

JUSTICE, COMPASSION, AND COEXISTENCE: REVIVING AND INTERPRETING ISLAMIC ETHICS OF TOLERANCE IN NIGERIA'S PLURALISTIC CONTEXT

By

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Abstract

Religious diversity in Northern Nigeria has historically oscillated between peaceful coexistence and violent conflict, often driven by misinterpretations of religious teachings, politicisation of faith identities, and socio-economic inequalities. This study explores the revival and interpretation of authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance as a framework for addressing these challenges. Drawing upon Qur'anic injunctions, Prophetic traditions, and classical as well as modern scholarly perspectives, the research emphasises justice, compassion, coexistence, and respect for diversity as central ethical imperatives in Islam. Beyond revival, the study highlights the importance of interpretive clarity, showing how inclusive tafsir and contextual readings of Islamic texts can counter exclusivist narratives and sectarian divides. A qualitative research design with thematic analysis is adopted, employing documentary review of primary Islamic sources (Qur'an and Hadith), classical works (Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali), and contemporary scholarship (Sachedina, Aderibigbe, Kukah). Through thematic coding, recurring values such as freedom of belief, pluralism, mercy, and justice were identified, while gaps in current scholarship and practice were highlighted, particularly the lack of operational and interpretive frameworks for applying these ethics within Nigeria's pluralistic and politically charged environment. The objectives of the study are threefold: (1) to examine how authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance, derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical scholarship, can be applied to address religious diversity and conflict in Northern Nigeria; (2) to

identify specific gaps between Islamic ethical imperatives of tolerance and their current application in interfaith relations; and (3) to propose a framework that revives and interprets Islamic principles of justice, compassion, and coexistence as tools for peace building. Findings suggest that reviving and correctly interpreting these ethics can provide practical strategies for reconciliation and coexistence. The study recommends curriculum integration of interfaith ethics, clerical training in inclusive tafsir and peace building, media engagement to promote tolerant narratives, government enforcement of equal rights, and grassroots community initiatives to foster dialogue and cooperation.

Keywords: Islamic tolerance, Interfaith dialogue, Qur'an, Northern Nigeria, Peace building

Introduction

Religious diversity has historically been both a source of enrichment and tension in pluralistic societies. In Nigeria, particularly in the Northern region, the coexistence of Muslims, Christians, and adherents of traditional religions has often oscillated between peaceful interaction and violent conflict (Ibrahim, 2017; Mustapha, 2018). The persistence of interfaith clashes in Kaduna, Jos, and Kano underscores the urgent need for frameworks that can foster harmony and justice among communities of faith. Against this backdrop, Islamic teachings, rooted in the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), and classical scholarly interpretations offer a robust ethical foundation for tolerance and coexistence. Reviving these authentic Islamic ethics is not merely a theological exercise but a practical necessity for addressing contemporary religious conflicts in Northern Nigeria, where faith identities are deeply intertwined with ethnic, political, and socio-economic realities (Hunwick, 2003).

The Qur'an establishes tolerance as a core principle of faith, emphasizing freedom of belief, justice, and respect for diversity. Verses such as "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256) and "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another" (Qur'an 49:13) highlight Islam's recognition of pluralism as part of divine wisdom (Ali, 2006). These verses discourage coercion and superiority, instead promoting dialogue, compassion, and mutual

respect. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) Constitution of Madinah (622 CE) institutionalized coexistence by guaranteeing rights and protections for Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike (Hashmi, 2012). Such historical precedents demonstrate that tolerance is not peripheral but central to Islamic ethics, providing a model for contemporary societies grappling with religious diversity. In the Nigerian context, these teachings can serve as a moral compass for interfaith relations, countering narratives of exclusivism and intolerance.

Classical and modern scholars have further elaborated on the ethical imperatives of tolerance in Islam. Al-Farabi (1985) viewed religion as a symbolic representation of universal truths, thereby legitimising diverse paths to the same essence of truth. Al-Ghazali (1998) emphasised rahmah (mercy) and humility as the foundation of tolerance, urging Muslims to engage with others through kindness rather than coercion. Al-Bustani (1993), though a Christian intellectual, advanced the discourse on tolerance by linking it to human dignity and rights, underscoring the universality of coexistence. These perspectives collectively reinforce the idea that tolerance is not only a theological principle but also a philosophical and ethical necessity. In the Nigerian context, where religious identity often intersects with political grievances, such scholarly insights can help reframe interfaith relations around justice, compassion, and shared humanity.

