

Forum:	General Assembly
Issue:	Reducing religious, communal and sectarian conflicts
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Introduction

Religious, communal, and sectarian conflicts have shaped human societies and political orders for centuries, from medieval crusades to the partition of states in the modern era, with religion and communal identity often mobilized as powerful tools to unite or divide populations. While religion provides meaning, belonging, and cultural identity to millions, it has also been instrumentalized to justify violence, exclusion, and political domination. In the contemporary world, these conflicts persist in new and evolving forms, often intertwined with political instability, economic inequality, and the spread of extremist ideologies. Whether in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, or beyond, religious and communal divisions continue to fuel insurgencies, civil wars, and mass displacement, leaving behind legacies of mistrust and humanitarian crises. International and regional organizations, alongside national governments, play a critical role in addressing these conflicts through dialogue, mediation, and structural reforms. Therefore, this report will explore the historical roots of religious and communal conflict, analyze the modern drivers that sustain and intensify them, examine the consequences for affected communities, assess the roles of major countries and organizations involved, and finally evaluate viable solutions such as interfaith dialogue, education, and governance reforms.

Definition of Key Terms

Religious Conflict

Religious conflicts refer to violent confrontations between different religious groups, often driven by ideological differences, as exemplified by the clashes between Muslims and Christians in regions such as Nigeria and the Central African Republic, where armed struggles have resulted in significant casualties and political instability.¹

Communal Conflict

¹ sciencedirect. "Religious Conflicts - an Overview | ScienceDirect Topics." *Sciencedirect.com*, 2015, www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/religious-conflicts.

Communal conflict is defined as a conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity. They are products of social relations. It involves threat or action of one party directed at a community's rights, interests or privileges or of another party, because of differences over economic issues, power or authority, cultural values and beliefs.²

Sectarian Conflict

Sectarian Conflict is defined as "violence etc that is related to the strong feelings of people who belong to different religious groups".³

Extremism

Tendency to be extreme; esp. the holding of extreme political or religious views, or advocacy of illegal, violent, or other extreme measures.⁴

Radicalization

The notion of 'radicalization' is generally used [by some States] to convey the idea of a process through which an individual adopts an increasingly extremist set of beliefs and aspirations. This may include, but is not defined by, the willingness to condone, support, facilitate or use violence to further political, ideological, religious or other goals.⁵

Communal Violence

Typically this relates to acts that promotes enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and acts prejudicial to the maintenance of harmony.⁶

Persecution

Persecution as per Merriam Webster Dictionary is "punishment or harassment usually of a severe nature on the basis of race, religion, or political opinion in one's country

² "What Is Communal Conflict | IGI Global." *Www.igi-Global.com*, www.igi-global.com/dictionary/communal-conflict/85551.

³ "Sectarian Violence/Conflict/Murder Etc | Meaning of Sectarian Violence/Conflict/Murder Etc in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English | LDOCE." *Ldoceonline.com*, 2025, www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/sectarian-violence-conflict-murder-etc.

⁴ "Extremism, N. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary." *Oed.com*, 2023, www.oed.com/dictionary/extremism_n?tl=true, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6408059589>.

⁵ "Blocked Page." *Unodc.org*, 2025, www.unodc.org/e4j/fr/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/radicalization-violent-extremism.html.

⁶ "Communal Violence." *Drishti IAS*, 2025, www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/communal-violence-4.

of origin.”⁷

Identity Politics

Identity politics is “political or social activity by or on behalf of a racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, or other group, aimed at addressing injustices stemming from conflicts between their identity and the dominant identity of society. It also seeks to challenge negative stereotypes that justify exclusion, exploitation, or marginalization. Broadly, identity politics can include nationalist or separatist movements within countries and territories.”⁸

Interfaith Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. “faiths”) at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely.⁹

Background Information

Historical roots of religious communal conflict

Religious and other communal conflicts are not something new that has occurred lately; they have shaped societies for millennia. The [crusades of the Middle Ages](#), the partition of India in 1947, and the [Lebanese Civil War](#) are all examples where religious or communal identity played a significant role in shaping different violent outcomes. These conflicts often left behind legacies of mistrust, further conflicts, and division that continue to influence the world today.

In history, during the colonial period, European imperial powers such as England often [manipulated religious and ethnic identities](#) to maintain control. For example, in British India, policies of “divide and rule” intensified more Hindu-Muslim divisions. These problems culminated in the Partition of India in 1947. These divisions displaced over 14 million people and caused further violence that killed hundreds of thousands. These

⁷ “Definition of PERSECUTION.” *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2018, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/persecution.

