
Fulani Herdsmen Carnage in Nigeria: Implications for National Cohesion

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Abstract: *This paper examined the Fulani herdsmen carnage in Nigeria and its implications for national cohesion. The human and material cost of the incessant conflicts between suspected Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria is mind-boggling. Thousands of people have been killed, communities have been destroyed and so many farmers and pastoralists have lost their lives and property in an extended orgy of killings and destruction that is not only continuously destroying livelihoods but also affecting national cohesion. The paper deployed descriptive and historical methods of data of analysis. The study revealed that the carnage has grown, spread and intensified in the last two years and today pose a threat to national unity. It was therefore recommended among others that, there should be an establishment of ranches laws to guide behaviors of herdsmen as one of the possible models, especially in areas with lower population.*

Keywords: *Carnage, Fulani herdsmen, national cohesion*

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, the Nigerian state has been characterized by insecurity. While the menace of Boko Haram insurgency continues to rage, the security crisis in the country has taken a new dimension. Nigerians have been served bloody reminders that Boko Haram is no longer the country's biggest internal security threat. Sadly, as the war against Boko Haram makes appreciable progress, out of the blue came yet another menace of a different kind, but with an equally potent capability to cold-heartedly waste human lives. Take the back seat Boko Haram; enters the vicious herdsmen!

From Agatu in Benue State, Akure in Ondo State, Bukuru area in Plateau State, Oke Ogun area in Oyo State, Gassaka and Bali local government areas in Taraba State to Nimbo in Enugu State, rampaging herdsmen seem to be on a mission to draw blood. And blood they are getting. Everywhere they go, sorrow, tears and blood trail them. Curiously, they operate in such audacious fashion that makes mockery of our national security arrangement (Ogunbiyi, 2018). Each day, Nigerians witness more reprisal killings that are simply making the possibilities of peaceful resolution more difficult. Rural banditry is becoming the norm in the Nigerian hinterland and has been transformed into a vicious criminal activity. The result is that the scale of loss of both herds and human life has been escalating and the victims are on all sides – subsistence farmers, commercial farmers and pastoralists (Premium Times, 2018).

Indeed, some States in Nigeria have been rocked by attacks from suspected Fulani herdsmen in a new wave of violence which primarily stems from disputes over grazing areas for cattle. There have been several attacks in many villages which have left dozens of thousands of people dead including communities razed and buildings destroyed. In fact, the threat of violent

herdsmen is now a serious challenge to the survival of the Nigerian state. In 2016, pastoral conflicts accounted for more deaths in Nigeria than Boko Haram (Kazeem, 2018).

Herdsmen Carnage in Nigeria

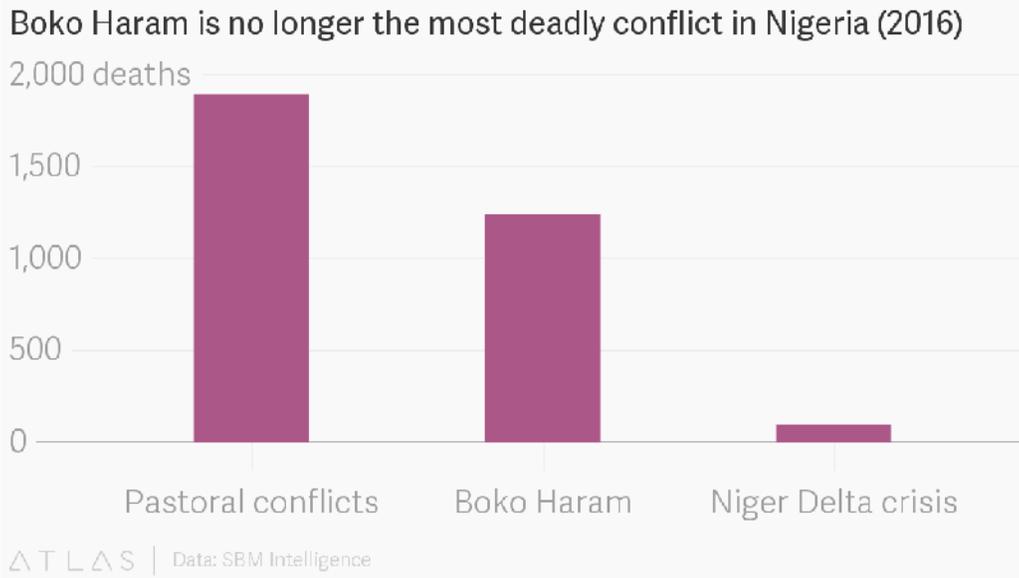
The increase in the activities of Fulani herdsmen can be traced to population growth and the quest to provide the attendant need of the society. According to Premium Times (January 12, 2018),