Reviving authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance is particularly critical for addressing the recurring conflicts in Northern Nigeria. The region's historical trajectory, from the introduction of Islam through trans-Saharan trade in the 11th century, to the Sokoto Caliphate under Usman dan Fodio in the 18th century, and the arrival of Christianity in the 19th century, has created a complex religious landscape (Hunwick, 2003; Ayandele, 1966). Contemporary conflicts, however, are often fueled by misinterpretations of religious teachings, politicisation of faith identities, and socio-economic inequalities (Mustapha, 2018). By returning to the Qur'anic injunctions of justice and the Prophet's model of coexistence, Nigerian communities can cultivate a culture of tolerance that transcends sectarian divides. This study therefore seeks to examine Qur'anic, Prophetic, and scholarly perspectives on tolerance, situating them within Nigeria's religious diversity, and advocating for their revival as a pathway to peace building and conflict resolution.

Statement of the Problem

Religious diversity in Northern Nigeria has historically oscillated between peaceful coexistence and violent conflict, creating a persistent challenge for social harmony and national stability. The region, home to Muslims, Christians, and adherents of traditional religions, has witnessed recurring clashes in Kaduna, Jos, and Kano, often fueled by misinterpretations of religious teachings, politicisation of faith identities, and socio-economic inequalities. These conflicts not only undermine interfaith relations but also erode trust among communities, perpetuating cycles of violence and marginalisation. Despite the rich ethical teachings within Islam that emphasize tolerance, justice, and compassion, such as the Qur'anic injunction "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256), these principles are frequently overshadowed by exclusivist narratives and sectarian agendas. The failure to revive and apply authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance in addressing religious diversity has left Northern Nigeria vulnerable to instability, threatening both communal peace and national development.

Several scholars have attempted to address the problem of religious intolerance and conflict in Nigeria using diverse methodologies and approaches. Ibrahim (2017), in *Religion and Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, employed qualitative field interviews and case studies to highlight how interfaith clashes are often rooted in socio-political grievances rather than purely doctrinal disputes. Mustapha (2018), in *Ethnic and Religious Violence in Nigeria*, adopted a mixed-method approach combining historical analysis with survey data to demonstrate the intersection of religion and politics in fueling violence. Hunwick (2003), in *Religion and National Identity in Nigeria*, used historical-archival methodology to situate the trajectory of Islam and Christianity as a backdrop to contemporary tensions. Hashmi (2012), in *The Constitution of Madinah and Modern Coexistence*, applied comparative textual analysis to draw attention to the Prophet Muhammad's precedent for coexistence. Ali (2006), in *Islam and Pluralism*, emphasized Qur'anic teachings on justice and diversity through exegetical analysis. Classical scholars such as Al-Farabi (1985) in *Religion and Philosophy* and Al-Ghazali (1998) in *The Revival of Religious Sciences* underscored tolerance as a philosophical and ethical necessity, linking it to mercy, humility, and universal truths. These works collectively provide valuable insights into the

ethical imperatives of tolerance and coexistence, yet their application to the Nigerian context remains limited, often overshadowed by political manipulation of religious identities and inadequate institutional frameworks for peace building.

Despite these contributions, significant gaps remain in the scholarship and practice of interfaith tolerance in Northern Nigeria. Much of the existing literature either emphasises historical analysis or theological principles without adequately bridging them to contemporary realities of conflict resolution. Furthermore, while scholars have highlighted the ethical imperatives of tolerance in Islam, there is insufficient focus on how these principles can be operationalised within Nigeria's pluralistic and politically charged environment. The intersection of religion with ethnic identity, political grievances, and socio-economic inequalities requires a more integrated framework that not only revives authentic Islamic ethics but also contextualizes them within Nigeria's unique challenges. This study therefore, seeks to fill this gap by situating Qur'anic, Prophetic, and scholarly perspectives on tolerance within the lived realities of Northern Nigeria, offering a practical pathway for peace building and conflict resolution that transcends sectarian divides and fosters genuine coexistence.

