

# Industrial Conflict as a Threat to Peacebuilding Efforts in Nigeria: A Thematic Review of Literature

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## Abstract

Industrial conflict remains a persistent yet underexplored challenge to peacebuilding in Nigeria, with significant implications for governance, institutional stability, and social cohesion. While existing studies often frame labour disputes as economic or administrative issues, limited attention has been given to their broader peacebuilding impact. This study addresses this gap by examining industrial conflict as a structural threat to peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative thematic review approach, it draws on peer-reviewed literature, policy documents, and institutional reports to analyse patterns, causes, and consequences of industrial unrest across key sectors. The findings reveal a cyclical pattern of negotiation, partial agreement, weak implementation, and recurrent strikes, particularly in the education, health, and public sectors. These conflicts are primarily driven by governance failures, including inadequate funding, poor remuneration, and persistent non-implementation of agreements. The study further shows that industrial disputes disrupt essential services, erode institutional trust, and weaken state legitimacy, thereby undermining both human security and sustainable peace. Grounded in Conflict Theory, Structural Violence Theory, and Human Needs Theory, the study argues that industrial conflict reflects deeper structural inequalities and unmet welfare needs. The study concludes that industrial conflict poses a direct challenge to both negative and positive peace in Nigeria. It recommends strengthening labour governance, ensuring full implementation of agreements, and institutionalizing preventive dispute resolution mechanisms. By situating industrial conflict within peacebuilding discourse, the study offers a more integrated understanding of labour relations and sustainable peace in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Industrial Conflict; Labour Relations; Peacebuilding; Labour Strikes; Governance; Institutional Stability; Nigeria

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Industrial conflict has remained one of the most persistent yet often underestimated challenges to peace, governance, and development across the world. Beyond its immediate manifestation in workplace disputes, it quietly shapes the stability of states, the resilience of economies, and the level of trust citizens' place in public institutions (Murphy & MacMahon, 2022). In contemporary discourse on peace and development, sustainable peace is increasingly understood not merely as the absence of armed conflict, but as the presence of justice, equity, and fairness in social and economic relations, particularly within the workplace. In this regard, labour relations have emerged as a critical indicator of societal harmony and institutional credibility (Junça Silva & Lopes, 2025). From frequent public sector strikes in Europe and Asia to recurring labour unrest in Latin America and Africa, industrial conflict continues to expose the fragile balance between workers' welfare, state capacity, and economic productivity (Liu, 2025; Chamorro-Futinico, 2025).

Across the African continent, this challenge assumes even greater significance due to persistent structural vulnerabilities, weak institutional enforcement mechanisms, and widening socio-economic inequalities (Thelma et al., 2024). Many African states continue to grapple with unstable labour relations in the face of rising unemployment, inflationary pressures, and governance deficits. Industrial disputes often transcend the boundaries of the workplace and evolve into broader questions of

governance legitimacy, social cohesion, and national stability (Iwuoha et al., 2025). In several instances, prolonged strikes in essential sectors such as education, health, and energy have not only disrupted economic activities but have also eroded public trust in the state's ability to manage competing interests fairly, transparently, and effectively (Okonkwo, 2025).

In Nigeria, these dynamics are particularly pronounced and deeply entrenched. The country has experienced recurring waves of industrial conflicts across critical sectors, including education, healthcare, oil and gas, and public administration. Prominent labour unions such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), and various sectoral associations have frequently engaged in industrial actions over issues such as poor remuneration, deteriorating working conditions, and persistent failures in policy implementation. While these actions are often rooted in legitimate grievances, their prolonged and recurrent nature has resulted in disruptions to essential social services, significant economic losses, and growing public frustration. More importantly, these patterns raise critical concerns regarding their broader implications for peacebuilding processes in Nigeria, particularly in relation to institutional trust, governance legitimacy, and social stability (Onuigbo & Soba, 2025).

