



# IT IS GETTING WORSE

## The deepening pastoral conflict

### Disclaimer

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Our researchers employed methods such as one-on-one interviews and desk research to collate the available data. Our editors sifted through the data and prepared the report, using various proprietary tools to fact-check and copy edit the information gathered.

Our publicly released reports are formatted for easy and quick reading, and may not necessarily contain all the data that SB Morgen gathered during a given survey. Complete datasets can be made available on request.

All forecasts were built using data from a variety of sources. A baseline of accurate and comprehensive historic data is collected from respondents and publicly-available information, including from regulators, trade associations, research partners, newspapers and government agencies.

# Introduction

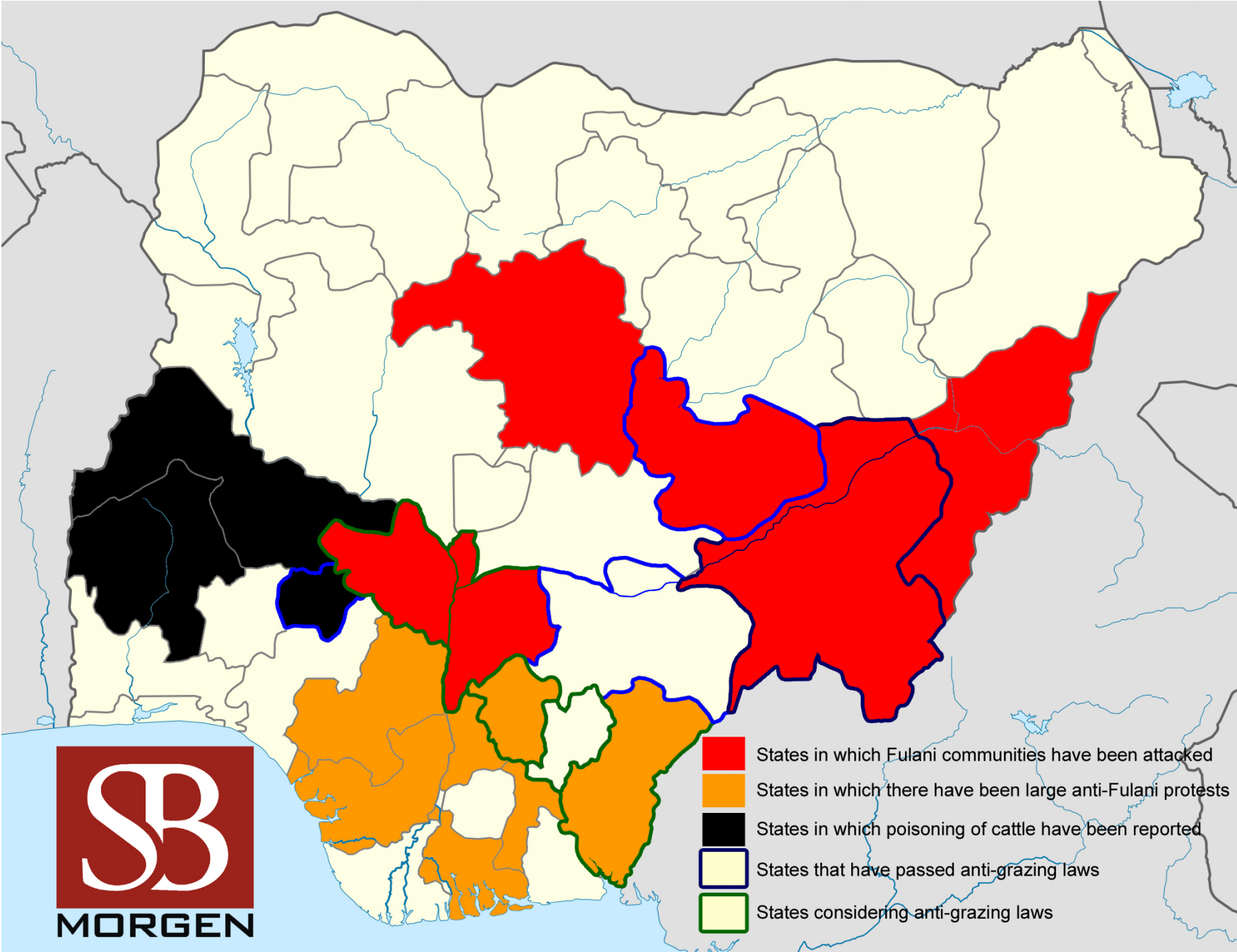
The pastoral conflict, which SBM Intelligence has talked about in previous reports, is expanding, and deepening. Many communities, Fulani and non-Fulani alike, are beginning to take matters into their own hands. In the final analysis, this conflict is not just a discussion about ethnicity or religion, it is a conversation about the sanctity of economic institutions like property rights. Nigeria cannot build a proper economy if basic property rights can be so casually violated as we have seen repeatedly. The discussion is also a conversation about security and the rights of states. We are seeing some state governors trying to legislate proactively at least. The lack of national leadership in this issue is unfortunate.

