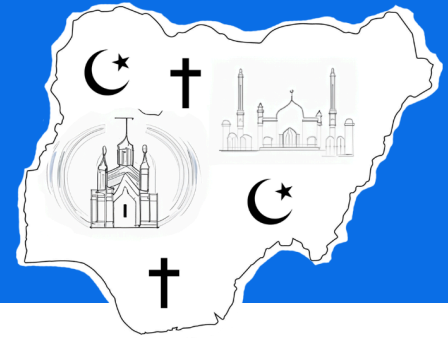


Digital Pulse: Key Findings in Nigeria's Online Inter Religious Dialogue



This report is intended to offer an overview of inter-religious issues present in Nigeria's digital ecosystem, identifying emerging narratives, key actors, tactics, or techniques used in conversations related to communal clashes and religious groups. The overview is the fourth in a series of social media analytical reports by the Build Up and local partners that seek to empower youths in Bauchi, Plateau, and Gombe to advance inter-religious tolerance and freedom of religion. The report was written by Allan Cheboi, Data and Digital Technology lead at Build Up.

1. Executive Summary

The following are the main findings of Build Up's social media analysis in the month of October:

- **Polarising Historical Narratives:** Narratives in Plateau State, such as claims of Fulani expansionism and historical grievances, deepen ethnic and religious divides. These received substantial engagement, such as 48,600 views, highlighting their resonance with the public.
- **Positive Counter-Narratives:** Stories of interfaith harmony, such as a church and mosque sharing a wall in Jos, emerged as examples of peaceful coexistence. However, they received lower engagement compared to divisive narratives.
- **Religious and Political Tensions:** In Bauchi and Gombe, debates over Sharia law, religious representation, and leadership sparked polarisation. Posts questioning Christian inclusivity in politics and framing governance issues as religious conflicts perpetuated distrust.
- **Economic Challenges Framed Religiously:** Economic issues like the high cost of rice in Gombe were linked to religious politics, creating a narrative of failed Muslim leadership, with minimal but potent engagement.
- **Global Religious Solidarity:** Posts praising Iran's Islamic leadership and addressing religious persecution in Plateau and Bauchi amplified intra-religious unity but risked alienating other religious groups.
- **Inspirational Stories:** Celebrations of achievements, such as Hajara Dan'azumi's recognition as a global Quran reciter, provided a counter-narrative to divisive content but had comparatively low engagement.

We recommend that Influencers and CSOs should amplify positive interfaith narratives, counter divisive content with fact-based messaging, and engage religious leaders and grassroots initiatives to promote unity and dialogue while addressing shared socio-economic challenges.

The section below expands on the core narratives, the main actors identified and the main social media channels used to propagate them. At the end of the report, we make suggestions for particular narratives or techniques that warrant ongoing monitoring.

2. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology and tools the team uses to identify and map key events in the Nigerian information ecosystem and the actors or networks behind them.

This analysis uses social media listening and mainstream media monitoring tools to scan emerging trends and narratives in the Nigerian information environment. The report focuses on content primarily published in English between 01 October 2024 and 31 October 2024.

The analysis team used a number of tools, including:

1. **Phoenix**: This is Build Up's social media monitoring tool tracks and maps mentions of specific keywords and individuals across various social media platforms. It provides access to data feeds from Facebook and TikTok.
2. **Meltwater**: This social media monitoring tool tracks and maps mentions of specific keywords and individuals across various social media platforms. It provides access to data feeds from X, blogs, and online news sources.

The analysis used specific Boolean¹ search terms to gather relevant data for monitoring and analysis. These search terms were carefully selected to capture relevant content related to the topic of interest. Here is an example of a Boolean search query used:

Query: (("nigeria" OR "nigerians") AND ("plateau" OR "bauchi" OR "gombe") AND ("christian" OR "islamic" OR "boko" OR "haram" OR "Boko Haram" OR "apc" OR "muslim" OR "ethnic" OR "terrorists" OR "children" OR "insecurity" OR "insurgency" OR "alhaji" OR "terrorism" OR "killings" OR "kidnapping" OR "violence" OR "fulani" OR "bandits" OR "taraba" OR "tribe" OR "criminal" OR "army" OR "shettima" OR "armed" OR "el-rufai" OR "deaths" OR "kidnappers" OR "crisis" OR "banditry" OR "massacre" OR "mourn" OR "islamists" OR "displaced" OR "customary" OR "suspects" OR "perpetrators" OR "killers" OR "abduct" OR "victims" OR "threats" OR "territorial" OR "soldiers" OR "islam" OR "terrorist" OR "kidnap"))

The full list of keywords used for the data collection can be found on this [link](#).