... increase in the population has put enormous pressure on land and water resources used by farmers and pastoralists. One of the outcomes of this process has been the blockage of transhumance routes and loss of grazing land to agricultural expansion, while the increased southward movement of pastoralists has led to increased conflict with local communities. This is particularly the case in the Middle Belt – notably in Plateau, Kaduna, Niger, Nasarawa, Benue, Taraba, and Adamawa States. The conflicts primarily involve Fulani pastoralists and local farming communities. As violence between herdsmen and farmers has grown and developed into criminality and rural banditry, popular narratives in the form of hate speech have exacerbated the crisis the problem of insecurity that has arisen.

EFFECTS OF HERDSMEN CARNAGE

The Herdsmen Carnage has indeed caused much harm to various communities that were victims in particular as well as the country as a whole. Listed below are some of the demerits of the carnage.

- i. Loss of Lives:** A lot of lives have been lost due to herdsmen attacks. The 2017 Global Terrorism Index released by the institute for Economics and peace saved the conflict, worsened by droughts, erratic rainfall, and land degradation killed an estimated 60,000 people since 2001 in Nigeria alone. Statistic provided by institute of Economic and Peace shows that 1,229 people were killed in 2014. Benue State was the worst affected area. Agatu L.G.A of Benue State witnessed 500 persons killed and properties burnt down (Agbedo, 2016). In January, 2015, Nkpologu community in Uzo-Uwani L.G.A of Enugu state witnessed massacre of over 40 persons. Also in April 27, 2016, the same Enugu State witnessed 46 people killed. January 11th, 2018, 73 people were killed in Benue in which the Governor conducted mass burial on them (Kazeem, 2018). The state authorities directly blamed herdsmen of Fulani extraction for the attacks. A major Fulani association had claimed responsibility for similar attacks in the past and gave reasons for the deadly assaults, which had left more than 1,500 dead since 2013 (Premium Times, January 12, 2018). Herds men crisis has led to loss of live more than the Boko Haram insurgency and Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria (see chart below).



Source: [Kazeem \(2017\)](#).

Reporter at Quartz, [Quartz](https://www.theatlantic.com/charts/Bk-wuTiUx) <https://www.theatlantic.com/charts/Bk-wuTiUx>

- ii. The consequences of the unchecked killing of innocent citizens by Fulani herdsmen across Nigeria are taking its toll on business investments in the country. According to Ruwase, (2018), estimated N200 billion projected investment in an agro allied industry has been suspended because rising insecurity in the country. Ruwase (2018) opined that no meaningful business can be done in an environment that is insecure. Security of life and property is a very critical factor in the investment environment and a major consideration in investment decisions. The impact of these security challenges on business and investors' confidence is phenomenal. Not much investment activities are taking place in the North-Eastern part of the country. Again, attacks by herdsmen on farming communities across the country are not abating, resulting in increasing loss of lives. Many rural farmers are holding back from the current planting season because of the fear of attacks by herdsmen. Agricultural activities are being negatively impacted. Already food inflation is at 20 per cent as against 12 per cent for core inflation (Ruwase, 2018).
- iii. **Destruction of Properties:** The attack of Herdsmen in various communities has led to the destruction of properties with billions of Naira. Some communities in Abia State such as Uzuakoli, Ebem, Akanu in Ohafia and Umuchieze in Umunneochi witnessed this ordeal Enugu State witnessed a situation where properties with millions of Naira were destroyed. In April 2016 attack, over hundred people were injured, houses and churches were burnt down. In Mbakpase, herdsmen destroyed more than 60 houses. Also in Tse Ali village, more than 70 houses were set ablaze while in Ise Umenye village, 50 houses were burned down.
- iv. **Chances of Disintegration:** As the Herdsmen activities increases each day and remained untainted, there is the tendency that a reprisal attacks may ... from the communities that were affected. There was an occasion where the Benue State