Unfortunately, our worst case scenarios, which we have mentioned in at least two previous reports, are materialising. Non-Fulani communities have set up militias to attack Fulani communities. This pattern is repeating itself across the country on both sides of the River Niger. If nothing is done urgently, it is going to get worse.

Classic liberal theory is to the effect that one’s liberty ends where the other man’s begins. This principle is the essential intellectual bedrock of the concept and practice of modern property rights. With respect to Nigeria’s pastoralist problem, this frame might not be adequate to properly delineate the extent of this growing social problem. In theory, the pastoralists have had ample time to make the adjustment to the realities of modern, contemporary living that most Nigerians now live in.

On the one hand, modern property rights, while alien to these itinerant pastoralists, has been enthusiastically adopted by the settler farmers and traders who possess small farm holdings across a vast swath of Nigerian territory spanning from Bauchi in the geographic north-east to Rivers, Abia and Akwa Ibom in the deep south and west to Ekiti and Ondo. On the other hand, better enforcement of the country’s laws is required so that perpetrators of violence and trespassers on private property are brought to justice. In this regards, the Nigerian security apparatus has failed woefully, thereby creating an environment that emboldens herdsmen to use violence to access private property for grazing purposes, while farmers resort to self-help to defend their land. The result is a vicious cycle which has essentially spiralled into escalating levels of violence from both parties.

Stepping into the gap created by the federal government’s failure, some affected state governments have resorted to banning open grazing within their territory. However, the Secretary-General of Gan Allah Fulani Development Association of Nigeria (GAFDAN), Sale Bayeri, has warned that banning of open grazing in Benue, Ekiti, Plateau and Taraba states will create more problems than it intends to resolve. Bayeri noted that the Fulani do not know any other method of grazing their cattle, “and any attempt to confine them to a place was a sure invitation to anarchy.”



However, it appears that Bayeri, like many other Fulani leaders conflate a measure taken to curb infringement on the property rights of others with a restriction of movement of Fulani herders. There is nothing in the any of the laws stopping the Fulani from trading for the feed of their cattle, and this strikes at the heart of the matter – respect for the property rights of others in the places they pass through and willingness to obtain via trade, feed that may be owned by others.

Many will find this disturbing, but as we have studied the pastoral conflict more, we have realised that the current situation illustrates the lack of a collective vision aimed at addressing a glaring problem that has been festering for decades, a problem that no Nigerian government has tried to tackle in an intelligent way.

This led to two big blow-outs in the last two weeks of November, 2017.



## The conflict in Oyo

About fifteen people are reportedly in critical condition in two hospitals in Igangan town, Ibarapa North local government area in Oyo state after a clash between farmers and herdsmen in the town on November 22, 2017. Eye witnesses told SBM correspondents that the victims were attacked with machetes by herdsmen.

The herdsmen accused the farmers of killing about fifteen of their cattle in the previous fortnight. Apparently the farmers had poisoned the cattle by placing poisonous tubers of cassava on the paths that the herdsmen considered as grazing tracks.

The chief of the local Fulani community, Saliu Kadir, was immediately called upon to rein in the herdsmen and restore peace by dialoguing with the farmers. Mr. Kadir is the Sarkin Fulani of Igangan, and also the National President of the Jamu Nati Fulbe Association of Nigeria.

Addressing a press conference after an emergency meeting with security agencies, Kadir confirmed that fifteen cattle had been killed by the farmers. According to him, "They poisoned some crops which they put on the tracks that the cattle usually take. My people actually wanted to avenge the death of their cattle, but I calmed them down by telling them that Governor Abiola Ajimobi, the Commissioner of Police and other security agencies in the state should be allowed to address the issue."

