THE HERDSMEN MENACE: A CRITICAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE DRIVERS AND DIMENSIONS OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

OBA PREYE INIMIESI
Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
E-mail: preye.oba@uat.edu.ng; Orcid ID: 0009-0000-4602-5092

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Keywords

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Abstract

Research problem: *This paper interrogates the increasing link between pastoralism and insecurity in Nigeria, reflecting a trend that is increasingly observed worldwide. Despite providing for millions of people and making a substantial contribution to the production of meat, milk, and leather, pastoralism is currently the focal point of violent confrontations, particularly between sedentary agricultural communities and nomadic Fulani herders.*
Methods: *Using a qualitative research approach, the study draws on existing literature, government reports, and data from non-governmental organisations to explore the complex causes of farmer–herder clashes. These include climate change, population growth, weak governance, the proliferation of small arms, and cattle rustling, which often trigger cycles of violence and retaliation.*
Results: *The findings show that this instability hampers humanitarian efforts, economic activities, environmental sustainability, and political stability. These impacts destabilise communities and impede Nigeria's overall development.*
Conclusion: *The study concludes that resolving the crisis requires a multifaceted, comprehensive strategy.*
Key contribution to knowledge: *The main contribution of this research is a holistic framework for policy actions that addresses the root causes of the conflict, fostering peaceful coexistence, enhancing long-term stability, and safeguarding food security for all Nigerians through integrated strategies that balance socio-economic development, conflict resolution mechanisms, and inclusive governance practices tailored to the nation's diverse cultural and ecological contexts.*
Recommendations: *Suggested measures include strengthening climate change adaptation through better land and water management, promoting sustainable ranching practices, and reforming the Land Use Act to clarify land rights. Additionally, improving the capacity of security forces to act impartially, investing in grassroots conflict resolution, and reducing ethno-religious rhetoric are essential.*

Introduction

Pastoralism is a way of life that involves raising a lot of cattle and moving them around seasonally. It has been used by societies for thousands of years in many parts of the world, from the dry savannas of Africa to the steppes of central Asia. Pastoralism is the primary source of income for approximately 200 to 500 million people worldwide. It covers more than a third of the Earth's area and makes a big contribution to the production of meat, milk, and other animal products (UNEP, 2016). Pastoral systems provide about 10% of the world's meat and 5% of the milk. They are also often the main source of protein for people who are more susceptible to illness (FAO, 2012). In addition to directly producing food, pastoralism also offers important ecological services, preserves cultural legacy, protects biodiversity, and cycles nutrients (Benkahla & Mason, 2017). A large part of the world's pastoral population lives in Sub-Saharan Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Niger, Mali, and Chad serving as pastoral strongholds. Pastoralism is more than simply an economic activity in this area; it is a deeply rooted cultural and social framework.

However, the association between pastoralism and insecurity has become more significant in recent decades in many parts of the world. The increasing rivalry for land and water resources, exacerbated by climate change, has led to a number of clashes between pastoralists and other land users, including sedentary farmers, state authorities, and conservation organisations, with devastating results. For instance, the relocation of traditional grazing routes due to infrastructure development and desertification has resulted in a rise in disputes between crop farmers and pastoralists in the Sahel region of Africa (UNOWAS, 2019). Similarly, the Agency for Cross Border Pastoralists Development (2024) noted that the entrenchment of pastoral conflicts in countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan has been exacerbated by the spread of small arms, violent conflict, a lack of effective government, and the depletion of natural resources. These relationships show how intricately political, economic, and environmental factors interact to cause instability in pastoral regions. These disputes have resulted in large evictions, fatalities, and a breakdown of society, and they are often exacerbated by the widespread availability of small arms.

While exact global figures for conflicts involving pastoralists are difficult to determine, conflicts mainly arising from competition for resources between farming and pastoral communities have led to thousands of deaths and millions of displaced people in regions such as the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, and parts of East Africa (UNOWAS, 2019). What were once manageable resource disputes are now violent, protracted crises that impact stability and humanitarian aid on a regional and even global level. These localised conflicts frequently become linked with ethnic tensions and broader political instability.

