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Securing Elections: Farmer-Herder Conflict and the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic, Nigeria has witnessed national security-threatening conflicts of which the farmer-herder conflict appears to be a persistent one. The conflict in the present political dispensation has assumed unprecedented dimensions. Several lives have been lost, properties worth billions of naira have been destroyed and many people have been displaced due to the incessant violent clashes between farmers and herders. There was therefore, a great concern about the dangers that the farmer-herder conflict portended for the 2019 general elections. Through the adoption of the qualitative research design in which data were largely derived from secondary sources and using content analysis to analyse same, this paper attempted a prognosis of a peaceful 2019 general elections against the backdrop of rising spate of insecurity largely orchestrated by the farmer-herder conflict. It was revealed that while the period leading to the general elections was characterised by incessant killings. Election day and post-election periods were relatively peaceful, signifying that the farmer-herder conflict did not relatively impact on the 2019 general elections. The conflict however, created security challenges in North-Central geo-political zone. It was therefore, recommended among others that there is the need to devise approaches that will improve farmer-herder relationship.

Keywords: Elections, democracy, herders, farmers, insecurity

Introduction

The conduct of free, fair and credible elections undoubtedly remains a crucial indicator of democracy and one of the important requirements for its sustenance. Elections can only serve as a medium for sustaining democracy when they are free, fair and credible. For elections to be credible, it must be held within a



secured environment where the lives and safety of voters, electoral personnel and materials are guaranteed. Thus, adequate security is not only indispensable to the conduct of peaceful, free and fair elections but also form an integral part of an electoral process, since elections involves non-violent contests for political power and authority. Elections by its nature is conflict inducing. The fact that elections produce winners and losers makes it prone to a wide range of security threats against electoral stakeholders, personnel, infrastructure, materials and information. Therefore, there is a high probability that an election may result in violent conflicts and confrontations (Ace Project, 2019) particularly in new and developing democracies.

Electoral conflict is not the exclusive preserve of developing and new democracies such as those of Africa. Elections in developed democracies of Europe and America are not totally immune from electoral conflict. What is obtainable is that there is a wide disparity in the causal factors and the intensities of such conflict between the two (United States Agency for International Development, 2010). Africa has indeed over the years become a beehive of violent conflicts which have generated large scale insecurity within its frontier. Such conflicts have manifested in the forms of inter-ethnic crisis, ethnic cleansing, xenophobia, coups, counter-coups, genocides and most endemic of all, electoral conflict (Juma, Ogwora, & Amutabi, 2018). Buttressing this assertion Reynolds (2009, p. 75) observed that though elections in Africa has brought about positive historical events, they have also precipitated violent crisis which aggravates "ethnic conflict, political breakdown, and related social disequilibrium".

Since becoming an independent nation, Nigeria like some other African nations has been characterised by violent conflicts. Such conflicts have become intensified since the commencement of the Fourth Republic. Since its return to electoral democracy, Nigeria has witnessed national security-threatening conflicts of which the farmers-herdsmen conflict appears to be a persistent one. The conflict in the present political dispensation has assumed unprecedented dimensions. Several lives have been lost, properties worth millions have been destroyed and many people have been displaced due to the incessant violent clashes between farmers and herders. There is therefore, a growing concern about the dangers that the farmer-herder conflict portended for 2019 general elections. It is on this premise that this paper examines farmer-herder conflict and the prospects of peaceful 2019 general elections in Nigeria. This introduction is followed by the sections on conceptual and theoretical overview of electoral security and a

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discussion of the historical evolution of the conflict between herders and farmers in Nigeria. The paper from there proceeds to the section on the dangers of the conflict on the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The last part is the conclusion.

Electoral Security: Conceptual and Theoretical Overview

One of the major issues that have dominated discusses on electoral politics particularly as it relates to new and developing democracies is the issue of electoral security (Mohan & Yigit, 2015; USAID, 2013; USAID, 2010). While the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has contributed immensely to the development and consolidation of democracies of Africa and Latin America, it noted that the technical assistance given to emerging democracies is premised on the notion that credible elections enhances good governance and wellbeing of the people. It further observed that one impediment to achieving this is electoral conflict. This is because electoral conflict weakens electoral integrity via its influence on the process of selecting candidates for elections, voter turnout and the authenticity of election results or outcome (USAID, 2013). Thus, electoral conflict impedes democratic sustenance and consolidation, threatens the democratic institutions of governance and renders the entire electoral process fragile.

