



AFRICA POLICY  
CONVERSATIONS

## REPORT ON AfPC TWITTER SPACE ON RELIGION, VIOLENCE AND EXTERNAL INTERVENTION IN NIGERIA

### *Executive Summary*

The Africa Policy Conversations (AfPC) convened a critical policy dialogue on the theme “Religion, Violence, and External Intervention in Nigeria.” The session brought together speakers from diverse professional backgrounds, including governance, law, security, civil society, development, and interfaith advocacy.

The conversation examined the intersection of religion and violence in Nigeria, explored long-standing grievances from communities affected by conflict, and reviewed the growing involvement of external actors, such as foreign governments, international media, and advocacy groups in Nigeria’s internal affairs.

Participants emphasised the historical, political, and socioeconomic complexities that shape Nigeria’s security landscape. They highlighted the dangers of framing national insecurity strictly as a religious war, noting that both Christians and Muslims have been victims of violence. The dialogue underscored the need for accurate narratives, improved state accountability, enhanced policing and justice systems, and multi-stakeholder peacebuilding efforts.

The session concluded with actionable recommendations for government, civil society, and young Nigerians, focusing on strengthening institutions, restoring public trust, and promoting national unity.



RELIGION, VIOLENCE  
AND EXTERNAL  
INTERVENTION  
IN NIGERIA

# WEBINAR REPORT

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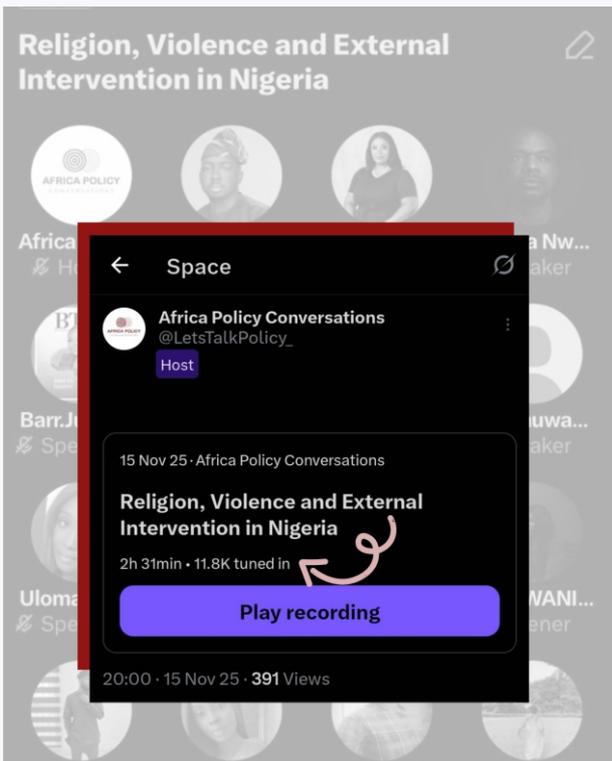


## Introduction

The Africa Policy Conversations headquartered in Abuja and registered across Nigeria, South Africa, the United States, and supported by a growing cohort in the United Kingdom serves as a platform for Africans to analyse policies, interrogate systems, and propose context-specific solutions. Members include policymakers, government actors, civil society leaders, academics, and the general public.

The dialogue on Religion, Violence, and External Intervention in Nigeria aimed to Explore the roots of religiously framed violence, examine the validity of narratives on "Christian genocide", analyse the role of external actors in shaping domestic discourse, propose evidence-based policy responses and strengthen frameworks for peaceful coexistence

The moderator, Mrs Uchechi Mba-Uzoukwu began by outlining ground rules to ensure a respectful, evidence-based, and non-partisan conversation, discouraging inflammatory language, hate speech, political propaganda, and disinformation.



## Speakers & Moderators



**Juliet Isi Ikhayere,**  
legal practitioner and  
Principal Partner at  
Makhoms-J Attorneys



**Amara Nwankpa,**  
Public Policy and  
Governance Expert



**Zakka Junior Emmanuel,**  
MPA candidate at  
Harvard Kennedy School



**Mairo Ibrahim,**  
founder of  
Tunani Initiative



**Hamzat Amoto ,**  
legal practitioner and  
founder of  
Lawgressive Attorneys



**Uchechi Mba-Uzoukwu,**  
co-founder AfPC



**Uloma Onyebuchi,**  
Founder and CEO of  
Innovate Africa Corp



**Ajibola Disu,**  
Vice chairman,  
Eti-Osa, African Democratic  
Congress



Venue: X Spaces (Virtual)  
Date: 15th November 2025



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## *Opening Address*

**Speaker:** Zaka Junior Emmanuel

**Topic:** Faith, Fragility, and the Future of Coexistence,  
Lessons from Southern Kaduna



Mr. Emmanuel began his address with a deeply personal reflection on the painful history of violence that has shaped life in Southern Kaduna. For over fifteen years, he explained, the region has lived under the shadow of recurrent attacks, cycles of unrest that have become woven into the lived memory of its people. Long before the world began paying attention, the community relied on early online platforms such as the Gurara Forum to document incidents, warn one another, and preserve evidence of the violence that was unfolding around them.

