

**SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, RESOURCE GOVERNANCE, AND STATE LEGITIMACY:
DYNAMICS OF FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICTS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

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dare.akindoyin@augustineuniversity.edu.ngDOI: [10.69713/uoaaj2025v03i02.16](https://doi.org/10.69713/uoaaj2025v03i02.16)**Abstract**

The farmers-herders conflict in Northern Nigeria has emerged as one of the most persistent internal security challenges, undermining resource governance, social cohesion, and state legitimacy. The struggle over land and water resources has increasingly escalated into violent clashes, displacements, and destruction of livelihoods, reflecting deeper governance failures. Despite numerous state interventions, the conflict remains unresolved, highlighting the limitations of existing approaches. The central problem lies in the over-securitization of the crisis, where militarized state responses overshadow the need for inclusive governance, human rights protection, and sustainable management of natural resources. The main objective of this study is to examine how social movements and state responses to resource governance shape the legitimacy of the Nigerian state in addressing the farmers-herders conflict. Methodologically, the paper employs a qualitative approach based on secondary sources, including scholarly works, policy documents, and reports, with Northern Nigeria serving as the focal case. The analysis is guided by securitization theory and the human security framework to assess the reliance on force versus community-centered strategies. Findings reveal that while securitized interventions have achieved limited tactical gains, they are undermined by human rights abuses, weak institutional capacity, and exclusionary policies that alienate affected communities. The study concludes that militarized approaches alone are insufficient. It recommends that Nigeria revitalize its strategy in dealing with conflicts so that security operations and governance reforms work together, among other recommendations.

Keywords: Farmers-Herders Conflict, Resource Governance, Social Movements, State Legitimacy, Human Security

INTRODUCTION

Resource governance and social movements have emerged as pivotal themes in contemporary political discourse, especially in the African context, where disputes over natural resources frequently converge with matters of identity, legitimacy, and state capacity. In Nigeria, these dynamics are prominently

evident in the persistent conflicts between farmers and herders that have devastated numerous northern states in recent years. Competition for access to and control of important natural resources like land, water, and grazing routes is at the heart of these conflicts (Akindoyin, and Badru, 2024). The Nigerian government's failure to effectively mediate these disputes has led to the rise of

social movements that both voice community complaints and question the government's power. As a result, the conflict between farmers and herders is a good way to look at how social movements, resource management, and state legitimacy are all connected.

The farmers-herders conflict is not a new or unique issue in Nigeria; it is part of a larger pattern of resource-based conflicts that happen all over Africa. However, the number of deaths, injuries, and attacks in Nigeria makes it a very important issue for national security. Estimates say that these violent conflicts have killed thousands of people and forced millions to leave their homes, with Northern Nigeria being the centre of the violence (Udosen, 2021). Pastoralists and sedentary farmers used to live together peacefully by following rules for sharing resources, negotiating, and moving to different places during different seasons. However, in the last twenty years, these systems have stopped working because farming has taken over grazing routes, desertification has pushed herders south, and small arms have become more common. This change has turned the conflict from small fights into long-lasting violence that now threatens the Nigerian state's very authority.

Social movements have become more and more important in determining the course of the conflict between farmers and herders. Farmer associations and vigilante groups have come together to protect the interests of their communities. They often say that their fight is against state neglect and insecurity. On the other hand, pastoralist unions and advocacy groups have come together to fight unfair policies and demand that herders' rights be recognized (Bassi, 2017). These movements do not function in isolation; they engage with civil society organizations, religious leaders, and transnational networks. Their activism has brought the conflict into national and international policy debates, bringing up bigger

issues of fairness, justice, and governance in Nigeria's resource management.

