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# From Jihadist Roots to Contemporary Realities: A Historical and Socio-political Study of the Fulani Herders in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Nigeria's diversity is one of its greatest strengths, bringing together many ethnic groups with rich histories and cultural traditions that connect the nation to the broader African and global community. Among these groups, the Fulani hold a distinctive place, especially the subgroup known as the Fulani herders. Renowned for their nomadic lifestyle and deep-rooted attachment to pastoralism, the herders have become a central focus of national discussion due to the recurring conflicts associated with their movements across regions. This paper examines the journey of the Fulani herders, from their historical origins to their present-day realities. It traces their roots to the jihadist movements of the 18th and 19th centuries led by Uthman Dan Fodio, whose influence reshaped the political and cultural landscape of Northern Nigeria. Drawing on insights from existing literature and secondary data, the study examines how centuries of migration, environmental pressures, and limited policy attention have shaped the Fulani herders of today. The findings reveal that while the herders share language and ancestry with other Fulani groups, they maintain a unique way of life, one that often keeps them on the margins of formal education, religion, and politics. Their constant movement in search of greener pastures, however, has brought them into tension with farming communities, fueling social and security concerns nationwide. The study concludes that the Fulani herders represent far more than an ethnic identity; they embody a living socio-political reality shaped by history, environment, and governance. Understanding their story is essential not only for conflict resolution but also for building a more inclusive and peaceful Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Fulani herders, pastoralism, conflict, ethnicity, identity, Nigeria, socio-political dynamics

## Introduction

Nigeria, located in West Africa, is not only the continent's most populous nation but also one of its most ethnically and culturally diverse. With over 370 ethnic groups and more than 500 indigenous languages (Oluwadele, Adediran & Olaogun, 2023), Nigeria's pluralism reflects a deep reservoir of cultural heritage and social complexity. This diversity, while often celebrated as a marker of national identity, has equally posed enduring challenges to political stability, equitable governance, and national cohesion. The interplay of ethnicity, religion, and geography continues to shape Nigeria's socio-political landscape, influencing everything from leadership selection to access to resources and the distribution of power.

The historical foundations of this diversity can be traced to the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by British colonial authorities, a political project driven by administrative expediency and economic convenience rather than by social or cultural compatibility (Faluyi, 2023). The artificial fusion of distinct kingdoms, chiefdoms, and empires into a single colonial state created a fragile structure that required constant negotiation among its heterogeneous components. As a result, Nigeria's postcolonial experience has been characterised by competing notions of identity, belonging, and legitimacy. Ethnic identity, therefore, remains a

potent force in defining group relations, shaping political alliances, and determining access to socio-economic opportunities (Aboi, 2024).

Ethnicity in Nigeria serves a dual role: it unites individuals within a shared community of meaning while simultaneously functioning as a marker of exclusion and competition. The intersection of ethnic consciousness with religion and class has deepened divisions across regions and communities (Yusuf, 2025). Internal migration, demographic pressure, and uneven development have further exacerbated these tensions, transforming ethnic identity into a source of both solidarity and strife. Within this complex web of ethnic relations, the Fulani occupy a distinctive place. This group has historically shaped the political evolution of Northern Nigeria and continues to influence contemporary debates on security, governance, and coexistence.

The Hausa-Fulani identity, often invoked to describe Northern Nigeria's socio-political bloc, conceals a complex web of ethnic, cultural, and occupational diversity (Berebon, 2024). Among the Fulani themselves exist distinct subgroups differentiated by lifestyle, settlement patterns, and economic pursuits, notably the pastoral (nomadic), semi-nomadic, and urban (settled) Fulani (Greiner, 2022). The Fulani herders, in particular, are distinguished by their nomadic pastoralism, which shapes their economic survival strategies, social organisation, and worldview (Riesman,

2024).

Traditionally, their livelihoods depend on seasonal transhumance, the cyclical movement of cattle in search of pasture and water. This practice has historically fostered reciprocal relations between herders and sedentary farming communities through trade, manure exchange, and conflict mediation (Köhler-Rollefson, 2023). However, the pressures of modernisation, environmental degradation, and demographic expansion have disrupted this delicate equilibrium, transforming what was once a symbiotic relationship into one of Nigeria's most persistent conflict dynamics (Usman & Obi, 2024). The southward migration of herders, previously limited to the savannah and Sahelian belts, has accelerated as a consequence of desertification, population pressure, and declining arable land (Bello & Kazibwe, 2023). Climate change has further depleted grazing reserves and freshwater sources across Northern Nigeria, compelling herders to push into the Middle Belt and southern states in search of viable grazing routes (Duruji & Bella, 2024). These movements have increasingly brought nomadic herders into violent confrontations with sedentary agrarian populations, resulting in widespread destruction of property, displacement, and loss of lives (Udoh, Aforijiku, Abasilim & Osimen, 2025).

