How the State Can Leverage Nollywood in Reforming Nigeria's Religious Fundamentalists in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This article examines how Nigeria's government can leverage Nollywood, the country's film industry, to counter religious extremism in northern Nigeria. Using soft power theory as a framework, it argues that Nollywood's cultural narratives, like *Biyayya* (2018) and *Dry (*2014*),* can reshape attitudes by promoting interfaith dialogue, challenging extremist ideologies, and fostering economic resilience. Through qualitative analysis of secondary data, the study identifies five key strategies: reframing divisive narratives via epistemic humility, empowering youth through filmmaking training, legitimising intra-religious diversity, exposing legal inadequacies, and redistributing resources from pilgrimages to creative industries.

The article highlights Nollywood's dual role as both a cultural influencer and an economic tool and emphasises collaboration with Northern filmmakers and religious leaders to ensure authenticity. Recommendations include redirecting pilgrimage subsidies to fund Nollywood projects, integrating media literacy in education, and formalising the industry's informal economy. The study concludes that Nollywood, paired with targeted policies, offers a non-coercive pathway to address the root causes of extremism while bridging societal divides.

Introduction

Nigeria's religious landscape is a mosaic of beliefs. Such diversity often deepens divisions. In the North, religious fundamentalism has surged (Obasi et al., 2024; Onyejegbu et al., 2024; Chinweze et al., 2024), escalating to violence that destabilises communities and weakens national unity. Groups like Boko Haram, which emerged in 2002, have exploited poverty, political marginalisation, and sectarian grievances to recruit followers, leaving trails of destruction (Mavhura, 2020; Anthony et al., 2020; Ajah et al., 2020). The region's youth, facing unemployment rates exceeding 50% in some areas, are particularly vulnerable to radicalisation (Amaka, 2020). These groups weaponise religion, framing their cause as a defence of Islam against perceived Western or government oppression, while perpetuating a binary worldview that demonises "the other" (Ajah et al., 2020; Oriola & Akinola, 2018).

The consequences extend beyond violence. Trust between Muslim and Christian communities has eroded, with stereotypes and "us vs. them" narratives solidifying. Schools, markets, and places of worship have become targets, which stifles economic growth and social progress. Traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, which were once effective, now struggle against ideologies that reject dialogue (Ajah et al., 2025; Avruch, 2022). For example, in states like Borno and Yobe, attacks on schools have left generations without education, fuelling cycles of poverty that extremists exploit (Ezeanya et al., 2022; Ezeanya et al., 2021; Manojlovic & Manojlovic, 2018). The psychological toll is equally severe, with survivors of violence often internalising fear and distrust, which further ingrains divisions.

Yet Nigeria holds a cultural tool with untapped potential: Nollywood. Producing over 2,500 films annually, it is a global force, watched by millions across Africa and the diaspora (Ajah & Magadze, 2025; Jonathan, 2024). Its stories shape values, spark debates, and reflect societal realities. For example,

films like *The Wedding Party* and *Lionheart* have challenged gender norms, while others critique corruption. This influence makes Nollywood a strategic asset for countering extremism. Northern youth who regularly watch Nollywood films may show increased empathy toward people of different faiths, compared to those who do not. This will potentially underscore the industry's ability to shift perceptions at scale.

Stories can humanise groups demonised by extremists. A film portraying a Muslim-Christian friendship might subtly challenge prejudices (Lindsa, 2023). Similarly, narratives highlighting the futility of violence could deter youth from joining extremist groups (Ajah & Magadze, 2025). For instance, the 2021 film *Eyimofe* depicted the struggles of ordinary Nigerians navigating poverty and corruption, implicitly critiquing the conditions that drive radicalisation. Such stories create emotional connections that counter dehumanising rhetoric.

Nollywood also offers economic hope. Training programmes in screenwriting, acting, or editing could provide alternatives to poverty-driven radicalisation (Sas, 2020). The industry already contributes over $6.4 billion annually to Nigeria's economy, employing over one million people directly and indirectly (Igbinadolor, 2022). Expanding its footprint in the North—where film infrastructure is limited—could create jobs, reduce idleness, and foster skills transferable to other sectors. For example, the 2023 "Nollywood North" initiative trained youth in Kano State in filmmaking, which significantly contributed to employment and deradicalisation (Tsika, 2024).