Some of the farmers in the area represented by the Baale of the community, Oludele Oyedepo, claimed that heavy grazing by Fulani settlers had destroyed their crops and they had the rights to apply any chemicals to their crops to aid growth and fertilize the soil. Mr Oyedepo said, "We agreed at one of our meetings that a farmer has the right to apply any chemical on his crops."

However, Oyedepo admitted that he found no justification for poisoning the foot paths that weren't necessarily owned by farmers.

At the peace meeting, the Sarki Fulani reminded the farmers that they had an agreement to pay full compensation to any farmer affected by unauthorised grazing and stray cattle encroaching into farmlands. The farmers replied, claiming that they received no compensation at all, which the Fulani community denied,, claiming that the farmers had forced them to pay compensation in the past.

**This is not the first time that allegations of poisoning of crops, and the deaths of cattle, have led to violence.**

In March 2017, Musliu Aliu, a farmer in Igbeti, in the Oke-Ogun area of Oyo state, was accused by his tenant, a Fulani herdsman, of poisoning his yam seedlings. The unnamed tenant's cattle ate some of the seedlings, and died. Following an altercation between the two men, Aliu died the next day. Aliu's death, which coincided with the non-fatal stabbing of a woman, led to disturbances in which nineteen houses were burned down.

Saliu Kadir, the local Fulani chief had at the time, said that Aliu was found without any stab wounds, implying that Aliu was not murdered. There were no arrests.



*Images like the above, where herdsmen are pictured holding automatic rifles have spread unchallenged, and have become the public image associated with herdsmen in the eyes of most people in Nigeria.*

*Image credit: Tobias Hagmann*

## The conflict in Adamawa

Between twenty and sixty people are reported to have been killed when gunmen, suspected to be farmers, attacked herdsmen in farming communities all in Numan Local Government Area of Adamawa state. The spokesman for the police in Adamawa state. The spokesman of the Nigerian Police in the state, Othman Abubakar, said that farmers from the mainly Christian Bachama ethnic group attacked settlements belonging to mainly Muslim Fulani herdsmen in four villages; Ketowal, Kikan, Kodomun, and Shafaran, hacking people to death and burning homes. Othman gave the number of dead as twenty-seven.

Numan, which lies on the Benue River some 70 kilometres west of Yola, the Adamawa state capital, is Adamawa's farming and herding hub, with fertile land and fresh water.

Various sources have said that the killings may be related to an ultimatum that was given to the Fulani by indigenous groups to vacate their ancestral lands as a result of their "uncompromising behaviour", and most importantly, the killing of a farmer, who was named as Pwagrayi Ezekiel, by gunmen suspected to be herdsmen. Pwagrayi's murder, which happened between 17 and 19 November, happened in the same period that the Bachama community alleged that two women were raped, had resulted in a prior reprisal attack by the youths on the Fulani herdsmen settlement in the community.

