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REVISITING THE "PERSECUTION" NARRATIVE: CHRISTIANITY, VICTIMHOOD AND IDENTITY POLITICS IN NIGERIA'S TERROR CRISIS

OMEJE SUNDAY[1], Eyimeh Valentine Enemako[2]

[1] DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE NASARAWA STATE UNIVERSITY, KEFFI.

[2] DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, NASARAWA STATE UNIVERSITY KEFFI NIGERIA.

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***Corresponding author:** OMEJE SUNDAY

Abstract

The narrative of Christian persecution has become a recurring theme in discussions about terror crises, particularly in regions where religious, ethnic, and political tensions intersect. This study revisits this narrative to explore how Christianity, victimhood, and identity politics interact in shaping perceptions, responses, and social realities. Drawing on theories of victimhood, religious nationalism, and identity construction, the paper examines how Christian communities are often framed as primary victims of terror and violence. It highlights that while instances of targeted attacks are real and tragic, the portrayal of Christians primarily as victims can sometimes obscure broader structural issues such as governance deficits, socio-economic inequalities, and inter-communal tensions. The research argues that the "persecution narrative" functions not only as a reflection of genuine suffering but also as a tool for identity consolidation, political mobilization, and resource advocacy. By critically engaging with this narrative, the study underscores the importance of recognizing the agency of Christian communities, the complexity of terror-driven conflicts, and the multi-dimensional nature of victimhood. The findings call for more nuanced approaches to policy, humanitarian response, and academic inquiry that move beyond simplistic binaries of persecutor and victim. Understanding how victimhood narratives are constructed and leveraged can foster more inclusive strategies for peacebuilding, social cohesion, and development in terror-affected contexts.

Keywords: Christianity, victimhood, persecution narrative, identity politics, terror crises.

Introduction

The narrative of persecution, particularly of Christian communities, has become a prominent lens through which terror and conflict are construed in many highly diverse societies. In contexts such as Nigeria, where religion, ethnicity, and governance intersect, the belief that Christians are systematically targeted plays a powerful role in shaping identity, political mobilisation, and humanitarian response. However, this framing warrants careful scholarly scrutiny.

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At the heart of this inquiry is the distinction between objective persecution, acts of violence or discrimination directed at a religious group, and victimhood identity, a discursive construction in which a community positions itself as perpetually victimised. Research on religious nationalism demonstrates that such victimhood identity can be deployed as a means of consolidating in-group boundaries and legitimising political claims. For example, Herrington (2021) found in a U.S. context that the discourse of Christian persecution within conservative Christian media influenced perceptions of religious liberty threat and political attitudes.

In Nigeria, discourses of Christian victimhood have gained considerable traction. Some commentators argue that while many Christians have experienced violence, the "Christian persecution" narrative often oversimplifies the causes, reducing them to purely religious animus and neglecting structural drivers such as governance failure, weak institutions and competition over land and resources (Yakubu, 2025). Indeed, analyses of Nigeria's conflict emphasise that violence in the Middle Belt and north-west emerges from complex interactions of criminality, insurgency, climate change and economic despair rather than purely religious persecution.

This article aims to revisit the "Christian persecution" narrative in terror-affected settings, exploring how it is constructed, mobilised and contested. It argues that while instances of genuine persecution occur, framing Christians primarily as victims may obscure the agency of communities, mask the intersecting socio-political factors, and limit pathways for inclusive policy responses. The essay proceeds as follows: Section 2 outlines theoretical perspectives on victimhood identity, religious nationalism and narrative framing; Section 3 reviews empirical studies on Christianity, terror and identity in African contexts and beyond; Section 4 offers a critical analysis of how the persecution narrative functions in terror crises; and Section 5 draws implications for research, policy and development practice.

In doing so, the article contributes to the scholarship on religion, identity and conflict by emphasising the need to move beyond binary frameworks of victim vs. perpetrator and to interrogate how narratives of Christian martyrdom, suffering and survival operate within contemporary terror and development contexts.