It is important to note that the general query is used only for an initial search. Based on the results, it is then customised to conduct more specific searches. Although we aim to capture a broad range of relevant content, there is always the possibility of missing posts that do not explicitly match the selected search terms. Additionally, the effectiveness of the Boolean search terms may be influenced by factors such as variations in language use, slang, or evolving terminology. It is important to note that the data gathered for this analysis may have certain limitations. These include:

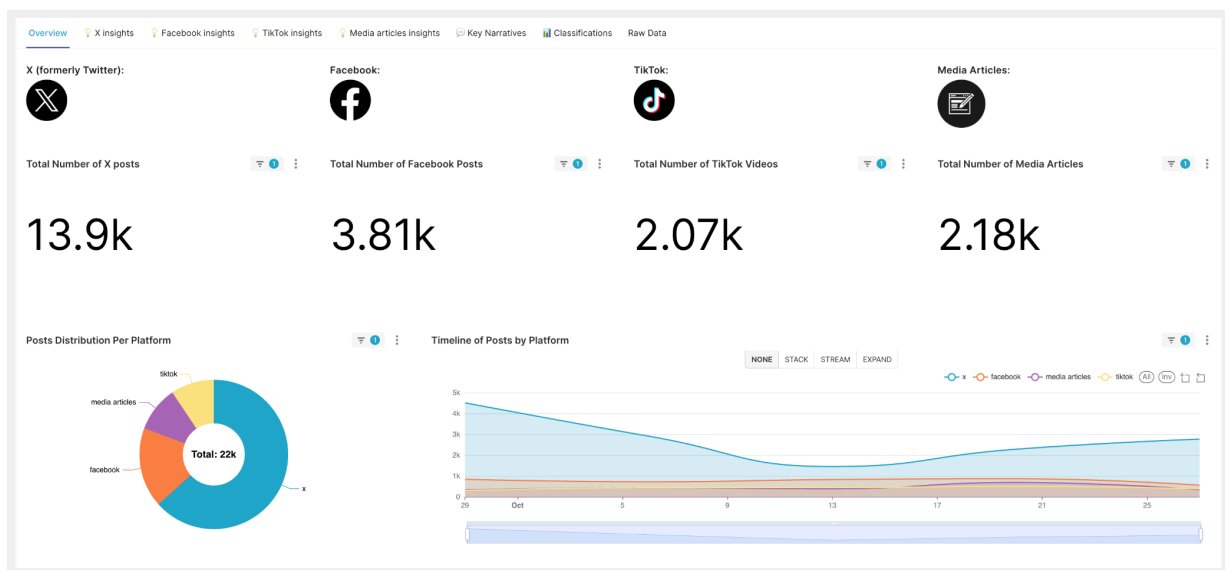
1. The reliance on publicly available information on social media platforms.
2. The possibility of missing data from private accounts or restricted platforms.
3. The inaccuracy of certain information even if shown on profiles such as location, gender, or identity in general.

¹ See Glossary section for definition

3. General findings

This section examines the key findings that were identified over the review period, citing specific examples.

The analysis is based on a total of 22,000 pieces of content from X, Facebook, TikTok and Media Articles.



Dashboard for the SfCG Youth For CARE Project (Source: Phoenix/ Build Up)

4. Findings by state

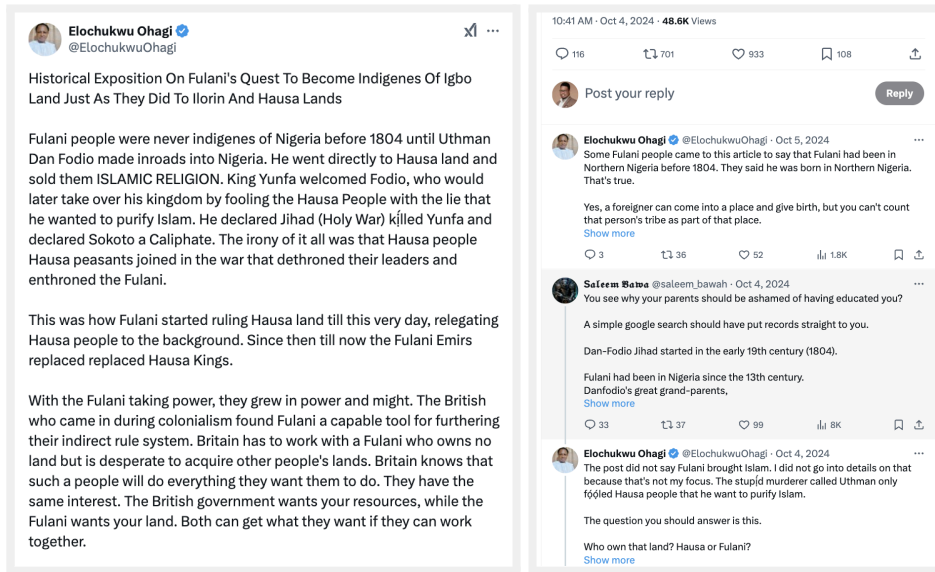
The following are the key narratives observed on Facebook and X with findings divided by state, both in terms of where events took place throughout this timeline, and how specific mention of states affected narratives of online users in comments, thereby allowing the team to track general patterns of polarisation:

3.1. Plateau state:

3.1.1. Fulani expansionism: Historical narratives fueling ethnic and religious tensions

Posts by user Elochukwu Ohagi, with a total of 48,600 views, 701 likes, 933 shares, and 116 comments, claim that the Fulani are outsiders with a colonial history of dominance over other ethnic groups, including the Hausa. These narratives frame Fulani actions as part of a historical expansionist agenda to dominate ethnic minorities and occupy indigenous lands. By connecting current tensions to historical grievances, such rhetoric deepens ethnic and religious divisions. It complicates

peacebuilding efforts in Plateau State by casting an entire ethnic group as aggressors and perpetuating mistrust between communities.



Sample post highlighting historical exposition of Fulanis ([link](#)) (Source: X, Facebook)

3.1.2. Religious tolerance in Jos: A Church and Mosque sharing a fence

A widely circulated post depicting a church and mosque sharing a fence in Jos gathered 4,406 views, 90 likes, 105 shares, and 9 comments. It highlighted a rare instance of interfaith harmony, crediting the stewardship of two biological brothers, one Christian and one Muslim. This narrative of peaceful coexistence serves as a counter-narrative to hostility in Plateau State. It underscores the potential for interfaith collaboration and can be used by influencers to promote reconciliation and mutual respect in the region.



Sample post of claim about Church and Mosque sharing a wall ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.1.3. Arm yourselves: Calls for retaliation against Fulani groups

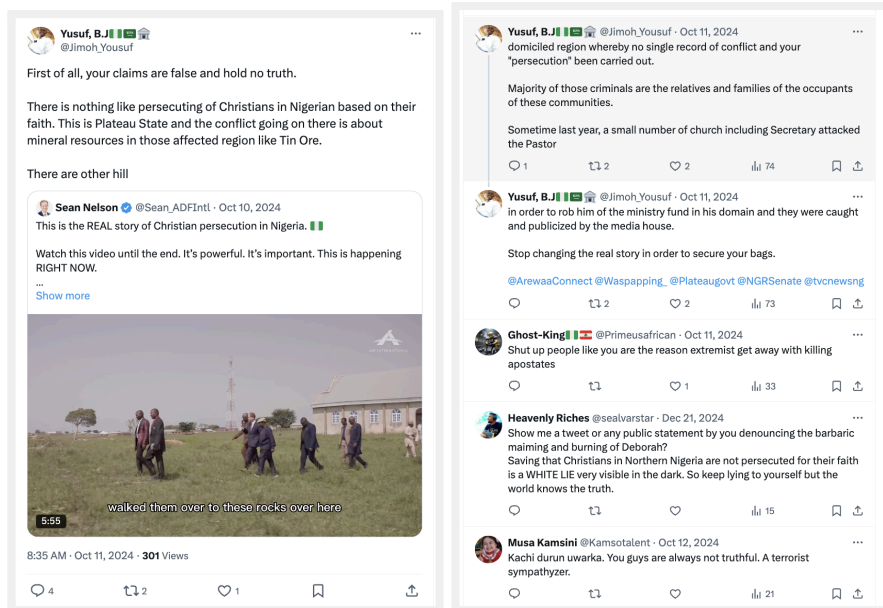
Posts by users such as The Njaba Times calling for Christian communities to arm themselves received a modest 124 views, 5 likes, 5 retweets, and 1 comment. These posts depict Fulani groups as aggressors and accuse the government of complicity in attacks on Christians. While they resonate with communities feeling abandoned by authorities, such calls exacerbate tensions, fuel cycles of violence, and discourage peaceful resolutions, making reconciliation efforts in Plateau State more challenging.



Post by Njaba Times calling on Christians to arm themselves ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.1.4. Religious persecution or resource conflict?: Disputing the narrative

Posts by Yusuf BJ, with 301 views, 4 likes, 2 retweets, and 1 comment, argue that the Plateau conflict is not about religion but rather mineral resources. By reframing the violence as a resource-based issue, such narratives attempt to shift public focus from religious tensions to economic grievances. While this framing may encourage broader perspectives, it risks alienating those who feel their religious grievances are being dismissed, thereby undermining interfaith dialogue.