Resource governance in Nigeria is still marked by weak institutions, corruption, and policies that are not always followed. The Nigerian government has historically controlled natural resources, especially land, from the centre. For example, the Land Use Act of 1978 gave state governors the exclusive power (Otubu, 2018). This framework was meant to make it easier to share resources, but it has often pushed local communities to the side and made it harder to protect land tenure, which has made conflicts between farmers and herders worse. Moreover, the government's responses to the conflict have mostly focused on security measures, like sending in troops and setting up security operations. There has been little focus on governance reforms, ways to have conversations, or long-term plans for managing resources. This dependence on militarized strategies has yielded transient alleviation in certain regions, yet has not tackled the fundamental causes of resource competition.

The Nigerian state's legitimacy is increasingly compromised by its failure to ensure security and equitable resource management. Legitimacy, which is how people see rightful authority, is a key part of state stability. In Northern Nigeria, ongoing conflicts between farmers and herders have revealed the disconnect between government power and public trust (Nwosu, 2025). People in communities often think that state institutions are either involved in unfairness or not doing anything to help with conflict management. This challenge has not only cultivated dependence on informal governance frameworks but has also enabled social movements to assume functions conventionally linked to the state, including conflict resolution and community safeguarding. These dynamics pose significant questions regarding the durability of Nigeria's democracy, the viability

of its federal structure, and the potential for peacebuilding in resource-dependent societies.

Hence, this paper examines the relationship between social movements, resource governance, and state legitimacy within the framework of farmers–herders conflicts in Northern Nigeria. It contends that the ongoing nature of these conflicts is not solely indicative of resource scarcity but is intrinsically connected to governance deficiencies and the crisis of state legitimacy.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research design to examine the influence of social movements, resource governance, and state legitimacy within the framework of farmers-herders conflicts in Northern Nigeria. The qualitative approach is suitable due to the study's emphasis on comprehending the social, political, and institutional dynamics influencing the conflict rather than quantifying measurable variables. Data were mainly obtained from secondary sources, such as academic journals, government policy papers, reports from civil society groups, and respected news sources. These materials elucidate the historical development of the conflict, the reactions of social movements, and the strategies employed by the Nigerian state.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Social Movement

Social movements are organized and collective actions taken by marginalized or interest-driven groups to oppose existing power structures, promote particular demands, or safeguard perceived rights (Johnston, 2014). They usually happen when regular political institutions do not properly address complaints. In Northern Nigeria, farmer associations, pastoralist unions, and vigilante groups have arisen as social movements advocating for land rights, grazing access, and community security. For instance, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association

of Nigeria (MACBAN), which is a major pastoralist advocacy group representing Fulani herders, and the Yan Sakai (Yan Sa Kai) Vigilante Group, a farmer-based vigilante group in northwest Nigeria which emerged to defend farming communities against banditry and perceived threats, including from herders. These movements, despite their varied strategies, represent a type of grassroots politics that both challenges and enhances state action.

Resource Governance

Resource governance is the set of rules, policies, and practices that decide how society manages, shares, and uses natural resources (Anderson, 2024). Fairness, sustainability, and accountability are important parts of good governance. This makes sure that resource allocation does not cause problems. However, in Nigeria, weak institutions, corruption, and policy inconsistencies have made resource governance problematic.

State Legitimacy

State legitimacy refers to how much citizens believe that the state's authority is just and binding (Roth, 2021). Legitimacy arises not solely from constitutional or legal authority but also from the state's capacity to provide security, justice, and public goods (Roth, 2021). In Northern Nigeria, the government's failure to properly handle conflicts between farmers and herders has made people somewhat lose faith in the government, which has led to a lack of legitimacy. Communities often view state responses as biased, insufficient, or oppressive, which undermines state authority and encourages dependence on non-state entities, including social movements.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Securitization Theory and Human Security Theory, two contrasting viewpoints that shed light on the complexities of conflicts between farmers and herders in Northern Nigeria, serve as the foundation for this investigation. These

frameworks are especially useful for examining how the conflict is framed, handled, and perceived in connection to social movements, legitimacy, and governance.

