

# Contextualising Fulani-Herdsman Conflict in Nigeria

Kingsley Emeka Ezemenaka, Chijioke Egwu Ekumaoko

This article examines President Muhammadu Buhari's role in the long-running conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria. Having attained the rank of fourth-deadliest terrorist group in the world, the attacks of Fulani herdsmen on Nigerian farmers and vice versa are gaining international coverage, but commanding too little internal investigation. Using qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches, this article reveals that the conflict between the farmers and Fulani herdsmen is multifaceted. This article debunks factors such as ethnic ties and overt regional favouritism on President Buhari's approach to the conflict. The research findings also implicate security agencies as drivers of the conflict by aiding the Fulani herdsmen with acquisition of arms, and withholding information useful for addressing the conflict. Endemic corruption, political incompetence and political misdemeanour are shown to be key factors exacerbating the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers.

*Keywords:* Nigeria, Fulani herdsmen, farmers, conflict, security

In international relations discourse, the issues of state interaction and state dependency arise because of problems facing nation-states, particularly resource scarcity. Such problems may be classified as internal or external. For many African nations, and for Nigeria specifically, external factors include a history of colonial experience, neo-colonialism, membership of international organizations, and shared sovereignty. But as Clark has already noted, 'a large majority of studies focused not

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on states, leaders, and their interests, but on the legacy of colonialism and the structure of the world economy, which they perceived to account for Africa's poor record of post-colonial development.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, Ekumaoko noted that insecurity has continued to rank as one of the problems of highest concern for the country.<sup>2</sup> In the oil-producing states of the Niger Delta, militancy has destabilized the economic, social and political wellbeing of many Nigerians. The affected citizens point to marginalization and poor representation in a poorly-structured federal system as their primary grievances against the state. Between 2009 and 2014, the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram destroyed lives and property on a rampage through north-eastern Nigeria. The terrorists proclaimed their aim of Islamizing the entire country. Though it is unclear why, the wave of destruction at the hands of Boko Haram has steadily declined following the election of President Buhari in 2015. While relative peace seems to have returned to north-eastern Nigeria, another form of unrest and insecurity is escalating across the entire country.

Records from IFRA-Nigeria (2014) show that violent deaths as a result of clashes between herdsmen and farmers accounted for 68 percent of the total number of deaths across north-central Nigeria (786 of 1,150).<sup>3</sup> This trend of fatal conflict has since spread to the eastern part of the country, with a total of 710 Nigerians killed by Fulani herdsmen over ten months in 2015-16 (Mamah and Ndajihe).<sup>4</sup>

This present spike in insecurity in Nigeria is especially worrisome because of the underlying factors attributed to it- factors that indicate that the spate of recent attacks will not discontinue without government action. The Nigerian state now faces many challenges in pivotal areas such as terrorism, militancy, ethnic tension and religious conflict. The conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen has prompted the need for a state intervention before the issue escalates enough for the international community to brand Nigeria as another 'failed' African state. More worrisome still is the way President Buhari's administration is addressing the problems of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria. The crucial point on which this study is anchored is the reluctance of the presidency to address the herdsmen-versus-farmers conflict as it foments in its early stage, before it threatens state legitimacy and sovereignty.

The Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflict are not a one-way conflict, both have suffered causalities. However, from 2010 to 2013, Fu-

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lani militants killed around 80 people. In 2014 alone, Fulani militants (who are also herdsmen) killed a total of 1229 people, making them the fourth deadliest militant group in the world according to the Global Terrorism Index.<sup>5</sup> A recent report by Mercy Corps, a global humanitarian organization funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID), said ‘the endless conflict between farmers and herdsmen across the country, especially in the north-central, is costing Nigeria at least \$14 billion in potential revenues annually’ (Agbedo).<sup>6</sup> This study investigates the hypothesis of how state are weakened by institutional deficiency, while showing how the Nigerian state responded to the Fulani-Farmer conflict and security challenges which increases ethnic disparities and xenophobic attacks. This article makes no attempt to prioritize the related problems since no single issue stands out as slighter or weightier. While the conflict’s causes and consequences are many, the primary issues discussed are state legitimacy, sovereignty, and the president’s leadership role in governing the state.

This study also seeks to address the gap in the literature concerning behavioural roles in addressing regional and ethnic conflict caused by the actions of nomadic herdsmen. Therefore, it examines the leadership behavioural role and introduces a new line of thought using the presidency role on the current conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers through an exploration of three questions:

1. Does the president’s cultural and ethnic affiliation to the Fulani tribe influence the way he addresses the conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen?
2. Is state security, legitimacy and sovereignty challenged by this conflict?
3. What are the consequences of the Buhari administration’s inability to address the conflict in a timely or effective manner?

## **Methodology**

In evaluating the observable phenomenon of the presidential role on the Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflict in Nigeria, the methodology of this study adopts a collaborative and adaptive research design that makes use of theory, regional and community situations with the objectives mentioned above and theoretical framework to help investigate and analyse the presidential role on the Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflict in Nigeria. Furthermore, the hypothetical problems

and notion associated with the presidential ethnic affiliation with the Fulani in addressing the conflict will be tested and addressed through the qualitative usage of an instrumental case study approach and quantitative method of data collection and analysis.