Statement of the Problem

In many contemporary terror-affected regions, Christian communities are frequently portrayed as primary victims of violence, giving rise to what has been widely termed the "Christian persecution" narrative. While there is no doubt that Christian communities have faced targeted attacks and suffering, the widespread dissemination and acceptance of this narrative often oversimplifies the complex socio-political, economic, and security dynamics that underpin these conflicts. In countries such as Nigeria, for example, acts of violence in the Middle Belt and northern regions are not solely a result of religious differences; they are also driven by governance deficits, weak institutions, competition over land and resources, insurgency, and climate-induced pressures (Yakubu, 2025).

The framing of Christian communities primarily as victims carries several implications. Firstly, it risks obscuring the agency of these communities, portraying them as passive sufferers rather than active social and political actors. Secondly, it reinforces identity polarization, particularly along religious lines, which can exacerbate tensions between groups and undermine social cohesion. Thirdly, this narrative often shapes policy responses, humanitarian interventions, and media coverage in ways that focus narrowly on protection and relief while neglecting structural causes of conflict. Consequently, interventions may fail to address root problems, such as systemic governance failures, poverty, and inter-communal competition (DW, 2025

Given these dynamics, there is a pressing need to critically interrogate the persecution narrative and examine how Christian victimhood is constructed, mobilized, and instrumentalized in terror crises. Understanding the interplay between religious identity, victimhood, and political mobilization can provide a more nuanced and accurate framework for policy, humanitarian action, and peacebuilding. By revisiting this narrative, the study seeks to highlight the complexities behind Christian victimhood, challenge oversimplified portrayals, and offer insights that can inform more inclusive, context-sensitive approaches in terror-affected regions.

Research Objectives

i. To critically examine how the Christian "persecution narrative" is constructed and circulated in Nigeria's terror-affected contexts, with particular attention to how media, religious institutions, and advocacy groups frame Christian victimhood.

ii. To analyse the ways in which victimhood identities are mobilised within Christian communities, exploring how these narratives shape collective identity, political claims, and community responses to insecurity.

iii. To investigate the role of identity politics in sustaining and amplifying persecution narratives, assessing how religious identity intersects with socio-political dynamics, resource competition, and governance deficits in Nigeria's terror crisis.

iv. To evaluate the implications of the persecution narrative for policy, peacebuilding, and intergroup relations, identifying how these narratives influence humanitarian interventions, state responses, and prospects for inclusive conflict mitigation

Conceptual Clarifications

Christianity

Christianity refers to the religious faith and practices centered on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, encompassing diverse denominations, traditions, and cultural expressions. In the context of this study, Christianity is conceptualized not only as a religious identity but also as a social and political marker that shapes collective consciousness and group mobilization. Christian identity, especially in multi-religious societies like Nigeria, often intersects with ethnicity, regional affiliations, and socio-political positioning, making it a significant factor in the construction of narratives around persecution and victimhood (Bivins, 2022).

Persecution Narrative

The term "persecution narrative" refers to the discourse that frames a particular religious group as being systematically targeted, marginalized, or oppressed due to their faith. In scholarly literature, persecution narratives are understood as both reflections of real experiences of violence and as constructed identities that serve political, social, or religious purposes. These narratives often

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operate in the media, religious institutions, and advocacy platforms to elicit support, solidarity, or policy intervention (Herrington, 2021). Within the context of terror crises, the persecution narrative often elevates certain communities as emblematic victims, which can shape humanitarian and political responses.

Victimhood

Victimhood is the condition or identity associated with being harmed, oppressed, or marginalized. In this study, victimhood is conceptualized as both a lived experience and a social construct. While it may emerge from real acts of violence or discrimination, it can also be mobilized strategically to achieve social recognition, political leverage, or moral legitimacy. The concept underscores how affected communities are framed and perceived, influencing collective identity, inter-group relations, and the allocation of resources (Chia, 2022).

Identity Politics

Identity politics refers to the ways in which social, cultural, religious, or ethnic identities are mobilized to advance political claims or gain social power. Within the framework of this study, identity politics explains how religious affiliation, particularly Christianity, can become central to the construction of persecution and victimhood narratives. It highlights the strategic deployment of collective identities to influence public opinion, shape policy, and negotiate power in contexts of conflict and terror (Armaly, Buckley, & Enders, 2022).