Against this background, this study conceptualizes industrial conflict not merely as a labour or economic phenomenon, but as a structural and systemic challenge to

peacebuilding in Nigeria. It argues that unresolved labour disputes undermine the foundations of sustainable peace by weakening cooperation between the state and the workforce, disrupting essential public services, and deepening societal grievances. Through a qualitative thematic review of existing literature, this study critically examines the intersection between industrial conflict and peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria, identifying the structural and institutional deficiencies that perpetuate cycles of labour unrest. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing scholarly debates on how strengthened labour relations, effective dispute resolution mechanisms, and improved governance practices can serve as essential pathways toward consolidating national peace and stability.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly literature on industrial conflict in Nigeria consistently underscores its deep-rooted connection to governance deficiencies, weak institutional frameworks, and persistent socio-economic inequalities. Rather than being isolated workplace disputes, industrial conflicts are widely understood as structural manifestations of strained labour relations and governance inefficiencies that cut across critical sectors of the Nigerian economy. Across studies, a dominant consensus is that industrial unrest is sustained by recurrent failures in policy implementation, weak collective bargaining systems, and a deficit of trust between the state as employer and organized labour.

A significant strand of literature situates industrial conflict within the broader problem of governance failure. Empirical and theoretical contributions from Nancy et al. (2025) converge on the view that strikes and labour disputes in Nigeria are largely triggered by the government's inability to honour negotiated agreements, particularly in the public sector. This recurring pattern has institutionalized a cycle of mistrust, where agreements are frequently reached but inconsistently implemented, thereby reproducing industrial tensions. Folorunsho & Samuel (2025) extends this argument by framing industrial conflict as a governance pathology rooted in policy inconsistency and weak accountability structures, rather than merely economic dissatisfaction.

According to Abdul Raza (2025), within sector-specific analyses, the education and health sectors receive substantial scholarly attention due to their vulnerability to industrial disruption. Studies on the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) highlight the systemic nature of academic strikes, emphasizing their impact on human capital development and institutional stability. The literature consistently demonstrates that prolonged university closures not only disrupt academic calendars but also weaken public confidence in Nigeria's higher education system, thereby contributing to broader social frustration and institutional decay. Similarly, research on the health sector by Manguete et al. (2024) reveals that strikes by medical personnel significantly compromise healthcare delivery, increase mortality risks, and expose structural neglect in public health governance. These findings collectively illustrate that industrial conflict in essential services has direct consequences for human security and social welfare.

Beyond sectoral impacts, a growing body of literature links industrial conflict to declining institutional trust and weakened state legitimacy. Rulashe & Jam (2025), alongside Elbahnasawy et al. (2025) argue that recurrent labour disputes erode citizens' confidence in government institutions, particularly when essential services are repeatedly disrupted. This erosion of trust is not merely perceptual but reflects a deeper crisis of state capacity and responsiveness. In this context, industrial conflict becomes both a symptom and a driver of governance fragility, reinforcing negative perceptions of state inefficiency and weak crisis management.

From a peacebuilding perspective, existing studies increasingly frame industrial conflict as a form of structural violence that undermines sustainable peace. Drawing on Galtung's conceptualization, scholars such as Mokofe (2025) argue that industrial unrest reflects embedded injustices within labour systems, particularly in relation to wages, working conditions, and institutional responsiveness. This perspective shifts the analytical focus from visible strikes to the underlying structural conditions that produce them. In this sense, industrial conflict is not merely disruptive but constitutive of broader patterns of inequality that impede the realization of positive peace.

Recent scholarship also emphasizes the role and limitations of institutional mechanisms for conflict resolution. Nzom (2025) observe that while institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and the National Industrial Court are formally mandated to mediate disputes, their effectiveness is constrained by political interference, weak enforcement capacity, and delayed arbitration processes. Consequently, industrial disputes often escalate into full-scale strikes before resolution is achieved, reflecting a reactive rather than preventive approach to labour governance.

The literature reveals a convergence of evidence pointing to industrial conflict in Nigeria as a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in governance failure, structural inequality, and institutional weakness. However, a critical gap persists in the integration of peacebuilding frameworks into the analysis of industrial relations. While existing studies extensively document the economic and administrative consequences of strikes, fewer works explicitly theorize industrial conflict as a direct threat to both positive and negative peace. This study addresses this gap by situating industrial conflict within peacebuilding discourse, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of its implications for national stability and sustainable development in Nigeria.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

The current study draws on Conflict Theory, Structural Violence Theory, and Human Needs Theory to explain industrial conflict as a structural challenge to peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. These theories collectively provide a comprehensive lens through which industrial disputes can be understood not merely as workplace disagreements, but as deeper reflections of inequality, institutional weakness, and unmet human needs within the Nigerian socio-political system.

