

# NIGERIA

## Spike in farmer-herder violence in the Middle Belt

### LIKELIHOOD



### CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

Violence between herders (also known as pastoralists) and farmers has been ongoing for decades in Nigeria's Middle Belt states of Taraba, Benue, Kaduna, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Adamawa (UN Environment 04/10/2018). Violence arises from tensions over land between Fulani herders and farming communities (ACLELED 05/10/2018; UPI 7/09/2018). Tensions have been growing in recent years. Drought and desertification have forced herders in northern and central Nigeria to move further south to access grazing land and water sources for their cattle (USIP 07/11/2018). The movement of Fulani herders south has also been accelerated by the Boko Haram (BH) insurgency, which has forced herding communities from the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa to seek safety elsewhere (UPI 07/09/2018). Rapid population growth has increased demand for agricultural land and led farmers to settle on tracts of land which herders seasonally use as grazing routes (ACLELED 05/10/2018).

With growing tensions over land, disputes concerning cattle theft or crop damage have become more violent, and traditional mediation mechanisms and accepted alternatives have been unable to prevent the violence (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

Fulani herder attacks on farming communities are primarily about access to resources, but have increasingly been rooted in religious and ethnic motivations (Humanitarian Aid Trust 11/2018; USIP 07/11/2018). Some 90% of the herders are traditionally Fulani, an ethnic group of 20 million people spread across west and central Africa, who are predominantly Muslim. Most farmers are Christians of various ethnicities (ACLELED 05/10/2018). The country is roughly divided by the Muslim north and Christian south, and the ongoing farmer-herder violence has intensified friction between the two religious communities (The Washington Post 10/12/2018). Two separate attacks by herdsmen on a church in Makurdi, Benue state

in April 2018, killing more than 18 people including two priests, and a following attack in Garwaza, Plateau state in June 2018, where the church was burned, indicate the tense religious nature of farmer-herder attacks (News24 26/04/2018; The Washington Post 10/12/2018).

Neither herders nor farming communities claim to have organised militias. However, Fulani herders have been involved in organised clashes against civilians, in government confrontations, and remote violence in the same areas where tensions between herders and farmers are high (ACLELED 05/10/2018). The limited government response has contributed to the formation of ethnic militias, to allow communities to better protect themselves (Quartz Africa 12/02/2018). The Tarok militia in Plateau state has coordinated with other militias, including Jukun people in Taraba state and Eggon people in Nassarawa state. These community militias have carried out reprisal attacks against innocent Fulani communities (Financial Nigeria 15/11/2017). Fulani and community militias have become larger in size and better armed to defend themselves (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Violence between herders and farmers killed more than 1,500 people and displaced over 300,000 people, predominantly within their states of origin, between September 2017 and June 2018. There is conflicting data on the amount of people displaced. Other sources indicate that 300,000 people were displaced between January and June 2018 (ACLELED 05/10/2018; Crisis Group 26/07/2018; Humanitarian Aid Trust 11/2018; USIP 07/11/2018). IDPs are staying within host families and are seeking shelter at IDP camps (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

Violence spiked in January 2018, when over 90 violent incidents and 300 deaths involving Fulani militias were reported, and some 130,000 people (est.) were displaced (ACLELED 05/10/2018; OCHA 05/02/2018). The frequency of attacks by Fulani militias decreased after January, but still continued at around 40 per month until June and well beyond end of the dry season in March, before decreasing since July. In September 2018, 10 attacks and 50 deaths were reported (USIP 07/11/2018; ACLELED 05/10/2018). The decreasing trend is in line with seasonal features, which make fighting impractical during the May to October rainy season, when movement is constrained for militias, and livelihoods and production are prioritised (ACLELED 05/10/2018). An increase in Fulani militia attacks are often seen throughout the dry season, from November to March (FEWS NET 10/2019).

Compared to the last five years, there has been an overall increase in the total number

of Fulani militia attacks in 2018 in Benue, Taraba, Plateau and Nasarawa states (ACLEDD 05/10/2018).

A geographical shift has also been observed, with Fulani attacks reported in states where they were not previously seen. In 2018, violence has spread to northern and southern regions including Zamfara, Rivers, Ekiti, Enugu, Ogun, and Bayelsa states (UN Environment 04/10/2018).