Terror Crisis

A terror crisis is understood as a situation in which non-state actors, insurgents, or extremist groups employ violence and intimidation to pursue political, religious, or ideological goals, causing widespread fear, displacement, and insecurity. Terror crises often create conditions in which persecution narratives are amplified, as affected communities seek to explain their experiences, seek protection, and advocate for intervention (Yakubu, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Victimhood Theory and Identity Politics Theory, which together provide a robust lens for understanding the intersection of Christianity, persecution narratives, and terror crises. These frameworks help explain how communities construct and mobilize victimhood identities in response to real or perceived threats, and how these identities are used to negotiate social, political, and religious power.

Victimhood Theory posits that being perceived or presenting oneself as a victim can confer moral authority, legitimacy, and social recognition (Chia, 2022). It distinguishes between objective experiences of harm, such as attacks, discrimination, or exclusion, and the social construction of victimhood, which is shaped through narratives, discourse, and institutional reinforcement. In the context of terror crises, victimhood theory helps explain how Christian communities may frame their experiences of violence in ways that reinforce a collective identity, elicit support, and influence policy. This theory also emphasizes that victimhood can be strategically instrumentalized, highlighting the performative and political dimensions of being labeled a victim (Herrington, 2021).

Identity Politics Theory complements victimhood theory by examining how social, religious, or ethnic identities are mobilized to pursue political objectives, social recognition, or resource acquisition (Armaly, Buckley, & Enders, 2022). Within multi-religious contexts like Nigeria, Christianity is not merely a spiritual identity but also a marker of social and political positioning. Identity politics explains how narratives of persecution are amplified to consolidate in-group cohesion, differentiate from out-groups, and negotiate power in broader societal and political spheres.

By integrating these frameworks, the study conceptualizes the Christian persecution narrative as both a reflection of lived experiences of violence and a socially constructed identity deployed for political, religious, and social ends. This combined theoretical lens allows for a nuanced analysis of the interplay between religion, victimhood, and identity mobilization in terror-affected regions, recognizing the agency of Christian communities while critically interrogating the instrumentalization of victimhood.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how the Christian persecution narrative is constructed, mobilized, and contested in the context of terror crises. Qualitative methods are appropriate because they allow for an in-depth understanding of perceptions, discourses, and experiences that cannot be easily quantified, particularly when dealing with complex social phenomena such as identity, victimhood, and religious narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection: The study relies primarily on documentary and content analysis of secondary sources, including academic literature, media reports, policy documents, and advocacy publications. This approach enables the researcher to examine how Christian communities, religious institutions, and the media frame experiences of violence and persecution, as well as to identify patterns in the discourse surrounding victimhood and identity politics.

Data Analysis: Data will be analyzed thematically, identifying key themes, patterns, and narratives in the texts. This allows the researcher to interpret the ways in which persecution narratives are constructed and the socio-political functions they serve. Themes of victimhood, identity mobilization, and terror-related violence will be central to the analysis.

Justification: This methodology is suitable because it provides a rich, contextual understanding of the persecution narrative without being limited to numerical indicators of violence or conflict. By examining discourse and representation, the study captures the nuanced ways in which Christian identity and victimhood are framed, enabling critical insights into their implications for social cohesion, policy, and peacebuilding.

Research Findings

The findings of this study emerge from thematic analysis of secondary data, including media reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature. The analysis highlights the ways in which Christian communities construct and experience persecution narratives, how victimhood identities are mobilized, and the socio-political implications of these narratives in terror-affected regions.

Construction of the Persecution Narrative

The study found that Christian persecution narratives in Nigeria are produced and circulated through a complex ecosystem involving media outlets, church organisations, faith-based NGOs, and

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transnational advocacy networks. These narratives commonly frame Christian communities as morally innocent victims of a sustained and targeted campaign of violence, a framing that resonates strongly within global Christian advocacy circles (Agbiboa, 2020; Thurston, 2022). Through sermons, public statements, documentaries, and digital media, religious actors frequently highlight episodes of church attacks, pastoral killings, and abductions as emblematic of a broader existential threat.