Conflict Theory, associated with Karl Marx, offers a foundational explanation by viewing society as a space of

continuous struggle over scarce resources and power. In the context of industrial relations, this theory suggests that conflicts between employers and employees are inevitable due to inherent inequalities in control over resources and decision-making. Applied to this study, industrial conflict in Nigeria reflects the persistent power imbalance between the state as the dominant employer and labour unions representing workers' interests. Frequent strikes and breakdowns in negotiations demonstrate how unequal bargaining power and structural inequities contribute to recurring industrial unrest. These tensions, when unresolved, weaken cooperation between the state and its workforce, thereby undermining efforts toward sustainable peacebuilding.

Complementing this perspective is Structural Violence Theory, developed by Johan Galtung, which shifts attention from direct acts of violence to systemic injustices embedded within social and political institutions. According to this theory, violence exists when social structures prevent individuals or groups from meeting their basic needs. In Nigeria's industrial relations system, structural violence is evident in poor remuneration, delayed wages, inadequate working conditions, and the repeated failure of government to implement collective agreements. These systemic shortcomings generate frustration among workers and frequently trigger industrial actions. Such conditions not only disrupt essential public services but also erode public trust in state institutions, thereby posing significant obstacles to peacebuilding and social stability. Furthermore, Human Needs Theory, advanced by John Burton, provides a human-centered explanation of industrial conflict by emphasizing that conflicts arise when fundamental human needs such as security, recognition, identity, and welfare are not satisfied. In the Nigerian labour context, workers' demands for fair wages, improved working conditions, job security, and respect are often central to industrial disputes. When these needs are consistently unmet, strikes and other forms of industrial action become mechanisms through which workers seek recognition and redress. This theory therefore highlights that sustainable peace cannot be achieved unless the underlying human needs of workers are adequately addressed within the governance and labour systems.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a robust analytical framework for this study. Conflict Theory highlights the role of power imbalances, Structural Violence Theory exposes the institutional and systemic injustices that sustain industrial unrest, while Human Needs Theory emphasizes the importance of addressing workers' welfare and recognition. Collectively, they demonstrate that industrial conflict in Nigeria is not merely an economic or administrative issue, but a structural threat to peacebuilding efforts. It disrupts institutional trust, weakens governance legitimacy, and undermines the social foundations necessary for sustainable peace and development.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a thematic literature review approach, to examine industrial conflict as a threat to peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria. The choice of this design is informed by

the need to critically synthesize existing scholarly works, policy documents, and institutional reports in order to generate a coherent understanding of how industrial conflicts intersect with peacebuilding dynamics. Rather than generating primary statistical data, the study relies on systematically analyzing existing knowledge to identify patterns, contradictions, and gaps in the literature.

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study is designed as a qualitative thematic review of literature. This approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of existing studies on industrial conflict, labour relations, governance, and peacebuilding in Nigeria. It is particularly suitable for this research because the subject matter is complex, socially constructed, and deeply embedded in institutional and political contexts that require interpretive analysis rather than numerical measurement.

#### 3.2 Sources of Data

Data for this study are drawn from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents, and institutional reports from key stakeholders such as the Nigerian government, labour unions (NLC, TUC, ASUU), and international organizations like the ILO. Academic conference papers and credible scholarly databases are also consulted. These sources ensure reliability, depth, and contextual relevance, providing a comprehensive foundation for analysing industrial conflict and its implications for peacebuilding in Nigeria.

#### 3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection of literature is guided by clear criteria to ensure relevance and quality:

*Inclusion criteria:*

- Studies focused on industrial conflict, labour relations, or strikes in Nigeria
- Literature addressing governance, institutional trust, or peacebuilding
- Peer-reviewed academic publications and credible policy reports
- Works published in English

*Exclusion criteria:*

- Non-scholarly opinion articles without academic grounding
- Studies unrelated to labour relations or peacebuilding
- Duplicated or outdated materials with limited relevance to current discourse

#### 3.4 Method of Data Analysis

This study adopts thematic analysis as its primary method of data analysis. The process begins with a careful reading and re-reading of selected literature to gain a clear understanding of key ideas and arguments relating to industrial conflict and peacebuilding in Nigeria. Relevant information is then systematically coded to identify recurring concepts and patterns across the literature. The generated codes are grouped into broader themes, such as the nature and patterns of industrial conflict in Nigeria, labour strikes and governance challenges, and the impact of industrial conflict on peacebuilding and social stability. These themes are further interpreted in line with the study's

theoretical framework and research objectives. Through this process, the study moves beyond simple description of literature to a more critical synthesis and interpretation of how industrial conflict shapes peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria.