The Fulani (also known as Peul or Fulbe) are one of the most prominent pastoralist ethnic groups, with their long-standing migration patterns that span Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Senegal (BBC, 2016 cited in Johnson & Taofik, 2017; Ifeyinwa & Henry, 2024). The Fulani pastoral system has historically been acknowledged for its sporadic travels in search of pasture and water, which facilitated trade and interethnic contacts across the region. They are crucial to the supply of meat and dairy products, which are necessary for the food security and income of millions of people. Their vast knowledge of animal husbandry, especially sustainable grazing practices, has improved biodiversity and maintained grassland health for many generations. On the other hand, because of their actions, there have been more violent conflicts between agricultural

communities and pastoralists in recent years, which often result in mass displacement, property destruction, and fatalities. This has raised severe security concerns. For instance, Benjaminsen and Ba (2021) described how disputes between Fulani and Dogon populations in central Mali over land and water have turned into violent clashes between farmers and herders, which are frequently presented as insurgency and counterinsurgency. These conflicts escalated in 2018, leading to both sides' self-defence groups carrying out massacres. The March 2019 Ogossagou massacre, in which Dogon militants are reported to have killed more than 170 Fulani civilians, was one particularly horrific incident (Benjaminsen & Ba, 2021). According to the United Nations, armed organisations from Fulani communities in Mali carried out 47 attacks in the first half of 2020, killing 162 civilians (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2020).

Similarly, there has been a considerable amount of increasing violence by pastoralists in Burkina Faso. The Fulani-Mossi war, a sub-conflict of the broader Islamist insurgency, has resulted in numerous attacks and massacres. At least 43 civilians, mostly Fulani, were killed in the Yirgou massacre in December 2018 in retaliation for a terrorist attack, starting a cycle of retaliatory killings that continued into 2019. By the end of March, more than 775,000 people had been displaced by the violence, according to Human Rights Watch (2020). By 2024, more than 30,000 Fulani had been forced to migrate to Ouagadougou alone due to the ongoing violence (Wikipedia, n.d). Niger's border regions with Mali and Burkina Faso have experienced an increase in instability and displacement due to intercommunal violence; however, the exact death counts aren't well documented and are solely related to Fulani farmer-herder clashes. Climate change, resource scarcity, a weak administration, and extremist groups exploiting these tensions have created a dangerous environment in these three countries, where conflicts often lead to vast numbers of deaths and widespread migration. In certain regions of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, attacks by Islamist armed groups and intercommunal violence between farmers and herders caused at least 235,000 people to be displaced in 2018–2019, and the figure has been steadily increasing in recent years, according to ACAPS (2019). Because of this uncertain climate, pastoralism has become both a source and a victim of insecurity in West Africa, with Nigeria being one of the most affected countries.

Nigeria, with its vast agro-ecological zones and ethnically diverse population, is not immune to pastoral-related insecurity, as evidenced by the shocking increase in violence related to pastoral areas, particularly between sedentary farming communities and nomadic Fulani herders (Johnson & Taofik, 2017). Pastoralists, primarily Fulanis, used to travel from the arid north of Nigeria to the more humid south and centre during the dry season. The Fulani are Nigeria's primary vendors of milk and meat. According to Abbass (2012), Fulani possess almost 90% of Nigeria's cattle, contribute 3.2% of the nation's GDP, and have a significant influence on the meat and dairy sectors. The Fulani are also in charge of supplying hides and skins in Nigeria. However, because of desertification, water scarcity brought on by climate change, and the expansion of grazing reserves, pastoralists have been compelled to move permanently to regions that have traditionally been governed by farming groups. In other words, the increasing pressure on land and water resources and consequent scarcity of resources in the North push Fulani pastoralists southward into Nigeria's Middle Belt in pursuit of diminishing grazing pastures and water. This transformation has made land disputes worse since these Fulani herders usually attack farmlands, destroying crops and creating fierce competition for vital resources that leads to bloodshed. For instance, this conflict claimed six times as many lives in