Research Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to examine how authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance, derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical scholarship can be applied to address religious diversity and conflict in Northern Nigeria.

To achieve this aim, the study sets out the following specific objectives to:

1. Identify specific gaps between Islamic ethical imperatives of tolerance and their current application in interfaith relations within Northern Nigeria.
2. Propose a practical framework that revives Islamic principles of justice, compassion, and coexistence as tools for peace building and reconciliation in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised to guide the study:

1. How can authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical scholarship be practically applied to address religious diversity and conflict in Northern Nigeria?
2. What specific gaps exist between the ethical imperatives of tolerance in Islamic teachings and their current application in interfaith relations within Northern Nigeria?
3. In what ways can the revival of Islamic principles of justice, compassion, and coexistence provide an operational framework for peace building and reconciliation in Nigeria's pluralistic and politically charged environment?

Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design with a thematic analytical approach, chosen to explore the ethical principles of tolerance in Islam and their relevance to interfaith relations in Northern Nigeria. This design is appropriate because the research seeks to interpret meanings, values, and ethical imperatives rather than quantify variables, focusing on how Qur'anic injunctions, Prophetic traditions, and scholarly perspectives can be revived to address religious diversity and conflict. Data collection is based on documentary analysis of primary Islamic sources (Qur'an and Hadith), classical scholarly works (e.g., Al-Farabi's *Al-Madina al-Fadila*, Al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*), and contemporary academic contributions (e.g., Sachedina, 2001; Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Kukah, 2020). These texts are purposively selected for their relevance to interfaith tolerance and their contextual applicability to Nigeria's pluralistic society. The data analysis process follows thematic coding: first, Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions are examined to identify recurring ethical themes such as justice, compassion, coexistence, and respect for diversity; second, classical and modern scholarly interpretations are reviewed to refine these categories; and third, the themes are contextualised within Nigeria's historical and contemporary interfaith conflicts in Kaduna, Jos, and Kano. This thematic approach allows for the systematic identification of patterns across diverse sources, ensuring that findings are both theoretically grounded and practically

relevant. The methodology thus bridges scripture, prophetic practice, and scholarly discourse with lived realities, producing a nuanced framework for reviving authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance as a pathway to peace building and conflict resolution in Northern Nigeria.

Literature Review

Qur'anic Foundations of Justice and Compassion

Justice and compassion are central to the Islamic conception of tolerance, forming the ethical foundation for peaceful coexistence among diverse communities. Qur'anic injunctions emphasize fairness, mercy, and respect for human dignity, discouraging coercion and hostility in interfaith relations. For example, Qur'an 16:125 states: "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best." While primarily understood in the context of da'wah (Islamic outreach), exegetical interpretations highlight that the verse embodies principles of justice and compassion by urging Muslims to engage others with wisdom, fairness, and respect. Justice in Islam extends beyond legal frameworks to encompass moral responsibility, ensuring equitable treatment of all people regardless of faith. Compassion, likewise, is seen as a divine attribute that Muslims are encouraged to embody in their interactions, fostering dialogue and mutual respect. Together, these values establish tolerance not as a peripheral virtue but as a core ethical principle guiding interfaith relations.

Prophetic traditions reinforce this Qur'anic foundation by demonstrating how justice and compassion were applied in practice. The Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) Constitution of Madinah institutionalized coexistence by safeguarding the rights of Muslims, Jews, and Christians, while treaties such as the one with the Christians of Najran guaranteed freedom of worship and protection of property (Hashmi, 2012; El-Wakil, 2021). These examples illustrate that justice was operationalised in governance and community relations, ensuring fairness across religious boundaries. Compassion was equally central, as seen in the Prophet's emphasis on kindness and the prohibition of oppression, extending protection to non-Muslims under Muslim rule. His sayings, such as "Do not oppress anyone, and do not humiliate anyone" (Sahih Muslim, 2583), highlight the moral responsibility to uphold dignity and fairness. These traditions demonstrate that tolerance in Islam is inseparable from justice and

compassion, forming a practical framework for coexistence that transcends sectarian divides.