He recalled the 2001 Sharia crisis in Kaduna, a turning point that exposed the tension between Nigeria's secular constitutional framework and attempts to introduce religious law at the state level. For him, this was not just a national issue but a personal tragedy. Returning home during the crisis, he found his house in ashes, his community shattered, and neighbours he had grown up with brutally killed. His family had no choice but to flee and resettle in a safer, predominantly Christian area.

He further highlighted the immense human cost of the violence. He described attending mass burials, sometimes with over 300 bodies laid

side by side. Entire families were wiped out in their sleep, never having engaged in any conflict with their attackers. Widows and children, left without support, became symbols of the region's long-term suffering. Priests, community leaders, and ordinary citizens alike had been targeted and killed, leaving a deep wound in the social and spiritual fabric of Southern Kaduna.

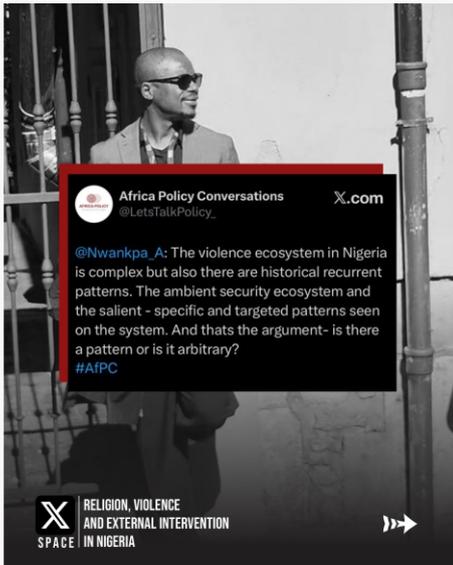
Mr. Emmanuel acknowledged that opinions differ on how to describe these atrocities. While some argue over whether the term "genocide" applies, he insisted that the debate over language must not overshadow the undeniable reality: people are being killed. Efforts to frame the violence merely as "farmer-herder clashes" strip away the complexity and ignore the lived experiences of those directly affected. He also highlighted the political dimensions of the crisis. He noted that people minimize or excuse violence when the perpetrators share their ethnic or regional identity. This selective empathy, driven by political loyalty or communal bias, undermines any hope for unity or accountability.

Turning to the role of external actors, Mr. Emmanuel noted that international voices, such as remarks by President Donald Trump, have drawn global attention to the situation. This attention, he observed, may have pressured Nigerian authorities into providing stronger security responses than before. He called this generation to confront Nigeria's religious and ethnic fractures with honesty. Rather than focusing solely on lamenting the past, he urged participants to channel their energy into developing actionable solutions that can pave the way for a more peaceful and united Nigeria.

## Panel Discussions

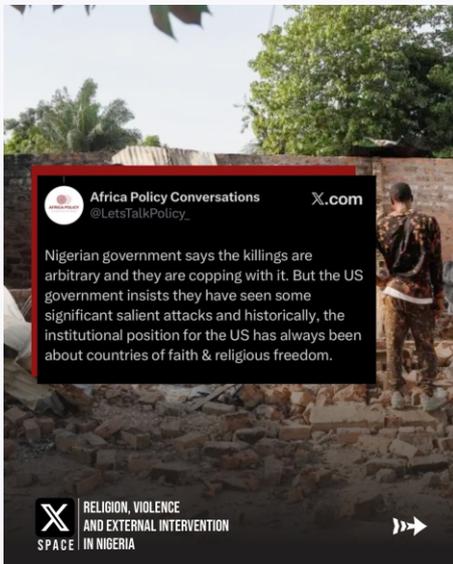


### Amara Nkwankpa



Amara began by expressing his appreciation for AFPC’s commitment to creating a space where difficult national issues could be examined honestly. He described Nigeria’s insecurity not as a single problem with a simple cause, but as a complex and multi-layered challenge shaped by history, politics, religion, and social dynamics.

Drawing from past events, he noted that there have been clear historical patterns pointing to targeted attacks on communities of faith across the country. These patterns did not emerge overnight; they have accumulated over time, forming a troubling trend that the international community has not ignored.