### 3.5 Justification of Method

The qualitative thematic review method is appropriate for this study because it enables a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature on industrial conflict and peacebuilding in Nigeria. It allows for critical interpretation of diverse scholarly perspectives, helping to identify patterns, agreements, and contradictions within the literature. The method also makes it possible to clearly highlight gaps in existing studies, particularly the limited focus on the peacebuilding implications of industrial conflict. Furthermore, it aligns with the conceptual and theoretical nature of the study, which seeks to understand complex social and institutional dynamics rather than measure statistical relationships.

### 3.6 Methodological Limitation

A key limitation of this approach is the absence of primary empirical data, which may limit direct representation of current stakeholder experiences. However, this is mitigated by the inclusion of a wide range of credible and contemporary secondary sources, ensuring robust and balanced analysis.

## 4. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### 4.1 Concept of Industrial Conflict

According to Lah & David (2025), industrial conflict refers to disputes between employers and employees over issues such as wages, working conditions, job security, and the implementation of agreements. It reflects a breakdown in the employment relationship and is a key aspect of industrial relations. It commonly occurs through strikes, protests, lockouts, or other forms of industrial action, which workers use to express dissatisfaction and demand change. While it can disrupt productivity and workplace harmony, industrial conflict is also seen as a natural outcome of competing interests between labour and management.

### 4.2 Concept of Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding refers to the process of creating conditions for sustainable peace by addressing the root causes of conflict and strengthening institutions that support social harmony (Dogonyaro et al., 2026). Johan Galtung distinguishes between negative peace, which is the absence of direct violence or conflict, and positive peace, which involves the presence of justice, equity, and functional institutions that prevent the recurrence of conflict (Kim et al., 2024). In the Nigerian context, negative peace may be observed during periods when strikes or industrial actions are suspended, but underlying grievances remain unresolved. Positive peace, on the other hand, requires fair labour practices, effective governance, and strong dispute resolution mechanisms that address the root causes of industrial conflict (Uzougbo, 2023). This study adopts the positive peace perspective, emphasizing that sustainable peacebuilding cannot be achieved without addressing structural inequalities within labour relations.

### 4.3 Industrial Conflict in Nigeria: Nature and Patterns

Industrial conflict in Nigeria is a recurring and deeply rooted feature of the country's labour relations system, often expressed through strikes, protests, and other forms of industrial action. It is primarily characterized by disputes between employers mostly the government and employees represented by labour unions over wages, working conditions, welfare packages, and the implementation of collective agreements. Over time, these conflicts have moved beyond ordinary workplace disagreements to become national issues that directly affect governance, service delivery, and peacebuilding (Okonkwo, 2025).

The nature of industrial conflict in Nigeria is largely structural, reflecting long-standing weaknesses in governance and institutional management. One key feature is the failure of government to fully implement agreements reached with labour unions, which repeatedly triggers renewed disputes. For instance, the prolonged disagreement between the Federal Government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) over issues such as funding of universities, earned academic allowances, and university autonomy has led to several nationwide strikes. A notable example was the 2022 ASUU strike, which lasted for about eight months, disrupting academic activities across federal universities and delaying academic calendars nationwide (Ogunode, 2026).

Similarly, in the health sector, industrial conflict has become a recurring phenomenon. The Nigeria Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) has frequently embarked on strikes over unpaid salaries, poor working conditions, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. For example, in 2021 and 2023, resident doctors across the country engaged in prolonged industrial actions that significantly disrupted healthcare delivery in public hospitals, forcing patients to seek expensive private alternatives or endure limited access to care. These incidents highlight how industrial conflict directly affects human welfare and public health systems (Udeobasi et al., 2025).

Another important pattern is the cyclical and repetitive nature of strikes in Nigeria. Even after agreements are reached, implementation gaps often lead to renewed conflicts. A clear example is the recurring agreements between the Federal Government and labour unions such as the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) regarding minimum wage adjustments. Although the 2019 national minimum wage agreement was celebrated as a major milestone, several states delayed implementation, leading to repeated threats of strikes and industrial action by workers' unions (Okolo et al., 2024).