2018 alone than the Boko Haram insurgency, with over 7,000 fatalities in just five years (Sanni, 2019). Recently, devastating attacks have displaced thousands of people from their homes in Benue, Plateau, Kaduna, and Nasarawa states—the epicentres of this conflict—to communities like Yelwata in Guma LGA of Benue State. Incidents involving nomadic pastoralists accounted for 44% of all deaths in the country in 2016 (SBM, 2017). Population growth exacerbates resource scarcity by increasing demand on available land for farming and pastoralism. Conventional dispute resolution processes have broken down, formal legal frameworks are usually absent or poorly administered, and the issue is made worse by ineffective land management policies and poor governance. Cattle rustling, the proliferation of illegal small arms, and the dangerous politicization of these conflicts—often with ethno-religious overtones—all contribute to and perpetuate cycles of violence. A new SBM Intelligence analysis claims that since 2019, these conflicts have led to 542 murders and the relocation of around 2.2 million Nigerians in Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa states alone between 2019 and February 2025. More than 60,000 Nigerians have allegedly been slaughtered since 1999, according to prior numbers, emphasising the massive human cost and substantial effect on the country's food security and stability. Given the persistent and sophisticated nature of the insecurity faced by Nigerian pastoralists, a thorough scholarly analysis of its causes, dynamics, and effects is required. In light of this, the study's objectives are to investigate Nigeria's pastoralist-related insecurity's causes, characteristics, and history. Understanding this connection is essential to creating evidence-based policies that promote sustainable resource management, equitable growth, and peaceful coexistence.

Statement of the problem

In Nigeria, insecurity is becoming more closely linked to pastoralism, a centuries-old livelihood pattern that is essential to the world's food security. Despite providing for millions of people and making a substantial contribution to the production of meat, milk, and leather (UNEP, 2016), pastoralism is currently the focal point of violent confrontations, particularly between sedentary agricultural communities and nomadic Fulani herders. A complex combination of ecological, socioeconomic, political, and security considerations is responsible for this shift from a mostly symbiotic relationship to one marked by lethal antagonism. Herders are migrating southward into Nigeria's Middle Belt as a result of increased competition for arable land and grazing areas brought on by climate change-induced desertification, declining water supplies, and population development. The devastation of agriculture, livestock rustling, and retaliatory attacks in these disputed areas has intensified into cycles of mass murder, eviction, and livelihood destruction. These conflicts have not been sufficiently mitigated by the governance mechanisms now in place. Formal legal structures are either non-existent or very weak, traditional dispute resolution procedures have broken down, and official actions are frequently weakened by corruption, politics, and the spread of small weapons. With millions of people displaced, hundreds dead every year, and a serious danger to Nigeria's food security and stability, the human and financial consequences are enormous. The severity of the situation is shown by the startling fact that fewer people have died in recent years from violence connected to pastoral areas than from the Boko Haram conflict (Sanni, 2019).

The desire to comprehend the relationship between pastoralism and insecurity motivated a number of empirical studies in Nigeria due to the country's growing uncertainties and the

worries they cause. For example, Johnson and Taofik (2017) examined the origins, development, dynamics, and resolutions of the disputes resulting from the fights between Nigerian farmers and herders. The study's conclusions suggested several ways to maintain peace, including the creation of a national livestock development policy, the establishment of an efficient community policing model, the demarcation of livestock grazing reserves, the provision of constitutional roles and recognition for traditional rulers, and the holding of a stakeholders' conference on nomadic pastoralism. In a similar vein, Sulieman et al. (n.d.) evaluated instability and conflict between Nigerian farmers and nomadic pastoralists. The study found that there are instances of conflict between Nigerian farmers and nomadic pastoralists using a mixed strategy. They therefore suggested that the government and other organisations, like the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), should act swiftly to lessen conflict and bring peace back to the warring regions, given that the ongoing conflict between farmers and nomadic pastoralists is one of the main factors contributing to the breakdown of law and order in Nigeria. According to Ifeyinwa and Henry's (2024) research, the invasion of agricultural communities by Fulani nomadic pastoralists is referred to as a "clash between settled farmers and Fulani herdsmen" since the conflicts are waged in farming communities. According to the report, farmers experience more fatalities, injuries, and damage than nomads. While these studies have examined resource competition, ethno-religious tensions, Fulani herder-farmer conflicts, and weak governance as major factors contributing to violent clashes, displacement, and threats to food security and national cohesion, they have failed to capture the complex aspects of these pastoralist conflicts, especially the socio-political, ecological, and migratory dynamics that feed recurrent tensions. This leaves a significant gap in the literature. This paper aims to fill this gap by expanding the literature examining the dimensions of pastoralists' insecurities in Nigeria, providing an evidence-based foundation for sustainable resource governance, equitable development, and peaceful coexistence.