He explained that since 2009, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom has consistently listed Nigeria as a “Country of Particular Concern” for religious freedom violations. This repeated designation reflects the seriousness with which external actors view the situation. Amara emphasized that while Nigeria is a sovereign nation, sovereignty is not an unchallenged shield. A state’s legitimacy depends on its ability and willingness to protect its own people. When citizens remain vulnerable and unprotected, the credibility of that sovereignty weakens.

He pointed out that the heart of the matter is simple: Is Nigeria fulfilling its fundamental responsibility to safeguard communities of faith? Until that question is answered honestly, the country will continue to struggle with both internal insecurity and external scrutiny.

### Juliet Isi Ikhayere



Juliet built on the conversation by acknowledging Nigeria’s status as a sovereign nation; however, sovereignty does not stand unquestioned when a state fails to prevent crimes against humanity. In the eyes of the international community, she explained, sovereignty carries responsibilities, and when those responsibilities are not met, external scrutiny becomes inevitable.

She noted that weak policing and the persistent failure to prosecute offenders have created an environment where perpetrators feel emboldened. When people commit violent crimes without consequences, it signals a breakdown in the justice system and deepens public fear and mistrust. She added that the government’s lack of transparency has only worsened the situation. Because citizens are not given clear or honest information about what is happening, many feel compelled to look outward, seeking help, advocacy, or attention from international actors who appear more responsive than their own institutions.

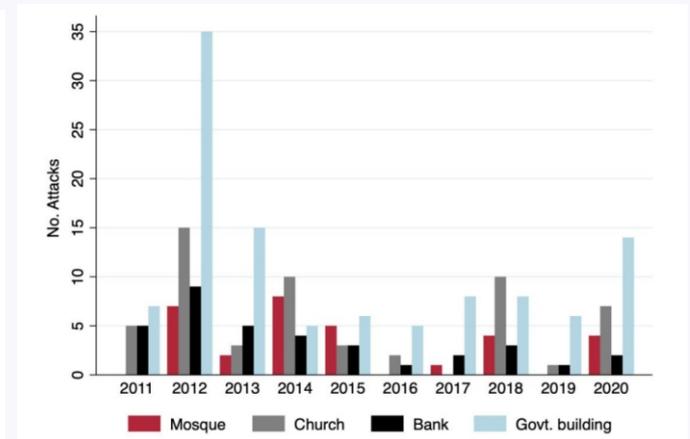
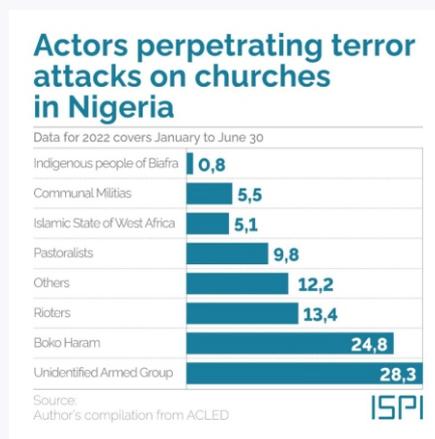
## Panel Discussions



### Mairo Ibrahim

She cautioned against the growing tendency to frame Nigeria's insecurity purely through a religious lens, explaining that such framing only deepens existing divides and distracts from the actual issues at stake. When every act of violence is interpreted as an attack by one faith against another, she said, it becomes easier for communities to turn against each other rather than unite against the real problem.

She argued that citizens must shift their focus away from religious labels and concentrate instead on demanding accountability from the government. The core responsibility of any state is to protect the lives and property of its people. Until Nigerians collectively insist on competent governance and responsible leadership, insecurity will continue to thrive, regardless of which narrative is used to describe it.



Mercy Corps - Fear of the Unknown

### Uloma Onyebuchi



Uloma observed that, in recent years, Nigeria has increasingly been portrayed on the international stage as a "religious warzone." This label, she noted, paints a narrow and often misleading picture of the country's challenges. While religion is frequently used as a frame, the deeper, more persistent roots of the crisis lie in bad governance, widespread poverty, and the lack of economic opportunities that leave people vulnerable and desperate.

She explained that these negative international narratives do more than damage reputations; they actively discourage foreign investment and partnerships. When the world sees Nigeria primarily as a battleground of religious extremism, investors hesitate, development slows, and communities suffer even more. She emphasized the need for Nigeria to "own its narrative." This means telling its own story clearly, honestly, and confidently, engaging with communities, rebuilding trust, and ensuring that the loudest voices about Nigeria are not always external ones.