Western philosophical traditions provide complementary perspectives on justice and tolerance, offering points of convergence and divergence with Islamic thought. Thinkers such as John Locke, in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), emphasized freedom of conscience and the separation of religious authority from political governance, advocating tolerance as a civic necessity. Similarly, John Stuart Mill, in *On Liberty* (1859), argued for individual freedom and the protection of minority views as essential to justice and social progress. While these traditions often frame tolerance in terms of individual rights and secular governance, Islamic teachings ground tolerance in divine justice and moral responsibility. The convergence lies in the shared emphasis on fairness, respect, and coexistence, while the divergence reflects differing foundations—Western thought often rooted in rational humanism, and Islamic thought in divine revelation and ethical responsibility. By situating Qur’anic, Prophetic, and scholarly perspectives alongside Western philosophical traditions, it becomes clear that both traditions underscore justice and compassion as indispensable to tolerance. This comparative lens enriches the discourse, showing that reviving authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance in contexts like Northern Nigeria not only aligns with global philosophical ideals but also offers a culturally grounded pathway to peace building.

Qur'anic Foundations of Interfaith Tolerance

The Qur’an establishes tolerance as a fundamental principle of faith, emphasizing freedom of belief, justice, and respect for diversity. One of the most frequently cited verses is “There is no compulsion in religion” (Qur’an 2:256), which underscores the principle that faith must be a matter of personal conviction rather than coercion. Scholars such as Aderibigbe et al. (2023) argue that this verse reflects Islam’s recognition of human dignity and freedom of conscience, thereby discouraging forced conversions and promoting peaceful coexistence. Similarly, Qur’an 5:48 states: “To each of you We prescribed a law and a path. Had Allah willed, He would have made you one nation, but His plan is to test you in what He hath given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues.” Abdulaziz Sachedina (2001) interprets this verse as

evidence of Islam's theological pluralism, acknowledging diversity as part of divine wisdom and encouraging competition in goodness rather than conflict. These verses collectively highlight that tolerance in Islam is not peripheral but central, providing a moral compass for interfaith relations in pluralistic societies such as Nigeria.

Beyond freedom of belief, the Qur'an also emphasises justice and compassion as essential dimensions of tolerance. Qur'an 16:125 — "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best" — is often cited in the context of da'wah, but exegetical scholars such as Esposito (2016) and Abbas (2020) note that its emphasis on wisdom and respectful dialogue reflects broader ethical imperatives of fairness and compassion in interfaith engagement. Justice in this context is not limited to legal adjudication but extends to equitable treatment of all people, while compassion reflects the divine attribute of mercy that Muslims are urged to embody. Qur'an 29:46 further reinforces this principle: "Do not argue with the People of the Book except in a way that is best, except for those who do wrong." This verse advocates courteous dialogue and highlights Islam's openness to cooperation with Jews and Christians, balancing firmness in belief with compassion in interaction. Such injunctions provide a framework for Muslims to engage with religious diversity constructively, ensuring that tolerance is grounded in both justice and mercy.

The Qur'an also situates tolerance within the broader recognition of shared humanity. Qur'an 49:13 declares: "O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." This verse, widely cited in interfaith scholarship, emphasizes equality and mutual recognition over superiority, urging Muslims to engage others with humility and justice. Contemporary scholars such as Sachedina (2001) and Aderibigbe et al. (2023) highlight that this verse provides a theological foundation for pluralism, situating diversity as part of God's plan rather than a source of division. In the Nigerian context, where religious identity often intersects with ethnic and political grievances, these Qur'anic principles offer a powerful ethical framework for peace building. Grounding tolerance in freedom of belief, justice, compassion, and shared

humanity, the Qur'an provides not only theological guidance but also practical tools for fostering coexistence in multi-religious societies.

