOB in 2012, and the Nigerian government banned it as a terrorist organization in 2017.

IPOB's armed wing, the **Eastern Security Network (ESN)**, has been accused of violent attacks. Tensions escalated sharply in early 2021: after the Nigerian military attempted to expel the ESN from Orlu, Imo State in January, fighting broke out, and by February 18, 2021, IPOB declared that a state of war existed between Nigeria and Biafra, prompting separatist groups to mobilize against security forces across several southern states. Kanu has maintained that IPOB sought a non-violent path to independence and that the ESN was meant to fight bandits rather than the state but Nigerian authorities have consistently held that his broadcasts incited

violence. It is in the light of this, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), as at 2023 reported that the security situation in Nigeria's Southeast revealed a troubling shift (Gavin, 2023).

Nnamdi Kanu's arrest and extradition in June 2021 triggered intensified protests, the strict enforcement of sit-at-home orders, and the rise of the Eastern Security Network, which escalated agitation into armed resistance. (Omiunu, Funmilayo I & Ezirim, Gerald Ekene, 2025). His trial and sentenced to prison is one that has defeated the Igbos trust in the Nigerian government and makes the agitation of this group still ongoing.

### State Failure and Moral Responsibility:

State failure refers to the inability or unwillingness of a government to perform its fundamental responsibilities, including maintaining security, enforcing the rule of law, protecting the rights of citizens, delivering essential public services, and preserving territorial integrity. The concept has become increasingly significant in political science, security studies, and governance discourse because it provides a framework for evaluating the effectiveness and legitimacy of state institutions. Although the notion of state failure remains contested, scholars generally agree that a state is considered fragile or failed when it lacks either the institutional capacity or the political will to provide security, ensure justice, promote development, and maintain social order (Rotberg, 2004; Zartman, 1995).

The modern conception of the state is closely associated with Max Weber's understanding of the state as the institution that successfully claims the legitimate monopoly of the use of physical force within a defined territory (Weber, 1946). This monopoly is exercised through constitutional authority and institutional mechanisms such as the military, the police, and the judiciary, whose primary responsibility is to protect lives and property while preserving public order. Consequently, when non-state actors including insurgents, armed bandits, kidnappers, militias, and other criminal organizations consistently challenge governmental authority with little effective resistance, the legitimacy and effectiveness of the state become increasingly compromised.

Nigeria presents a compelling case for examining the dynamics of state fragility. While the country continues to maintain functioning governmental institutions and therefore cannot be accurately classified as a completely failed state, persistent insecurity, institutional weaknesses, and governance deficits reveal significant characteristics of state fragility. These challenges have weakened public confidence in governmental institutions and undermined the

state's constitutional responsibility to guarantee the security and welfare of its citizens.

One of the clearest indicators of state failure in Nigeria is the inability of security institutions to provide adequate protection for citizens. In Nigeria, this is reflected in their inability to protect lives and properties, slow and ineffective responses to violent attacks, poor intelligence gathering and coordination among security agencies. Limited capacity to prevent terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and communal violence and the persistency of these security challenges has weakened public confidence in the state's ability to guarantee safety and maintain public order. Corruption constitutes another major indicator of state failure. Resources allocated for critical sectors such as security, infrastructure, and social welfare are frequently diverted

through embezzlement, mismanagement, or political patronage. Such practices weaken public institutions, reduce the effectiveness of government programmes, and create conditions that foster insecurity and social discontent.

The rule of law is fundamental to a functioning democratic state. However, state failure becomes evident when legal institutions are unable to administer justice fairly and effectively. In Nigeria, there are cases of selective application of justice, widespread impunity for influential individuals and criminal groups. Delayed prosecution and prolonged judicial processes and weak enforcement of laws and court judgments. These deficiencies erode public confidence in the justice system and encourage criminal behavior.

Poor governance is another significant indicator of state failure. Governance deficits often manifest in high unemployment rates and widespread poverty. Inadequate educational opportunities, weak healthcare systems and social exclusion and economic inequality. These

structural challenges create fertile ground for violent extremism, organized crime, and social unrest by fostering frustration, marginalization, and hopelessness among affected populations. A further indicator of state failure is the inability of government to exercise effective authority over all parts of its territory. In some rural communities in Nigeria, criminal organizations, insurgent groups, and armed bandits have, at various times, exercised de facto control by imposing illegal taxes, restricting movement, attacking communities, and undermining governmental authority. Such developments demonstrate the weakening of state sovereignty and highlight the urgent need for institutional reforms to restore public confidence and national security.

Moral responsibility in violence is not merely a political or security problem; it is fundamentally a moral problem because it involves deliberate actions and omissions that undermine human dignity, violate justice, and destroy the conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence. While analyses of violence in Nigeria frequently emphasize terrorism, criminality, weak governance, or economic deprivation, these explanations remain incomplete unless they are situated within a broader ethical framework of responsibility. Moral responsibility concerns the obligations of individuals, institutions, and communities to act in ways that preserve life, promote justice, and safeguard the common good. Consequently, the persistence of violence in Nigeria reflects not only institutional weaknesses but also failures of moral leadership, ethical accountability, and civic responsibility.

From the perspective of moral philosophy, responsibility extends beyond direct participation in acts of violence. Individuals and institutions may also bear responsibility through negligence, indifference, complicity, silence, or the failure to prevent foreseeable harm. Paul Ricoeur argues that ethical responsibility requires individuals to evaluate both the consequences of their actions and their obligations toward others within society (2001). Similarly, Emmanuel Levinas maintains that the vulnerability of the other person imposes an ethical obligation that precedes political or legal considerations (1998). Human beings are therefore morally accountable whenever their decisions, omissions, or institutional practices contribute to the suffering of others. Within the Nigerian context, moral responsibility is necessarily shared among multiple actors. Although government bears the primary constitutional responsibility for ensuring security, sustainable peace cannot be achieved unless political leaders, religious

institutions, traditional authorities, civil society organizations, educational institutions, the media, and ordinary citizens collectively embrace their ethical obligations. Violence flourishes where responsibility is neglected, accountability is absent, and injustice becomes normalized.