**Data collection:** The data were gathered through the use of a questionnaire (general information concerning the Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflict was extracted from the Nigerian population through the quantitative method using questionnaires to reach a sample of 200 respondents); 15 interviews (these were conducted across key security sector operatives consisting of members of the police, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corp (NSCDC) and the State Security Services (SSS), as well as media practitioners and key politicians whose roles relate to the Fulani conflict); the local Fulani herdsmen representative (traders) and existing literature from journals, books and newspapers.

**Data analysis:** The five months' worth of empirical information gathered from the questionnaire were analysed using the SPSS statistics software program, using logical regression with interpretations, and interviews were transcribed. Also, quantitative information was compared with the qualitative narrative and phenomenological analysis. With this, gaps in the literature concerning regional and ethnic conflict that are caused by Fulani herdsmen, farmers and the presidential role in resolving the conflict will be better understood and subsequently addressed.

### **Study rationale**

This research advances the debates of the presidential role on the regional and ethnic conflict caused by nomadic herdsmen (Fulani and farmers) in Nigeria, by showing and explaining the underlying factors that destabilizes peace and security. It is significant to African affairs studies because it takes a state-centric approach to the study of democracy and advances the debate on regional security in an African nation. This state-centric approach seeks to set aside for a moment questions of colonialism, neo-colonialism and other countries' foreign policy in order to achieve a deeper understanding of domestic political behaviour. This deeper understanding is necessary if we are to see more insightful studies of challenges to state legitimacy and sovereignty within the framework of regional and international politics.

As Malaquias argues, the realities of political, social, cultural, religious, and other connections to national and ethnic groups cannot be

ignored or dismissed in new African(ist) approaches to understanding contemporary African phenomena.<sup>7</sup> And as Clark notes, ‘for Africanists on the continent, a large majority focused not on states, leaders, and their interests, but on the legacy of colonialism and the structure of the world economy, which they perceived to account for Africa’s poor record of post-colonial development.’<sup>8</sup>

### Literature review

Recent studies of Nwanegbo and Odigbo,<sup>9</sup> Hassan<sup>10</sup> and Okemi<sup>11</sup> have suggested that Nigeria is facing enough security challenges to place it in the category of fragile or failing state. Studies from Richard attempted to explain the state failure as a result of inept leadership.<sup>12</sup> Agbaje wrote about religious sentiments,<sup>13</sup> Nnoli wrote about ethnicity,<sup>14</sup> also Nnoli<sup>15</sup> and Offiong discussed and described the effect of ethnicity.<sup>16</sup> Atwood<sup>17</sup> and Ogbeidi<sup>18</sup> talked extensively on corruption and Osaghae<sup>19</sup> and Ekeh<sup>20</sup> discussed the colonial legacy and the personal attributes of political leaders in Nigeria. The dominant perception among the international community is that African leaders govern failed states--christened with ugly names like “corruptocracies”, “chaosocracies” or “terrorocracies”-which occur because of the perennial violence and insecurity that bedevils the continent. African leaders agree on the severity of the crises on the continent, but how do they respond to these crises? What leadership styles, roles and initiatives are emerging? Leadership style is of importance as one style may produce a very different outcome than another. In this regard, the Nigerian political ‘leadership’ (past and present, military and civilian), as well as government institutions have suffered and still suffer from certain legitimacy problems that stem from the nature of the state’s composition and authority.

The work of Burgess et al. revealed how African leaders are influenced by ethnic orientations. Their study revealed that political regime changes matter and leaders disproportionately invest in those districts where their ethnicity is dominant under autocracy and attenuated when the same leaders are in a democratic setting and increase constraint on the leader.<sup>21</sup> For example, sub-Saharan Africa plays the role of prime mobilizer of resources for the people, but when the state is hijacked by one or more ethnic groups under autocracy who use the state machinery for selfish ends as opposed to national development concerns, a predatory state emerges where ‘clientelism’ and nepotism

are used for state development.<sup>22</sup> Another exploratory study by Chin, who noted that most leadership research is silent about how race and ethnicity influence the exercise of leadership, showed that cultural variations emerged on a factor consistent with a humane orientation and collaborative leadership style.<sup>23</sup> From the foregoing, one can say that African leaders such as Buhari are influenced by regional and cultural orientations.

Ogundiya summarised the prevailing explanations for political crises as: differing political cultures among differing ethnic groups; the lingering impacts of colonialism; ethnicity-based political parties; the loss of idealism; the politics of cultural sub-nationalism; and the politics of regional security. Each of these crises is compounded by an apparent unwillingness to attack these problems at their foundation.<sup>24</sup> Upholding this summary of the political situation, Suberu argues that:

A fundamental feature of the contemporary Nigerian psyche is the deep and profound distrust for government. The dream of responsive and popular government in Nigeria has collapsed in the face of repeated abortion and frustration of popular aspirations by consecutive Nigerian governments, very few Nigerians believe that government can act for the public good.<sup>25</sup>

The Fulani herdsmen conflict traces back to 1980-1984, involving the Tiv people of Benue state in a violent conflict with Fulanis resulting to the loss of about 80 cattle which meant a lot of loss for the Fulani's. (WEP 2012).<sup>26</sup> In March 2014, the fatality trend in North East Nigeria with the rate of about 1187 dead people also indicated lethal violence associated with herdsmen attack and other drivers of violence. (IFRA-Nigeria 2014)<sup>27</sup>. The curation of attacks and fatalities by SBM intelligence (2016), revealed that Pastoral conflict is the deadliest threat which has resulted to 470 victims killed during cattle rustling and about 1425 killed in attacks involving Fulani herdsmen, with an average of 30 deaths per attack by Fulani herdsmen and the residents of the attacked communities account for most of the deaths.<sup>28</sup> Concerning the South-East region which the study focuses on, 9 people were killed by suspected herdsmen in Nimbo/Ukpabi community in Enugu state. Thus, security agencies failed to prevent the attack even when they were forewarned by the community of the imminent attack. (Amnesty International 2017). Due to the incessant clash of Fulani herdsmen and farmers, there is now a general notion that any attack on farmers are executed by Fulani herdsmen.<sup>29</sup> This is stressed by USAID/Nigeria

