

FAILURE OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

The Nigeria Herdsmen and Farmers clash:

The conflict between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria's Middle Belt is a complex, multifaceted crisis rooted in resource competition, ethnic and religious tensions, environmental pressures, and weak governance.

Below is a comprehensive overview of the key facts, based on field investigation and available information up to August 2025, focusing on the dynamics, causes, impacts, and responses to the violence in the Middle Belt, particularly involving Fulani herdsmen and local farming communities.

Overview of the Conflict:

Parties Involved - The conflict primarily involves nomadic Fulani herdsmen, who are predominantly Muslim, and sedentary farmers, often from Christian ethnic groups such as the Tiv, Mwaghavul, Irigwe, and others in the Middle Belt states (e.g., Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Taraba, Kaduna, Kogi, Kwara, Niger, and the Federal Capital Territory).

Geographic Focus - The Middle Belt, Nigeria's agricultural heartland, is the epicenter of the conflict, often referred to as the country's "food basket." States like Benue and Plateau have been hit hardest.

Nature of Violence - The clashes involve mass killings, arson, crop destruction, cattle rustling, displacement, and reprisal attacks, often escalating into cycles of violence. The conflict has taken on ethnic and religious dimensions, with accusations of genocidal intent and land-grabbing.

Key Facts and Statistics

1. Casualties and Displacement:

Since 2019, at least 542 civilians have been killed in farmer-herder conflicts across Nigeria, with over 2.2 million people displaced, particularly in Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa states. <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/> [\(https://fij.ng/article/report-pastoral-conflict-in-nigeria-has-killed-542-displaced-2-2-million-in-7-years/](https://fij.ng/article/report-pastoral-conflict-in-nigeria-has-killed-542-displaced-2-2-million-in-7-years/)

In Benue alone, over ****6,800 deaths**** were reported between 2023 and May 2025, while ****2,600**** were killed in Plateau during the same period. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/08/11/the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt-has-long-historical-roots/>

A single attack in Yelwata, Guma LGA, Benue, in 2025 reportedly killed ****200 people****, according to local estimates. <https://neusroom.com/from-benue-to-plateau-exploring-the-root-causes-of-killings-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

In 2018, the conflict was reportedly six times deadlier than the Boko Haram insurgency, with over 1,800 fatalities****** in the first half of the year alone. <https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/activities/report-on-farmer-herder-crisis-in-middle-belt-nigeria.html>

Over ****60,000 deaths**** have been attributed to the farmer-herder crisis in the Middle Belt over decades, with hundreds of thousands displaced. <https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

2. Specific Incidents:

January 2024, Plateau State - At least 30 people were killed in Mangu district, with schools, homes, and places of worship burned despite a curfew. The Mwaghavul Development Association blamed Fulani herdsmen for the attack on Kwahaslalek village. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/25/thirty-people-killed-in-latest-herder-violence-in-nigerias-plateau-state>.

May 14, 2025, Plateau State - Fulani militias attacked Wereng camp, Riyom County, killing ****eight Christians****, mostly children and the elderly, and destroyed ****740 acres of farmland**** in Kpachudu village, Bassa County. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/05/21/8-christians-killed-farms-destroyed-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

April 7, 2023, Benue State - The ****Umogidi massacre**** saw Fulani herdsmen kill ****53 civilians**** during a funeral in Otukpo LGA, with a simultaneous attack in Mgbán. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umogidi_massacre

April 17-18, 2025, Benue State - Attacks in Ukum and Logo LGAs killed ****56 people****, with homes razed and looted. <https://www.dw.com/en/nigeria-death-toll-rises-sharply-in-attacks-in-benue-state/a-72290647>

Christmas 2023, Plateau State - Nearly ****200 people**** were killed in raids on mostly Christian villages in Bokkos and Mangu areas, with attacks linked to land disputes and reprisals. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/25/thirty-people-killed-in-latest->

[herder-violence-in-nigerias-plateau-state](#)

<https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

3. Humanitarian Impact:

Over 300,000 people in Benue are living in overcrowded IDP camps due to displacement.

<https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/>

The destruction of farmlands, such as the 740 acres in Kpachudu, has crippled agricultural output, exacerbating food insecurity and inflation.