Sample post related to resource conflict claims ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.1.5. Islamic solidarity: Praising Iran’s defence of Islam

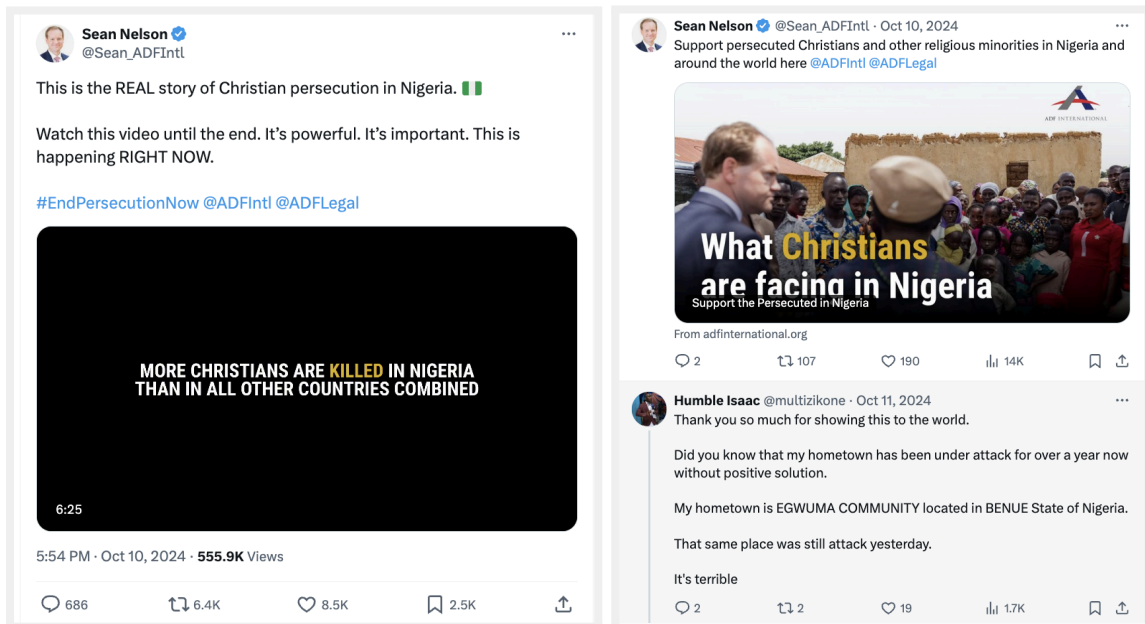
A narrative praising Iran as a defender of Islamic values received 31,000 likes, 3,600 retweets, and 959,000 views. These posts resonate with local Muslim communities by framing global Islamic solidarity as a countermeasure to religious persecution. While they strengthen intra-religious unity, they risk deepening divisions by alienating Christian communities, complicating reconciliation efforts within Plateau State.



Sample post related to Iran & Nigeria support for Islam ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.1.6. Viral video of Christian persecution in Plateau State

A widely shared video describes how Christians in Plateau State are disproportionately targeted, with several posts declaring that "more Christians are killed in Nigeria than in all other countries combined." This narrative was highlighted in a video post by Sean Nelson from ADF International, an NGO that was seeking funding to enable provision of legal services for Christians persecuted in Nigeria. The post was shared further by other users including Elzee of Jos, receiving 159 views.



Sample posts about the Christian persecution in Plateau State ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.1.7. Islam Hate: Criticism of religious hatred from a Christian perspective

A post by a user called Francis rebuts narratives accusing Christians of hating Islam, instead attributing Christian scepticism towards Islam to lived experiences of terrorism in Jos and other regions. This post, responding to a critique of Christian attitudes, only received a modest 56 views and 3 likes.



Sample posts about the Christian hate of Islam in Plateau State ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.2. **Bauchi state:**