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(2014) that when rural massacre occurs the media puts the blame on Fulani instead of ‘unknown gunmen’.<sup>30</sup>

### Theoretical framework

*CEJISS 2/2018* This study mainly employs Chabal’s twofold theoretical tenets of the politics of surviving and politics of suffering, supported by several additional theories used to examine leadership behaviour. Chabal’s ‘politics of suffering and smiling’<sup>31</sup> is useful here to explain the legitimacy of African politics on local and national scales in Nigeria. He explains that ‘ordinary people engage in economic activities to maintain life and a degree of self-respect’. He goes on to argue that for an understanding of what is happening in regional politics, it is vital to consider the informal political experience, made up of a number of socio-economic and political facets that are outside the sphere of traditional academic analytical categories. An understanding that incorporates formal as well as informal experience helps us attribute importance to previously neglected relationships and causalities, and to rationalize behaviours that may appear ‘irrational’ according to standard economic logic.

The first part of the twofold theoretical tenet adopted here explains President Buhari’s role in the conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen as a role borne out of what Chabal calls ‘the politics of surviving,’ specifically as it concerns migration. The politics of surviving (using migration) explains that people are not confined to the domestic arena. Africans have always moved in search of work, goods and land, and the erection of colonial territorial borders, later solidified into national frontiers, has not erased this traditional migration. Modern Africans, like many people throughout the world, are prepared to move for economic gain and/or out of economic necessity. The nomadic Fulani herdsmen customarily migrate to gain access to green pastures for their cattle, a custom which increases their economic activity and gains. This activity has become ever more desperate in recent times as pasture land is developed into housing and farmland. Chabal’s contemporary ‘politics of surviving’ provides an excellent insight into attitudes of and toward migrants, extensive African diasporas, the interrelation between migration and modern technology, and migration between nation states. However, Chabal doesn’t adequately apply his theory to the locality of migration *within* states (such as that witnessed by the nomadism of the Fulani). For example, on climate change, the Abugu and Onuba studies

revealed that pastoralists migrate within the state due to extreme and harsh weather conditions largely caused by climate change.<sup>32</sup> Also, Nte notes climate change as the cause of Fulani herdsmen conflict.<sup>33</sup>

President Buhari's hesitation to address the attacks made by Fulani herdsmen may be due to understanding rather than ignorance: a compassion for the Fulani tribe who are struggling to meet livelihood needs in the face of severe drought and drastically reduced pasture. However, Buhari seems not to have taken into consideration the scale of the conflict associated with migrations in contemporary African societies. According to Chabal, if the ability to survive is not in doubt, neither is the depth of suffering endured by the millions of desperately poor people who have no access to the "clientelistic" networks that are so essential to life in Africa.<sup>34</sup>

The second part of the twofold theory examines President Buhari's role through Chabal's 'politics of suffering' with specific reference to violence and conflict. Whether intentional or not, President Buhari's fight against corruption, with little attention given to other aspects of Nigeria's politics, has resulted in a 'politics of suffering,' leading to violence and conflict because people are struggling for basic resources and survival. This struggle cuts across all forms of resources, including the basic livelihood needs of the farmers and Fulani herdsmen central to this study.

From Chabal's theory, one prelude to violence and conflict is the *informalization* of the state. *Informalization* of the state causes trouble for the powerless in that it decreases certainty around justice. In the absence of effective top-down security measures, widespread abuses spring up, where groups of people prey on each other for survival. In rural areas, the state powers have few resources with which to curb violent activities or resolve emerging local conflicts. Conflict which takes the three forms of 'degradation of the human body, the collapse of shared values and the breakdown of social order' is, according to Chabal 'like a low-grade fever that never ends... it is probably that such persistent subjection to an arbitrary and continuous form of brutality is having long-term psychological effects we do not yet fully understand'.<sup>35</sup> One psychological effect manifesting itself in Nigeria is the stereotyping of Fulani ethnic tribes as violent dagger-carriers; a dreadful, unwanted component of Nigerian society.

Leadership theory shows how leaders' behaviour affects their ability to perform tasks set before them. Different theories concerning lead-

ers have been put forward, ranging from behavioural theories, modern theories, contingency theories and transformational theories. Horne noted that 'People point to a leader who is benign, corrupt, power thirsty, sincere, charismatic or whatever, because humans give up their individual freedom in exchange for a greater good so that everyone may live well, but few persons may realize that there is a profound philosophical underpinning to leadership'<sup>36</sup>. This study utilizes role-play theory (a subset of Behavioural theory) to explain the leadership role of President Buhari. Role-play theory according to Mead, Person and Merton refers to:

[T]he explanation of what happens when people are acting out social processes and the consequences of their doing so. Each person is an actor representing a typical individual in a real-life scenario performing within a specific context and a set of functions with which are associated norms, expectations, responsibilities, rights, and psychological states.<sup>37</sup>

Mead et al highlight that the principal function of role-play theory is its application to conflict resolution, and for discovering information about exhibited behaviour that needs to be addressed. Role-play theory elucidates social positions in education, economics, science and government, which underpin social cohesion in the state. The central problem with 'role-playing' in leadership is that individuals cannot be representative for everyone all the time. In other words, individual role-play is limited in time, space and to specific situations, and may not accurately respond to real life events.