⁸ Duignan, Brian. “Identity Politics | Politics and Social Science.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 30 Jan. 2025, www.britannica.com/topic/identity-politics.

⁹ getonline. “CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE?” *Society of African Missions*, 9 Jan. 2013, sma.ie/chapter-1-what-is-interreligious-dialogue/.

historical patterns highlight that religion has been [instrumentalized](#) for further political use to justify violence and power struggles. Religion in certain countries are be used as personal meaning while also being used as a political tool.

Modern drivers of conflict.

Today, religious and other sectarian conflict continues to manifest, but often in new forms that are shaped by the political, economic, and social conditions of each state. In the Middle East, the Sunni-Shia divide remains a critical driver of instability in the region. In Iraq, tensions between the majority Shia and minority Sunni populations were amplified after the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. This led to cycles of insurgency and counter-violence. Other groups like ISIS capitalized on certain divisions and [framed their struggles in religious terms](#) while actually doing so for political goals.

Elsewhere, sectarian conflicts stem from [political opportunism](#) and exclusionary nationalism. In India, Hindu nationalist rhetoric has fueled violence against Muslims, while in Myanmar, Buddhist nationalist groups have persecuted the Rohingya, creating one of the largest recent refugee crises. Religion in certain regions serve as a tool that unites some groups while marginalizing others.

Consequences of religious and communal violence.

The consequences of religious, communal, and sectarian conflicts extend far beyond immediate violence. It creates [property damage](#), destruction, and a gradual loss of life. Humanitarian impacts are often catastrophic; communities that face mass killings, forced displacement of ethnic groups, and destruction of cultural heritage are also impacted by these conflicts. The Syrian Civil War displaced more than [7 million people](#), these are partly along sectarian lines, while the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar has forced over 700,000 to flee to Bangladesh.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the countries that are most heavily impacted by religious and communal conflicts. The country's population is almost evenly divided between Christians and Muslims, who are predominantly divided into North and South. The extremist groups like [Boko Haram](#) and the [ISWAP](#) exploit different religious divisions while. The Nigerian government, alongside international assistance that they are gaining, continues to struggle against both extremist insurgency and different localised violence.

India

India also remains one of the most heavily impacted regions. Home to over a billion people, India has a long history of communal violence, particularly between Hindu and Muslim communities. Events like the [1947 Partition](#), the [1984 anti-Sikh riots](#), and the [2002 Gujarat riots](#) highlight how communal tensions can eventually lead to more large-scale violence. Communal violence is not only a threat to India's democratic identity, but also creates instability in a region where societal cohesion is heavily dependant religious identity.

Syria

The [Syrian Civil War](#) began as a political conflict and uprising in 2011, but it quickly evolved into a deeper issue about the sectarian conflict. The ruling Assad regime, which is the minority Shia, faced rebellion from the predominant Sunni opposition groups. External actors such as Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia have intervened in these problems, further fueling violence. [Sectarianism](#) has been a key factor that led to the fragmentation of the country and in the humanitarian crisis that has displaced millions.

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

The UNAOC plays a critical role in promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue globally while also addressing sectarian conflict. They have been engaging religious leaders, youth, and civil society groups. They have also created [platforms](#) to counter hate speech and promote tolerance that upholds each communal and sectarian group. Their initiatives are often tied to other UN efforts to combat and prevent violent extremism.

Viable Solutions

Promoting interfaith dialogue and education.

One of the most effective long-term strategies of dealing with such issues is to strengthen interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Governments, civil society, and other international organizations can collaborate to create school curricula in certain countries that highlight religious tolerance. [Programs led by the UNAOC](#) already focus on reducing hate speech and prejudice. Nonetheless, the religious leaders can play a central role by engaging in joint statements, symbolic visits, and shared community projects that demonstrate unity and set examples for their followers.

Reforming governance and power-sharing structures.

While this may seem like a radical solution, in countries where political systems are tied to sectarian divisions, such as Lebanon and Iraq, reforming governance models is crucial. Power-sharing arrangements should be redesigned to prioritise national

identity rather than solely religious purposes. International mediators or neutral parties such as the [United Nations could assist in reforms](#) that are targeted towards government corruption and systematic discrimination.

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