<https://www.persecution.org/2025/05/21/8-christians-killed-farms-destroyed-in-nigerias-middle-belt/> <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/>

Communities face economic sabotage, with farmers like Ibrahim Danjuma reporting losses exceeding 10 million naira due to deliberate crop destruction.

<https://www.persecution.org/2025/05/21/8-christians-killed-farms-destroyed-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

Root Causes

The conflict is driven by a combination of environmental, economic, social, and political factors:

1. Environmental Pressures:

Climate Change and Desertification - Droughts and desertification in northern Nigeria have reduced grazing land, pushing Fulani herdsman southward into the fertile Middle Belt, leading to competition with farmers.

<https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/> <https://fij.ng/article/report-pastoral-conflict-in-nigeria-has-killed-542-displaced-2-2-million-in-7-years/>

Population Growth - Urbanization and expanding farmlands have encroached on traditional grazing routes, escalating disputes.

<https://guardian.ng/news/542-killed-2-million-displaced-in-farmer-herder-conflicts-report/>

2. Resource Competition:

The conflict centers on access to land and water. Farmers accuse herdsman of allowing cattle to graze on crops, while herdsman claim farmers encroach on grazing routes.

<https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/> Land-grabbing allegations have emerged, with

some officials claiming attacks are motivated by valuable mineral deposits.
<https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt>

3. Ethnic and Religious Tensions:

The Middle Belt is a dividing line between Nigeria's predominantly Muslim north and Christian south, with Fulani herdsman (Muslim) often clashing with Christian farmers. This has fueled perceptions of religious targeting, with Christian leaders alleging a "genocidal campaign" or "Fulanisation." <https://www.persecution.org/2025/05/21/8-christians-killed-farms-destroyed-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/08/11/the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt-has-long-historical-roots/> <https://www.opinionnigeria.com/the-fulani-herdsmen-crisis-in-nigeria-a-genocidal-campaign-on-the-plateau-and-benue-states-by-jeff-okoroafor/>

Historical grievances, including memories of the 1804 Sokoto Caliphate jihad, shape local narratives of resistance against perceived Fulani domination.
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/08/11/the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt-has-long-historical-roots/>

4. Proliferation of Arms:

The availability of sophisticated weapons, including AK-47s, has turned local disputes into militarized conflicts. Armed groups, including Fulani militias and bandits, exploit weak security frameworks. <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/> <https://fij.ng/article/report-pastoral-conflict-in-nigeria-has-killed-542-displaced-2-2-million-in-7-years/>

5. Weak Governance and Security Failures:

Inconsistent security responses and allegations of complicity among security forces have fueled distrust. Victims report that security personnel often fail to intervene or arrive after attacks. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/05/21/8-christians-killed-farms-destroyed-in-nigerias-middle-belt/> <https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>
<https://middlebelttimes.com/2025/07/24/exclusive-how-armed-fulani-militants-executed-coordinated-attack-while-nigerian-army-allegedly-provided-safe-passage/>

The lack of arrests or prosecutions for attackers perpetuates a cycle of impunity and reprisals. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/08/11/the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt-has-long-historical-roots/>

6. Cattle Rustling and Reprisals:

Cattle rustling by local communities is a significant trigger, prompting retaliatory attacks by herdsmen. The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association (MACBAN) has cited this as a cause of violence, alongside neglect of Fulani grievances. <https://www.legit.ng/nigeria/1666070-just-miyetti-allah-finally-explains-continuous-killings-plateau-avenging/>

Reprisal attacks, such as the 2021 killing of **26 Muslim travelers** in Jos North, Plateau, by Irigwe locals, have deepened the cycle of violence. <https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

Government and Policy Responses

1. Anti-Open Grazing Laws:

States like Benue, Ekiti, and others have implemented laws banning open grazing to reduce conflicts, promoting ranching instead. However, enforcement is weak due to lack of resources and political resistance. <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/> <https://fij.ng/article/report-pastoral-conflict-in-nigeria-has-killed-542-displaced-2-2-million-in-7-years/>

The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association opposes these laws, arguing they criminalize their livelihood. <https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

2. National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP):

The NLTP aims to transition herders to ranching but has been poorly funded and implemented, yielding minimal results. <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/>