Lastly, in 2018 the proportion of Fulani militia attacks against civilians has increased, while the proportion of Fulani militia attacks against community militias has decreased compared to previous years. In 2013, 21% of Fulani militia attacks were against community militias, compared to 10% in 2018. The percentage of Fulani attacks targeting civilians increased within the same time period, from 71% to 77% (ACLEDD 05/10/2018). The increase in attacks against civilians and government confrontations points to a more violent and organised nature of attacks, many of such being retaliatory attacks causing the situation to spiral further (The Washington Post 10/12/2018; ACLEDD 05/10/2018).

The rise in availability of illicit firearms from northeast Nigeria and neighbouring countries, has contributed to the increasingly more violent attacks (All Africa 26/07/2018). In 2018, the use of remote violence by Fulani militia has also increased, killing over 45 people in January 2018 (ACLEDD 2016; ACLEDD 05/10/2018; ACLEDD 12/2018).

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

In 2018, 12% of Fulani militia attacks were related to violent confrontations with the government, compared 3% in 2013 (SFCG 01/2018; ACLEDD 05/10/2018; UPI 7/09/2018). The government has become increasingly involved in the violence between herders and farmers in 2018, and has significantly scaled up its response to the attacks. The federal government has deployed additional army units and police in Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa (The Guardian 19/05/2018). Two military operations were launched, Exercise Cat Race, from 15 February – 31 March, followed by the ongoing Operation Whirl Stroke (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

The government have also introduced political measures of open grazing bans, though these have also been associated with an escalation of violence in Benue and Taraba states. On 1 November 2017, the anti-grazing law was implemented in Benue, allowing livestock to only graze on ranches, or their owners would face jail sentences and fines

(Crisis Group 26/07/2018; UPI 07/09/2018). Instead of deterring herders from grazing in non-prescribed areas, it has invoked more violent responses to herders whose livestock graze in the wrong area and destroying crops, and pushed other herders into nearby Nasarawa state where such restrictions are not in place. In turn, the high influx of herders in Nasarawa state has led violence to spill over into Nasarawa state as a result (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

On 24 January 2018, a similar law was implemented in Taraba state, with a phased transition to ranching to avoid the spike in violence seen in Benue state. However, on 20 February, the anti-grazing law was suspended in Taraba, in order to review the legislation (Crisis Group 26/07/2018; SFCG 01/2018; Premium Times 20/02/2018; The Sun 20/02/2018).

## POLITICAL DYNAMICS

The government response to violence in the Middle Belt has become an important political issue in the campaigning for the February 2019 elections (Crisis Group 26/07/2018). Despite the implementation of Exercise Cat Race and Operation Whirl Stroke, the farmers in the Middle Belt region believe President Buhari's response to farmer-herder violence has been inadequate, and claim Buhari is biased given that he is himself Fulani (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

Herders feel that the implementation of the state-led anti-grazing laws should have been challenged by the federal government, and are worried about systematic discrimination against their ethnic group (ACLEDD 05/10/2018; UPI 7/09/2018; Crisis Group 26/07/2018). The recent politicisation by state government officials has sparked further tensions by state government officials, and increasing tensions among political party lines (TRTWorld 17/12/2018).

The ongoing violence is also undermining Buhari's 2015 campaign pledge to ensure security within the country and defeat Boko Haram (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

With frustrations of both herders and farmers targeted at President Buhari, in addition to the army's inability to restore security in Boko Haram affected areas, it weakens the incumbent's position in the run-up to the 2019 elections. However, the official campaigning period, began on 19 November (EWN 19/11/2018; UPI 07/09/2018).

## PREDICTED DEVELOPMENTS

Past elections in Nigeria have been characterised by violence since the country returned to civilian rule in 1999, which sets a precedent for potential further violence in 2019, despite the recent peace accord signed by election candidates on 12 December (CFR 12/10/2018; NYTimes 12/12/2018).

Most political commentators agree that the campaigning period will be a close race between President Buhari, from the APC, and Abubakar, from the opposition party, PDP (Bloomberg 17/10/2018). Based on 2011 and 2015 elections, the Middle Belt region (North Central), is typically a swing region between the PDP and APC, which likely means a tense and hard-fought political campaign (Sahara Reporters 05/11/2018, BBC 16/04/2011; INEC 28/03/2018).