**Religious, Ethical and Political Implications for Nigeria State**

i. **Violation of Human Dignity:** The foremost ethical implication of violence is the violation of the intrinsic dignity of the human person. Christian theology affirms that every human being is created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) (Genesis 1:26–27); therefore, every act of terrorism, kidnapping, murder, rape, torture, and displacement constitutes a direct assault on God's image. Likewise, African communitarian ethics views every individual as an integral member of the community whose well-being contributes to the flourishing of society. Violence destroys this sacred dignity and undermines the moral foundations of communal life.

ii. **Breaking down of Justice and Rule of Law:** Persistent violence and institutional weakness weaken the rule of law and encourage a culture of impunity. When criminals, insurgents, or corrupt public officials are not held accountable, citizens lose confidence in legal institutions and may resort to vigilantism or self-help. Ethically, justice demands impartiality, accountability, and equal protection under the law. A state that cannot uphold justice fails in one of its most fundamental moral obligations.

iii. **Erosion of Public Trust:** State failure diminishes public confidence in government institutions. Citizens expect government to protect life, secure property, and promote the common good. When these expectations remain unmet, trust in public institutions deteriorates. This erosion of trust weakens democratic participation, reduces civic responsibility, and creates an environment in which conspiracy theories, fear, and social fragmentation flourish.

iv. **Moral Failure of Leadership:** Leadership is fundamentally an ethical vocation. Political leaders who tolerate corruption, manipulate ethnic or religious identities, or neglect public welfare violate the moral principles of justice, stewardship, and accountability. From a Christian perspective, leadership is a sacred trust exercised in service to others (Mark 10:42–45). Ethical leadership requires integrity, transparency, compassion, and commitment to the common good rather than personal or sectional interests.

v. **Weakening of Social Cohesion:** Violence deepens divisions based on ethnicity, religion, region, and politics. Suspicion, fear, and hostility replace trust and cooperation, making national integration increasingly difficult. African communitarian philosophy emphasizes solidarity, mutual care, and communal responsibility. Violence undermines these values and weakens the moral bonds that hold society together.

vi. **Threat to the Common Good:** The common good refers to the social conditions that enable all members of society to flourish. Violence diverts public resources from education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic development toward emergency

security responses. As a result, poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion are reinforced. Ethically, this represents a failure to pursue policies that benefit the entire society.

vii. **Ethical Responsibility of the Religious Institution:** Religious institutions have a moral obligation to promote peace, justice, reconciliation, and respect for human dignity. Silence in the face of injustice or the misuse of religion to justify violence represents a failure of prophetic witness. Churches, mosques, and traditional religious communities are called to denounce violence, encourage forgiveness, facilitate dialogue, and advocate for policies that protect the vulnerable.

viii. **Responsibility of the Citizens**: Citizens also bear ethical responsibility. Those who participate in electoral violence, spread hate speech, shelter criminals, pay or receive bribes, or remain indifferent to injustice contribute, directly or indirectly, to the persistence of violence. Responsible citizenship requires obedience to the law, respect for others, civic participation, and active commitment to peacebuilding.

ix. **Moral Imperative to Peacebuilding:** The ethical response to violence extends beyond condemning wrongdoing; it includes actively pursuing peace, reconciliation, and justice. Christian ethics calls believers to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9), seek justice (Micah 6:8), and overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21). Similarly, African ethical traditions encourage restorative justice, dialogue, communal healing, and the rebuilding of broken relationships. Governments, religious leaders, traditional institutions, civil society, and citizens therefore share a collective moral responsibility to address both the immediate manifestations of violence and the structural conditions that sustain it.

**Possible Solutions to Conflicts in Nigeria**

i. The government should implement the land governance reform in the digitizing and harmonizing land records, mapping cattle corridors, stronger rural policing, disruption of illicit funding networks (kidnapping, mining), and inclusive peace committees, plus integrated early-warning systems linking villages, vigilantes, and security forces.
ii. Beyond communal tensions, armed groups increasingly finance operations through kidnapping, cattle rustling, and illicit mining making the conflict self-sustaining rather than purely resource-driven.
iii. The 2017 Open Grazing Prohibition Law should be implemented. It will help in curb conflict and crime, and also help in stalling cattle movement.
iv. Government should listen to the South-south agitation and dialogue with them in bringing a lasting solution to this agitation.
v. Repentant Boko haram members should not be integrated into the society and the Nigerian army; the law must take its cause on them for the safety of the society and

Nigerian citizens.

## Conclusion

Violence in Nigeria manifests in multiple forms, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, ethno-religious conflict, farmer-herder clashes, electoral violence, and organized crime. These challenges expose significant weaknesses in governance, security, and the rule of law that can

be understood as elements of state failure. At the same time, addressing violence is a shared moral responsibility. Governments must provide security and justice, political and religious leaders must reject divisive rhetoric, security agencies must uphold professionalism and human rights, and citizens must actively contribute to peacebuilding. Sustainable peace in Nigeria requires institutional reform, accountable leadership, socio-economic development, and a renewed ethical commitment to the dignity and flourishing of every person. Sustainable peace in Nigeria requires not only institutional reforms and effective security governance but also moral transformation, ethical leadership, interreligious dialogue, and a renewed commitment to justice, accountability, and the common good.

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