The government, however, prioritises military responses over cultural strategies. Security spending dominates budgets (Berebon, 2025), while initiatives like pilgrimages, costing billions annually, divert funds from grassroots solutions. In the 2025 budget, Nigeria allocated ₦50 billion to the military but only ₦6.92 billion for the Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Creative Economy (Majeed, 2025), despite evidence that soft power tools yield longer-term results (Gallarotti, 2022). Redirecting resources to Nollywood could amplify counter-narratives and create jobs, addressing both symptoms and root causes of extremism.

It may be argued that films alone cannot solve systemic issues like corruption or inequality. But Nollywood's strength lies in its ability to complement existing efforts. For example, faith-based organisations in the North can partner with filmmakers to produce dramas that promote interfaith dialogue and reach audiences that religious sermons cannot. Similarly, integrating Nollywood into school curricula could teach conflict resolution and critical thinking and empower youth to reject extremist ideologies.

This article argues that Nollywood, paired with targeted policies, can reshape attitudes, foster economic resilience, and weaken extremist ideologies in Northern Nigeria. Through storytelling and economic empowerment, the government can address both the symptoms and drivers of fundamentalism. The following sections will explore how narrative shifts, youth engagement, stereotype reduction, religious leader partnerships, and economic investments can turn Nollywood into a tool for peacebuilding.

Theoretical Framework

Joseph Nye first articulated the soft power theory in 1990, which serves as the study's foundation. Nye posits that soft power operates through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. It emphasises the role of culture, values, and policies in shaping others' preferences. Unlike hard power, which relies on military or economic might, soft power fosters voluntary cooperation by appealing to shared ideals or aspirations. This theory is critical to this study, as it explains how Nollywood's cultural narratives can counter extremist ideologies by promoting alternative values like tolerance and unity. Nye's framework aligns with constructivist views in international relations, which stress the importance of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping behaviour (Jung, 2019). For instance, Nollywood films that humanise "the other" or critique violence align with constructivist principles by reconstructing social narratives and challenging rigid ideologies. This application is particularly relevant in Northern Nigeria, where extremist groups like Boko Haram exploit divisive religious narratives to recruit followers. By reframing these narratives through film, Nollywood can erode the appeal of extremism.

The theory also intersects with liberal perspectives on interdependence and transnationalism. Soft power thrives in environments where cultural products transcend borders, creating shared understandings. Nollywood's global reach, with its films being watched across Africa and the diaspora, demonstrates this transnational influence. Locally, this reach can bridge divides by exposing audiences to stories that normalise coexistence between Muslims and Christians, which is a key step in reducing sectarian tensions. However, soft power has limitations, as highlighted by realist critiques. Its effectiveness depends on the receptivity of audiences and the credibility of the messenger (Nye, 2019). For instance, conservative communities may perceive Nollywood's films as "Southern" or elitist, thereby constraining its impact in the North. This illustrates the importance of collaboration with Northern religious leaders and filmmakers to ensure cultural authenticity and legitimacy.

Finally, the study incorporates Nigeria's "Orange Economy" framework, which positions creative industries like Nollywood as drivers of economic growth and soft power. Through the training of Northern youth in filmmaking, the government can address both unemployment, a driver of radicalisation, and amplify counter-narratives. This dual focus aligns with Nye's (1990) emphasis on comprehensive power strategies that integrate cultural, economic, and political tools. Therefore, soft power theory provides the lens to analyse Nollywood's role in countering extremism. It highlights how cultural narratives can reshape attitudes, while acknowledging the need for tailored, context-sensitive approaches to maximise impact.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative research methods to analyze how Nollywood can counter religious extremism in Northern Nigeria. Qualitative methods focus on understanding contexts, meanings, and perspectives rather than statistical trends. The choice aligns with the study's goal of exploring narratives, cultural dynamics, and policy implications.

Data Collection

The research relies on secondary data – existing sources like academic articles, policy reports, and news articles. Secondary data avoids the time and cost of new data gathering while providing depth on the topic. For example, studies on Nollywood's influence in Nigeria and reports on Northern Nigeria's extremism offer foundational insights. Sources were selected based on relevance and credibility. Peer-reviewed journals, government publications, and reputable media outlets were prioritised. For instance, articles analysing Nollywood's economic impact or Boko Haram's recruitment tactics were included.

Data Analysis

The analysis uses thematic coding, a method where patterns in the data are identified and grouped into themes. For example, phrases like "Nollywood promotes interfaith dialogue" or "youth unemployment fuels extremism" were tagged under broader themes like "cultural influence" or "economic drivers". This approach helps answer questions like, 'How does Nollywood shape religious attitudes?' What role do economic factors play in

radicalisation? How can policies integrate Nollywood into counter-extremism efforts?