Objectives of the study

Though the main aim of the paper is to interrogate the increasing link between pastoralism and insecurity in Nigeria, reflecting a trend that is increasingly observed worldwide, other specific objectives are to:

i. To chronicle a historical account of pastoralism in Nigeria

ii. To critically investigate the drivers of pastoralists' insecurities in Nigeria

iii. To examine the dimension of pastoralists' insecurities in Nigeria

iv. To provide evidence-based recommendations based on the objectives above

Study methods

This paper employed the qualitative research design to investigate the complex nexus between pastoralism and insecurity in Nigeria. It employed a comprehensive review of existing literature, including academic journals, books, and policy papers from various international and national organizations. In addition, the paper analyzed government reports, security briefs, and data from non-governmental organizations to gain a deeper understanding of the socio-economic, environmental, and political dimensions of the conflict. The study adopted a critical and contextual approach, placing the Nigerian situation within the broader West African and global contexts of climate change, population dynamics, and resource competition. The data collected was synthesized and critically

analyzed to identify recurring themes, causal relationships, and the multifaceted impacts of the farmers-herders clashes, ultimately leading to the development of a holistic framework for policy interventions.

History of pastoralism in Nigeria

The Fulani ethnic group's nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles are the main feature of Nigeria's rich and complicated pastoral heritage, which is intricately intertwined into the country's socioeconomic and ecological fabric. A symbiotic interaction between pastoralists and sedentary agricultural populations has historically characterised this centuries-old subsistence structure, which predates colonial administration. During the pre-colonial period, a customary system called burti frequently promoted understanding between people. It allowed for the agreement on specific migratory patterns, giving farmers access to manure for their crops and herders access to grazing pastures (Chika et al, 2024). Primarily Fulani, pastoralists travelled periodically, heading north to take advantage of bountiful pastures during the rainy season and south during the dry season to find water and feed, frequently retracing their steps. These customary relationships were severely disrupted with the arrival of the colonial era. Colonial land policy, frequently promoting sedentary agriculture and cash crop production, increasingly encroached onto community grazing pastures and traditional cattle paths, leading to the first evidence of greater rivalry over resources (Eric et al., 2023). The creation of more than 417 grazing reserves in the Northern region by 1965 was one attempt to control land use, but many of these reserves were mismanaged or eventually abandoned, making it impossible to meet the demands of an expanding pastoral population (Accord, 2018).

The difficulties facing pastoralism grew significantly in the post-colonial era, especially starting in the late 20th century, turning it from a traditional means of subsistence into a significant cause of insecurity. The demand for land from farming and pastoral groups in Nigeria expanded dramatically due to the country's rapid population expansion, which resulted in direct rivalry and invasion (Nnaji et al, 2022). Established farming communities were disrupted as herders were forced to move further south into Nigeria's Middle Belt and even southern states in search of viable pastures and water due to the severe effects of climate change, which included desertification in the northern Sahelian regions and increasingly unpredictable rainfall patterns (UNOWAS, 2019). Crop devastation brought on by this southerly movement frequently led to violent clashes. Weak governance, a breakdown in conventional conflict resolution institutions, and the proliferation of illicit small guns further aggravated the situation, turning localised disagreements into large-scale confrontations that were frequently characterised by ethnic and religious tensions. According to Sanni (2019), by 2018, farmer-herder conflicts were killing thousands of people and uprooting millions more, six times as many as the Boko Haram insurgency. This marked a significant shift in the historical course of pastoralism in Nigeria.

Pastoralism and Insecurities in Nigeria

Due to a complex interaction of several variables, pastoralism—particularly that of Fulani herders—has emerged as a significant contributor to instability in Nigeria. Devastating farmer-herder clashes have resulted from this, killing thousands of people and uprooting millions more. Degradation of the environment and climate change are two of the biggest causes. The rainy season has shrunk from 150 days to 120 days over the past three decades, according to Chika et al. (2024). The availability of grazing grounds and water supplies has been drastically diminished in northern Nigeria due to desertification and increasingly unpredictable rainfall patterns. Around 62 million people are impacted by

desertification, which covers more than 580,000 km2 of Nigeria's geographical area (Audu Adie, 2018). Fulani herders are forced by environmental pressure to migrate southward into the southern states and the Middle Belt, where they frequently come with sedentary farming populations (Egbewole, 2025). The ensuing struggle for dwindling resources, especially access to water and fertile land, sometimes turns into bloody conflicts. For example, Njoku et al. (2023) discovered that 87.4% of fatal pastoralist-farmer conflict occurrences frequently take place in regions that are directly impacted by climate change, such as water scarcity, desertification, and falling plant cover.