3.2.1. **Islamisation allegations: Controversy around Sharia law expansion**

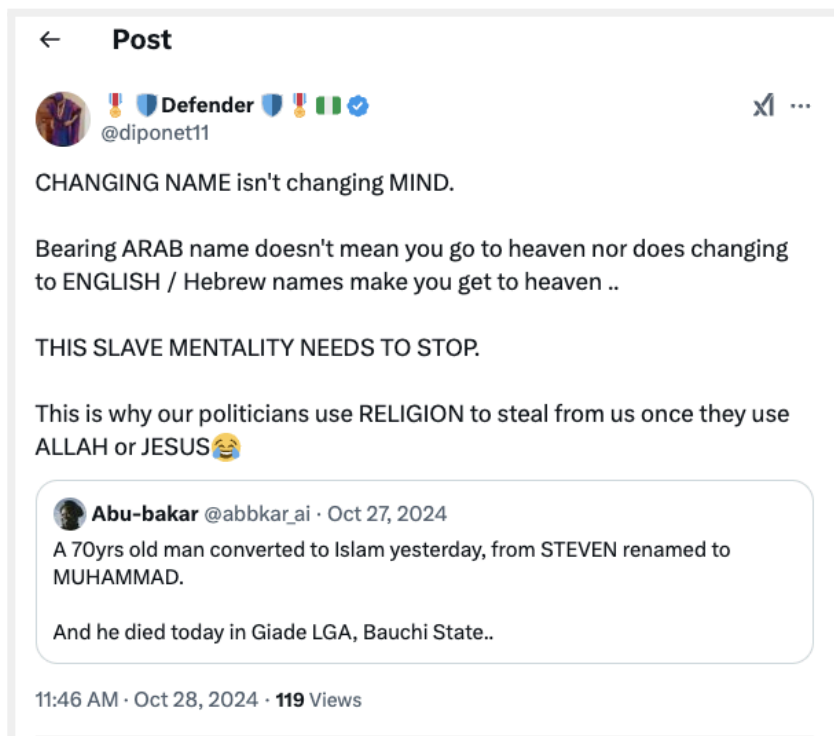
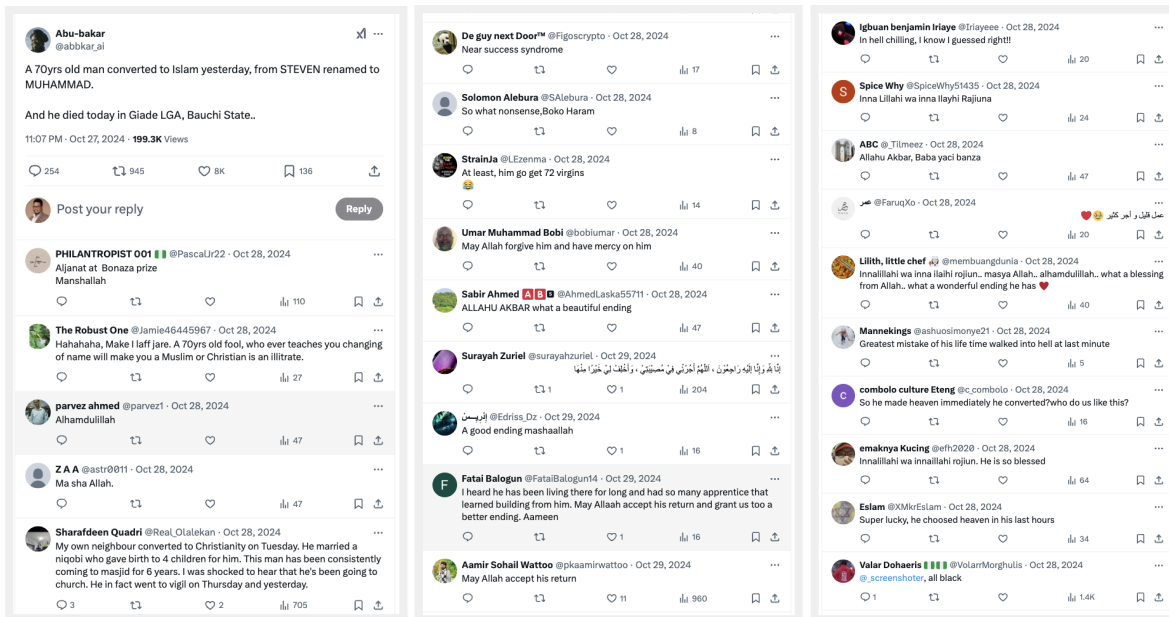
Aliyu Bappa Misau, a Bauchi lawmaker, sparked heated debates by proposing a bill to expand Sharia law in Nigeria to cover civil matters such as contracts and disputes. Critics argued that the move could undermine Nigeria's secular constitution and alienate non-Muslims, while proponents framed it as modernising Islamic law to reflect contemporary needs. The primary post discussing the bill accumulated 133.4K views, 1,000 likes, 978 retweets, and 499 comments, generating widespread social media engagement. The debate highlights the tension between religious and secular ideologies in governance, with critics viewing the proposal as a step toward religious domination. This narrative risks alienating non-Muslim communities, deepening distrust, and exacerbating fears of exclusion in Bauchi and beyond.