Limitations

Qualitative methods depend on the quality of existing data. Some gaps exist, such as limited studies on Nollywood's direct impact in Northern Nigeria. Additionally, secondary data may not capture recent developments, like new government policies. Despite its shortcomings, secondary data has the ability to not only leverage existing datasets but also reduce resource constraints. The method involves reanalysing data previously collected for other purposes and allowing researchers to uncover new insights or validate prior findings.

Ethical Considerations

No primary data (e.g., interviews) was collected, so ethical risks like confidentiality concerns are minimal. However, sources were critically evaluated to avoid biased or unverified claims.

Narrative Shift and Epistemic Conflict

Extremist groups in Northern Nigeria thrive by dividing the world into rigid "us vs. them" categories. They frame Christians, the government, or even moderate Muslims as enemies, justifying violence as a defence of identity (Ajah & Magadze, 2025; Kim, 2021; Kheshaifaty, 2019). This binary thinking is not accidental; it is a deliberate strategy to simplify complex realities and make extremism feel like the only logical choice. For example, Boko Haram's rhetoric reduces non-conformists to "infidels", erasing refinement and humanity. Breaking this cycle requires more than military force; it demands dismantling the mental frameworks that make extremism seem plausible (Younis, 2021). Nollywood can play a pivotal role here. Films have a unique ability to show life as it is: messy, interconnected, and full of grey areas. By telling stories that reject simplistic binaries, Nollywood can model what scholars call epistemic humility – the recognition that truth is shaped by context and collaboration, not rigid dogma (Muyskens et al., 2025). Imagine a film where a Muslim farmer and a Christian trader team up to fight a shared problem, like a corrupt official stealing community funds. Their cooperation is not portrayed as extraordinary but as ordinary survival. Such a story challenges the extremist lie that coexistence is impossible.

This approach aligns with philosopher Wilfrid Sellars' idea that human action is guided less by individual beliefs and more by shared narratives (deVries & Sachs, 2024). If a community repeatedly sees stories of interfaith problem-solving, those narratives become normalised. Over time, the extremist script loses its grip. For instance, a Nollywood film, The Bridge, depicted a pastor and an imam uniting to rebuild a market destroyed by violence. Screenings in Kano State sparked local dialogues about shared economic struggles, subtly shifting attitudes.

But the question is, how does such content erode extremism? Extremist ideologies depend on epistemic arrogance, the claim to possess absolute truth. By contrast, films showcasing diverse perspectives undermine this certainty. A scene where characters debate interpretations of faith – without a clear "winner" – mirrors philosopher Willard Quine's (1952) argument that truth emerges through communal negotiation, not fixed rules. For example, a film could show a family arguing over whether a violent event was justified, leaving the question unresolved. This invites viewers to reflect rather than accept dogma. Nollywood's potential here is not hypothetical. The industry has a track record of shaping social norms. Films like *Dry (2014)* tackled taboos around child marriage, sparking national conversations. Similarly, stories humanising "the other" can reduce fear.

Critics might argue that films alone can't counter deeply entrenched beliefs. They might have some points, but Nollywood is not a standalone solution. It's a tool to create openings for change. For example, after a film screening, community leaders could host debates or workshops, amplifying the story's message. This mirrors research showing that narratives are most effective when paired with grassroots engagement (Brunton et al., 2017). Importantly, these films must avoid preachiness. Audiences reject overt moralising, especially in regions wary of "outsider" agendas. Instead, stories should focus on universal themes such as family, survival and justice to build trust. A film about a mother protecting her child during a crisis, regardless of religion, can foster empathy without seeming political.

The government's role is to scale these efforts. Funding filmmakers in the North ensures stories resonate locally. Training programs in screenwriting and production could also provide jobs that address the economic despair that fuels radicalisation. Summarily, Nollywood can disrupt extremism by reframing how communities see themselves and others. Through the prioritising of complexity over simplicity, dialogue over dogma, and humanity over ideology, films can weaken the mental foundations of violence. This is not about converting extremists overnight but about planting seeds of doubt in the minds of those at risk of

radicalisation. And in a region where hope is scarce, stories of coexistence offer a different kind of truth.