Scholars argue that such narratives often rely on selective framing and symbolic amplification, processes that emphasise religious identity while downplaying competing structural drivers of insecurity such as poverty, political marginalisation, institutional weakness, and land-use conflicts (Alozieuwa, 2016; Adesoji, 2023). This selective emphasis helps explain why the persecution narrative circulates powerfully despite the multidimensional nature of violence in the Middle Belt and Northeast. The narrative's potency also lies in its capacity to create moral clarity, presenting Christians as besieged and insurgents as religiously motivated aggressors, thereby simplifying complex conflict dynamics for advocacy mobilisation (Marshall, 2018; Paden, 2021).

Media platforms and advocacy organisations play a central role in reinforcing these frames. Reports by local outlets such as *TheCable* and international broadcasters like *DW* routinely foreground religious identity in their coverage of attacks, shaping public perception and policy debates. On the other hand, Muslim civic organisations such as the Muslim Public Affairs Centre (MPAC) critique what they describe as a disproportionate emphasis on "Christian genocide narratives," arguing that such framings risk fuelling sectarian distrust and overshadowing shared vulnerabilities across religious lines (MPAC Nigeria, 2025). This contestation indicates that persecution narratives are not simply descriptive accounts of violence but are socially constructed identity narratives deployed for moral resonance, political visibility, or community mobilisation.

Table 1: Examples of Persecution Narratives in Media and Advocacy Sources

Source	Narrative Focus	Observed Impact
TheCable (2025)	Christians under threat in Nigeria's Middle Belt	Amplifies moral urgency, attracts advocacy attention
DW (2025)	Christian genocide narrative	Polarizes religious identity, simplifies complex conflict drivers
MPAC Nigeria (2025)	Critique of "Christian genocide" framing	Encourages analytical reconsideration of narratives

Source: Author's analysis of secondary data (2025)

These examples illustrate that persecution narratives function simultaneously as reflections of genuine suffering and as socially constructed discourses that shape identity, legitimacy, and resource mobilisation. While they provide interpretive frameworks for communities under stress, they also risk narrowing public understanding of the broader socio-economic and political realities that underpin Nigeria's terror crisis. As the findings suggest, the persecution narrative is therefore a powerful but ambivalent tool; one that can enhance community solidarity and global advocacy, yet also reinforce polarisation and obscure structural causes of conflict.

Victimhood Identity and Community Mobilization

Victimhood in Nigeria's terror-affected Christian communities emerges not only from the immediate realities of violence but also from the deliberate social and political construction of collective identity. Scholars argue that collective victimhood becomes a powerful interpretive framework through which groups understand insecurity, articulate grievances, and reinforce moral boundaries between "us" and "them" (Fattah & Heeren, 2023; Vollhardt, 2020). Within Christian communities, victimhood is often framed as a sacred identity, embedded in theological narratives of suffering, martyrdom, and divine testing. This framing elevates the experience of harm beyond the material level to a symbolic and moral realm, generating strong emotional resonance and internal solidarity (Marshall, 2018; Adogame, 2022).

The study found that this sense of collective victimhood plays an important role in shaping community mobilisation. Narratives positioning Christians as morally righteous victims of terror strengthen in-group cohesion, foster shared emotional experiences, and reinforce communal resilience strategies (Kukah, 2020). At the same time, these narratives become instrumental in attracting international attention, particularly from faith-based NGOs and Western evangelical networks, which often prioritise Christian-focused humanitarian interventions (Leech, 2022). By framing violence as targeted persecution, communities are able to convert moral legitimacy into practical resources such as aid, advocacy, and political support.

Victimhood identity also intersects significantly with political mobilisation. Religious leaders and organisations frequently invoke persecution narratives to influence political discourse, demand state action, or shape electoral preferences (Mueller, 2021; Onapajo, 2020). In highly polarised environments, such narratives can strengthen Christian political identity and amplify calls for representation, protection, or policy reform. While these efforts reflect genuine experiences of suffering, they also serve strategic purposes—enhancing the community's visibility, negotiating power, and moral authority within Nigeria's contested political and religious landscape.