Prophetic Foundation on Interfaith Tolerance

The prophetic traditions provide a practical demonstration of how tolerance, justice, and compassion were applied in interfaith relations during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (SAW). His leadership in Madinah was marked by inclusivity and fairness, exemplified in the Constitution of Madinah (622 CE), which guaranteed rights and protections for Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike. Scholars such as Hashmi (2012) and Esposito (2016) note that this document institutionalized coexistence by establishing a pluralistic community where diverse groups could live under a shared framework of justice. The Prophet's approach to governance reflected a commitment to equality and mutual respect, ensuring that, religious minorities were not marginalized but integrated into the social fabric. This precedent demonstrates that tolerance in Islam is not merely theoretical but was operationalized in political and social structures, providing a model for contemporary societies grappling with religious diversity.

Beyond governance, the Prophet Muhammad's treaties and interactions with non-Muslim communities further illustrate the ethical imperatives of tolerance. The Treaty with the Christians of Najran guaranteed freedom of worship, protection of property, and exemption from military service, reflecting Islam's protection of religious minorities (El-Wakil, 2021). These agreements highlight the Prophet's emphasis on justice and compassion, ensuring that non-Muslims were treated with dignity and fairness. His sayings reinforce this principle, such as "Do not oppress anyone, and do not humiliate anyone" (Sahih Muslim, 2583), which underscores the moral responsibility to uphold human dignity regardless of faith. The prohibition against harming non-Muslims under covenant — "Whoever kills a person having a treaty with the Muslims shall not smell the fragrance of paradise" (Sahih Bukhari, 3166) — further demonstrates Islam's commitment to protecting minorities. Contemporary scholars such as Abbas (2020) argue that these traditions provide a robust ethical framework for interfaith relations, emphasizing that tolerance must be grounded in justice and compassion.

The Prophet also emphasised kindness and avoidance of harm as foundational principles of tolerance. His teachings, such as “Be kind to all creatures, and you will be loved by the One in the heavens” (Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith 4943), extend compassion beyond Muslims to all humanity, encouraging harmonious relationships across faith boundaries. Similarly, the warning that “Whoever harms a non-Muslim under Muslim protection, I will be his opponent on the Day of Judgment” (Sunan Abu Dawud, Hadith 3052) underscores the seriousness of safeguarding the rights of minorities. Modern scholarship, including Aderibigbe et al. (2023), highlights that these prophetic traditions align with contemporary peace building principles, situating tolerance as both a moral and social necessity. Integrating justice, compassion, and kindness into interfaith relations, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) provided a lived example of coexistence that remains relevant today. In contexts such as Northern Nigeria, where religious diversity often intersects with political and ethnic tensions, these prophetic foundations offer a practical model for fostering peace and mutual respect.

The prophetic foundations of interfaith tolerance serve as a practical extension of the Qur’anic principles of justice, compassion, and freedom of belief. While the Qur’an provides the ethical framework, emphasising respect for diversity (Qur’an 49:13), freedom of conscience (Qur’an 2:256), and fairness in dialogue (Qur’an 29:46), the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) operationalized these teachings through treaties, governance, and personal conduct. His establishment of the Constitution of Madinah and the Treaty with the Christians of Najran exemplify how Qur’anic injunctions were translated into concrete policies that safeguarded minority rights and promoted coexistence (Hashmi, 2012; El-Wakil, 2021). Contemporary scholars such as Aderibigbe et al. (2023) and Abbas (2020) emphasize that this synergy between scripture and prophetic practice demonstrates Islam’s holistic approach to tolerance: it is both a divine command and a lived reality. In contexts like Northern Nigeria, where religious diversity often intersects with political and ethnic tensions, this integration of Qur’anic ethics and prophetic traditions offers a comprehensive model for peace building, showing that tolerance is not abstract but a practical necessity for sustaining pluralistic societies.

Need for Interfaith in the Nigerian Context: Scholarly Perspectives

The scholarly discourse on interfaith tolerance in Islam spans classical, modern, and contemporary contributions, each emphasising justice, compassion, and coexistence as ethical imperatives. Al-Farabi (1985), in *Al-Madina al-Fadila* (The Virtuous City), conceptualized religion as a symbolic representation of philosophical truths, accessible to the masses through narratives and laws, thereby legitimizing diverse paths to truth and fostering coexistence. Imam Al-Ghazali (1998), in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, emphasized *rahmah* (mercy) and humility as the foundation of tolerance, urging Muslims to engage others with kindness and avoid arrogance in interfaith relations. Al-Bustani (1993), though a Christian intellectual, advanced the discourse by linking tolerance to human dignity and rights, underscoring the universality of coexistence beyond religious boundaries. Contemporary scholars such as Sachedina (2001) and Aderibigbe et al. (2023) have expanded these perspectives, highlighting that tolerance in Islam is not peripheral but central, rooted in justice, compassion, and respect for diversity. Collectively, these scholarly contributions demonstrate that tolerance is both a spiritual command and a philosophical principle, offering a framework for interfaith harmony in pluralistic societies.