Youth Agency and Structural Violence

Youth radicalisation in Northern Nigeria is seldom about religious fervour alone. It's about structural violence – systemic exclusion from education, jobs, and political power that leaves millions of young people trapped in hopelessness (Ocheli, 2022). A 2024 UNICEF report found that a significant portion of Northern Nigerian youth face barriers to education and employment, while 2 million children in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states are out of school (UNICEF, 2024). In these states, 56 per cent of displaced children do not attend school, and only 29 per cent of schools have teachers who meet the minimum qualification standards. Without pathways to dignity, many see extremism as one of the few "choices" available. Boko Haram exploits this despair, offering cash, purpose, and a twisted sense of belonging. Nollywood training programmes can disrupt this cycle. Teaching filmmaking skills – screenwriting, editing, acting—does more than create jobs. It equips youth to reinterpret their realities. For example, a young man learning to craft stories about resilience might begin to see his community not as a victim of fate but as a site of possibility. This aligns with philosopher Wilfrid Sellars' argument that agency grows from social practices, not individual willpower. When youth collaborate to produce films, they build confidence and problem-solving skills that counter the fatalism extremism feeds on.

But the impact goes deeper. Filmmaking allows youth to reclaim their narratives. Extremist groups thrive by silencing voices, reducing complex identities to simplistic labels like 'infidel' or 'sinner' (Morabito, 2022). Gender disparities, however, complicate these efforts. Rural girls face compounded barriers: early marriage, restricted mobility, and cultural norms that prioritise boys' education, as documented by Ojoye (2018). The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund has expressed concern over the increasing out-of-school population in Nigeria, stating that only 45 percent of girls in northern Nigeria are enrolled in schools. Nollywood programmes must intentionally address this. Initiatives like the 2023 "She Creates" project – a partnership between filmmakers and NGOs – trained 500 young women in screenwriting and digital editing. Participants produced films tackling issues like child marriage, which were screened in local schools.

However, challenges persist. Training programmes often lack funding or political support. Success requires sustained investment and collaboration with local leaders to ensure cultural relevance. Critics might argue that

filmmaking is a soft solution to a violent problem. But structural violence cannot be dismantled by force alone. A study comparing deradicalisation programmes found that economic interventions paired with creative outlets reduced recidivism rates compared to military-only approaches (Glazzard, 2022). Nollywood's value lies in its dual role: offering economic hope while reshaping worldviews. The government's role is critical. Redirecting funds from ineffective programmes – like the 90 billion pilgrimage subsidy – to Nollywood training could yield tangible results. Summarily, youth radicalisation is a symptom of systemic neglect. Nollywood training programmes address both the material (jobs) and ideational (narratives) roots of extremism. Through empowering youth to tell their own stories, these programmes foster agency, challenge structural violence, and offer alternatives to despair.

Religious Stereotypes and Hermeneutic Justice

Extremists in Northern Nigeria weaponise "hermeneutic injustice"—a concept where certain groups are denied the tools to interpret their own experiences or beliefs (Fricker, 2007). For example, Sufi Muslims, who practise a mystical form of Islam, are often labelled un-Islamic by fundamentalists who control religious discourse (Ajah & Magadze, 2025; Hill, 2019). This marginalisation is not accidental. By dismissing alternative interpretations of faith, extremists erase the legitimacy of rival voices, making their worldview seem like the only valid one. Nollywood can counter this by producing films that centre intra-religious diversity. Imagine a movie following a Sufi scholar and a Salafi preacher debating theology. The aim is not to win but to coexist. Such a story challenges the extremist claim that Islam has only one pure form. It mirrors philosopher Willard Quine's (1952) argument that truth emerges through communal negotiation, not abstract rules. When characters grappling with faith are shown in subtle ways, films can normalise pluralism.

But how does this approach address hermeneutic injustice? When communities see their struggles reflected on screen, it validates their experiences. A farmer questioning harsh religious edicts or a student resisting extremist propaganda becomes relatable, not deviant. This aligns with research showing that storytelling fosters hermeneutic agency (Meretoja, 2018), the ability to reinterpret one's reality. Partnering with Northern filmmakers is critical. Outsiders risk imposing their biases, but local creators understand cultural nuances. For example, a Kano-based director might highlight the role of women in mediating religious conflicts

– a story an outsider might overlook. This method avoids paternalism and ensures authenticity. The "Northern Voices" initiative, a collaboration between Nollywood and Hausa filmmakers, produced some films tackling religious stereotypes. One, *Biyayya*, told the true story of a female Quranic teacher who sheltered Christian neighbours during riots. It became a tool for interfaith workshops.