Studies by Osemuyi & Festus (2024) and Faluyi & Olutola (2025) indicate that farmer-herder conflicts have become one of Nigeria's deadliest forms of communal

violence, surpassing even the insurgency-related fatalities in some years. The recurring clashes have drawn national and international attention, framing the Fulani herders as both victims of ecological displacement and perpetrators of rural insecurity.

Understanding the contemporary realities of the Fulani herders requires an appreciation of their historical roots. The group's socio-political evolution cannot be separated from the jihadist movements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries led by Uthman Dan Fodio. The Sokoto Jihad (1804-1808) fundamentally transformed the political and cultural landscape of Northern Nigeria by establishing a network of emirates under Islamic rule (Maccarone, 2024). This movement not only unified the region under a common religious ideology but also elevated the Fulani from scattered pastoralists to ruling elites in several areas. The herders, however, remained largely outside this political transformation, maintaining their pastoral autonomy and preserving cultural practices that emphasised mobility and self-sufficiency. Over time, this dual legacy, political dominance by the settled Fulani elite and socio-economic marginality among the nomadic herders, created a complex internal differentiation that persists today (Olamide Sowale, 2024).

Scholarly interpretations of the Fulani herders' identity and conflict dynamics remain divided. One strand of thought situates the contemporary crisis within the historical continuity of Fulani

expansionism and religious reformism, arguing that the herders' movements reflect a residual assertion of space and influence derived from their jihadist ancestry (Ojo, 2024). Another school, however, interprets the phenomenon through ecological and socio-economic lenses, emphasising the effects of climate stress, poor governance, and the failure of state institutions to manage resource competition (Elegbede, Fakoya, Adewolu, Jolaosho, Adebayo, Oshodi, ... & Abikoye, 2025). These contrasting perspectives highlight the need to move beyond binary explanations and to understand the Fulani herders as a socio-political phenomenon shaped by historical evolution, environmental pressures, and policy neglect.

The marginalisation of the Fulani herders in contemporary Nigeria is also evident in their limited access to education, health care, and political representation. Their mobility and dispersed settlement patterns often exclude them from census exercises, voter registration, and developmental planning. Consequently, policy interventions addressing pastoralist issues have been inconsistent, reactive, and often politically charged. Programmes such as grazing reserves, cattle colonies, and ranching initiatives have faced resistance due to inadequate consultation, mistrust, and the perception of ethnic favouritism. As a result, tensions between herders and farmers persist, undermining national cohesion and rural development.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the historical and socio-

political trajectory of the Fulani herders from their jihadist roots to their contemporary realities. It interrogates how historical legacies of religious reform and political conquest have intersected with environmental change, migration, and state failure to shape the present dynamics of conflict and identity. The study also explores how the herders' unique socio-cultural orientation, rooted in pastoralism, mobility, and self-reliance, has been misunderstood and politicised within Nigeria's broader discourse on ethnicity and nationhood. By situating the Fulani herders' experience within the continuum of Nigeria's state formation, ethnic politics, and governance challenges, this paper contributes to the ongoing scholarly effort to contextualise pastoral conflicts in Africa. It argues that a historically grounded and socio-politically sensitive understanding of the Fulani herders is crucial for designing effective conflict resolution frameworks and promoting inclusive national integration.

## Methodology

This study adopts a historical-qualitative research design, which aligns with tracing the evolution of the Fulani herders from their jihadist origins to their contemporary socio-political realities in Nigeria. Historical research is inherently retrospective, seeking to interpret past events and their enduring effects on present conditions. This approach allows the researcher to analyse documented evidence, identify continuities and shifts in identity and power relations, and

situate them within the broader socio-political fabric of the Nigerian state.