Securitization Theory

The Copenhagen School's securitization theory offers a conceptual framework for analyzing how problems are framed as existential threats that call for drastic measures. Buzan et al. (2003) define securitization as the process by which a securitizing actor, typically a social movement, government agency, or political figure, presents a problem as a security threat to a specific audience to support the implementation of extraordinary measures or policies. Securitization theory is built on the assumption that security is not an objective condition but a product of social construction. It argues that an issue becomes a security concern only when political actors successfully frame it as an existential threat through speech acts that persuade an audience. The theory assumes that language, discourse, and the authority of the speaker play decisive roles in determining what society accepts as a security threat. Another assumption is that once an issue is securitized, it justifies extraordinary measures outside normal political procedures. Its strength lies in its ability to highlight how threats are constructed rather than naturally occurring, allowing scholars to analyze why some issues gain urgent attention while others do not. It also broadens the understanding of security by including political, societal, and environmental dimensions. Similarly, securitization theory is often criticized for overemphasizing elite actors while neglecting grassroots voices and everyday insecurity. It is also seen as Eurocentric in its origins and less suited to contexts where security practices rely more on actions than speech.

Hence, securitization theory explains how rival factions, state actors, and local elites present the farmers-herders conflict in Northern Nigeria as

a fight for limited resources, ethnic identity, terrorism, or community survival. This viewpoint emphasizes the discursive aspect of conflict, where state reactions and public perceptions are influenced by the way political and social actors frequently depict herders as invaders or security threats. On the other hand, herder associations and related organizations might portray the crisis as a fight for justice and a means of subsistence against marginalization. Therefore, the theory explains how the politics of threat construction and labelling help to escalate tensions and justify specific state or community actions.

Securitization theory also highlights the extraordinary actions of the Nigerian government, such as the deployment of military forces, the creation of special security task forces, and the framing of conflicts between farmers and herders as a component of the larger war on terror. Even though these actions are frequently meant to bring about peace, they often undermine state legitimacy if they lead to discrimination, violations of human rights, or a failure to address underlying structural challenges.

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory moves the emphasis from regime survival and territorial integrity to the protection of people and communities, in contrast to conventional state-centric approaches to security (Ugwu, 2023). By defining seven aspects of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security, the United Nations Development Programme in 1994 popularized the idea. This expanded framework highlights the need to protect the conditions essential to human survival and dignity rather than relying only on military or coercive methods to ensure security.

Human security theory, when applied to the farmers-herders conflict, highlights the

everyday vulnerabilities that both farmers and herders face. Problems like food insecurity, climate change, dwindling grazing routes, farmland loss, and forced relocation pose serious security risks in addition to environmental and economic ones. While the devastation of agricultural resources jeopardizes local and national food security, the deaths, injuries, and displacement brought on by violent conflicts compromise personal and community security.

Additionally, the theory offers a framework for evaluating the legitimacy of the Nigerian government, which is frequently assessed based on its ability to maintain human security. Social movements arise to fill the void left by citizens' perceptions that the state is failing to protect lives, livelihoods, and justice; they may advocate for alternative governance mechanisms or mobilize against state neglect. Accordingly, human security theory emphasizes that conflict resolution needs to adopt development-oriented and rights-based strategies rather than relying solely on coercion.

Synchronizing the Frameworks

Human security theory highlights the real-world experiences and vulnerabilities of impacted populations, whereas securitization theory describes how actors frame the farmers-herders conflict as a security threat. When combined, these frameworks offer a comprehensive analytical perspective. Securitization, on the one hand, shows how elites have framed, politicized, and instrumentalized the conflict, influencing public opinion and state responses. Human security, on the other hand, emphasizes the lived realities of common people, showing how securitized solutions like sending troops or making herding illegal frequently fall short of addressing the underlying issues of poverty, environmental damage, and ineffective governance.