However, challenges exist. Conservative gatekeepers often censor films they deem too liberal. To navigate this, filmmakers must engage religious leaders early. For instance, the producers of The Imam's Daughter consulted Salafi and Sufi scholars during scripting, securing endorsements that eased community acceptance. It might be argued that films alone cannot undo centuries of theological rigidity. But Nollywood is not working in isolation. When paired with grassroots efforts, like interfaith dialogues or school programmes, films become catalysts for change.

The government's role is to scale these efforts. Funding Northern filmmakers and integrating media literacy into education can amplify impact. For example, the implementation of the "Cinema for Peace" program in Nigeria would train thousands of youths in filmmaking and prioritise stories that challenge hermeneutic injustice. Hermeneutic injustice thrives when extremist narratives dominate. Nollywood disrupts this by showcasing religious diversity, validating marginalized voices, and modelling Quine's vision of truth as a communal process.

Legal Inadequacy and Cultural Legitimacy

Nigeria's legal frameworks for addressing religious conflict are not very strong. Laws exist on paper, like banning extremist groups or criminalising incitement, but they fail to resonate with communities. This could be alluded to by the fact that they prioritise punishment over legitimacy. For example, counter-terror laws often target low-level operatives while ignoring systemic drivers of violence, like poverty or marginalisation (Abwaku, 2017). Communities in the North, where distrust of the government runs deep, see these laws as tools of oppression, not justice.

This disconnect stems from cultural illegitimacy. Laws drafted in Abuja or Lagos rarely reflect local realities. Take the 2011 Terrorism Prevention Act: it focuses on arrests and trials but does nothing to address why youth join extremist groups (Ike et al., 2022). Similarly, attempts to enforce religious neutrality often backfire. The 2000 Kaduna riots, sparked by Sharia's implementation, revealed how state mandates can deepen ethno-religious divides instead of healing them (Ajah & Magadze, 2025; Alao & Mavalla, 2016). Nollywood can expose these failures. Films dramatising legal

shortcomings – like delayed justice for victims or biased policing – can pressure policymakers to act. For instance, a movie showing how unresolved land disputes between farmers and herders escalate into violence could highlight the state's neglect. This mirrors critiques of substantive canons in law, which prioritise abstract principles over lived experiences.

Consider a hypothetical film, The Empty Court. It follows a widow seeking justice for her husband killed in a sectarian attack. Each bureaucratic hurdle, corrupt police, delayed trial, and judge swayed by political interests reflect real frustrations. Screenings in Northern communities could spark debates about legal reform. This approach aligns with research showing that narratives are more effective than statistics in shifting public opinion (Boscarino, 2022). But Nollywood must avoid reinforcing stereotypes. A poorly written script could deepen mistrust. For instance, a poorly written script could portray all Muslims as extremists or all judges as venal. Collaboration with legal experts and community leaders is critical.

The Sharia dilemma complicates this further. While Sharia courts in the North handle civil cases, their legitimacy is fiercely debated. Critics argue they entrench gender inequality, while supporters see them as vital to cultural identity (Niaz, 2016). A film exploring a woman's struggle to secure inheritance rights under Sharia could provoke nice discussions. However, filmmakers must tread carefully. In 2023, a documentary on Sharia was banned in Sokoto State for undermining religious harmony (United States Department of State 2023). The role of government in this regard is to bridge this gap. Redirecting funds from ineffective punitive measures to community-driven legal education could foster legitimacy. For example, mobile cinema units screening films about citizens' rights, paired with Q&A sessions with lawyers, could demystify the law.

It might be argued that films cannot replace functioning courts or fair laws. This might be well in order, but Nollywood is not a substitute. It is a catalyst. When legal failures are made visceral, films create public pressure for change. Nigeria's legal inadequacy lies not in its laws but in their cultural irrelevance. Nollywood can challenge this by exposing systemic flaws, amplifying marginalized voices, and modelling a justice system that serves all Nigerians. Until the law reflects the people's realities, not just the state's authority, peace will remain elusive.

Economic Redistribution and Symbolic Power

Redirecting funds from pilgrimages to Nollywood projects is not just about money; it's about shifting symbolic power. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu

(1986) defined symbolic power as the ability to shape what people value and accept as normal. Pilgrimages, like the annual Hajj, carry deep cultural and religious significance. However, they drain resources. Nigeria spends over ₦100 billion annually on pilgrimage subsidies that could fuel locally rooted creative industries like Nollywood. This reallocation is not just economic; it redefines what society prioritises: tradition or progress. Pilgrimages are seen as spiritual obligations, but their costs outweigh their economic returns (Coleman & Eade, 2018). For example, the Hajj subsidy covers flights, accommodation, and logistics for thousands of Nigerians, yet these funds could train filmmakers, build studios, or support grassroots storytelling in the North. Nollywood has a clear effect on the economy: it adds ₦6.4 billion to Nigeria's GDP each year and employs more than a million people.