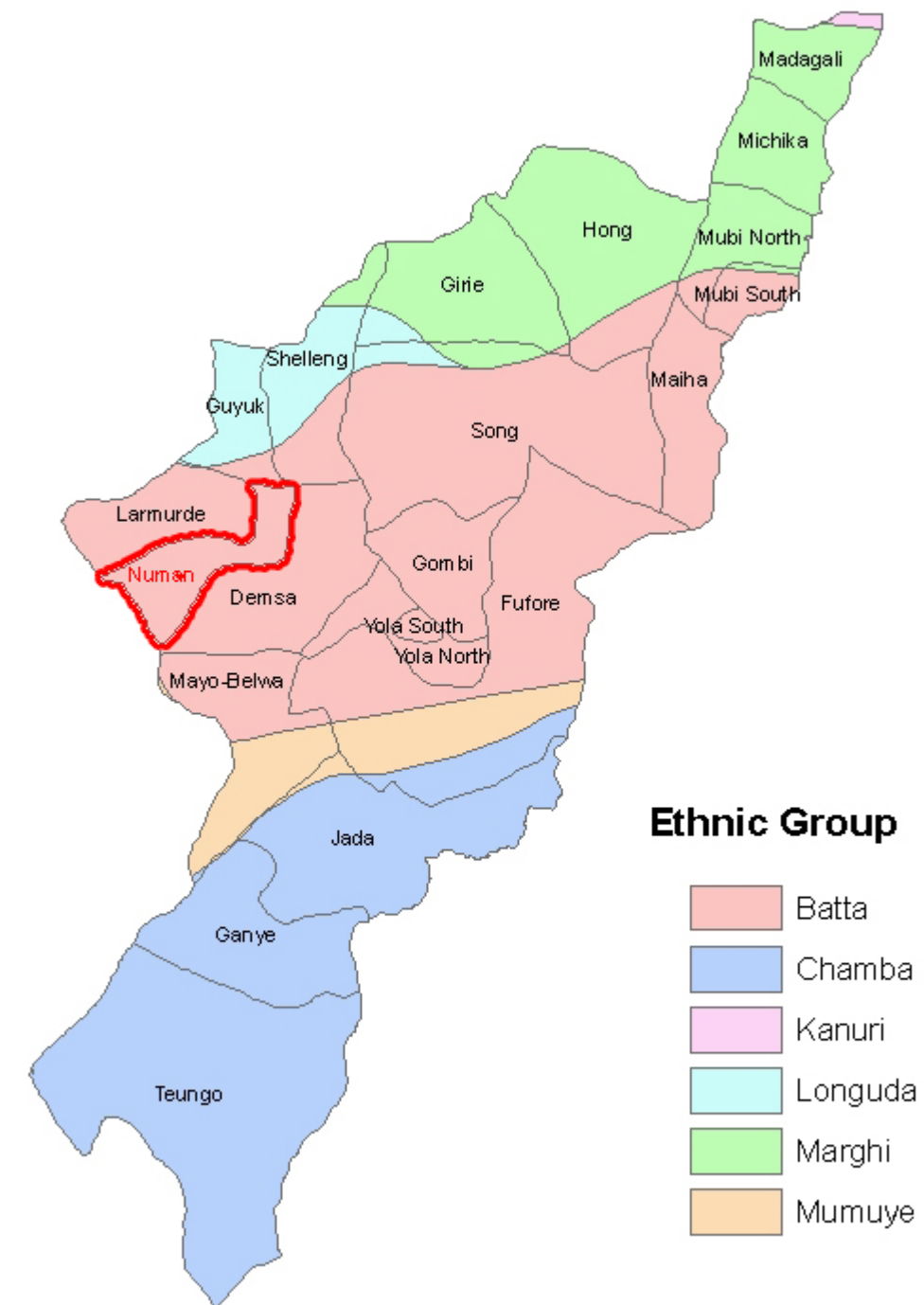
The tension has been brewing all year following a bloody clash at a fishing pond close to the River Benue in neighbouring Girei Local Government Area. This incident which happened on January 31, claimed three lives.

Disputes over grazing and water rights have persisted between the indigenous Bachama farmers and settler Fulani herdsmen, leading to periodic violence.

On their part, Fulani community leaders gave higher death tolls from the attacks. Mafindi Danburam, chairman of Miyetti Allah in Adamawa, said, "The farmers stormed the villages of Kikan, Kodomun, Shafaran and Ketowal at about 1:00 pm (1200 GMT) on Monday (20 November, 2017), killing women and children and burning homes.

"From our estimation more than sixty women and children were slaughtered in the attack, with some of them pursued inside the bush and killed while they tried to flee."

Damburam however said that forty-five of those killed have been buried while many are still missing.



Map showing the dominant indigenous ethnic groups in various local governments in Adamawa state. Numan LGA highlighted.  
Map credit: Yohanna Kari Ezra



## Implications

In both Adamawa and Oyo states, and in other states where there have been farmer and herdsman clashes, there has been a pattern where accusations and counter-accusations are ignored by the security agencies until various groups take matters into their own hands. In Adamawa, the tension occasioned by the recent reprisal attacks has emptied neighbouring villages such as Imburu, Pullum and Kwapuke appear braced for a reprisal as the villagers have abandoned their homes, seeking safety elsewhere due to rumours of an impending attack by the Fulani. The fleeing residents claimed that some Fulani herdsman were spotted lurking around their communities after the recent massacres. They alleged that the herdsman were armed and planning a reprisal attack. We are of the view that it is irresponsible for a government to look the other way while such large scale movements of populations are occurring within its territory, spurred by fear.

Cattle herding is a private owned enterprise, thus encouraging growing calls among some that cattle owners must build and support their own ranches, respect the laws of the land and pay taxes. Pre-1960, the British maintained a cattle tax across all of Northern Nigeria, which the Balewa government removed after independence.