Sample posts about the Sharia Law ([link 1](#), [link 2](#), [link 3](#), [link 4](#)) (Source: X)

3.2.2. Conversion and death: A 70-year-old man's journey to Islam

A post shared the story of a 70-year-old man in Giade LGA, Bauchi State, who converted to Islam and was renamed “Muhammad” before passing away the following day. The post received 199.3K views, 8,000 likes, 945 retweets, and 254 comments, with users expressing a mix of admiration for his spiritual journey and scepticism over the implications of such conversions. While this narrative celebrates religious choice, it also sparked divisive debates about the authenticity and motives behind interfaith conversions, fuelling underlying tensions between Christian and Muslim communities. This narrative risks exacerbating interfaith mistrust, limiting opportunities for reconciliation and mutual understanding.



Sample posts about the conversion of the 70 year old ([Link1](#), [link 2](#)) (Source: X)

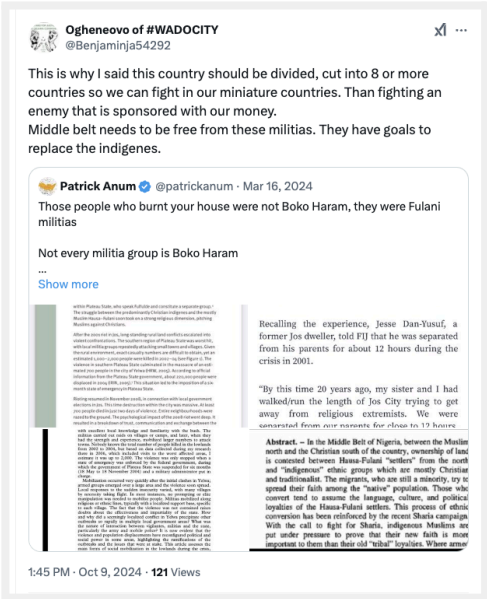
3.2.3. Christian persecution in Bauchi: Recounting historical grievances

Social media posts revisited past violence targeting Christians in Bauchi, including the 2012 bombing of St. John’s Catholic Church, which was attributed to Boko Haram. A user cited this incident as evidence of Arewa complicity in nurturing terrorism against Christians. One post gathered 442 views, 147 likes, and 8 retweets, reigniting anger and distrust among Christian communities. By bringing historical grievances back to the forefront, this narrative perpetuates a cycle of victimhood and

resentment, hampering efforts to foster interfaith reconciliation and understanding. It also stokes fears of continued systemic marginalisation in Bauchi and other northern states.

3.2.4. Dividing Nigeria: Advocacy for middle belt autonomy

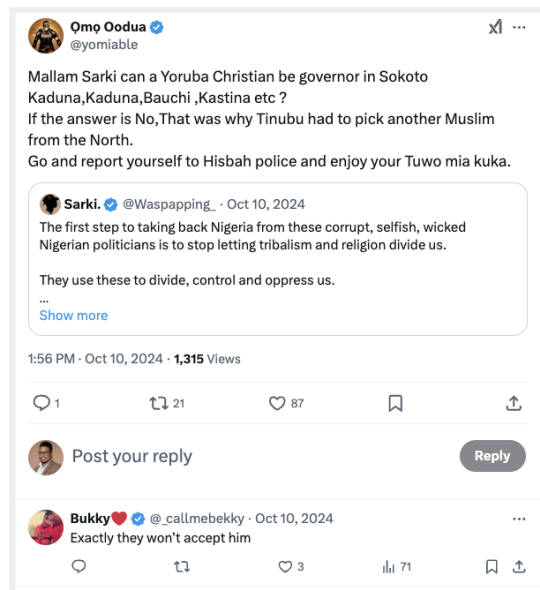
A post from a user supported the idea of splitting Nigeria into smaller entities, including autonomy for the Middle Belt, to escape perceived oppression by Fulani groups. The post, which received 121 views, 4 likes, and 3 comments, argued that independence would protect the Middle Belt from religious and ethnic aggression. This narrative reflects growing frustration with perceived systemic marginalisation and domination by northern elites, potentially fuelling secessionist sentiments. While it gives a voice to grievances, such rhetoric risks deepening inter-ethnic and inter-religious divisions, making peaceful coexistence increasingly difficult.



Sample post related to division of Nigeria ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.2.5. Political exclusivity: Can a Christian lead in Bauchi?

A social media post questioned whether a Yoruba Christian could ever hold political leadership positions in predominantly Muslim northern states like Bauchi. The post received 1,315 views, 87 likes, and 21 retweets, sparking debates about the systemic exclusion of Christians from political power in northern Nigeria. This narrative underscores the challenges of political inclusivity, as perceptions of marginalisation continue to alienate Christian communities. By questioning the balance of representation, this narrative risks exacerbating religious divides in Bauchi's political landscape, hindering broader efforts for interfaith cooperation and fairness in governance.