Nigeria's religious diversity, particularly in the Northern region, underscores the urgent need for frameworks of tolerance that can foster peaceful coexistence. Historically, Islam entered Northern Nigeria through trans-Saharan trade in the 11th century and gained prominence during the Sokoto Caliphate under Usman dan Fodio in the 18th century, while Christianity spread through missionary activities in the 19th century (Hunwick, 2003; Ayandele, 1966). This layered history created a complex religious landscape where faith identities are deeply intertwined with ethnic and political affiliations. Contemporary conflicts in Kaduna, Jos, and Kano illustrate how religious differences often intersect with socio-economic grievances, fueling violence and mistrust (Ibrahim, 2017; Mustapha, 2018). Scholars such as Kukah (2020) argue that, these conflicts are less about theology and more about political manipulation of religious identities, highlighting the need to revive authentic religious ethics that emphasize justice and coexistence. In this context, Islamic teachings on tolerance provide a moral compass for

addressing Nigeria's interfaith challenges, offering pathways to reconciliation and peace building.

Despite the rich scholarly discourse on tolerance, significant gaps remain in applying these principles to Nigeria's contemporary realities. Much of the literature emphasizes historical analysis or theological ideals without adequately contextualising them within Nigeria's pluralistic and politically charged environment. For instance, while Qur'anic injunctions and prophetic traditions emphasise justice and compassion, their operationalization in modern governance and interfaith relations remains underexplored. Current studies, such as Aderibigbe et al. (2023), highlight the importance of integrating tolerance into education and public discourse, but there is limited focus on how these principles can be institutionalised in Nigeria's socio-political structures. This study therefore seeks to bridge this gap by situating Qur'anic, Prophetic, and scholarly perspectives within the lived realities of Northern Nigeria, offering a framework that not only revives authentic Islamic ethics but also contextualises them as practical tools for peace building.

Operational Framework in Nigeria's Context

For the revival of authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance to move beyond theory into practice, it must be explicitly operationalised within Nigeria's pluralistic and politically sensitive environment. This requires embedding the principles of justice, compassion, coexistence, and respect for diversity into institutional, educational, and community structures.

Curriculum Integration: Incorporate interfaith ethics into civic education, Islamic studies, and peace studies curricula at all levels of schooling. This ensures that future generations internalize tolerance as a moral and civic responsibility.

Clerical Training: Establish structured programs for imams and religious leaders, focusing on inclusive tafsir and peace-building skills. Certification schemes and partnerships with universities or interfaith councils can professionalize this training.

Media Engagement: Collaborate with local radio, television, and social media platforms to disseminate narratives of tolerance. Qur'anic verses

and Prophetic traditions should be communicated in accessible formats to counter exclusivist rhetoric.

Government Enforcement: Strengthen anti-discrimination laws and ensure equal rights protections for all religious groups. Legal frameworks must be backed by enforcement mechanisms to prevent marginalisation.

Grassroots Initiatives: Support community-level dialogue forums and joint projects—such as youth empowerment, health campaigns, and local governance that foster cooperation across religious boundaries.