Amid the tense political environment in the Middle Belt, differences between herders and farmers are likely to polarise further. During the campaigning period there is a risk of the use of hate speech, the spread of misinformation, vote rigging, political patronage, and disrupted voting registration due to displacement (Vanguard 16/12/2018; CFR 12/10/2018; Crisis Group 26/07/2018; Daily Trust 06/05/2018; UPI 7/09/2018; Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

In addition, the increase in government troops to ensure security throughout the elections is likely to spark further attacks against government officials, which have already been a major feature of the violence between farmers, herders, and Fulanis in 2018 (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

As politics and intercommunal tensions interconnect, more violence is likely to lead to further displacement and significant humanitarian needs.

## IMPACT BY SECTOR

### Displacement

Displacement in Middle Belt states is likely to spike between January-March 2019 at the peak electoral period, with hundreds of thousands of people likely to be displaced. Given that farmer-herder violence displaced 300,000 people between September 2017 and June 2018, similar levels or more displacement is likely in early 2019 (Human Rights Watch 06/08/2018; Crisis Group 26/07/2018). People are particularly likely to flee if houses are burned or they are forced to leave their agricultural land, as was the case in early 2018.

### Shelter

Many of the IDPs displaced are likely to remain within their states of origin where they can stay with host families, but many others will need to seek shelter in IDP camps, in schools, churches, and other public facilities (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

Conditions in IDP camps and shelters are already poor, particularly for women and children, and urgent food assistance is needed. Although there is a lack of information on how many IDPs have returned home since June 2018, it is likely that a new spike of displacement will place stresses on the existing camp and shelter infrastructure (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

### WASH

Overcrowding and limited health, water and sanitation facilities are reported in the Middle Belt IDP camps, and likely to worsen with an increased caseload of waterborne diseases (Crisis Group 26/07/2018).

### Food security

The areas worst affected by violence between herders and farmers, including Zamfara, Adamawa, Plateau, Benue and Taraba, are already predicted to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) acute food insecurity from February to May 2019, as households are unable to access their basic food needs (FEWS NET 10/2019).

More farmers abandoning their land in 2019 is likely to lead to a further decrease in food production in Nigeria's breadbasket. February is typically the start of the land preparation season in northern and southern states, followed by the planting season in mid-March in the south and May in the north (FEWS NET 10/2019). Interrupted access to

land during this period could lead to significant decreases in food production. In 2018, food production is estimated to have dropped by 33% to 65% due to farmer-herder violence. Another year of poor food production is likely to lead to a further increase in food prices and negatively impact access to food for the most vulnerable populations (Crisis Group 26/07/2018; FEWS NET 10/2019).

After the spike in violence in January 2018, herders struggled to find sufficient fodder for their cattle. Fodder shortages were particularly reported in Nasarawa state for herders who had been displaced from Benue state. However, the negative impact will be mitigated by pasture availability, which is expected to be slightly above average outside northern areas due to good rainfall predictions (SBM Intelligence 04/07/2018; Crisis Group 26/07/2018; FEWS NET 10/2018).

## Protection

There is a major risk of fatalities resulting from violence against civilians: from January to 29 September 2018, almost 1,870 fatalities were reported due to farmer-herder clashes, remote violence, and violence against civilians (ACLED 05/10/2018). Attacks against civilians have become increasingly violent. There are reports of armed herdsmen opening fire within communities, killing people in their sleep and burning homes in Plateau state (The New York Times 26/06/2018).

Women who lose male relatives face compounding protection risks from violence. They may lose access to land and livestock, which will likely increase their vulnerability (IPS 06/08/2018). Female-headed households affected by farmer-herder violence face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, such as rape by attackers. Women and girls are also vulnerable to gender-based violence in IDP camps, where abuse and exploitation are of great concern. Overcrowding at IDP camps, with a lack of privacy and inadequate toilets and washing facilities, increases the risks and vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse (Crisis Group 26/07/2018; UNHCR 12/2017). Health risks are increased for pregnant and nursing mothers with the lack of access to adequate WASH facilities, particularly in overcrowded IDP camps.