When the two theories are combined, a significant conflict emerges: human security necessitates people-centered policies based on justice and development, whereas securitization favours elite-driven and state-centric threat narratives. By closing this gap, academics and decision-makers can better understand how securitizing discourses and the success of state initiatives to ensure human security interact to both contest and reconstruct state legitimacy. This integration is essential to comprehending the reasons behind the emergence of social movements in Nigeria, how they subvert state narratives, and how resource governance affects security realities and perceptions.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW OF FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICTS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

The conflict between farmers and herders in Northern Nigeria is one of the longest-lasting and most violent examples of resource-based conflicts in West Africa. People often call it a "modern crisis," but its roots go back hundreds of years and are deeply ingrained in Nigerian society's economy, culture, and social structure. Historically, pastoralism has been a key part of the region's economy, especially among Fulani communities (Mbih, 2018). They moved their cattle around seasonally in search of water and pasture to make a living. Farmers, on the other hand, grew crops to eat and sell. For decades, these two groups got along due to informal systems that encouraged give-and-take and negotiation. Local Chiefs, Emirs, and traditional authorities were important in settling disputes. Colonial governments set up grazing corridors and cattle routes to make things easier between people who lived in one place and those who moved around (Mbih, 2018). These arrangements did not eradicate conflict; however, disputes were frequently confined, addressed through compensation, and seldom escalated into widespread violence.

After independence, this balance started to change because of population growth, rapid agricultural growth, and changes in the environment that made land and water resources less available. Desertification and less rain in the north forced pastoralists to move south, where sedentary farming communities were more common. The Land Use Act of 1978 made things even more complicated by giving state governors more power over who gets what land (Ugwueze, 2022). The goal was to make land management easier, but it made traditional tenure systems weaker and pushed aside local ways of settling disputes. This made both farmers and herders open to random government actions and political manipulation (Ugwueze, 2022). By the end of the twentieth century, disagreements that used to be settled through conversation and compromise started to turn into fights that happened over and over again.

The conflict has had a big impact on people and the economy. Recent reports say that fights between farmers and herders have killed more people each year than the Boko Haram insurgency, which has killed thousands and forced millions to leave their homes (Chiluwa, & Chiluwa, 2022). These violent fights ruin people's lives; that is, farmers lose crops and land to destruction, and herders lose cattle to theft, reprisals, or targeted attacks. The overall effect has been a major threat to Nigeria's food security, since agriculture and livestock production are two of the most important parts of the country's economy. Markets in affected areas fail, and the people who have to leave their homes depend on humanitarian aid, which keeps them in cycles of poverty and vulnerability (Chiluwa, & Chiluwa, 2022).

Most of the time, the government's responses have been reactive and focused on security deployments. Military and police operations are often used to stop violence, but they often make things worse by abusing people's rights or being

seen as biased. Policy ideas like grazing reserves and ranching schemes have had trouble because of bad planning, inadequate funding, and a lack of support from the local communities (Akindoyin & Alade, 2025). Farmers and state governments strongly opposed the idea of a National Grazing Reserve Law because they thought it favoured the interests of pastoralists (Nnamani, 2024). On the other hand, some states have passed anti-open grazing laws that make herders criminals without giving them any long-term options, which makes things even worse (Nnamani, 2024).

The conflict also has important effects on other countries. A lot of herders who move to Nigeria come from nearby countries like Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. This shows how regional Nigeria is. Weak border controls enable cattle, weapons, and sometimes armed groups cross the border, which connects the Nigerian crisis to instability in the Sahel region as a whole. These regional dynamics make it harder for states to respond because problems caused by cross-border migration, climate change, and regional insecurity can't be solved by domestic policies alone (Nnamani, 2024).

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND RESOURCE GOVERNANCE IN THE CONFLICT

Emergence of Social Movements in the Farmers-Herders Conflict

The ongoing conflicts between farmers and herders in Northern Nigeria have led to the growth of social movements, many of which focus on defending communities, advocating for rights, or mobilizing for resource rights. Social movements arise in contexts where state institutions are lacking, ineffective, or regarded as illegitimate, functioning as platforms for expressing grievances and demanding accountability. In Nigeria, farmers and herders have formed groups, unions, and vigilante groups to protect their rights. For farmers, groups like community vigilantes or

agricultural cooperatives protect them from herder attacks and push for more government protection. Unions like the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) have come together to protect the rights of herders, fight against laws that make it harder for them to graze their animals, and push for recognition in state policy frameworks (Okwelum, 2023). These groups represent grassroots collective action, influencing the political landscape of resource governance in ways that both contest and enhance state authority.