In the oil and gas sector, industrial conflict has also been evident through the activities of unions such as the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG). Strikes or threats of industrial action in this sector often have immediate national consequences due to Nigeria's heavy dependence on oil revenue. For instance, past industrial actions and protests within this sector have contributed to fuel scarcity, price hikes, and economic disruptions, illustrating the strategic importance of labour stability in this industry (Odey, 2025).

Another observable pattern is the escalation of disputes into prolonged shutdowns of essential services. For example, university strikes often extend for months due to delayed negotiations and weak mediation mechanisms. The prolonged ASUU strikes of 2013, 2020, and 2022 illustrate how unresolved disagreements can paralyze the education system for extended periods, resulting in academic setbacks, student frustration, and brain drain as students seek opportunities abroad (Ayatse et al., 2025).

Additionally, industrial conflict in Nigeria is often intensified by broader socio-economic challenges such as inflation, unemployment, and declining purchasing power. These conditions increase workers' demands for wage reviews and better welfare packages, thereby fueling labour unrest. At the same time, public perception adds another dimension to these conflicts. While workers view strikes as legitimate tools for demanding justice, citizens often experience frustration due to disruptions in essential services, particularly in education and healthcare, thereby increasing social tension (Haruna & Haliru, 2025).

#### 4.4 Labour Strikes and Governance in Nigeria

Labour strikes in Nigeria represent one of the most visible expressions of industrial conflict and have significant implications for governance, public administration, and state legitimacy. A labour strike is typically a collective withdrawal of labour by workers to compel employers often the government to address grievances relating to wages, working conditions, and the implementation of agreements. In Nigeria, however, strikes have evolved beyond workplace disputes to become a recurring governance challenge that affects policy continuity, service delivery, and public trust in state institutions (Ololube, 2025).

One key dimension of labour strikes in Nigeria is their direct link to governance failures in policy implementation. A recurring pattern in the Nigerian labour system is the signing of agreements between government and labour unions, followed by partial or delayed implementation. For example, the 2019 national minimum wage agreement, which raised the minimum wage to ₦30,000, was met with resistance and delays in implementation by several state governments. This led to repeated threats of industrial action by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), highlighting how governance inconsistencies often trigger labour unrest (Kuforiji & Oikhala, 2025).

Similarly, in the education sector, governance challenges are clearly reflected in the prolonged disputes between the Federal Government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The 2022 ASUU strike, which lasted several months, was largely driven by unresolved issues such as university funding, payment systems (IPPIS), and revitalization agreements. This strike not only disrupted academic activities nationwide but also exposed weaknesses in governmental commitment to long-term policy agreements, thereby affecting the credibility of governance structures in the education sector (Okorie, 2026).

Labour strikes in Nigeria also reveal the reactive nature of governance responses to industrial disputes. Rather than adopting preventive and institutionalized mechanisms of conflict management, government

responses are often crisis-driven. For instance, interventions during strikes by health workers or university lecturers are frequently characterized by last-minute negotiations aimed at ending disruptions rather than addressing root causes (Nzom, 2025). The repeated strikes by the Nigeria Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) in 2021 and 2023 illustrate this pattern, where government responses often came after significant disruption to healthcare services had already occurred (Nancy et al., 2025).

Furthermore, labour strikes significantly affect public service delivery and administrative efficiency, which are central components of governance. In the health sector, strikes by medical professionals often lead to partial or complete shutdown of public hospitals, forcing citizens to seek expensive private care or face limited access to treatment (Rulashe & Jam, 2025). Similarly, strikes in the education sector disrupt academic calendars, delay graduation timelines, and reduce institutional productivity. These disruptions weaken the ability of the state to fulfil its core governance responsibilities, thereby affecting citizens' perception of government effectiveness (Okonkwo, 2025).

Another important dimension is the impact of labour strikes on public trust and state legitimacy. Frequent industrial actions often create frustration among citizens, who bear the consequences of disrupted services without being directly involved in the disputes. This situation contributes to declining trust in government institutions, as citizens perceive the state as unable to manage labour relations effectively. In extreme cases, prolonged strikes may also fuel social dissatisfaction and increase tensions between the state and civil society (Cornell & Dukes, 2025).

In addition, labour strikes in Nigeria highlight the weakness of institutional conflict resolution mechanisms. Institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the National Industrial Court are constitutionally mandated to mediate industrial disputes. However, their effectiveness is often constrained by limited enforcement power, political interference, and delayed arbitration processes. As a result, disputes frequently escalate into full-scale strikes before resolution is achieved (Iloka, 2026).