3. Security Measures:

Curfews, such as the one in Mangu, Plateau, in January 2024, have failed to stop attacks. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/25/thirty-people-killed-in-latest-herder-violence-in-nigerias-plateau-state> Security operations provide temporary relief but do not address root causes, and allegations of bias or inaction persist. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/05/21/8-christians-killed-farms-destroyed-in-nigerias-middle-belt/> <https://middlebelttimes.com/2025/07/24/exclusive-how-armed-fulani-militants-executed-coordinated-attack-while-nigerian-army-allegedly-provided-safe-passage/>

4. Peacebuilding Initiatives:

State and non-state actors, including faith-based organizations, have attempted peace dialogues, but these have been largely ineffective due to entrenched mistrust and ongoing violence.[](<https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>)

Controversies and Narratives

Genocide Allegations - Local leaders, such as the Tor Tiv in Benue, have described the violence as a “genocidal invasion” and “land-grabbing campaign,” rejecting the government’s framing of “herder-farmer clashes.” Christian communities cite targeted attacks on churches and pastors as evidence of religious persecution. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/08/11/the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt-has-long-historical-roots/> <https://www.persecution.org/2025/05/21/8-christians-killed-farms-destroyed-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

Fulanisation Narrative - Some Christian groups and the Southern and Middle Belt Leaders Forum accuse the government of bias toward Fulani interests, fueling fears of a deliberate agenda to impose Fulani hegemony. <https://fij.ng/article/report-pastoral-conflict-in-nigeria-has-killed-542-displaced-2-2-million-in-7-years/>

Fulani Perspective - Herders, through groups like MACBAN, argue they are victims of cattle rustling, discriminatory laws, and stereotyping as terrorists. They claim their movements are driven by survival needs, not aggression. <https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/> <https://www.legit.ng/nigeria/1666070-just-miyetti-allah-finally-explains-continuous-killings-plateau-avenging/>

Government Framing - The Nigerian government often downplays the crisis as localized “clashes,” a narrative criticized for obscuring the scale and intent of the violence. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/08/11/the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt-has-long-historical-roots/>

Broader Implications

Food Security - The destruction of farmlands and displacement of farmers have reduced agricultural output in the Middle Belt, contributing to food insecurity and rising inflation. <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/>

National Stability - The conflict's spread to southern states and its politicization risk escalating into a broader civil conflict. <https://observers.france24.com/en/africa/20210428-farmer-herder-crisis-in-nigeria-s-middle-belt-could-blow-up-into-a-civil-war>

Human Rights Crisis - The National Human Rights Commission has highlighted fatalities, injuries, displacements, and heightened ethnic/religious hostilities as a grave humanitarian crisis. <https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/activities/report-on-farmer-herder-crisis-in-middle-belt-nigeria.html>

Proposed Solutions

Land Reforms - Clarifying grazing rights and registering land to prevent disputes. <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/>

Arms Control - Addressing the proliferation of weapons to reduce militarized violence. <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/>

Climate Adaptation - Programs to mitigate environmental pressures driving herder migration. <https://businessday.ng/agriculture/article/farmer-herder-clashes-displace-2-2m-people-in-7yrs/>

Inclusive Dialogue - Depoliticized peace processes engaging both farmers and herders, addressing historical grievances and ensuring justice. <https://humanglemedia.com/silent-emergency-the-unending-cycle-of-ethnic-and-religious-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>
<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2025/08/11/the-violence-in-nigerias-middle-belt-has-long-historical-roots/>

International Advocacy - Local leaders urge global intervention, including diplomatic pressure and humanitarian aid, to protect vulnerable communities. <https://www.persecution.org/2025/05/21/8-christians-killed-farms-destroyed-in-nigerias-middle-belt/>

In Conclusion

Critical Perspective:

While official narratives often frame the conflict as resource-based, the ethnic and religious dimensions cannot be ignored. The government's reluctance to label the violence as systematic or address allegations of security complicity fuels distrust.

Conversely, stereotyping all Fulani as aggressors risks oversimplifying the crisis, as many herders are also victims of violence and economic hardship. The interplay of historical grievances, modern criminality, and governance failures suggests that solutions must be holistic, addressing both immediate security needs and long-term structural issues.

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