Resource Governance and the Politics of Access

The conflict's main issue is how to manage natural resources, especially land, water, and paths for grazing. The Land Use Act of 1978 had a big impact on Nigeria's land management system. It gave state governors more power and weakened traditional systems of tenure. Farmers frequently experience insecurity regarding their land ownership, whereas herders encounter growing encroachment on grazing routes due to agricultural expansion (Usman, 2022). In this situation, social movements come together to fight for different claims to access and ownership of resources. Farmer movements often talk about their fight as one to protect their ancestors' lands and ways of making a living. Pastoralist movements, on the other hand, focus on the right to move around and historical claims to grazing routes (Usman, 2022). These conflicting stories show how problems with governance make it easier for people to come together and fight for resources.

Religious networks and civil society groups also have a say in how resources are managed. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have worked on peacebuilding and pushing for open dialogue, while faith-based groups have given people a place to come together. However, due to the government's inefficiency in

regulating these groups, they often take on roles in government, such as settling disputes, making community rules, or even enforcing justice. These changes show how the lines between social movements and government structures are becoming less clear in societies that are prone to conflict.

Social Movements, Violence, and Mobilization

Some movements use nonviolent means to get their point across, while others have turned to violence or militant tactics because the government has not been able to keep people safe. In states like Benue and Plateau, farmer vigilante groups often set up armed patrols, which are security structures that are not under the control of the state (Iornumbe, 2025). Pastoralist groups have also used violence to get back at people, claiming that these actions were in self-defense (Iornumbe, 2025). The militarization of these movements mirrors overarching trends of insecurity in Nigeria, characterized by widespread access to arms and a lack of trust in state protection. This raises important questions about the Nigerian state's legitimacy. When people look to social movements for safety and justice, they are implicitly questioning the power of formal state institutions.

Also, social movements have become important players in shaping how the conflict is talked about in national debates. They change the stories about being a victim, being left out, and having rights through protests, advocacy campaigns, and working with the media. The portrayal of farmers as indigenous protectors of land against "foreign" Fulani herders, alongside the characterization of herders as marginalized groups subjected to discriminatory laws, has intensified polarization (Olamide, 2024). These discursive strategies illustrate that social movements serve not only as participants in resource disputes but also as generators of

political significance that can either promote or hinder conflict resolution.

State Responses to Social Movements

The Nigerian government has had mixed reactions to social movements in the farmers-herders conflict. The state works with some groups, like MACBAN, to try to make peace or put grazing rules into place. The government has often made farmer-based vigilantes illegal or made them seem like security threats, though (Asante & Mullard, 2021). This selective engagement shows that the state is somewhat fragile in general. It seeks alliances with strong social movements practically, while others are repressed. However, this uneven response gives a wrong notion to the citizen and therefore sees the government as being biased, which often translates to even less legitimacy.

Policy initiatives that might have opened doors for working with social movements, like ranching programs or grazing reserves, have failed because they were not open to everyone and did not ask for input. The state not only misses chances for grassroots legitimacy by leaving social movements out of decision-making processes, but it also keeps cycles of mistrust going. This failure shows how important it is to have governance models that see social movements as stakeholders in resource management and peacebuilding, not as threats.

Social Movements and Legitimacy Crises

The growth of social movements in the farmers-herders conflict shows how fragile the Nigerian government is. When people in a community turn to groups of people for help with problems, getting resources, or settling arguments, it means they do not trust the government as much. Many movements that started out to protect resource rights have now become quasi-governments, which makes it even harder for the state to have a monopoly on coercion and justice. In this regard, social movements

represent both an indication of governmental inadequacy and a distinct manifestation of grassroots legitimacy. Their actions show how closely resource governance and state legitimacy are connected. They also show how governance vacuums can give power to groups of people in societies that are likely to have conflicts.