Growing populations and shifting land-use patterns make resource scarcity even worse. According to Sakaba et al. (2024), Nigeria's growing population has resulted in the extension of farmlands, urbanisation, and the obstruction of traditional livestock paths, forcing pastoralists into more constrained and frequently disputed areas. The commodification of land and the "land grab" have put centuries-old coexistence mechanisms under stress (Okezie, 2022). Traditional open-grazing pastoralists are further disenfranchised by the transition from traditional land tenure systems to more formalised, sometimes opaque land ownership.

These conflicts are further accelerated by institutional failures and poor governance. The Nigerian government has come under heavy fire for failing to protect its people, uphold the law, or administer justice in a timely manner. Older land-use laws, such as the Land Use Act of 1978, led to unclear land tenure arrangements and conflict. According to Oyebode et al. (n.d.), the 19778 Land Use Act's elitist stance and subpar execution have sparked resource disputes. Particularly in rural areas, the Act's centralization of land control under State governors and disregard for customary land rights have resulted in tenure instability and ownership disputes. Minor arguments swiftly turn violent due to the lack of efficient dispute resolution procedures at the state and local levels. Furthermore, repeated assurances of security have not been followed through on, suggesting a perceived lack of political will to put long-term solutions into place. Communities frequently turn to self-help and vigilante organisations as a result of this institutional gap, which feeds the cycle of violence even more.

Another important and growing factor contributing to farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria is cattle rustling, which frequently exacerbates already-existing tensions and adds a criminal element to resource disputes. According to Shehu (2018), the frequency of rustling events has skyrocketed in recent years. Livestock is a major asset and source of income for pastoralists, and it is frequently stolen on a large scale by organised criminal groups and occasionally resentful members of agricultural or herding communities. In order to re-establish their livelihoods, pastoralists who lose their herds to rustling are frequently forced to relocate, sometimes illegally, in search of new pastures or replacement animals (Chika et al, 2024). Forceful invasions onto farmlands due to this desperation may result in retaliation attacks from farming communities. On the other hand, even if a community is innocent, herders may attack it in retaliation if they believe it is harbouring rustlers or profiting from the theft. A cycle of self-help and retaliation is fuelled by the security agencies' incapacity to effectively stop cattle rustling, turning what might start as a criminal act into a full-fledged community conflict and increasing the level of insecurity and mistrust between Nigerian farming and herding communities. These battles are now even more deadly due to the widespread use of light and small weaponry. Higher casualty rates result from the use of sophisticated firearms in disputes that were previously settled with conventional tools (Gofwan et al, 2019). Both

farmers and herders are empowered by the easy access to these weapons, which are frequently smuggled over porous borders, turning conflicts into murders. Dr. Joseph Ochogwu, Director General of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), made it clear that the spread of light and small weaponry is a major cause of the violence (Adeyemi, 2023).

Lastly, the conflict's complexity is increased by its politicization and ethno-religious aspects. Particularly in the Middle Belt, where Christian agricultural groups struggle with primarily Muslim Fulani pastoralists, farmer-herder conflicts are sometimes framed, manipulated, or exploited along ethnic and religious lines. Usman (2019) demonstrated how political actors use religious and ethnic identities as weapons. It points out that farmers are frequently Christian ethnic minorities, while herders are primarily Muslim Fulani. This contrast is used to sow mistrust, terror, and political benefit. Efforts to solve the fundamental problems of resource scarcity and land management are hampered by this politicisation, which also raises tensions and prevents objective dispute resolution. The perception of prejudice is further cemented and retaliatory assaults are fuelled by the government's incapacity to apprehend or punish offenders or to react to early warning indicators (Ewoh et al, 2025).

Dimensions of pastoralists' insecurities in Nigeria

The insecurity stemming from pastoralism in Nigeria manifests across multiple critical dimensions, impacting human lives, socio-economic stability, the environment, and the political landscape. These dimensions, as discussed below, are interconnected, creating a complex and escalating crisis.

a. Humanitarian Dimension:

The severe humanitarian catastrophe is the most destructive aspect. Conflicts between farmers and herders have claimed thousands of lives nationwide, which is a startling number. Although exact numbers differ, several accounts point to a devastating death toll. For instance, a March 2025 SBM Intelligence report stated that these clashes killed more than 542 civilians in Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa states alone between 2019 and February 2025 (SBM Intelligence 2025; Akinmoyeje, 2025). Previous data indicates that, with over 7,000 deaths in five years by 2018, farmer-herder clashes killed six times as many people as the Boko Haram insurgency (Sanni, 2019).