### Research Design

The historical-qualitative design, conceptually similar to the *ex post facto* approach, enables the investigation of phenomena that cannot be manipulated or reproduced experimentally (Karababa, 2024). In studying the Fulani herders, this design is handy for examining the long-term social transformations, ideological legacies, and structural conditions that have shaped their identity, mobility, and interactions with other groups. The focus is interpretive rather than predictive, aiming to uncover causal linkages and contextual meanings embedded in Nigeria's ethnic and political history.

### Data Sources

This study relies exclusively on secondary data drawn from a diverse range of credible and authoritative sources to ensure depth, reliability, and contextual accuracy. The materials consulted include peer-reviewed academic journals in history, political science, and African studies, which provide theoretical and empirical insights into the evolution of the Fulani herders and related socio-political dynamics. In addition, archival and historical records, including documents on the Sokoto Jihad, colonial administrative correspondence, and postcolonial policy papers, were examined to trace the ideological, economic, and political roots of the Fulani movement and its evolution over time.

Complementing these are government

and institutional reports, including white papers, policy frameworks, and security assessments on herder–farmer conflicts, internal security management, and rural development. Books and scholarly monographs that explore themes of ethnicity, pastoralism, governance, and national integration in Nigeria further provided critical background and analytical grounding for the study. To capture contemporary developments and public discourse, credible media reports and investigative publications were also consulted, offering firsthand accounts of recent conflict episodes and evolving state responses.

All data sources were rigorously selected based on authenticity, relevance, and credibility. Cross-validation techniques were employed to triangulate information from multiple sources, thereby enhancing the reliability of interpretations and minimising potential bias. This multi-sourced approach ensures that the study presents a balanced and historically grounded understanding of the Fulani herders' phenomenon within Nigeria's socio-political landscape.

### Data Analysis

The study employs qualitative content analysis to interpret and synthesise findings from the reviewed materials. This analytical technique involves a systematic process of coding, categorising, and interpreting textual data to identify recurring patterns and relationships (Krippendorff, 2013). The analysis proceeded in three stages:

1. Initial Coding: Extraction of key

ideas and historical events relating to jihadist heritage, migration, and conflict.

2. **Thematic Categorisation:** Grouping of data under major analytical dimensions such as *identity and religious heritage, migration and livelihood systems, conflict and security dynamics, and state response mechanisms*.
3. **Interpretive Synthesis:** Integration of these themes to reveal how historical experiences and socio-political structures have shaped the Fulani herders' present realities.

This method enables a comprehensive examination of the intersection between identity, history, and governance, offering insight into how past structures of power and belief continue to shape contemporary socio-political relations.

### **Validity and Reliability**

To strengthen analytical validity, triangulation was employed by comparing insights from diverse data sources, including academic literature, government documents, and historical archives. Each source was critically evaluated for potential ideological bias or contextual limitations. Consistency and accuracy in interpretation were maintained through iterative cross-checking of data and continuous reference to established scholarly frameworks on ethnicity and conflict in Africa.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Although the study relies solely on publicly available secondary data, it adheres to strict ethical research standards. All ideas, quotations, and arguments are properly cited to maintain intellectual integrity. Sensitivity was observed in discussing religious and ethnic issues to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or misrepresenting any group. The researcher approached the subject with cultural empathy and analytical objectivity.

### **Results and Discussion of Findings**

Findings from the synthesis of secondary data reveal that the Fulani herders' question in Nigeria is a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in deep historical, environmental, and governance trajectories. The evidence suggests that pastoralism, once a resilient livelihood system, has evolved into a contentious sociopolitical issue, shaped by identity politics, ecological stress, and policy neglect. Three interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: the historical evolution of Fulani pastoral identity, the transformation of mobility under environmental pressures, and the sociopolitical and governance dimensions of the herders' crisis.

**1. Historical Evolution of Fulani Pastoral Identity:** The study traces the formation of the Fulani pastoral identity to centuries of nomadic culture, religious reform, and political transformation across the Sahel and West Africa. Historically dispersed from Senegambia through the Sahel, the Fulani developed a

socio-economic system centred on cattle rearing, which required continuous mobility and cross-cultural interaction (Greiner, 2022; Riesman, 2024). The Sokoto Jihad (1804–1808), led by Uthman Dan Fodio, redefined the Fulani's place in northern Nigeria by consolidating Islamic rule and embedding Fulani elites within the emerging emirate structure (Maccarone, 2024).