She stressed that meaningful change must begin with education and empowerment, especially for young people. By equipping citizens with knowledge, skills, and opportunities, Nigeria can reduce vulnerability to extremist recruitment and create pathways that steer individuals away from violence. Education, she said, is one of the strongest tools for building resilience and rewriting Nigeria's future.

## *Panel Discussions*



**Hamzat Amoto**

He pointed out that at the heart of the country's persistent insecurity lies a deeper, longstanding problem: the failure of government institutions to fulfil their basic responsibilities. For years, he explained, leaders have avoided accountability, allowing impunity to flourish and violence to spread unchallenged.

This lack of responsibility, both in preventing attacks and in responding to them, has created an environment where insecurity is not just possible but inevitable. Until the government takes ownership of its failures and commits to genuine accountability, the cycle of violence will continue to repeat itself.

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## *Recommendations*

1. End the "repentance" reintegration approach without justice or accountability for offenders.
2. Strengthen institutions, including modern policing, intelligence systems, and judicial effectiveness.
3. Implement real-time policing reforms, including state policing.
4. Local government reforms to improve grassroots security management.
5. Government prioritization of security, placing protection of lives above politics.
6. Responsible information sharing, avoid narratives that externalize an internal problem.
7. Integrate security and economic interventions, acknowledging economic roots of conflict.
8. Invest in education and mindset change, especially for youth.
9. Enforce prosecution and impose deterrent penalties for offenders.
10. Strengthen democratic processes, ensuring credible elections and public trust.
11. Develop creative economic empowerment frameworks for both skilled and unskilled citizens.
12. Fast-track prosecution of terrorists and perpetrators of communal violence.

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## *Questions and Responses*

### *1. What is the general consensus on Donald Trump's intervention?*

Amara responded that opinions on President Trump's intervention are far from unified. There is no single, shared consensus, he explained, because people interpret external involvement through different political, religious, and emotional lenses. But despite these varying perspectives, one thing remains clear: the central focus should always be on saving Nigerian lives.

He emphasized that while international assistance can be helpful, it must never overshadow Nigeria's sovereignty or be shaped by foreign agendas. Any external support, he insisted, must be guided by Nigeria's own priorities, its context, and the voices of its people, not the interests of outsiders.

## *2. Who is committing the killings and why?*

Mairo acknowledged that many of the attacks have been carried out by Muslim extremists, a reality that cannot be ignored. However, she reminded everyone that the violence has not spared any group, as both Christians and Muslims have suffered devastating losses. Entire communities across different faiths have been torn apart by the same wave of brutality.

She stressed that while identifying perpetrators is important, becoming fixated on labels only deepens divisions and shifts attention away from what truly matters. The real priority, she insisted, should be stopping the killings and protecting innocent lives. Until the violence itself is halted, debates about who is responsible will do little to ease the pain of the victims or bring lasting peace.

## *3. What is Nigeria's symbol of unity? What stories of unity can we collectively point to? And who are the role models our generation, and those after us, can look up to?*

Uloma admitted that, at this moment in Nigeria's history, there is no single symbol of unity that every citizen can collectively point to. The country's divisions, religious, ethnic, and political, have made it difficult to rally around one shared identity or emblem. She urged young Nigerians to come together, not around a symbol that does not yet exist, but around a shared purpose: to reshape the narratives that define the nation. She encouraged them to channel their frustration not into conflict but into meaningful civic action that demands accountability and drives positive change.

Most importantly, she emphasized the need to amplify stories that highlight Nigeria's strength, resilience, and potential. By telling these stories and showing the world a different side of the country, young people can help rebuild the unity that has eroded over time.

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## *Closing Remarks*

Chinenye Uwanaka, co-founder AfPC, concluded the discussion by highlighting the vital role of young people in leading with courage, empathy, and accountability. She emphasized that Nigeria's diversity should be viewed as a source of strength and called on citizens to actively participate in governance through policy engagement, elections, advocacy, and public discourse. She noted that meaningful progress requires both faith and action. She also expressed her gratitude to all speakers and to AfPC for providing a platform that enabled this important dialogue.

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## *Conclusion*

The AfPC session illuminated the complex layers of Nigeria's religiously linked violence, demonstrating that historical grievances, political interests, socioeconomic conditions, and contested narratives shape insecurity. Participants agreed that while religion often frames conflict, the underlying drivers are deeply structural.

Strengthening institutions, restoring trust, promoting accurate narratives, and fostering unity across religious and ethnic divides remain central to building a peaceful Nigeria. The session's insights will contribute to a broader AfPC policy brief for engagement with policymakers and civil society stakeholders.