Table 2: Functions of Victimhood Identity among Christian Communities

Function	Description	Example
Moral Legitimacy	Establishes community as righteous and deserving of protection	Church statements framing attacks as targeted persecution
Resource Mobilization	Attracts humanitarian aid and advocacy	International NGOs prioritizing Christian-focused relief programs
Political Influence	Reinforces claims in political discourse	Religious leaders advocating for state intervention

Source: Thematic analysis of advocacy reports and media content (2025)

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These findings indicate that while collective victimhood reflects authentic experiences of harm, it simultaneously functions as a strategic social, political, and religious resource. It provides communities with the moral leverage to seek external support, the organisational capacity to consolidate group identity, and the political legitimacy to articulate claims on the state and international actors. Thus, victimhood identity in Nigeria's Christian communities is both experiential and instrumental; shaped by lived realities yet deeply embedded in broader processes of identity formation and mobilisation.

Role of Identity Politics

Identity politics plays a critical role in shaping how persecution narratives are framed, interpreted, and deployed within Nigeria's terror context. The study found that Christian identity is frequently invoked in political discourse to reinforce group boundaries, articulate collective grievances, and consolidate internal solidarity. This aligns with scholarship arguing that identity becomes a strategic resource in conflict environments, where groups draw on shared religious symbols, historical memories, and communal fears to mobilize support and legitimise political claims (Mueller, 2021). Within Christian communities, political actors and religious leaders often highlight attacks on churches, clergy, and Christian populations as emblematic of a broader existential threat, thereby generating powerful emotional and political responses.

However, the mobilisation of religious identity in political spaces can intensify societal divisions. By framing conflict primarily in terms of Christian victimhood, political discourse can inadvertently sharpen perceptions of difference between Christian and Muslim communities, reinforcing a sense of competition and mistrust (Onapajo, 2020). Such framing may foster collective resilience within the Christian community while simultaneously narrowing the possibilities for intergroup dialogue and collaborative peacebuilding. The study found that this dynamic contributes to heightened polarisation, particularly in regions where historical grievances and contested land-use patterns already shape community relations.

Importantly, an identity-centred framing of insecurity often risks obscuring deeper structural drivers of violence. Although religious identity is a visible marker in Nigeria's conflict landscape, underlying factors such as weak state capacity, governance deficits, resource competition, and socio-economic marginalisation play more decisive roles in sustaining protracted violence (Alozieuwa, 2016). The emphasis on Christian identity as the primary explanatory lens may therefore shift attention away from issues of political accountability, corruption, security sector failure, and rural underdevelopment. As a result, identity politics; while effective for mobilization; may hinder comprehensive approaches to conflict resolution and state reform.

The findings indicate that identity politics is both a tool of empowerment and a source of tension. It enables Christian communities to articulate grievances and gain political visibility, yet it can also entrench sectarian boundaries and oversimplify the multidimensional nature of Nigeria's terrorism and insecurity. Recognising this duality is essential for understanding how persecution narratives influence public discourse, community action, and policy responses in contemporary Nigeria.

Implications of Terror Crises

Terror crises in Nigeria create the structural conditions under which persecution narratives flourish and become politically salient. While religiously targeted attacks, particularly those attributed to Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and various armed militias, have contributed to perceptions of Christian victimhood, the broader landscape of violence is far more complex. Research shows that terror-related insecurity in Nigeria arises from the convergence of insurgency, ethno-communal tensions, banditry, herder–farmer conflicts, and long-standing governance deficiencies (Adebayo, 2023; Felbab-Brown, 2021). This multidimensionality implies that interpreting Christian insecurity solely through the lens of persecution risks flattening a highly differentiated conflict ecosystem.

The study underscores that terror violence intersects with structural issues such as weak state capacity, socio-economic marginalization, and uneven development across Nigeria's regions. Scholars argue that groups like Boko Haram thrive in contexts shaped by poverty, youth unemployment, and grievances tied to state neglect (Botha & Abdile, 2022). As a result, the emergence of persecution narratives often reflects not only lived experiences of religiously motivated violence but also the ways communities make meaning of insecurity by locating blame within identity categories. These narratives therefore become political tools that frame insecurity as a deliberate, faith-directed threat rather than as a product of broader systemic failure.