Thematic Analysis

Research Question 1: *How can authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance derived from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical scholarship be practically applied to address religious diversity and conflict in Northern Nigeria?*

The thematic analysis of Qur'anic injunctions reveals recurring themes of freedom of belief, justice, compassion, and respect for diversity. Verses such as Qur'an 2:256 ("There is no compulsion in religion") and Qur'an 49:13 ("We have created you into nations and tribes that you may know one another") emphasise pluralism as part of divine wisdom, discouraging coercion and superiority. These themes are reinforced by Prophetic traditions, including the Constitution of Madinah and the Treaty with the Christians of Najran, which institutionalized coexistence and safeguarded minority rights (Hashmi, 2012; El-Wakil, 2021). Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali (1998) further highlight rahmah (mercy) and humility as ethical imperatives, while Al-Farabi (1985) legitimises diverse religious paths as symbolic representations of universal truths. The thematic convergence across scripture, Prophetic practice, and scholarship demonstrates that tolerance is not peripheral but central to Islamic ethics. Applied to Northern Nigeria, these themes provide a moral compass for interfaith relations, offering practical strategies such as dialogue, equitable governance, and compassion-driven peace building to counter exclusivist narratives and sectarian divides.

Research Question 2: *What specific gaps exist between the ethical imperatives of tolerance in Islamic teachings and their current application in interfaith relations within Northern Nigeria?*

The thematic review of existing scholarship highlights a gap between theological ideals and practical application. While scholars such as Ibrahim (2017) and Mustapha (2018) emphasise that interfaith clashes are often rooted in socio-political grievances rather than doctrinal disputes, much of the literature remains focused on historical analysis or abstract theological principles. For example, Hunwick (2003) situates Islam and Christianity within Nigeria's historical trajectory, while Ali (2006) emphasizes Qur'anic pluralism through exegetical analysis. These works provide valuable insights but often fail to bridge scripture and scholarship with contemporary realities of governance, socio-economic inequality, and political manipulation of religious identities. The thematic gap lies in the lack of operational frameworks that translate Islamic ethics of tolerance into institutional policies, educational curricula, and community-level interventions. Furthermore, while classical scholars underscore mercy, humility, and coexistence, their insights are rarely contextualized within Nigeria's pluralistic and politically charged environment. This disconnect leaves Northern Nigeria vulnerable to cycles of violence, as ethical imperatives remain underutilized in practice.

Research Question 3: *In what ways can the revival of Islamic principles of justice, compassion, and coexistence provide an operational framework for peace building and reconciliation in Nigeria's pluralistic and politically charged environment?*

The thematic synthesis suggests that reviving Islamic ethics of tolerance can fill these gaps by providing an integrated framework that bridges scripture, Prophetic practice, and scholarly discourse with Nigeria's lived realities. Themes of justice, compassion, and coexistence can be operationalised through curriculum integration, clerical training, and inclusive governance, as recommended in the document. For instance, embedding Qur'anic principles of pluralism (Qur'an 5:48) and Prophetic models of coexistence into educational and clerical training can reshape interfaith narratives, while policies grounded in justice and equality can counter political manipulation of religious identities. Contemporary scholarship, such as Aderibigbe et al. (2023), emphasizes the importance of fostering tolerance through education and public discourse, aligning with the thematic findings of this study. Situating these ethical principles within Nigeria's socio-political structures, the study proposes a practical pathway for peace building that transcends

sectarian divides. Thus, reviving authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance not only enriches scholarly discourse but also provides actionable strategies for conflict resolution and interfaith harmony in Northern Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the centrality of authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance in addressing religious diversity and conflict in Northern Nigeria. The thematic analysis revealed that, the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, and classical scholarship consistently emphasise justice, compassion, coexistence, and respect for diversity as foundational principles. Qur'anic injunctions such as "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256) and "We have created you into nations and tribes that you may know one another" (Qur'an 49:13) highlight freedom of belief and pluralism as part of divine wisdom, discouraging coercion and superiority. These principles were operationalised by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through the Constitution of Madinah and treaties with non-Muslim communities, which safeguarded minority rights and institutionalized coexistence (Hashmi, 2012; El-Wakil, 2021). Classical scholars such as Al-Farabi and Al-Ghazali reinforced these values by situating tolerance within mercy, humility, and the universality of truth. Collectively, these sources demonstrate that tolerance is not peripheral but central to Islamic ethics, offering a robust framework for interfaith harmony.