However, this political ascendancy largely excluded the pastoral Fulani, who remained outside the emirate bureaucracy. Iro (1994) terms this the “*pastoral paradox*”—a condition where a historically dominant ethnic group simultaneously experiences socio-economic marginality. This duality persists today: while the settled Fulani (Fulbe Gida) exercise political and religious authority, the nomadic Fulani (Fulbe Na'i) continue to navigate structural exclusion in education, health, and governance systems (Olamide Sowale, 2024).

This historical stratification has shaped both perception and policy. The pastoral Fulani's mobility and detachment from sedentary governance systems fostered enduring stereotypes of “outsiders” or “perpetual migrants,” reinforcing a social divide between mobility-based and land-based communities (Berebon, 2024). The Fulani herders' identity thus embodies both historical continuity and political exclusion — an inheritance from the jihadist era and colonial administrative structures.

## 2. Environmental Pressures and the Transformation of Mobility into Conflict:

The second theme highlights the profound ecological drivers that have transformed pastoral migration into conflict-prone mobility. Findings reveal that desertification, the drying of Lake Chad, and erratic rainfall have reduced grazing reserves across northern Nigeria (Odoh & Chigozie, 2012; Bello & Kazibwe, 2023). Climate change-induced scarcity has compelled herders to migrate southward into the Middle Belt and southern zones (Duruji & Bella, 2024), where population growth and land fragmentation have intensified competition with sedentary farmers (Usman & Obi, 2024).

Traditionally, such transhumant movements were managed through reciprocal arrangements and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms (Köhler-Rollefson, 2023). However, these have weakened due to population pressure, weak governance, and the proliferation of small arms (Mohammed, Ismaila & Bibi, 2015; Musa, Shabu & Igbawua, 2014). The consequence has been escalating violence, destruction of property, and rural displacement (Udoh, Aforijiku, Abasilim & Osimen, 2025).

Moreover, the herders' mobility has acquired new political and security dimensions. The infiltration of armed groups and the state's inability to distinguish between legitimate pastoralists and criminal networks have contributed to the “securitisation” of Fulani mobility. In public discourse, the term “Fulani herdsmen” has become

racialised and weaponised, linking the group with banditry and terrorism (Ojo, 2024). This stigma not only alienates the pastoral community but also undermines the search for durable policy solutions.

### 3. Socio-Political Dimensions and Governance Gaps:

The final theme reveals that governance failures, weak institutional coordination, and ethnic politicisation underpin the persistence of the herders' crisis. While some state governments, such as Benue and Ekiti, have enacted anti-open grazing laws to protect farmlands, others have championed ranching or grazing reserves. The absence of a coherent National Livestock Management Policy has perpetuated regional polarisation and mistrust (Faluyi, 2023).

Applying Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the Fulani herders occupy a liminal social space defined by overlapping and conflicting identities. As Fulani, they are part of a historically dominant northern elite; as Muslims, they share a religious majority in the north but are minorities in the southern zones; and as nomads, they are structurally marginalised in a state built on sedentary citizenship models (Yusuf, 2025). These layered identities create a dynamic of inclusion and exclusion, which political elites often exploit for regional or electoral advantage.

Additionally, porous borders and inadequate land-use policies have facilitated the infiltration of transnational herders from Niger, Chad, and Mali, further complicating security and

citizenship questions (Aboi, 2024). The failure of successive Nigerian governments to integrate pastoral systems into formal planning frameworks has entrenched inequality and undermined nation-building. Thus, the herders' conflict is a symptom of Nigeria's broader governance crisis—one that reflects institutional weakness, elite manipulation, and historical neglect.

### 4. Implications for National Integration

The findings of this study reveal that the Fulani herder phenomenon extends beyond the boundaries of agriculture, land use, and security management. It mirrors the broader challenges of national integration and the fragile fabric of Nigeria's multiethnic coexistence. Historically, the Fulani identity, shaped by the jihadist movements of the nineteenth century, conferred on the group a distinctive consciousness rooted in religious reformism, mobility, and sociopolitical influence. This legacy continues to inform contemporary perceptions of belonging and authority, influencing the relationship between Fulani pastoralists, other ethnic communities, and the Nigerian state. The persistence of conflicts involving herders and sedentary farmers, therefore, reflects unresolved questions about citizenship, resource access, and the inclusiveness of Nigeria's nation-building process.