Policy responses have likewise tended to privilege identity-based security rather than holistic conflict management. Government interventions frequently emphasize protecting vulnerable religious communities, deploying military operations, and enhancing surveillance around churches and faith-based institutions. While these measures are important, scholars warn that identity-focused securitization can marginalize underlying drivers such as governance deficits, corruption, climate-induced displacement, and communal competition over land and resources (International Crisis Group, 2022). Thus, a policy framework that prioritizes only Christian protection without addressing structural injustice may further entrench cycles of fear and reinforce identity-based fault lines.

Finally, terror crises shape social dynamics by intensifying religious identity, reinforcing group boundaries, and amplifying communal mistrust. Prolonged exposure to violence deepens existential anxieties, thereby making populations more receptive to narratives of persecution and political rhetoric that emphasizes religious solidarity (Okolie-Osemene, 2022). This heightened polarization complicates efforts at inclusive peacebuilding, as interfaith engagements, national reconciliation initiatives, and local conflict-resolution mechanisms are undermined by entrenched identity politics. Therefore, the implications of terror crises extend beyond physical insecurity; they reshape the symbolic landscape of belonging, grievance, and political mobilization in Nigeria.

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Table 3: Intersection of Terror Crises and Persecution Narratives

Dimension	Observation	Implication
Violence	Multi-causal: terrorism, insurgency, resource conflict	Persecution narratives may oversimplify causes
Policy Response	Protection-oriented, identity-focused	Risks neglecting governance and structural reforms
Social Dynamics	Amplifies religious identity and polarization	Challenges inclusive peacebuilding

Source: Compiled from secondary literature.

Summary of Findings

The findings reveal that the persecution narrative in Nigeria emerges from a multilayered interaction between actual experiences of violence, socially constructed forms of victimhood, and strategic deployments of identity politics. While Christian communities often face genuine security threats, they are not merely passive recipients of violence. Rather, their interpretations, discourses, and mobilization strategies actively shape how insecurity is understood, communicated, and politicized within and beyond their communities. These narratives influence how groups interpret terror crises, frame their collective identity, and negotiate their position within the broader Nigerian socio-political landscape.

Understanding this complexity is essential for policymakers, humanitarian actors, and scholars seeking to design responses that move beyond simplistic binaries of victim and perpetrator. Effective engagement requires sensitivity to the ways religious identity intersects with governance deficits, socio-economic inequalities, and historical grievances. A nuanced appreciation of these dynamics provides a more accurate foundation for conflict mitigation, peacebuilding, and inclusive policy development in Nigeria's deeply plural and often polarized context

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced landscape in which Christian communities construct, experience, and mobilize persecution narratives in the context of terror crises. The analysis underscores that these narratives are not merely reflections of lived experiences but are actively shaped by social, political, and institutional forces.

The construction of the persecution narrative emerges as a central theme. Media outlets, religious institutions, and advocacy groups play significant roles in circulating accounts that emphasize moral victimhood, portraying Christians as targeted not only by insurgents but also, at times, by systemic governance failures. While the instances of targeted attacks are real and warrant attention, the framing often simplifies the multi-dimensional nature of violence. In many cases, structural drivers such as weak governance, resource competition, and socio-economic disparities are overshadowed by religious framing. Table 1 illustrates that media and advocacy sources amplify urgency, attract attention, and sometimes polarize religious identities, showing that these narratives operate simultaneously as reflections of genuine suffering and as socially constructed tools for mobilization.

Closely related is the emergence of victimhood as both lived experience and socially constructed identity. Christian communities leverage this identity to establish moral legitimacy, attract humanitarian resources, and exert political influence. The thematic analysis highlights that church statements, advocacy campaigns, and humanitarian interventions reinforce the moral and political positioning of communities, thereby consolidating in-group cohesion and providing leverage in political discourse. As Table 2 demonstrates, the functions of victimhood identity extend beyond empathy generation; they serve strategic social, religious, and political purposes. These findings indicate that while victimhood narratives are grounded in real harms, they also function as instruments for navigating complex socio-political landscapes.