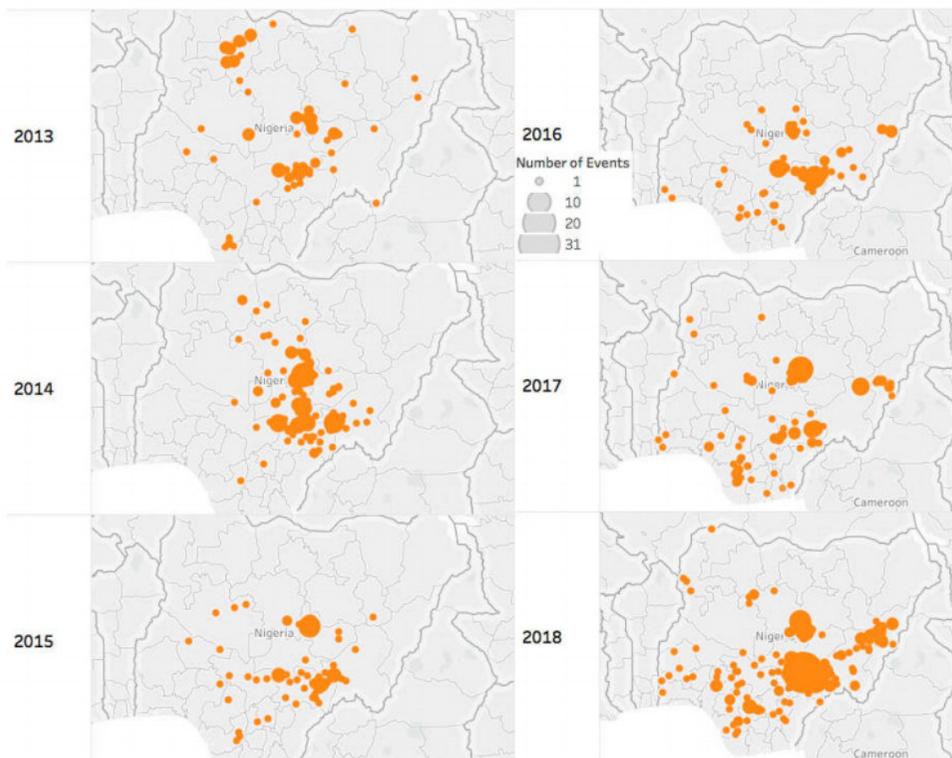
## HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

Several NGOs have carried out needs assessments and responded to needs of IDPs affected by farmer-herder violence in IDP camps in 2018 (AllAfrica 28/08/2018). Data is lacking on the number of humanitarian actors operating in the Middle Belt states, although several international NGOs have reported operating at times during 2018. State-led response has aggravated tensions, increasing the challenges for civil society actors to address the crisis (Chatham House 12/04/2013). However, insecurity is a major constraint to humanitarian operations. Militia involved in farmer-herder violence have committed attacks against security personnel, decreasing the safety and security for humanitarian organisations. Violence is expected to increase during the election period, adding further security challenges to the operating environment (Crisis Group 26/07/2018; The Guardian 19/05/2018).

# MAPS

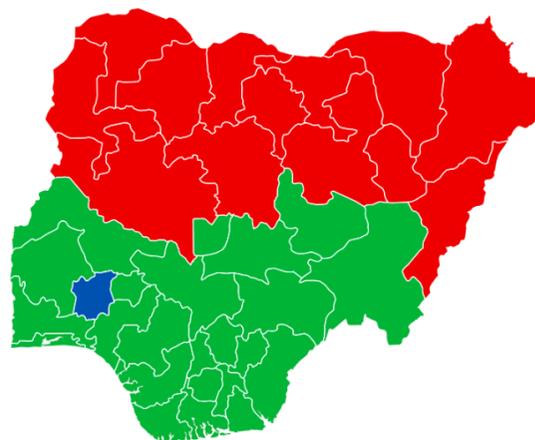
**Violent events involving Fulani Militias by year (01/01/2013 – 29/09/2018)** (ACLEDA 05/10/2018)

*Map of Violent Events Involving Fulani Ethnic Militias by Year (1 January 2013 - 29 September 2018)*



## Presidential elections results in 2011

States won by Jonathon (PDP – 58.89% of votes) in green and states won by Buhari (CPC – 31.98%) in red, state won by Ribadu (CAN - 5.5%) in blue (BBC 16/04/2011; WikimediaCommons 04/2015).



## Presidential elections results in 2015

States won by Buhari (APC – 53.96% of votes) in blue and states won by Jonathon (PDP – 44.96%) in green (INEC 28/03/2018; WikimediaCommons 04/2015).