STATE LEGITIMACY AND THE RESPONSE TO FARMERS-HERDERS CONFLICTS

Theoretical Link between State Legitimacy and Security Provision

The legitimacy of a state is closely linked to its capacity to provide security, justice, and welfare to its citizens. When insecurity is common in a society, people lose faith in the state because they think that its institutions cannot even meet their most basic obligations under the social contract (Akindoyin & Obafemi, 2025). The farmers-herders conflict in Northern Nigeria has revealed and exacerbated the legitimacy crisis of the Nigerian state. This owes to the fact that the state has not been able to effectively mediate disputes, protect vulnerable communities, and manage scarce resources; people have to look for other ways to get justice and safety, often through social movements and vigilante groups. This creates a dual system of authority in which the state is becoming less important and non-state actors are taking over areas of governance (Akindoyin, & Obafemi, 2025).

Militarization of State Response

The Nigerian government has mostly used military force to deal with the conflict between farmers and herders. The goal of sending security forces to hotspots in Benue, Plateau, Kaduna, and Nasarawa States is often to stop violence. Police operations, joint task forces, and special military deployments are all common ways to get involved. However, these militarized strategies have not been totally successful because they do not deal with the

root causes of the conflict, like land tenure insecurity, climate-induced resource scarcity, and weak rural governance systems (Akindoyin & Obafemi, 2025). In many cases, security deployments make tensions worse because people accuse them of being biased, using too much force, or only protecting certain people. When people in a community feel abandoned or treated unfairly, they often pull away from state authority even more, which makes it less legitimate.

Governance Reforms and Policy Failures

In addition to militarization, successive Nigerian governments have put in place policies to change pastoralism and lower conflicts between farmers and herders. The 2018 National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) and different state-level laws against open grazing, especially in Benue and Ekiti States, are two examples (Kelechi, 2024). The goal of these programs was to promote ranching and bring livestock production up to date. However, they have been hurt by not having limited financial resources, bad execution, and not carrying stakeholders along, especially pastoralist groups (Kelechi, 2024). The failure to include these concern groups in the process of making policies has led to the idea that government actions favour one group over another. For example, pastoralist groups say that laws against grazing make it illegal for them to make a living, while farming communities say that the government lets herders get away with it (Nwankwo, 2024). This policy failure shows how weak governance hurts legitimacy and makes people less trusting.

Human Rights Violations and State Credibility

The actions of security agencies in managing conflicts have also dented the Nigerian state's reputation. There have been reports of extrajudicial killings, random arrests, and raids on communities in areas affected by the conflict

(Iduma, 2021). These kinds of violations dent the state's image as it looks like the state is out to repress the people instead of protecting them. Moreover, the selective enforcement of justice, characterized by the infrequent prosecution of violent offenders, fosters a culture of impunity. People in communities often think that the government is unfair, either because they think it favours herders because of their ties to political elites or because it favours farmers because of the need to win elections in agricultural states. This view of bias undermines the moral legitimacy of government institutions and makes grievances worse.

Role of Federalism and Local Governance

Nigeria's federal system makes it harder to deal with conflicts because different levels of government are in charge of security, land management, and resource management. Under the Land Use Act, governors are in charge of how land is used. Security, on the other hand, is mostly under federal control. This split often leads to problems with coordination, as state-level anti-grazing laws and federal livestock transformation policies don't always work together. Local governments, which should help settle conflicts between people in the community, are relatively weak and lack proper resources. Hence, traditional rulers and community leaders often have to step in to settle disputes; these actors have some local legitimacy, but their power is not equal to the legally binding power of state actors. The structural contradictions of Nigerian federalism consequently impede coherent state responses, thereby further eroding legitimacy.