As a concept, electoral security entails two terms namely; electoral and security. On the one hand, electoral has to do with phenomena relating to or involving elections. Such phenomena include voting, electorate, ballot box and collation of results. The meaning of security on the other hand is not universal. For instance, governments perceive security from the point of view of what makes their states or territory safe from external aggression and intrusion, for example secured borders as well as strong and well equipped military. To an individual, security entails immunity from daily dangers and threat to life of themselves and their loved ones (Megan & Whitman, 2013). Generally, security refers to the state of being free from danger or threat to life. It entails the absence of physical threat resulting in an environment in which people can exercise their rights without hindrance. It also connotes a state where the rights of citizens are enforced and people are treated fairly by state's institutions. In this regard, people have unfettered access to quality education, quality healthcare service delivery and fundamental human rights as well as socio-political and economic development (Megan & Whitman, 2013).

In essence, electoral security refers to the process of safeguarding electoral stakeholders, electoral information and campaign materials including electoral facilities and electoral events and programs against death, damage or destruction



(Fischer, 2002). In a similar vein, electoral security has been defined as safeguarding the sanctity and integrity of elections and voting equipments from cyber attacks and threats which includes the tampering with or infiltration of voting machines, electoral cyber networks and voter registration data bases (Fidler, 2017). USAID (2010, p. 5) in a more comprehensive manner defined electoral security as "the process of protecting electoral stakeholders such as voters, candidates, poll workers, media, and observers; electoral information such as vote results, registration data, and campaign material; electoral facilities such as polling stations and counting centers; and electoral events such as campaign rallies against death, damage, or disruption".

From the above definitions, it is quite revealing that electoral security is an electoral necessity which cuts across all the stages of the electoral process. It is a very sensitive and delicate aspect of the democratic process. Nevertheless, electoral security should not be seen as an end in itself, rather it should be seen as a means to an end - a means of ensuring the holistic veracity of the entire electoral process (Olusola & Ademowo, 2015). The essence and significance of adequate security to the electoral process was captured by Jega (2013, p. 20) when he posited that:

Security is indispensable to the conduct of free, fair and credible elections. From the provision of basic security of voters at political rallies and campaigns to ensuring that results forms are protected, the whole electoral process is circumscribed in security considerations. In view of the scale of general elections, the number of people involved, election materials that need to be moved, difficulty of the terrain to be traversed, as well as the physical locations that need to be protected, such an operation is complex.

The above assertion is borne out of the criticalness of the need to protect and secure electoral personnel, environments and locations as well as processes so as to ensure that the electorate exercises their right to franchise without impediments. In this regard, electoral security is necessary in "creating a level playing field for all political parties and candidates to canvass for support; in protecting domestic and foreign observers in discharging their duties and obligations, and in maintaining the overall integrity of the democratic and electoral processes" (Jega 2013, p. 21). In other words, electoral security is mainly targeted at securing and protecting the human and material phenomena that are involved in the electoral process. It is on



this basis that the USAID (2010) identified four distinct variants of electoral security. These are: **physical security, personal security, information security and electoral events.**

Physical security entails securing and protection of facilities and materials such as buildings of electoral commission, electoral observers' offices as well as those of political parties. Physical security also includes residences of election officials and candidates. Personnel security pertains to the security of electoral stakeholders such as voters, public officials, election workers, security personnel, candidates, agents of various political parties' election observers and media personnel. Information security has to do with protection of election data. Such can include protection of data stored in computers, protection of communication systems used in registering voters and collation of election results. Aspects of information security can also include securing sensitive election materials such as ballot papers used on voting and unused ballot papers. Security of electoral events pertains to securing events that have to do with the electoral process. This can include voter registration and sensitisation programmes, campaign rallies, political debates and meetings (USAID, 2010).