Table 1: Selected Herdsmen and farmers conflict from March 20016 to November 2019

S/N	Date	Location	Deaths/caualties	Source
1	March, 2016	Agatu L.G.A Benue State	About 500 Killed	Premium Time March 12,2016
2	April, 2016	Gashaka L.G.A Taraba State	15 Killed	Punch April 13, 2016
3	April, 2016	Ukpabi;Nimbo, Uzo-uwani L.G.A Enugu	40 Killed	Vanguard April 26, 2016
4	June, 2016	Ossissa in Ndokwa East L.G.A Delta State	46 years old farmer killed	Punch June 18, 2016
5	August, 2016	Attakwu, Akagbe-UgwuNkanu L.G.A, Enugu State	A seminarian and 2 others killed	The Sun September 4, 2016

6	october	Umu Irete Owerri west L.G.A Imo State	Many injured and 2 were feared dead	New Telegraph October5, 2016
7	January, 2017	Logo and Guma L.G.A of Benue State	73 killed, and many wounded	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
8	January, 2017	Lau L.G.A of Taraba State	55 killed many wounded	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
9	January, 2017	Rafin Gona and Gbayyi village of Bosso L.G.A in Niger State	9 persons were killed among them were 2 police officers	New Nigeria January24, 2017
10	January, 2017	Birnin Gwari Kaduna State	10 killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
11	January, 2017	Bachama in Numan Local council Adamawa State	4 killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
12	January, 2017	Bassa, plateau State	8 killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
13	February, 2017	Kaguru village in Chukun L.G.A of Kaduna State	7 killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
14	February, 2017	Gassol in Taraba State	4 killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
15	February, 2017	25 Tiv villages in Kadaerko, Nasarawa State	12 killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
16	February, 2017	Oyo State	One SARS commander killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
17	February, 2017	Logo L.G.A Benue State	2 police man killed, 2 missing	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
18	February, 2017	Guma L.G.A Benue State	12 NSCDC Operatives killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
19	February, 2017	Okere, Ondo State	12 Herdsmen killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
20	March, 2017	Owusu Village, Okpokwu L.G.A Benue State	26 killed	Sunday Vanguard March 11, 2018
21	January 1, 2018	Logo and Guma L.G.A of Benue State	73 people killed in 2 days coordinated attacks	Sunday Sun January 21, 2018
22	January 6, 2018	Lau, Taraba State	55 people killed	Sunday Vanguard January 28, 2018
23	January 8, 2018	Logo Benue State	2 people killed	Sunday Vanguard January 28, 2018
24	January 13, 2018	Birnin Gwari, Kaduna State	10 people killed	Sunday Vanguard January 28, 2018
25	January 18, 2018	Guma, Logo and Okpokwu L.G.A of Benue State	5 persons were killed	Sunday Vanguard January 28, 2018
26	February 27, 2018	Kwamba, Barrong District of Demas L.G.A in Adamawa State	No fewer than 37 people killed	Sunday Vanguard March 4, 2018
27	March 25, 2018	Ugboha, Edo State	3 people on Okada killed	Sunday Vanguard March 25, 2018
28	April 24, 2018	St Ignatius cath. Church Ukpo-Mbalom Quasi parish Gwer East L.G.A Benue State	Rev.FR Joseph Gor, Felix Tyolaha and 17 church members	Sunday Vanguard May 20, 2018
29	April 4,2019	Mmiata Anam, Anambra west L.G.A, Anambra State	6 people killed, 30 wounded	Sunday vanguard April 7, 2019

30	Sep-19	Ezeagu L.G.A, Enugu State	Rev.Fr Madu was abducted by suspected herdsmen	Sunday vanguard, November 17, 2019
31	November 15, 2019	Amamsiodo, Ezeagu L.G.A Enugu State	Rev.Fr Ndulue was abducted by suspected herdsmen	Sunday vanguard, November 17, 2019