#### 4.5 Industrial Conflict and Peacebuilding Challenges in Nigeria

Industrial conflict in Nigeria presents significant challenges to peacebuilding efforts, particularly because it repeatedly disrupts the social, institutional, and economic foundations required for sustainable peace. Peacebuilding, in its broadest sense, involves the creation of structures, relationships, and processes that prevent the recurrence of conflict while promoting justice, stability, and cooperation within society. However, recurring industrial disputes in Nigeria continue to weaken these foundations by generating instability in key public institutions and eroding trust between the state and its citizens (Olatayo, 2025).

One major peacebuilding challenge arising from industrial conflict is the disruption of essential social services, particularly in education and healthcare. For instance, prolonged strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), such as the 2022 nationwide strike,

halted academic activities across public universities for several months. This not only delayed academic progression but also created frustration among students and families, thereby generating social dissatisfaction (Nnagbo et al., 2025). Similarly, strikes by the Nigeria Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) in 2021 and 2023 led to significant disruptions in public healthcare delivery, limiting access to medical services and increasing public hardship. These disruptions weaken the state's capacity to provide basic services, which is a critical requirement for sustaining peace (Ekechukwu, 2025).

Another challenge is the erosion of institutional trust, which is central to peacebuilding. Frequent industrial conflicts signal to citizens that the government is either unwilling or unable to honour agreements with labour unions. This perception contributes to declining confidence in state institutions and weakens the legitimacy of governance structures. For example, repeated failures to fully implement agreements reached with labour unions, such as the 2019 minimum wage agreement, have led to continuous threats of strikes and renewed distrust between workers and government authorities. Over time, this weakens the social contract between the state and its citizens (Houeland, 2022).

Industrial conflict also contributes to the weakening of social cohesion and increased public frustration. While labour unions engage in strikes to demand better working conditions and rights, the general population often bears the consequences of disrupted services. Students experience prolonged academic delays, patients face limited access to healthcare, and economic activities are indirectly affected. This creates tension between different social groups and fosters resentment, which undermines collective trust and harmony key components of peacebuilding (Rulashe & Jam, 2025).

Industrial conflict exposes the limitations of conflict resolution and peacebuilding institutions in Nigeria. Institutions such as the Ministry of Labour and Employment, mediation committees, and the National Industrial Court are designed to manage labour disputes and prevent escalation. However, their interventions are often delayed or insufficient to prevent strikes. For example, many ASUU and NARD strikes proceed despite ongoing negotiations, indicating weaknesses in preventive diplomacy and institutional enforcement. This reflects a gap in Nigeria's peacebuilding architecture, where disputes are often managed reactively rather than through sustained preventive mechanisms (Jarikre, 2025).

In addition, industrial conflict contributes to the structural weakening of positive peace, as explained in peacebuilding theory. According to Johan Galtung's concept of positive peace, sustainable peace is achieved not merely through the absence of violence but through the presence of justice, equity, and strong institutions (Lasmana & Sripokangkul, 2024). In Nigeria, recurring industrial disputes reveal persistent inequalities in wages, working conditions, and resource allocation within the public sector. These structural injustices create a cycle of dissatisfaction that continuously undermines peacebuilding efforts (Esiere, 2026).

## 5. FINDINGS

Table 1: Selected Major Industrial Strikes in Nigeria and Their Negotiated Outcomes (2013-2023)