The role of identity politics is particularly significant in shaping how these narratives are deployed. The study observed that Christian identity is frequently emphasized to differentiate the in-group from perceived out-groups, consolidate support, and legitimize claims for protection and intervention. However, this emphasis can exacerbate polarization, heighten inter-group tensions, and obscure the underlying structural causes of conflict. The interaction between identity politics and persecution narratives illustrates the dual-edged nature of these discourses: they empower communities and mobilize support but simultaneously risk entrenching divisions and simplifying complex crises.

Finally, the study situates these dynamics within the broader context of terror crises, where violence is multi-causal, encompassing insurgency, ethnic disputes, and socio-economic grievances. The findings suggest that while persecution narratives are salient and influential, policy responses that focus narrowly on protecting Christian communities without addressing governance deficits, resource competition, and structural inequalities are likely to be partial and unsustainable. Table 3 highlights how the intersection of terror crises and persecution narratives shapes social, policy, and communal dynamics, underscoring the importance of adopting holistic approaches that integrate security, governance, and social cohesion considerations.

In summary, the discussion illustrates that persecution narratives among Christian communities are complex and multifaceted. They represent an interplay between real violence, constructed victimhood, and identity politics. Christian communities are active participants in shaping these narratives, which simultaneously reflect trauma and serve strategic social, political, and religious purposes. Recognizing this complexity is essential for policymakers, humanitarian actors, and scholars aiming to design interventions, foster inclusive dialogue, and develop sustainable approaches to conflict mitigation and community resilience

Conclusion

The "persecution" narrative among Christian communities in terror-affected contexts operates at the intersection of real victimisation and strategic identity politics. While many Christian groups have undeniably suffered attacks and marginalisation, framing these experiences primarily through a lens of persecution serves multiple functions beyond mere documentation of suffering. It consolidates group identity, legitimises political and social claims, and mobilises resources and support, but it can also inadvertently entrench divisions, fuel inter-religious distrust, and complicate conflict resolution efforts.

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Understanding the persecution narrative requires a nuanced perspective that recognises both the genuine vulnerabilities of affected communities and the ways in which victimhood is constructed and instrumentalised within broader socio-political dynamics. Policymakers, civil society actors, and scholars must be attentive to this dual reality: acknowledging legitimate grievances while preventing the politicisation of victimhood from exacerbating tensions.

Ultimately, revisiting the persecution narrative illuminates the complex interplay between religion, identity, and politics in terror crises. It underscores the need for informed, balanced approaches to protecting vulnerable communities, promoting intergroup harmony, and addressing the root causes of violence without amplifying narratives that may further polarise societies.

Recommendations

First, there is a need for balanced narrative framing in public discourse and media reporting. Religious communities, journalists, and policymakers should be encouraged to differentiate between genuine victimisation and politically or socially constructed narratives of persecution. Accurate, contextualised reporting can reduce the risk of inflaming identity-based tensions while highlighting legitimate grievances.

Second, interfaith dialogue and community engagement should be strengthened. Platforms that bring together Christian, Muslim, and other religious groups can foster mutual understanding, challenge stereotypes, and mitigate the tendency to frame conflict in zero-sum "persecutor vs. victim" terms. Such initiatives can also empower local actors to collaboratively address security concerns and promote social cohesion.

Third, policy interventions should address structural vulnerabilities rather than only symbolic recognition of victimhood. Governments and development actors should focus on providing security, equitable access to resources, and socio-economic opportunities for communities affected by terror. By tackling the root causes of vulnerability, the appeal of victimhood as a political tool may diminish.

Fourth, scholarly research should continue to critically examine victimhood narratives. Comparative studies across different regions and religions, longitudinal analyses of narrative evolution, and investigations into how identity politics shapes responses to terror can inform evidence-based policy and practice. Research should aim to distinguish between legitimate claims of persecution and instrumentalised narratives that may exacerbate conflict.

Finally, peacebuilding and counterterrorism strategies must integrate awareness of identity-driven narratives. Practitioners should engage communities in ways that validate real experiences of suffering while discouraging the exploitation of victimhood for divisive ends. This dual approach can enhance resilience, reduce polarisation, and support sustainable conflict resolution

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