Source: National dailies (cited in Ifeyinwa & Henry, 2024)

In addition to deaths, the wars have resulted in widespread displacement. Between 2019 and February 2025, more than 2.2 million Nigerians were displaced in Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa states alone, according to the SBM Intelligence report. They were either driven into overcrowded internally displaced persons (IDP) camps or sought safety with family members (Jaiyesimi, 2025). Significant suffering results from this relocation, including diminished access to food, healthcare, and education, loss of livelihoods, and increased vulnerability, especially for women and children (Fami, 2025). In Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, psychological trauma, such as anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), is very common among victims, particularly among teenagers. Adolescents who witness violent herdsmen-farmers' disputes frequently develop severe emotional scars, displaying symptoms including nightmares, hypervigilance, emotional numbness, and difficulty concentrating. Because of their developmental stage, limited coping skills, and the unpredictable conditions in the camps, these young people are especially vulnerable, underscoring the urgent need for focused mental health treatments.

Socio-Economic Dimension:

Conflicts between farmers and herders have serious socioeconomic effects, impairing livelihoods and making poverty worse. Due to farmers' inability to access their farmlands because of fear of assault, agricultural output has sharply decreased, especially in Nigeria's food basket regions like the Middle Belt (SBM, 2025). This causes severe crop damage, lower harvests, and a persistent danger to the country's food security, which raises food prices and causes shortages (Jaiyesimi, 2025). Livestock, a significant asset for pastoralists, is also regularly lost via rustling or retaliatory killings, hurting their economic well-being. In support of this claim, Abdulwahab et al. (2020) discovered that 65% of pastoralists have been the victims of cattle rustling, with many of them claiming increasing poverty, food insecurity, and income loss. Economic activity is further hampered by the devastation of houses, marketplaces, and infrastructure. Mercy Corps (2015) highlighted the enormous economic cost of the violence by estimating that Nigeria might benefit up to US $13.7 billion a year in macroeconomic advancement if peace between farmers and pastoralists were established in only four states (Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Plateau). According to the analysis, these disputes might result in a minimum 64% reduction in income for impacted households.

Environmental Dimension:

Although the war is mostly caused by environmental causes like climate change, the conflict itself also has an influence on the environment. Conflict-induced herders' forced relocation into new areas can put further strain on ecosystems that are already delicate, possibly hastening land degradation through overgrazing in populated areas. According to Egbewole (2025), herders in northern Nigeria are pushed southward into more fertile but vulnerable areas due to desertification and diminishing water supplies. Additionally, displaced groups could put their host towns' natural resources under excessive strain. The

environment is further deteriorated when natural resources, such as vegetation and water bodies, are destroyed during conflicts.

Political and Governance Dimension:

Nigeria's unity and governance are fundamentally threatened by the persistent nature of farmer-herder conflicts. Public confidence in government agencies and security forces is damaged by the state's alleged incapacity or reluctance to handle the issue. Weak law enforcement, inefficient land management plans, and a breakdown of conventional dispute settlement procedures are characteristics of this governance deficiency (Momoh et al., 2025). The conflict's politicisation, which is frequently framed along ethnic and religious lines (Christian farmers versus Muslim Fulani herders in the Middle Belt, for example), makes efforts at resolution more difficult and widens societal divides, which may result in wider instability (Li, 2018; Kpilaakaa, 2025). One of the main causes of the rise in violence is the spread of light and small arms, which exposes a weakness in governmental regulation of armaments.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The comprehensive analysis makes it clear that Nigeria's pastoralism-related insecurity is a complex dilemma that reflects and frequently surpasses global trends. It stems from a complex interaction between environmental deterioration, population pressure, poor governance, and sociopolitical manipulation. Devastating socioeconomic, political, environmental, and humanitarian aspects highlight the urgent need for multifaceted solutions. Therefore, this paper recommends a holistic approach encompassing the following: strengthening climate change adaptation strategies, particularly through improved land and water management; promoting sustainable ranching models and reviving grazing reserves with community consent; reforming the Land Use Act to clarify land tenure and usage rights; enhancing the capacity of security agencies to respond swiftly and impartially to conflicts; investing in robust alternative dispute resolution mechanisms at the grassroots level; and actively working to de-escalate the ethno-religious rhetoric that often fuels the violence, thereby fostering peaceful co-existence and ensuring long-term stability and food security for all Nigerians.

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