| Year | Sector           | Union/Association                                         | Key Grievances                                                              | Duration                               | Nature of Industrial Action                       | Negotiated Outcome                                                   | Policy Implementation Status                                                                           |
|------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2013 | Education        | Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)               | Insufficient funding, implementation of 2009 FU-ASUU Agreement              | ~1 month (July-Dec)                    | Nationwide university strike                      | FUN ASUU agreement reached leading to resumption of strike           | Partial implementation; establishment of monitoring committee with weak compliance                     |
| 2020 | Education        | ASUU                                                      | COVID-19 pandemic impact, funding, university autonomy, accreditation funds | ~4 months (Feb-Mar)                    | Nationwide strike                                 | Conditional resumption after negotiations                            | Agreement on COVID development and funding commitments; implementation remained partial                |
| 2021 | Health           | Nigeria Association of Resident Doctors (NARD)            | Delayed allowances, salary issues, COVID-19 safety protocols                | Multiple intermittent strikes          | Series of working and total strikes               | Series of 1000 signed with government                                | Partial payment of allowances; working condition implementation led to renewed disputes                |
| 2022 | Education        | ASUU                                                      | Reinstatement funding, revised academic allowances, autonomy                | ~4 months (Feb-Mar)                    | Intermittent nationwide strike                    | Strike suspended following government intervention and court rulings | Partial resumption; satisfaction of 70% of demands; no pay policy; limited implementation of agreement |
| 2023 | Health           | NARD                                                      | Salary structure review, financial irregularities, working conditions       | Multiple short strikes                 | Intermittent nationwide strike                    | Temporary suspension after negotiations                              | Increased wage adjustments and provision of medical relief; limited implementation of compliance       |
| 2019 | Labour (General) | Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Trade Union Congress (TUC) | National minimum wage increase                                              | Intermittent protests and negotiations | Nationwide labour agitation and threats of strike | Adoption of ₦30,000 national minimum wage                            | Legislative approval through National Assembly (2019); partial state-level implementation challenges   |

The analysis of selected industrial strikes in Nigeria between 2013 and 2023 reveals a consistent and cyclical pattern of labour unrest across the education, health, and general labour sectors. The findings indicate that industrial actions are primarily driven by structural issues, including inadequate sectoral funding, poor remuneration, welfare deficits, and the recurrent failure of government to fully implement previous collective agreements with labour unions.

A key pattern emerging from Table 1 is the centrality of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in prolonged industrial disputes within the education sector. The strikes recorded in 2013, 2020, and 2022 demonstrate a recurring cycle of conflict centred on university funding, institutional autonomy, and unresolved prior agreements. Although these strikes often culminate in negotiated settlements, the outcomes are largely characterised by partial compliance and weak enforcement mechanisms. This reflects a systemic governance challenge in the higher education sector, where policy agreements lack sustained implementation, thereby perpetuating industrial instability.

Similarly, the health sector, represented by the Nigerian Association of Resident Doctors (NARD), exhibits intermittent but recurring industrial actions. The strikes in 2021 and 2023 were primarily driven by delayed salary payments, poor working conditions, and inadequate welfare provisions. Although government interventions frequently led to temporary suspension of strikes, the persistence of underlying grievances suggests that resolutions are largely short-term and reactive rather than structurally transformative.

In the broader labour sector, the 2019 national minimum wage negotiation led by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) resulted in the formal adoption of the ₦30,000 minimum wage. However, implementation across several sub-national governments remains uneven, revealing a persistent gap between policy formulation and execution. This implementation deficit further reinforces tensions within Nigeria's labour relations system.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This study examined industrial conflict as a structural threat to peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria through a qualitative thematic review of literature. Drawing directly from the findings, particularly the cyclical patterns identified in Table 1, the study establishes that industrial

conflict in Nigeria is sustained by a persistent disconnect between negotiated agreements and their actual implementation. The repeated occurrences of strikes across the education, health, and general labour sectors most notably by ASUU, NARD, and NLC demonstrate that industrial unrest is not episodic but systemic. This reinforces the argument that the root of industrial conflict lies not merely in workers' demands, but in governance failures that undermine the credibility of state commitments.

The findings further reveal that industrial conflict has far-reaching implications for public service delivery and human security, thereby directly affecting peacebuilding outcomes. For instance, the prolonged ASUU strikes and recurring NARD industrial actions highlighted in the findings show how disruptions in education and healthcare services generate widespread social frustration and weaken societal resilience. These patterns indicate that industrial conflict extends beyond workplace disputes to become a broader social stability issue. In this regard, the study advances the understanding that labour unrest should be interpreted as a form of structural instability with direct consequences for peacebuilding, rather than as isolated sectoral challenges.

In addition, the findings demonstrate a consistent erosion of institutional trust resulting from repeated industrial disputes and weak policy enforcement. The inability of government to fully implement agreements such as those related to minimum wage and sectoral reforms creates a cycle of mistrust between the state and labour unions. This aligns with the theoretical propositions of Structural Violence Theory, which emphasize how systemic neglect and institutional inefficiencies generate conditions of conflict. Linking these theoretical insights to empirical patterns identified in the findings, the study shows that industrial conflict in Nigeria is deeply embedded in institutional weaknesses that undermine governance legitimacy and social cohesion.