### **Overview of the Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflict in Nigeria**

From the Nigeria Fact sheet, Nigeria has a vast land mass of 923,768 square kilometres, with about 800km of coastline, making Nigeria a potential maritime power.<sup>38</sup> Nigeria has abundant land for agricultural, industrial and commercial activities. The country's topography ranges from lowlands along the coast and in the lower Niger valley to high plateaus in the north and mountains along the east. Nigeria's ecology varies from dense tropical forest in the south to dry savannah spreading through the middle belt region to the far north, yielding a diverse mix of plant and animal life. The vegetation and climatic conditions shape and inform the occupation of the various peoples of Nigeria. For instance, the people of the southern part are

mainly fishermen and farmers because of the coastal line forming their boundary. This is also true for the peoples of the forest hinterland of the south-east and west. For the northern part of the country, agriculture and cattle rearing are not just occupations, but ways of life.

Historically speaking, cattle are highly valuable in the north, where they serve as a medium of exchange as well as a means of estimating a man's wealth, honour and prestige. Cattle have such religious, ritual, political, social and economic significance that 'bride price' is determined by the number of cattle owned by the suitor. The pre-historic trans-Saharan trade, which lasted into the twentieth century and spanned the entire West African region -- reaching Timbuktu, Songhai, Dahomey, Gao, Djenné, Tuareg, Agadez, Kanem, Borno, and far into the Berber regions of the north-- was made possible using cattle and camels. Long-distance trade was viable because of the constant migration of cattle herdsmen in search of greener pastures.

The root cause of conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria is the natural tension between herdsmen struggling to find rich pastures to graze their cattle and farmers struggling to convert and maintain productive farmland without the interruption and destruction that can be caused by migratory grazing. The Fulani herdsmen are one of the largest semi-nomadic groups in the world and own most of the cattle in Nigeria. Blench states that the exact period the Fulani -also known as Fulbe - moved into Nigeria is unknown, but they are believed to have been present in the far north from the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.<sup>39</sup> The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes the right of citizens to move and live freely in the country while respecting private territorial properties and spaces of different tribes in the country:

'Every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereby or exit therefrom'.<sup>40</sup>

Like every other citizen in the country, Fulani herdsmen enjoy their right to movement while carrying out their business in the country. However, the ancient nomadic culture of the Fulani herdsmen conflicts with modern society, which tends to prioritise the land rights of settled urban and agricultural communities. The Fulani migrations also impede other citizens' use of state and federal lands and roads.

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Herdsmen are often seen grazing or moving their cattle across federal and state roads meant for public transportation, and strict punitive measures do not exist to discourage such actions. Beyond violent conflict, disturbances caused by the herdsmen and their cattle include competing with vehicular movement on roads and littering roads with dung. Those familiar with Fulani herding activities will perhaps point out that this trend is nothing new, and ask why Fulani grazing should be an issue now. To answer this anticipated question, this study points to the dramatic increase in the number of casualties. Over the last decade, this conflict has claimed human lives at an increasing rate: deaths now number in the thousands.

It must be noted that the Fulani also have incurred loss of lives. The Armed Conflict Report reveals that between the first and seventh of January 2002, the conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Mambilla Plateau State resulted in the death of more than 96 herdsmen and the loss of 53,991 cattle, which led to mass internal migration of affected communities.<sup>41</sup> Notable Fulani clashes over farmland destruction occurred on September 30 2012, April 5 2014, February 18 2016, March 5 2016, April 12, 19 and 25 2016, June 16 and 20 2016, and December 18 2016. Of the ten cases in total, eight were recorded in 2016 alone.<sup>42</sup> In February 2016 over 300 people were killed in the state of Benue, and in March 2016 over 40 were killed in Enugu state, with many more fleeing their homes as a result. More recently, 20 Tiv farmers were killed with dozens more severely injured in Dan-Anacha, Gassol Local Government area, Taraba State. The deaths were attributed to Fulani militia who used sophisticated guns.<sup>43</sup> Armed clashes, crop destruction and nuisance have combined to transform the customary behaviours of the Fulani into a serious public disturbance, one that needs to be addressed by a democratic administration that bears the slogan of ‘change’.

Additionally, the presidential silence in response to grievances raised by farmers has been unsatisfactory. Lip-service to concern for security and intentions to address the conflict have been met with scepticism. Recently, there have been measures taken to address Fulani herdsmen issues, such as by Ayodele Fayose, Governor of Ekiti, who signed an anti-grazing bill in 2016 after the suspected killing of two people by herdsmen in the Oke Ako community at Ikole Local Government, Ekiti.<sup>44</sup> Fayose is the first executive governor to implement such a decisive punitive measure. Observers are concerned that Buhari is unable to dissociate himself from his cultural ties in discharging his

responsibility to the state as a Nigerian president. Furthermore, the president's (lack of) response to the conflict has raised far-reaching concerns, such as:

1. President inaction to farmers and Fulani herdsmen conflict is part of his Caliphate hidden agenda.
2. The Sultan of Sokoto, who is the chairman of the Board of Trustees of MACBAN cattle breeder's association and enterprise, uses the economic gain associated with cattle business to perpetrate crimes of trespassing, destruction of people's property, kidnapping, arson, murder and ethnic cleansing etc.<sup>45</sup>

It was shortly after the Ekiti state law on herdsmen movement that the (Federal) senate passed a bill against Fulani herdsmen using major roads in the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. Perhaps the Fulani herdsmen misunderstand the federal constitution on freedom of movement in the country, or have misconstrued their cultural rights assured them by the country's current constitution.