A lifestyle choice is akin to liberty, but when personal or group liberty adversely affects that of others, there are bound to be complications. The herdsman, almost all of whom are Fulani, cannot claim access to any land they choose in an age of personal property and well defined national and state borders. The question has to be asked of the utility of territorial laws if some groups can claim a right of way anywhere they find themselves to the detriment of others.

*What could happen if more ethnic groups make the same claim the Fulani are making?*

However, it is important to manage this change with a firm but delicate hand. It is impossible to suddenly put an end to a way of life that has thrived for centuries. Europe has had a problem with their own nomads, the Roma, or gypsies as they are often derogatorily called. They are universally despised, unwanted and loathed all over the continent. Europe has tried to promote a change of culture by setting up parks where the Roma are encouraged to live within their own communities and exercise some manner of regulations among themselves and within the confines of the law of the national state they settle in.

Having said that, the parallels with Europe evaporate. Europe has defined property ownership laws. Gypsies typically settle in unoccupied or public lots and not encroach on individual property mostly without consequences. In spite of centuries of the Roma's nomadic lifestyle, it is guaranteed that no European nation will look the other way if they kill farmers and villagers. Merchants bar them from their stores without fearing for their lives, and just like some Fulani herdsman are doing, some Roma continue to claim this age old lifestyle as a reason to perpetuate criminality. The difference is that such elements often end up in jail as a consequence.

Furthermore, humans have been farming the soils of the world for millennia, just as long as the nomadic lifestyle. One should not be sacrificed, so to speak, to preserve the other. Perhaps crucially, the unspoken denominator of being a member of a nation state is the commitment to adapt not only to changes in societal mores but also to adapt to coexisting with other ethnic nationalities. Much of south-east Nigeria transited from a predominantly farming model to trading and commerce in the face of serious land constraints for an ever growing population. There is little that is particularly novel about the current existential question facing the nomadic Fulani that suggests they are impervious to adapting to changing times. A proposed federal commission to administer and operate cattle reserves in every Nigerian state is being viewed as an affront by many non-Fulani Nigerians primarily because for them, hard pressed Nigerians should not be subsidising cattle owners while traders and other economic participants are labouring under a bureaucratic choke, poor infrastructure, and receive little by way of subsidies.

Trying to correct historical incompetence and a lack of vision by using or suggesting brute force alone is foolhardy. It is also worth noting that some Fulani herdsman have changed from a nomadic lifestyle by settling in some places. Whatever the approach, it should be recognised that it will take generations -- an evolution, a phasing out -- not merely the blunt use of the strong arm of the law.

Even at that, it is important that justice is seen to be done. In a report earlier this year, we had pointed to the likelihood of increased reprisal attacks, and warned that these were likely because the authorities were complacent. November's incidents are a result of that complacency, and it is devastating that innocent people are being slaughtered while the root causes of this conflict are being ignored.

In addition, from a strictly legal standpoint, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended, divides the responsibility of "power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the" country between the federal government and the states as delineated by geographic considerations. Pursuant to this, the Criminal and Penal Codes and a variety of federal and state public order laws and regulations have been passed into law and nominally govern the extent of criminal liability that might accrue to participants on both sides of the pastoral conflict. Ekiti and Benue have passed legislation that specifically address widespread concern that the clashes in their states are likely to increase. Cross River is currently considering anti-herdsman legislation while Ebonyi, Enugu and Kogi have publicly committed to consider similar laws. There has been no commensurate legislative activity at the federal level to deal with itinerant attacks that occur across state lines or a broad inter-agency security strategy aimed at tackling real and emerging security threats.

Like most herdsman/farmer conflicts, the pastoral conflicts across West Africa are resource conflicts amplified because of the differing ethnicities/religions of the hostile sides. There is a history of animosity and violence between the Bachama/Mbula ethnic groups around Numan, and the Fulani. **It is important to note that this animosity towards the Fulani is spreading.** In various parts of Nigeria, the Fulani are increasingly viewed with suspicion,

and hostility, by indigenous populations.

The onus, in the end, is on the government, particularly the federal government to address the issue. These are the issues our universities, research institutes, intellectuals should also chime in with possible solutions in papers, studies, symposiums and other venues of intellectual discourse, such as this, as these are contemporary, relevant issues that affect our own people and culture.

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