Another critical insight emerging from the findings is the reactive nature of Nigeria's conflict management approach. The evidence indicates that government interventions in industrial disputes are often crisis-driven, occurring only after strikes have significantly disrupted services. This reactive pattern limits the effectiveness of existing dispute resolution mechanisms and highlights the absence of institutionalized preventive frameworks. From a peacebuilding perspective, this suggests that Nigeria's labour governance system lacks the capacity to proactively manage conflict, thereby allowing grievances to escalate into repeated industrial actions.

Importantly, this study contributes to existing literature by explicitly linking industrial conflict to peacebuilding outcomes in the Nigerian context. While previous studies have examined labour disputes primarily from economic, legal, or administrative perspectives, this study extends the discourse by situating industrial conflict within the broader framework of peace and conflict studies. It demonstrates that recurring labour unrest undermines both negative peace (temporary stability) and positive peace (justice, equity, and institutional effectiveness), thereby positioning industrial conflict as a critical barrier to sustainable peacebuilding.

The discussion underscores that industrial conflict in Nigeria is not merely a labour relations issue but a reflection of deeper structural and institutional deficiencies. The findings provide clear evidence that without addressing governance failures, strengthening implementation mechanisms, and institutionalizing preventive conflict management strategies, industrial conflict will continue to undermine peacebuilding efforts. This reinforces the need for a more integrated approach that aligns labour relations with broader governance and peacebuilding objectives in Nigeria.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined industrial conflict as a structural threat to peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria through a qualitative thematic review of literature. The analysis demonstrates that industrial conflict is not merely a labour relations issue but a deeper reflection of governance inefficiencies, institutional weaknesses, and persistent socio-economic inequalities. Across sectors such as education, health, and public administration, recurrent strikes reveal a consistent pattern of unresolved grievances, weak policy implementation, and fragile state-labour relations. The study further concludes that industrial conflict significantly undermines peacebuilding by disrupting essential public services, eroding institutional trust, and weakening social cohesion. These disruptions affect both human security and national stability, as citizens experience the consequences of prolonged strikes in critical sectors such as healthcare and education. The persistence of these conflicts highlights the inability of existing institutional mechanisms to effectively manage labour disputes in a preventive and sustainable manner. The study establishes that industrial conflict in Nigeria poses a direct challenge to both positive and negative peace. While temporary resolutions may restore short-term stability, the persistence of underlying structural grievances continues to generate cycles of unrest. Therefore, achieving sustainable peace in Nigeria requires strengthening labour governance systems, ensuring full implementation of agreements, and institutionalizing effective conflict resolution mechanisms that address the root causes of industrial disputes.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of labour relations management and strengthen peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria.

1. Government at all levels should ensure full and timely implementation of agreements reached with labour unions. This will reduce the cycle of repeated strikes caused by unfulfilled commitments and help rebuild trust between the state and workers.
2. There is a need to shift from reactive to proactive approaches in managing industrial disputes. Establishing early warning systems, regular dialogue platforms, and continuous engagement between government and labour unions can prevent escalation into full-scale strikes.
3. Adequate and sustained funding of sectors such as education and healthcare is essential to address structural grievances that often trigger industrial

conflict. Improved budgetary allocation and transparency in resource management will reduce tensions and promote stability.

4. Institutions responsible for labour dispute resolution, such as the Ministry of Labour and the National Industrial Court, should be empowered with greater autonomy, resources, and enforcement capacity to effectively manage and resolve conflicts.
5. Regular review of wages in line with economic realities, alongside improved working conditions, will address workers' welfare concerns and reduce the likelihood of industrial action driven by economic hardship.
6. Strengthening collective bargaining frameworks and ensuring inclusive participation of all stakeholders will improve mutual understanding and foster cooperative labour relations.
7. Labour policies should incorporate peacebuilding principles by emphasizing fairness, equity, and justice in workplace relations. This will help address the root causes of conflict and promote sustainable peace.
8. Government actions in labour relations should be transparent and accountable to build public confidence. Monitoring mechanisms should be established to track compliance with agreements and policy commitments.
9. The use of mediation, arbitration, and negotiation should be promoted as effective alternatives to strikes. These mechanisms can provide faster, less disruptive, and more sustainable solutions to industrial disputes.

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