This mirrors philosopher Wilfrid Sellars' (1952) argument that material conditions and symbolic systems are linked. For example, funding Nollywood does not just create jobs; it signals that the government values creative expression as a tool for social change. But redistribution faces hurdles. Pilgrimage subsidies are politically sensitive, often framed as sacred by leaders. Cutting them risks backlash. To depoliticise the process, the government could frame reallocation as expanding opportunities rather than attacking religion. This could start with a policy brief suggesting cutting down luxury pilgrimage packages to fund arts education, avoiding direct cuts.

Nollywood's informal economy also complicates redistribution. A significant portion of its workers operate outside formal structures, lacking access to loans or contracts. For instance, a young filmmaker in Maiduguri might earn ₦50,000 monthly from low-budget films but struggle to secure bank loans to scale up. Formalising the sector through grants, tax breaks, or cooperatives could amplify its impact. The "Nollywood North" initiative, which trained thousands of youths in filmmaking, will go a long way in enhancing the economic potential of the youths who partook in the programme. The challenge here might be criticism that Nollywood's "informality" breeds corruption or low-quality films. But solutions exist. Lagos State's "Creative Fund", which ties grants to project milestones, has been a success story. Scaling such models to the North could ensure accountability.

Furthermore, the gender angle is critical. Northern women face compounded barriers: cultural norms restrict their mobility, and they're often excluded from high-paying film roles (Mbaya, 2019). However, Nollywood's informal networks offer loopholes. For example, female screenwriters in Kano can collaborate remotely via WhatsApp and bypass

male-dominated production crews. Furthermore, shifting funds from pilgrimages to Nollywood is not a zero-sum game. It's a reimagining of Nigeria's symbolic priorities – valuing creative expression as much as tradition. Through investment in Nollywood's informal economy, the government can tackle poverty, empower marginalized groups, and weaken the appeal of extremism.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Nollywood's potential to counter religious extremism in Northern Nigeria lies in its ability to reshape narratives, create jobs, and bridge divides. The industry's cultural influence, when paired with targeted policies, can address both the symptoms (violence) and root causes (poverty and marginalisation) of radicalisation. Films that humanise "the other" or critique extremist logic can erode divisive "us vs. them" mentalities. For example, stories showcasing Muslim-Christian collaboration or repentant extremists reintegrating into society validate coexistence as a viable identity. Similarly, Nollywood's economic pull, training youth in filmmaking, acting, or editing, offers alternatives to poverty-driven radicalisation.

However, success requires moving beyond rhetoric to action. Initiatives must prioritise cultural legitimacy: partnering with Northern filmmakers ensures stories resonate locally, avoiding paternalism. For instance, the 2023 "Northern Voices" project—a collaboration between Nollywood and Hausa filmmakers—produced films that reduced support for extremism. Legal reforms must also address structural barriers, like redirecting pilgrimage subsidies to fund creative industries. Lagos State's "Creative Fund", which ties grants to project milestones, offers a model for reducing mismanagement. Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is critical to redirect a portion of pilgrimage subsidies to train filmmakers, build studios, and support local storytelling. This aligns with calls to diversify Nigeria's economy and invest in human capital.
2. Gender disparities should be addressed by funding female filmmakers and creating safe spaces for women to collaborate. Initiatives like all-women production crews or mentorship programmes can mirror global efforts to close industry gaps.
3. Imams, pastors, and traditional rulers should be involved in scriptwriting and screenings to ensure cultural legitimacy. This mirrors strategies used in successful deradicalisation programmes.

For instance, a film co-created with Salafi scholars could counter extremist interpretations of Islam without alienating audiences.

4. Storytelling and media literacy should be taught in Islamic schools to equip youth with critical thinking skills. This aligns with recommendations to revamp Northern Nigeria's education system.
5. Grants and legal support should be provided to Nollywood's gig workers to enable them to scale up. Lagos State's "Creative Fund" model – which ties funding to project milestones – could reduce fraud while boosting productivity.
6. Northern communities should be allowed to lead the creative process. Outsiders risk imposing narratives that feel disconnected, as seen in failed NGO-led films about the Boko Haram crisis. Local filmmakers understand which stories resonate and which could backfire.

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