### **State legitimacy and sovereignty**

National government is primarily a means to address important national issues, such as security and human rights. The interference of the government is sometimes dubbed 'negative sovereignty' that breeds disorganized, divided, corrupt and chaotic nation-states.<sup>46</sup> As Clapham notes:

Sovereignty is a mechanism through which weak states seek to protect themselves against strong ones. Thus, the weaker the internal legitimacy of a state, the greater its external dependence will be. This in turn exacerbated the relationship between the government and the people whom it ruled.<sup>47</sup>

In a heterogeneous state like Nigeria, the challenges to state legitimacy and sovereignty result from the state's inefficiency in addressing long-standing issues in the society: security problems, marginalization, ethnic disenchantment, and the dominance of certain ethnic groups in state affairs. Specific challenges facing the current administration are:

1. An exacerbated conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen
2. Ethnic domination of Fulani-Hausa over other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

On the challenges of state legitimacy, Chabal and Daloz<sup>48</sup> assert that ‘one of the most important societal forces to challenge and replace the primacy of the state in Africa is the so-called “Big Men” or “Warlords”.’ This phenomenon has clear parallels with what is seen in Nigeria concerning the Fulani herdsmen, who are challenging the state supremacy by taking laws into their hands in reactionary and organised attacks that have killed thousands of people. Of course the Fulani herdsmen are not the only lethal non-state force acting in Nigeria today: Boko Haram continues to top the lists of groups challenging state legitimacy through deadly force. The challenges to the sole possession of power by the Nigerian state fit a pattern of revolutions brought about by inequality, marginalization, and differing ideologies.

External recognitions of government coupled with internal disturbance can in some cases not quell but compound challenges to state legitimacy. ‘The weaker the state,’ says Clapham, ‘in terms of its size and capabilities, its level of physical control over its people and territory, and its ability or inability to embody an idea of the state shared by its people, the greater the extent to which it will need to call on external recognition and support’ (Clapham 1996:11).<sup>49</sup> Examples of external assistance failing to resolve questions of legitimacy have already manifested themselves in Nigeria. This played out when the United States military came to support Nigeria in fighting the Boko Haram terrorist group in the Sambisa Forest with little or no success. Support –whether military or economic- from the international community rarely comes on a platter of gold, and is always conditional on the adoption of other policies that will be institutionalized for the benefit of the benefactor when help is accepted. This undermines the internal and international policies, and ultimately the sovereignty of the beneficiary state.

The role of every leader is determined by a number of concomitant factors that play on the leader’s idiosyncratic attitudes, reactions and sentiments. Individual leaders can be biased, discriminatory, repressive, suppressive, marginalizing, inclusive, sincere, progressive or otherwise.

From President Buhari’s inaugural speech, in which he declared that ‘[he is] for nobody, and belong[s] to nobody,’ the president’s actions demonstrate favouritism. This behaviour has led to a decline of legitimacy for his government. People question the sincerity, intentions and purposefulness of the president toward the Nigerian project. Especially in south-eastern Nigeria, where the president received significantly

fewer votes when he was initially elected, the level of disenchantment is high. The president has been quoted saying that he will remember the regions that gave him a larger percentage of the vote before he looks to other regions. This has played out in a way that made the South-East senators to visit Buhari, demanding developmental projects in the South East.<sup>50</sup>

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### **The consequences of the Buhari administration's inability to address the conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen in a timely and effectively manner**

From Benue to Enugu state, people have been gruesomely killed by Fulani herdsmen. This pattern of conflict isn't limited to hand-to-hand combat, either: an attempt was made by the Department of State Services (DSS) to arrest prominent Pastor Suleman for speaking out against herdsmen.<sup>51</sup> In response to individual incidents and to the conflict as a whole, the Nigerian government has done little more than passing the buck around. Small wonder, then, that the citizenry wishes the president dead.<sup>52</sup> This sentiment conforms to the information gathered during the interview at the NSCDC, which revealed that violent incidents and the larger issues behind them are being addressed only by protocols of meetings and deliberations to be debated by the senate. This has proved to be an inadequate measure to stem the escalating loss of life. Protocols and meetings are of course a necessary element of addressing the issues in Nigeria, but prolonging action longer than necessary mars the whole process. Issues concerning human and national security should be addressed as fast as possible before they escalate. This type of delaying tactic is what led to the formation of the full-blown Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, the resurgence of Biafra agitations, and the militants of the Niger Delta in Nigeria. These conflicts always have early warning signs, but the Nigerian government traditionally ignores latent problems until they escalate.

One of the consequences of President Buhari addressing the Fulani conflict on time is the approaches of state governors addressing such conflicts wrongly. For example, the Kaduna State Governor, Mallam Nasir el-Rufai, has made it known through print media that his government paid off a Fulani group in Southern Kaduna to prevent killings. According to the governor, the payment was compensation for Fulani herdsmen aggrieved by their loss of cattle and lives following the violence after the 2011 election.<sup>53</sup> This payment came to light

during heightened debate about the president's stance on the conflict. The consensus response in Kaduna to the compensation was that the governor was effectively paying killers not to kill again, when instead they could be apprehended and made to face the law. The compensation was seen as informal damage control, rather than the formal measure that the residents of southern Kaduna hoped for. This pattern of inadequate policy, escalation and weak response is a microcosm of what is playing out across Nigeria.