Regional and International Dimensions

Regional and international factors also make the legitimacy crisis worse as a result of pastoralism being transhumant; however, herders often move from Niger, Chad, and Cameroon into Nigeria. The Nigerian government's failure to control these cross-

border movements shows that it does not have strong territorial control, which is an important part of state sovereignty and legitimacy (Idris, 2024). Regional organizations like the Economic Community of West African States have tried to push for rules on transhumance, but have not been successful. People are losing faith in the Nigerian government as a legitimate authority because they believe it can't effectively protect its borders or manage the flow of resources across borders.

Implications for State Legitimacy

The ongoing conflicts between farmers and herders show how the Nigerian government is somewhat losing its legitimacy. The use of force without addressing the root causes of problems makes the state look more reactive than proactive. Policy failures caused by weak institutions and a lack of inclusivity push away both farmers and herders. Violations of human rights also make security agencies less credible. The federal structure divides power even more, which leads to interventions that are unclear and disputed. When citizens start to rely more on social movements, vigilantes, or religious groups for justice and safety, it means that the government is not doing its main task of securing lives and property. In the long run, these kinds of crises of legitimacy put not only Northern Nigeria's stability at risk, but also the unity of the Nigerian state as a whole.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The conflict between farmers and herders in Northern Nigeria has emerged as a significant internal security challenge for the Nigerian state, with substantial consequences for resource management, social unity, and national stability. The research has analyzed the convergence of social movements, resource governance, and state legitimacy in this context. The results show that the conflict is not just about fighting over land and water; it is also about weak governance, bad conflict management, and the

breakdown of trust between citizens and the state. The ongoing violence underscores the inadequacies of militarized interventions, which have not resolved the fundamental structural causes of insecurity and have concurrently undermined the legitimacy of the Nigerian state.

The adoption of securitization theory elucidates the rationale behind the Nigerian state's predominant characterization of the farmers–herders conflict as a menace to national security and territorial integrity. This framing legitimizes the utilization of military force, the implementation of restrictive policies, and the augmentation of security operations. However, this kind of approach often ignores the social and economic aspects of the crisis, makes the communities that are affected feel isolated, and keeps the cycle of insecurity going. Securitization has turned a complicated social and political conflict into a security emergency, which has led to state overreach, community resentment, and a loss of legitimacy.

On the other hand, the human security framework says that protecting and empowering people and communities is the key to long-lasting peace. This viewpoint applied to the farmers–herders conflict underscores the necessity of protecting livelihoods, guaranteeing equitable resource access, and promoting inclusive governance. Human security expands the focus of conflict management beyond territorial defense and regime survival, redirecting attention to the welfare of farmers, herders, and rural communities most directly impacted. Adding human security to how the state responds would not only cut down on violence, but it would also show that the state is really committed to the well-being of its citizens, which would help people trust state institutions again.

Recommendations

Based on these insights, the study hereby makes the following recommendations;

1. Firstly, Nigeria needs to change its strategy for dealing with conflicts so that security operations and governance reforms work together. Sometimes, security deployments are needed to protect weak groups of people. However, they should be followed by programs that improve local dispute resolution, make land tenure more secure, and update pastoral practices in ways that are open and welcoming to everyone.
2. Secondly, the Nigerian state needs to take actions that bring farmers and herders together to talk and make decisions. This will help people feel less like they are being left out or unfairly treated. For example, anti-grazing laws should be paired with support for other ways to make a living and negotiated frameworks that take into account the cultural and economic realities of pastoralist communities.
3. Similarly, the government needs to make it easier to hold people accountable and be open about how it handles conflicts. Addressing human rights abuses by security forces and making sure that victims of violence get equal justice will help people believe that the state is fair again.
4. It is very important for conflict mediation at the grassroots level to bring local governance institutions back to life. These include traditional rulers and community-based organizations.
5. Lastly, Nigeria needs to work more closely with its neighbours to control cross-border pastoralism and set up long-term systems for transhumance that follow ECOWAS rules. The farmers-herders conflict shows how dangerous it is to rely only on securitized responses to complicated social problems. The Nigerian state can only

regain its legitimacy and promote enduring peace in Northern Nigeria by incorporating human security principles into governance and conflict resolution.

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