The analysis underscores that the herders–farmers conflict is not an isolated socio-economic contest but a manifestation of deeper governance and



identity crises. Weak institutions, inequitable policy responses, and a lack of cultural recognition have perpetuated mistrust between pastoral and agrarian communities. Drawing on the principles of social integration theory and ethnic pluralism, the study argues that sustainable peace depends on building shared spaces for dialogue, equity, and mutual recognition among Nigeria's diverse groups. Policies framed purely in terms of coercion, relocation, or securitisation overlook the socio-historical roots of the Fulani question and risk deepening alienation.

Furthermore, the historical neglect of pastoral livelihoods has weakened the herders' sense of inclusion in the modern state. The disconnection between traditional pastoral systems and contemporary governance frameworks illustrates the gap between Nigeria's multicultural reality and its centralised policy orientation. Integrating the herders into national development requires deliberate recognition of their economic and cultural contributions, coupled with policies that promote social cohesion. Such measures include the creation of regulated transhumance corridors, community peace committees, intercultural education programmes, and the engagement of traditional and religious institutions as mediating agents. This study also emphasises that the portrayal of Fulani herders solely as aggressors obscures their position as both victims and participants within Nigeria's evolving socio-political landscape. Reframing the discourse to view them as

stakeholders, rather than outsiders, is crucial to restoring trust and reimagining the foundation of citizenship. The transformation of this perception is essential to building an inclusive national identity that values mobility, diversity, and economic interdependence.

Ultimately, the Fulani herders' challenge exposes the limitations of Nigeria's postcolonial integration model, which has often privileged territorial stability over social cohesion. National integration, therefore, demands a paradigmatic shift—from coercive control to participatory inclusion; from ethnicity-based suspicion to citizenship-based solidarity. By reconciling historical legacies with contemporary governance realities, Nigeria can turn the Fulani herders' question into an opportunity for redefining nationhood. Proper integration will emerge only when every community, whether pastoral or sedentary, finds legitimate space within the national imagination and policy framework.

## Recommendations

In light of the findings from this study, it is evident that addressing the Fulani herders phenomenon requires a multidimensional approach that integrates historical understanding, socio-political reform, environmental management, and cultural inclusion. The following recommendations are therefore proposed to promote sustainable coexistence and strengthen national integration in Nigeria.

### 1 Strengthening Historical Scholarship

**and Cultural Documentation:** There is an urgent need to deepen scholarly engagement with the historical and socio-political evolution of the Fulani herders. The persistence of misconceptions and stereotypes stems partly from inadequate documentation of the group's historical journey, from the jihadist reform movements of the nineteenth century to their present-day socio-economic realities. To fill this gap, historians, anthropologists, and social scientists should collaborate to produce an authoritative body of literature that reconstructs the Fulani experience across time and space. The establishment of a National Research Consortium on Nomadic and Pastoral Studies (NRCNPS) under institutions such as the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) or the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) is recommended. This body should coordinate longitudinal research, publish annual policy briefs, and maintain a national database on pastoralism. Tertiary institutions, research councils, and the Federal Ministry of Education should drive this initiative as part of Nigeria's cultural preservation and peacebuilding agenda.

**2. Policy Reform and Institutional Strengthening for Pastoral Management:** To mitigate the recurring conflicts between herders and sedentary farmers, governments at all levels must reform pastoral management policies to reflect inclusivity, fairness, and sustainability. The Federal Ministry of

Agriculture and Food Security, in collaboration with state governments, should pilot integrated grazing reserves, ranching systems, and transhumance corridors across geopolitical zones. These should be informed by scientific research, community consultation, and clear land tenure regulations to minimise disputes. Furthermore, a coherent National Livestock and Pastoral Policy Framework (NLPPF) should be enacted by the National Assembly to harmonise regional laws, regulate grazing activities, and promote private-sector investment in modern livestock systems. Such reforms would reduce resource competition, depoliticise pastoral mobility, and transform pastoralism into a more sustainable economic practice.

**3. Environmental Rehabilitation and Climate Adaptation:** Given that ecological degradation has been a central driver of southward migration, environmental restoration is essential. The Federal Government should prioritise reforestation, water conservation, and land reclamation projects across the northern grazing belts. Establishing a National Pastoral Resilience Programme (NPRP) focused on combating desertification, regenerating pasturelands, and managing water resources would directly address the environmental roots of the herders' mobility.

Collaboration between the Federal Ministry of Environment, the National Agency for the Great Green Wall, and local governments should be

institutionalised to ensure community ownership and continuity of interventions.