## Results and discussion

### *Interviews*

Interview responses gathered from the NSCDC revealed that the NSCDC have not been deeply involved in the conflict. Thus, the federal government have included the NSCDC to help douse the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and the farmers. According to minutes of the NSCDC meetings held with federal government representatives, the central point deliberated was access to roads: how the Fulani herdsmen can migrate through communities in their search for cattle-grazing pasture without destroying farmland. The minutes also contained an admonishment directed at both herdsmen and farmers, who were advised to report all grievances to officially sanctioned security agencies, instead of taking the law into their own hands. Information presented during the meeting revealed that Fulani herdsmen agreed to pay a commensurate amount for crops destroyed in the cases where cattle damaged farmland. In closing the meeting, the NSCDC highlighted that plans for designated grazing reserves advocated in 2016 as a measure to address the conflict are yet to be implemented.

One of the key respondents is a cattle dealer and the secretary of the Ebonyi state chapter of the Cattle Dealer's Association. We interviewed this respondent, who has consented to be cited as Alhaji Sule Mohammed, at Garki Market, Abakaliki on 03 February 2017. Alhaji Sule Mohammed, who is well versed with the Fulani herdsmen and Hausa community in general, noted that the herdsmen are nomadic and may therefore be not educated enough to recognize state law. In his words, 'The Fulanis survive mainly on rearing of cows and dwell on fertile land irrespective of the land being a farmland or not, which has been their pattern of life since time immemorial. During the dry season, which is also known as summer, they move southwards in search of green pastures to graze their cattle and during the rainy season they

return to their homes which are mostly located at the Northern region of the country, thus urbanization has made grazing impossible, while the remaining available fields for grazing are used for farms'. Alhaji Sule Mohammed specified the root of the conflict as a lack of available grazing fields. An increase in population has caused people living in the settled societies to develop the places the Fulani herdsmen usually graze during the dry season. Over successive migration seasons, less and less of the Fulani's customary grazing land is available to them. Consequently, the Fulani herdsmen, not understanding the implications of trespassing due to their level of education, and valuing their cows more than anything they possess, graze their cattle in forests and on farmland.

Alhaji Sule Mohammed said that the conflict has had grave consequences for Nigeria's national security. He said that the security operatives help herdsmen to procure arms and weapons in the name of self-defence. Although he couldn't mention any security agency, he said that none of them are innocent of this crime, and that greater blame should be apportioned to the security operatives for the enormous increase in challenges, scale and casualties caused by the violent dimension that the conflict has taken on in recent years.

On the conflict's consequences for the country's economy, Alhaji Sule Mohammed noted that due to the ban placed on cattle imports from Niger Republic and Chad, there has been increase in purchase prices. For example, a cow sold in 2012 for \$306 (exchange rate 150,000 naira) could now be sold for \$449 to \$510 (current exchange rate 220,000–250,000 Naira) depending on the size and the owner's bargaining power. Thus, the conflict affects the economy and raises the cost of staples for the poor masses.

Regarding public perception of the conflict, Alhaji Sule Mohammed (and other anonymous respondents) informed this study that due to the importance of (or sentimentality towards) ethnicity and religion in Nigeria, many Nigerians place blame for the conflict on President Buhari's bias toward the Fulani. Although it is agreed that Buhari doesn't condone the violence, many believe that the implicit support of the president is enabling the Fulani herdsmen to continue their armed provocations and deadly attacks.

On the question of whether security operatives have been adequately equipped to curb the conflict, Alahji Sule Mohammed asserted that 'Nigerian security is the best in Africa but they are corrupt. Corruption

everywhere: spiritually; economy; religion; politics; security- name it. They are very corrupt and that is affecting their operations and function. Are they not the people selling weapons to the herdsmen? It is unthinkable how ordinary civilians come in possession of such rifles like (the) AK 47, Mac 4 and other deadly weapons meant for the security operatives. They have what it takes to douse the situation but are very corrupt and that impedes their effectiveness. They are selling the weapons.' This anecdotal evidence is in accord with Bendix and Stanley who noted that, 'the security sector, especially the police and the military, often contributes to violent conflict rather than containing or preventing it'<sup>54</sup> Alhaji Sule Mohammed stated that the president is tackling the conflict seriously, 'doing his best to arrest the situation,' by dealing with militancy, insurgency and the herdsmen violence. Adequate security, advocacy and campaigns through the media are being put in place. At the moment, there are no punitive measures in place. Responding to a question about what he thought the best measures for resolving the conflict would be, Alhaji Sule Mohammed said that there should be round table discussion between farmers and herdsmen, and that a thorough investigation into the activities of the security operatives would go a long way toward dousing the conflict. Measures for weapon control should be put into place, and outright disarmament of the herdsmen should be conducted, since they are not part of the security agencies.