Sample post about leadership in Bauchi ([link](#)) (Source: X)

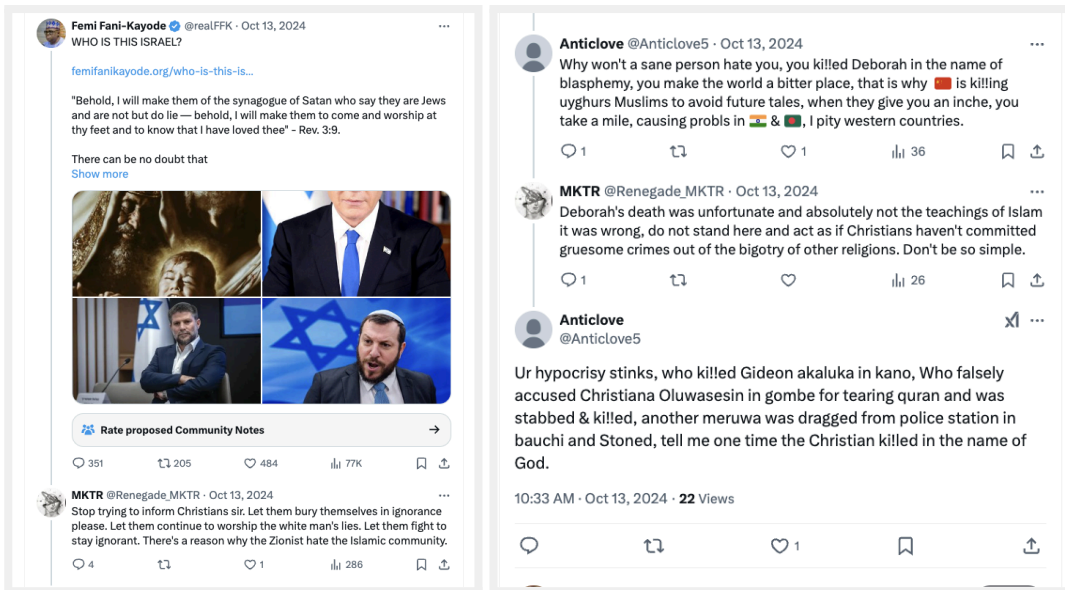
3.2.6. **Sharia expansion: Debunking Islamophobia**

A counter-narrative to the Sharia bill's criticism emerged, with a user explaining that Islamic law applies only to Muslims and does not infringe on the rights of non-Muslims. The post, which garnered 1,234 views, 98 likes, and 4 retweets, accused critics of sensationalism and clarified the bill's intent to align Islamic laws with commercial practices. While the explanation sought to calm fears, it also polarised opinions, with critics viewing it as dismissive of legitimate concerns. This narrative highlights the difficulty of achieving balanced interfaith dialogue, as defensive tones may alienate sceptics, further polarising communities.

3.3. **Gombe State:**

3.3.1. **Who is Israel? Religious polarisation and misuse of scripture**

A post by a prominent user quoting Revelations 3:9 to question the legitimacy of Israel as a state triggered discussions about religious interpretation and its divisive potential. The post, which garnered 77,000 views, 351 comments, 205 retweets, and 484 likes, saw comments both supporting and condemning the content. Some users used the thread to highlight perceived hypocrisy in inter-religious relationships, referencing cases of violence and religious tensions in Gombe and other states. The narrative fuels existing divisions by framing Christians and Muslims as adversaries, undermining the possibility of inter-religious dialogue and coexistence in Gombe State. Such discourse can perpetuate mistrust, making reconciliation efforts more challenging.



Sample post highlighting the Israel narrative ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.3.2. Muslim-Muslim ticket and economic hardship

Tweets mocking the "Muslim-Muslim" ticket of Nigeria's leadership and linking it to the high cost of rice in Gombe at ₦160,000 a bag, with hashtags like #TinubuMustGo, paints a narrative of failed leadership tied to religious affiliations. The post gained minimal traction but reflects sentiments of dissatisfaction. While the post's reach is limited, it connects religious politics with socio-economic issues, potentially exacerbating tensions in a state like Gombe, where socio-economic struggles are prevalent. Such narratives could deepen divisions and make it harder to address these issues through interfaith collaborations.