- governor had to advise his subjects to take a measure to protect themselves by keeping stones around them which can be used against herdsmen in the event of any attack. Persistence of herdsmen carnage can make the citizens to opt for disintegration. Especially when serious visible actions have not been taken by Federal Government to address the issue. Director of Amnesty international, Osai Ojigho lamented that frequent attack by herdsmen may get out of hand if not tackled squarely. she said that, “we are really reaching a boiling point of total anarchy” (Daily post 2018). In another development, Tinsu Odumakin a spokesman for Afenofere a Yoruba socio-cultural group said that, Delta State Monarch Ovie Ararite backed former minister of Defence, Lt-Gen. Theophilus Takubu Danjuma (rtd) on his call for Nigerians to defend themselves against attacks. The Air Vice Marshal added: “Everybody should be armed for the sake of self defense, the citizens should be given the constitutional right to bear arms since those attacking them are fully armed and dangerous” (Guardian NewsPapers, 2018).
- v. **Displacement:** A lot of families that were victims of herdsmen carnage have been displaced of their homes and communities. Some are now taking refuge in internally displaced person (IDP) camp. In February 2016, 7,000 Agatu indigenes were displaced. State emergency agency says 40,000 people have been displaced by the attacks.
 - vi. **Reduction in the rate food Production:** There is reduction in the rate of food production in the country owing to the fact that those communities affected cannot maintain their farming activities. Benue is known as food basket of Nigeria. The same Benue is worst hit in this herdsmen carnage thereby leading to shortage in their food production. Over 130,000 people have also been displaced due to these attacks. This has also affected farming and crop production in the affected areas. (www.quora.com).

A venture capitalist during summit in Lagos on future of Agriculture in Nigeria stated that, “conflict between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria continues increased, with cattle’s destroying farmers as herdsmen kill farmers. For a country whose future is said to be dependent on agriculture, trouble looms (Niyi, 2016).

Causes of Herdsmen Carnage in Nigeria

The escalation of pastoral conflicts in recent years have been triggered by the effects of climate change in Nigeria’s north with lower rainfall and increased desertification of grazing land forcing herdsmen to look farther south to farmlands in a region often described as Nigeria’s food basket. Farmers who are keen to protect their means of livelihood and their crops from being damaged by thousands of cattle have often clashed with herdsmen (Kazeem, 2018).

Efforts by Nigerian Government to Address the Carnage

The Nigerian government has been relatively slow in tackling the herdsmen crisis. Ruwase (2018) acknowledged the efforts and progress of the government and security agencies in addressing the problem of insecurity in the country, but said that a great deal still needed to be done. Herdsmen have continually killed with little or no opposition from security agencies (The Cable News, 2018). As it was the case at the onset of Boko Haram insurgency, the dastardly acts

of these reprehensible herdsmen have not really been accorded the requisite handling by appropriate authorities (Ogunbiyi, 2018).

This slow response of the Nigerian government has many communities believing that they are left with little choice than to resort to self-help. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has reviewed the catalogue of horrendous and inhuman attacks on several states and mostly Benue State from 2013 – 2018. Analyzing the effort of government on the issue above, the group asserted that Nigeria's security system has become dysfunctional. According to Godwin (2018)

“Under President Buhari, the murderous Fulani herdsmen enjoyed unprecedented protection and favoritism to the extent that the herdsmen treat Nigeria as a conquered territory. Rather than arrest and prosecute the Fulani herdsmen, security forces usually manned by Muslims from the North offer them protection as they unleash terror with impunity on the Nigerian people. The bottom line is that President Buhari failed woefully to protect Nigerians. He willfully permitted the Fulani herdsmen to operate killing people, destroying communities wholesale, destroying farmlands and turning the entire Middle Belt into “killing fields”, all the while enjoying government protection from counter attack, arrest or prosecution.

“By failing to curb the attacks of the Fulani herdsmen President Buhari has failed to uphold Section 14, Para. 2 (b) in the Constitution that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government:

In response to public backlash over recent killings, the presidency has ordered the country's police chief to go to areas like Benue state and investigate the crisis but even that's not seen as being enough (Kazeem, 2018).A stronger move would be to deploy the might of the military as the government has done in response to other regional crises. All we have heard have been platitudes and press releases being regurgitated but there has been no action, “The general feeling is that the government is not ready to stop this (Kazeem, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Security is everybody's business. It is vital to emphasise that military or police action alone might not suffice in thoroughly getting rid of the herdsmen's challenge as it is with other such thorny security issues in the country. Sufficient intelligence must be gathered to really understand their motives, sponsors (if any) and grouses. It has been argued that the herdsmen's 'insurgence' is being spearheaded by rascals from neighbouring countries. This claim must be properly verified and appropriate action taken if it is found to be real. But as frightening as the issue appears, with the required political will, it could be logically addressed options to address them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a road map to ensure that this present crisis does not degenerate into a full blown ethnic affair there by affecting national cohesion, the following recommendations are hereby put forward:

- The appropriate authorities need to methodically investigate recent increase in the reprehensible activities of herdsmen.
- There is the need to establish grazing zones across the country for the herdsmen.
- To avert future bloody clashes between herdsmen and farmers, the Federal Government should creatively strategize with relevant stakeholders to find a lasting solution to the problem.

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