From the farmer's side, two key respondents practicing subsistence farming volunteered for interview while others were not willing to interview due to fear of security operatives harassing them and the similarity in information to the two respondents. With the absence of mechanized farmers in the region of our research to get detailed information, a mechanized/commercial farm known as Aroms Farms in Edo State was enlisted for interview concerning the challenges of Fulani herdsmen. During the request for interview, the CEO of Aroms Farms, Aigbehi Emmanuel Aroms, provided us the link to an excerpt regarding farming needed for this study with explanation on how he invested 100 million Naira (\$317,715) with a mission to create food security, employment and quality agricultural product for Edo state. Nonetheless, this mission was countered by the Fulani herdsmen whose mission is to create fear, food scarcity and food dependency from the North and lost 50 million naira (\$158,858). He backed his assertions with an explanation that 'cows don't eat pineapple and pineapple which is part of

the farms produce were not only destroyed by the Fulanis but an entire field of pineapple was uprooted' and his workers were severely injured too, while some lost their lives, which shows that the Fulani herdsmen were not just wandering into farms with cows but with the mission to destroy farms. Also, he stated that destruction of farms was not done during day time but at night when farmers have all gone home and part of the effect of the dreadful activities by the herdsmen discourages the youth from engaging in agricultural business. An excerpt of similar information granted for this study can be found at (<https://www.facebook.com/AromsAigbehi/videos/229877960851653/>; <https://www.facebook.com/AromsAigbehi/videos/228510110988438/>)

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Shedding more light on the qualitative result above, this study used the quantitative approach to control and test the observable phenomenon and the results are show below.

## Quantitative result

Table One. Logistic Regression Model for the Prediction of Fulani-Herdsmen Conflict Effect on Nigeria's Security

| Predictor  | Coeff. | Standard Error | p Value | Odds Ratio | CI Lower Limit | CI Upper Limit |
|------------|--------|----------------|---------|------------|----------------|----------------|
| EthVio     | -0.237 | 0.164          | 0.148   | 0.789      | 0.573          | 1.088          |
| SepAgit    | -0.328 | 0.165          | 0.047   | 0.721      | 0.522          | 0.995          |
| StateLegit | 0.445  | 0.205          | 0.030   | 1.045      | 1.045          | 2.330          |
| Constant   | -1.515 | 1.380          | 0.272   |            |                |                |

Source: Field work research (2017)

\* Predicted Probability is of Membership for 'No'

Dependent Variable = Fulani-Herdsmen conflict undermine the country's security (Yes, No)

Independent variables: EthVio = Causes ethnic violence; SepAgit = Causes separatist agitations; StateLegit = Challenges state legitimacy

To determine the relationship between 3 independent variables: EthVio, SepAgit, and StateLegit and the dependent variable: Fulani-herdsmen conflict undermines the country's security, a binary logistic regression model was performed. Hosmer and Lemeshow Test ( $p = 0.418$ )

shows that the model fits the data, with 91.3percent correct prediction and Nagelkerke R Square of 0.160. Reasoning that Fulani-herdsman causes ethnic violence does not significantly influence participants' outcome that it undermines the country's security ( $p = 0.148$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.789$ , 95percent C.I. =  $0.573 - 1.088$ ) but the reasoning that it causes separatist agitations significantly influence their outcome that it undermines the country's security ( $p = 0.047$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.721$ , 95 percent C.I. =  $0.552 - 0.995$ ). Furthermore, reasoning that Fulani-herdsman challenges state legitimacy does not influence participants' outcome that Fulani-herdsman conflict undermines the country's security ( $p = 0.030$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.560$ , 95 percent C.I. =  $1.045 - 2.330$ ).

Table two. Logistic Regression Model for the Prediction of Factors that Challenge State Legitimacy and Sovereignty due to Fulani-Herdsman Conflict

| Predictor | Coeff. | Standard Error | p Value | Odds Ratio | CI Lower Limit | CI Upper Limit |
|-----------|--------|----------------|---------|------------|----------------|----------------|
| ForInt    | -0.152 | 0.129          | 0.241   | 0.859      | 0.667          | 1.107          |
| NeoCol    | -0.154 | 0.139          | 0.261   | 0.857      | 0.654          | 1.122          |
| StateFail | -0.053 | 0.112          | 0.638   | 0.949      | 0.761          | 1.182          |
| Constant  | 0.514  | 0.893          | 0.565   |            |                |                |

Source: Field work research (2017)

\* Predicted Probability is of Membership for 'No'

Dependent Variable = State legitimacy and sovereignty are challenged due to Fulani-Herdsman conflict (Yes, No)

Independent variables: ForInt = Foreign interference; NeoCol = Neo colonialization; StateFail = State failure/Failed state

To establish the reasons that determine that Fulani-herdsman conflict challenges state legitimacy and sovereignty, a binary logistic regression model was also performed. The model was shown for data fit as revealed by the Hosmer and Lemeshow Test ( $p = 0.290$ ), with 86.4 percent correct prediction and Nagelkerke R Square of 0.160. According to the study participant; foreign interference, neo colonialization and state failure are factors that could predict that Fulani-herdsman conflict can challenge state legitimacy and sovereignty (See Table two).

However, the influence of these factors was not significant in this study ( $p > 0.05$ ).

The two methods employed have a common ground in revealing the observable phenomenon concerning the Fulani-herdsmen and the regression analysis revealed gave more insight on some of the variables employed for the research which is focused on the undermining of the country's security.

Interviews conducted by this study found the conflict to be multi-faceted, with several root causes and exacerbating problems. Attempts to interview the security agencies raised a further concomitant problem: the security agencies were extremely reluctant to release useful information that could help in addressing this trend and future occurrences of conflict. Other respondents, including cattle dealers and herdsmen, blame the security operatives for providing the Fulani militants with weapons.