Sample posts mocking & linking the Muslim-Muslim ticket to economic hardship ([link 1](#), [link 2](#)) (Source: X)

3.3.3. Health and leadership in a religious context

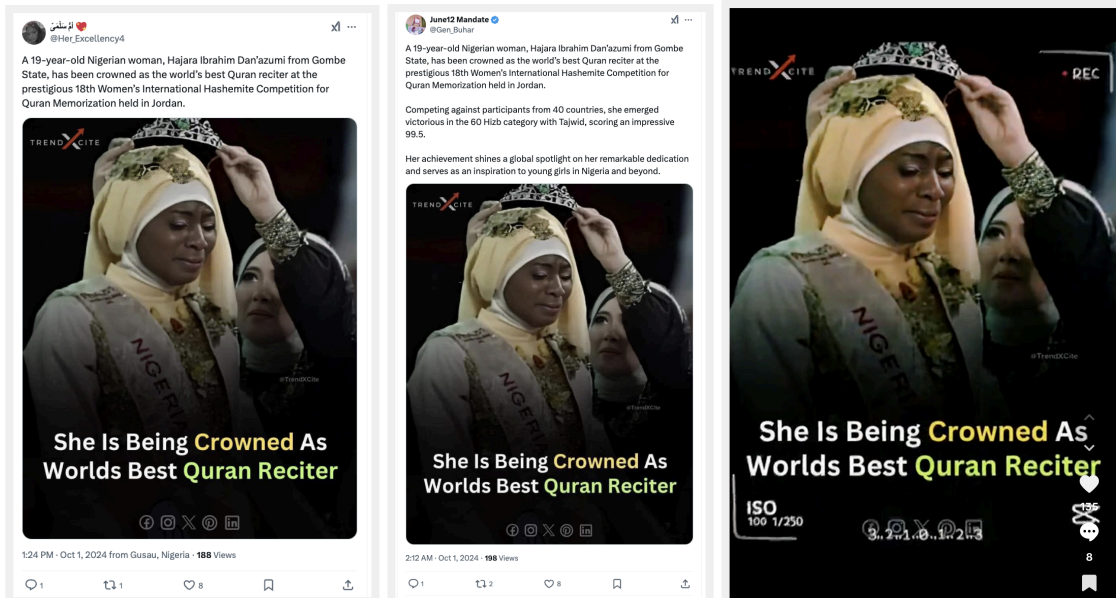
A viral discussion sparked by a post showing President Tinubu sitting on a chair in a mosque during a wedding ceremony, with 23 posts receiving a modest 178 likes, questioned the appropriateness of his actions and health for office. Responses included criticisms of religious practices and leadership capability. The conversation blends religious symbolism with political critique, potentially alienating certain groups in Gombe. It highlights how public figures' actions in religious spaces can influence perceptions, impacting inter-religious trust and discussions on governance.



Sample post highlighting the narrative ([link](#)) (Source: X)

3.3.4. Celebrating a global Quran reciter: Positive inspiration amidst religious tensions

The crowning of Hajara Ibrahim Dan'azumi from Gombe as the world's best Quran reciter at an international competition was widely celebrated, with 37 posts receiving 7,360 likes, and 807 comments. This narrative demonstrates a positive representation of religious accomplishment and its potential to inspire unity and pride in Gombe State. Highlighting such achievements fosters inter-religious understanding by showcasing cultural and religious contributions on a global scale, countering divisive narratives.



Sample posts highlighting the celebratory posts ([link 1](#), [link 2](#), [link 3](#)) (Source: X & TikTok)

4. Recommendations

- **Amplify positive interfaith stories:** Share and promote narratives like the church-mosque coexistence in Jos to demonstrate peaceful collaboration. This should be accompanied by campaigns highlighting interfaith dialogue and shared community successes.
- **Counter divisive historical narratives:** Use storytelling to challenge inflammatory posts about Fulani expansionism or religious domination. Provide nuanced historical perspectives to mitigate mistrust.
- **Reframe economic issues:** Address grievances such as economic hardship without linking them to religious or ethnic identities. Encourage discussions around governance and systemic solutions instead of sectarian blame.
- **Engage religious leaders:** Mobilise respected Christian and Muslim leaders in Plateau, Bauchi, and Gombe to jointly address polarising content, fostering unity through combined public statements or events.
- **Promote inspirational achievements:** Leverage stories like Hajara Dan'azumi's global success to inspire unity and pride in diverse cultural and religious contributions. Incorporate these into community development narratives.
- **Invest in grassroots dialogues:** Support community-driven initiatives that provide platforms for discussing localised grievances, such as resource conflicts or political inclusivity, in non-inflammatory, solution-oriented ways.
- **Monitor and debunk harmful narratives:** Use technology to track and flag posts that fuel polarisation, providing counter-narratives that are evidence-based and resonate with affected communities.