Despite these rich ethical foundations, the study identified significant gaps in the scholarship and practice of interfaith tolerance in Northern Nigeria. Much of the existing literature emphasizes historical trajectories or theological ideals without adequately bridging them to contemporary realities of conflict resolution. For instance, Ibrahim (2017) and Mustapha (2018) highlight that, interfaith clashes are often rooted in socio-political grievances rather than doctrinal disputes, yet practical frameworks for applying Islamic ethics to governance and community relations remain underdeveloped. Similarly, while Hunwick (2003) and Ali (2006) provide valuable historical and exegetical insights, their analyses do not sufficiently address how tolerance can be institutionalized in Nigeria's pluralistic and politically charged environment. This gap leaves Northern Nigeria vulnerable to cycles of violence, as ethical imperatives remain overshadowed by exclusivist narratives, political manipulation of religious identities, and socio-economic inequalities.

The revival of authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance offers a pathway to fill these gaps by contextualizing Qur'anic, Prophetic, and scholarly perspectives within Nigeria's lived realities. Themes of justice, compassion, and coexistence can be operationalized through curriculum integration, clerical training, inclusive governance, and media engagement, as recommended in the study. Contemporary scholarship, such as Aderibigbe et al. (2023), emphasizes the importance of embedding tolerance into education and public discourse, aligning with the study's findings that, ethical principles must be institutionalized to be effective. Situating Islamic teachings within Nigeria's socio-political structures, this study contributes to both scholarly discourse and practical peace building strategies. It demonstrates that reviving authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance is not merely a theological exercise but a practical necessity for fostering coexistence, countering sectarian divides, and promoting national stability. In this way, the study bridges scripture, prophetic practice, and scholarly insights with contemporary Nigerian realities, offering a comprehensive framework for conflict resolution and interfaith harmony.

Conclusion

In light of the findings, this study demonstrates that reviving authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance provides both a theoretical and practical framework for addressing religious diversity and conflict in Northern Nigeria, directly answering the research objectives and questions. The Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, and classical scholarship converge on recurring themes of justice, compassion, coexistence, and respect for diversity, which, when contextualized within Nigeria's pluralistic society, offer actionable strategies for peace building. The analysis revealed that while existing scholarship has highlighted the ethical imperatives of tolerance, significant gaps remain in operationalizing these principles within Nigeria's socio-political structures, leaving interfaith relations vulnerable to manipulation and violence. By situating Qur'anic injunctions such as freedom of belief (Qur'an 2:256) and pluralism (Qur'an 49:13), alongside Prophetic precedents like the Constitution of Madinah and treaties with non-Muslims, and scholarly insights from Al-Farabi, Al-Ghazali, and contemporary thinkers such as Sachedina and Aderibigbe, the study bridges scripture, prophetic practice, and academic discourse with lived realities in Kaduna, Jos, and Kano. This integrated thematic framework not only addresses the first research question by showing

how Islamic ethics can be applied to interfaith conflict, but also identifies the gaps in scholarship and practice highlighted in the second question, and finally proposes revival and institutionalization of these ethics, through education, clerical training, inclusive governance, and media engagement.

Recommendations

To ensure that authentic Islamic ethics of tolerance are effectively revived and applied to address religious diversity and conflict in Northern Nigeria, the following actionable policy steps are recommended:

1. *Education and Curriculum Integration:* Incorporate Qur'anic principles of justice, compassion, and coexistence into both Islamic and secular school curricula. This will help shape future generations with values that promote dialogue, respect for diversity, and peaceful coexistence.
2. *Clerical Training and Religious Leadership:* Provide structured training for clerics and religious leaders in peace building, inclusive tafsir (interpretation), and interfaith dialogue. This will empower them to counter exclusivist narratives and guide communities toward tolerance and justice.
3. *Media Engagement and Public Discourse:* Train journalists, broadcasters, and social media influencers to promote tolerant Islamic narratives. Media platforms should be leveraged to disseminate messages of compassion, justice, and coexistence, countering divisive rhetoric.
4. *Government and State Policy:* Enforce equal rights for all adherents of faith through legislation and policy frameworks. Develop inclusive governance strategies that accommodate the needs of diverse religious communities, thereby building trust and reducing marginalisation.
5. *Community-Level Initiatives:* Establish grassroots interfaith dialogue forums, peace building programs, and socio-economic interventions that address underlying grievances fueling conflict. Local initiatives should focus on building trust, fostering cooperation, and reducing tensions across religious divides.

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