Responses gained through questionnaires suggest that the security operatives and agencies feared giving out information because the Buhari administration uses the DSS to survey and hunt down people with opinions that contradict the administration. To an extent, this makes Buhari's administration not democratic but positions Buhari instead as a 'quasi democratic dictator'. Recently, the popular entertainer known as 2face (Innocent Idibia), who wanted to lead Nigerians in protest against the countless disappointments of the Buhari administration, was secretly caught, interrogated and threatened by the DSS.

The findings presented in the tables above informs us about Chabal's theoretical explanation in understanding the neglected relationships and causalities having taking into consideration the regional and community situations, and to rationalize behaviours that seems to appear "irrational" due to standard economic logic. What seems to appear irrational in the behaviours of Fulani herdsmen is linked to the politics of surviving or strategies of surviving. Therefore, the actions and behaviours of the Fulani herdsmen and the farmers is a resource problem. The empirical result from the regression has shown that the challenges of state legitimacy caused by Fulani herdsmen do not determine that the herdsmen weaken the country's security. This informs us that the causality of these challenges can be addressed by a holistic approach from the presidency through a bottom-up approach, which means addressing regional and ethnic problems from its root causes.

## Conclusion

The resurgence of conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen was first significant in south-eastern and north-central Nigeria, before spreading throughout the entire country. Popular opinion holds that the conflict is sustained by three contributing factors: inept performance in the country's official leadership roles; a related decline of state legitimacy; and the challenging of the state's sovereignty by armed non-state actors. There is also a widespread belief that the president's Fulani ethnic origin is the main reason for his reluctance to implement punitive measures to curb the conflict. This perspective has emerged because the president has not adopted a holistic approach for addressing conflicts in Nigeria. It is also vivid as the Fulani herdsmen attacks have met all conditions of a terrorist group, yet the Federal government under the leadership of the president has not proscribed it as a terrorist group but channelled its energy in proscribing the IPOB group in South-Eastern Nigeria, a terrorist group,<sup>55</sup> who have adopted peaceful protest in the fight against marginalization. Therefore, this study after investigation into the conflict between farmers and Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria has concluded that President Buhari's approach to leadership on this issue is unsuccessful in preventing the escalation of the conflict.

The loss of faith in government has exacerbated the activities of the militants, insurgents and separatist agitators engaging with activities that undermine the country's sovereignty and the exclusive power of the state to exercise the use of legal force. For this reason, the presence of the Boko Haram terrorists remains devastating in the north-east; militants in the Niger Delta region are blowing up oil pipelines, kidnapping and killing expatriates; and in the south-east, there is agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra,<sup>56</sup> with the presence of climate change, the conflict among farmers and Fulani herdsmen is farfetched if the Federal government ceases to address the issue of climate change which has become a reality and provision of alternative means for the Fulani herdsmen. Consequently, this study recommends that 1) the state quell the Fulani herdsmen and farmer conflict, 2) cattle ranches should be provided for the herdsmen, and 3) they should be educated and reoriented on alternative methods for cattle/animal husbandry through their local chiefs or representative to understand the state has adopted a democratic rule, and the local methods of subsistence and survival that disrupt the peaceful society will not be condoned in a democratic state.

Finally, this study debunks the fact that the president is ethnically biased in Federal allocation and security sectors in Nigeria as envisaged by many people. Below is the list of different ethnic group represented in the country:

|  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Chief of Defence Staff – General Olonisakin Abayomi Gabriel – Yoruba | <i>Kingsley Emeka Ezemenaka,</i> |
| Chief of Army Staff – Tukur Yusuf Buratai – Kanuri                   | <i>Chijioke Egwu</i>             |
| Chief of Naval Staff – Ibok Ekwe Ibabs – Ibibio                      | <i>Ekumaoko</i>                  |
| Chief of Air Staff – Abubakar Sidique – Fulani                       |                                  |
| IG Police – Ibrahim Kpotun Idris – Nupe                              |                                  |
| Director of DSS – Lawal Daura – Fulani                               |                                  |
| Comptroller of NSCDS – Abullahi Gana – Nupe                          |                                  |
| Minister of Defence – Mansur Mohammed Dan Ali – Kanuri               |                                  |
| National Security Adviser – Babagana Monguno – Kanuri                |                                  |

### **Limitations of the study**

In as much as we tried our best to gather information over a period of five months, we faced a serious constraint in the form of the security agencies' reluctance to cooperate. Some security agencies were reluctant to give us adequate information regarding the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers; presumably because the security agencies are themselves partly responsible for dousing tensions between the parties involved. As a matter of fact, a fraction of the questionnaire that was distributed among junior security sector staff delivered unreliable results because, in answering the questions, they had assumed the role of farmers. When confronted regarding the misinformation, we were told that their superior had directed them to answer the questionnaire as farmers. We disregarded the compromised questionnaires thus. Notwithstanding, we salvaged cogent and important information regarding the Fulani herdsmen and farmers from key personnel in the security sector whose identities are protected by the ethics involved in this study. Any further research on this conflict (conducted during the present administration) should bear in mind that similar challenges may be encountered in soliciting non-partisan opinion and information from security agencies. Thus, while this is an ongoing conflict, causalities from both Fulani Herdsmen and famers keep increasing and the statistics keeps undermining the period 2016 and early 2017 which this research was conducted.



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