#### **4. Educational and Socioeconomic Inclusion of Nomadic Populations:**

Education remains a key pathway to empowerment and social integration. The Nomadic Education Programme (NEP) should be restructured to incorporate mobile classrooms, digital literacy, and vocational training in animal health, agribusiness, and conflict mediation. This will enhance literacy, improve livelihoods, and bridge the knowledge gap between nomadic and sedentary populations.

The National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE), in partnership with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and relevant NGOs, should adopt a community-based implementation model to ensure sustainability. Beyond formal education, adult literacy and civic education programmes should be expanded to promote social inclusion and citizenship awareness among pastoral communities.

#### **5. Institutionalising Community Peacebuilding and Conflict Mediation:**

To prevent recurring violence, peacebuilding mechanisms must be localised and institutionalised. The study recommends establishing Community Peace and Mediation Councils (CPMCs) in areas prone to conflict. These councils, comprising traditional rulers, local government officials, religious leaders, and civil society actors, should serve as early warning systems and platforms for

nonviolent dispute resolution. The National Orientation Agency (NOA), National Peace Committee, and local governments should coordinate these structures to ensure community participation and accountability. This decentralised peace architecture would complement national security efforts by building trust and promoting reconciliation from the bottom up.

#### **6. Promoting National Dialogue and Inclusive Identity Reframing:**

Ultimately, sustainable national integration necessitates a deliberate reevaluation of the Fulani herders' narrative within Nigeria's national consciousness. The tendency to criminalise or politicise the Fulani identity fuels division and undermines collective nationhood. The government, through the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, should convene a National Conference on Identity, Integration, and Internal Security under the auspices of the Presidency and the National Council of Traditional Rulers. This platform should facilitate intercultural dialogue, promote inclusive narratives of citizenship, and cultivate mutual respect among Nigeria's diverse communities. Media institutions and educational curricula should also highlight shared histories and interdependence, thereby reinforcing unity in diversity.

#### **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the Fulani

herder phenomenon in Nigeria represents a complex intersection of history, identity, environment, and governance. Understanding the Fulani herders requires tracing their evolution from the jihadist roots of the nineteenth century, anchored in the Uthman Dan Fodio-led reformist movement, to their contemporary realities as mobile pastoralists navigating socio-political marginalisation and ecological challenges. The jihadist legacy not only consolidated Fulani influence across Northern Nigeria but also embedded religious, cultural, and political dimensions that continue to shape their collective identity within the Nigerian federation.

The research demonstrates that the Fulani herders' current predicament cannot be divorced from the historical processes that defined their relationship with the state and with other ethnic groups. Their enduring pastoral mobility, coupled with limited integration into formal governance, education, and land management systems, has perpetuated both social exclusion and economic vulnerability. Over time, these factors have produced a dual identity, one that associates them with the prestige of an Islamic reformist past, yet also marks them as outsiders within the modern Nigerian state. This paradox underscores the limitations of colonial and postcolonial governance structures in fully incorporating nomadic livelihoods into national development frameworks.

The study further reveals that the recurrent herder–farmer conflicts are

symptomatic of broader systemic weaknesses rather than mere ethnic antagonisms. Climate-induced migration, environmental degradation, and the absence of coherent land-use and livestock management policies have transformed historically adaptive pastoral movements into flashpoints of violence and mistrust. The politicisation of ethnic identity and the instrumentalisation of the Fulani narrative by competing political elites have further deepened divisions, eroding trust in state institutions and undermining efforts toward national integration.

From a socio-political standpoint, the Fulani herders' challenge reflects the incomplete nature of Nigeria's nation-building project. The crisis embodies the struggle to reconcile mobility with modern governance, tradition with modernity, and diversity with unity. Addressing these contradictions requires more than security interventions; it calls for a reimagined national policy that integrates nomadic groups into the social, economic, and political mainstream while preserving their cultural distinctiveness.

In essence, the journey *from jihadist roots to contemporary realities* is emblematic of Nigeria's broader quest to transform its historical pluralism into a platform for inclusive development and peace. Recognising the Fulani herders not as relics of a bygone pastoral order but as dynamic actors within a changing socio-ecological landscape is crucial for sustainable coexistence. Only through historical understanding, environmental stewardship, institutional reform, and

intercultural dialogue can Nigeria begin to transcend the narratives of conflict and

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