The absence of adequate security during elections can spell doom for the entire electoral process and can lead to loss of lives and destruction of properties most essentially in volatile societies. In an electoral process where there is the intent or actual attempt to influence the outcome of election, electoral stakeholders and the electorate become victims of large scale electoral violence and conflict. Mohan and Yigit (2015) noted that due to political and social realities of different countries, elections are conducted under unpredictable and perilous political and social circumstances. Thus, having a secured and peaceful environment where the right of the people to vote and be voted for is held in high esteem and are exercised without hindrance and bias is one of the major challenges facing election management bodies and other critical political stakeholders and policy makers. Such political stakeholders and policy makers employ various means to ensure that elections are peaceful (Mohan & Yigit, 2015).

From the above, it can be observed that electoral security goes beyond the prevention of violence and damage. According to Mohan and Yigit (2015) it entails a situation in which people of a country are free from fear of intimidation and any form of coercion and are able to exercise their franchise as guarantee in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and recognised and strengthened by



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other instruments of the United Nations and consequently provided for in national Constitutions, electoral legislations, regulations and Acts (Mohan & Yigit, 2015). The experience of fierce electoral competitions of new democracies particularly of Africa which in most cases lead to electoral violence and consequently, loss of lives and destruction of properties requires the involvement of security forces to handle or ensure security during elections (Hounkpe & Gueye, 2010). Elections have high potentialities of being marred by violent conflicts most especially when held in countries facing the challenges of insurgencies. Under this situation, election periods become an opportunity for insurgents to attack voters, politicians, electoral officials and cart away or destroy election materials in their bid to disrupt and derail the electoral process (Hounkpe & Gueye 2010) to register their grievances. The situation is worsened when the electoral process has to be supervised by security personnel that are poorly trained, inadequately equipped, politicised and corrupt. In this regard, elections become vulnerable to electoral violence through forceful tactics and incompetence of security personnel. The part which security personnel play in elections been considered as a potent source of insecurity and peace during electioneering periods (USAID, 2010). The potentials of security officials to generate violence during elections can manifest in their deliberate interference with the electoral process and performing below expectation during election periods.

Under above scenario, political stakeholders involved in the electoral process do not have confidence in the security officials (Gueye & Hounkpe, 2010). In Nigeria, particularly in the Fourth Republic, there has been massive deployment of security forces comprising of the police, army, officials of the State Security Service (SSS), officials of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps as well as other paramilitary forces for securing elections. Olaniyan and Amao (2015) noted that the governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States in 2012 and in Anambra state in 2013 as well as in Ekiti and Osun states in 2014 respectively witnessed the deployment of army personnel and other security agents to ensure peace during the elections. This according to them generated public criticisms. This study is of the view that the rationale for the deployment of heavy security forces is justified based on the nation's experience of electoral violence, most especially that of the aftermath of the 2011 presidential election. While it is the duty of the state to

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Farmer-Herder Conflicts

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maintain peace and secure lives and properties of the people, the massive deployment of security forces for election purposes particularly for the gubernatorial elections in Ekiti and Osun states in 2014 generated controversies.

The deployment of security personnel has been considered as plots to render members of opposing camps inactive during any election (Olaniyan & Amao, 2015) thereby gaining undue advantage of the power of incumbency to monopolize the state security apparatus for its political ambition. While security agents are meant to secure election process and lives of voters during election periods, Montclos (2011) observed that security agents in Nigeria have been found to be involved in ruinous election related violent incidents. Contrary to maintaining order during elections security agents in the country have been accused of getting involved in executing political attacks (Montclos, 2011). In a similar vein, the CLEEN Foundation (2010) noted that it is not only that police have not been able to perform their functions, they have also not been able to provide adequate security for elections and sadly enough they have always been involved in acts of electoral fraud and crimes.

Farmer-Herder Conflict: From Peaceful Co-existence to Violent Confrontations

The Fulani herdsmen are of the Fula ethnic origin. Though they are scattered across the continent of Africa, their largest concentration can be found in the West African sub-region and the Sahel. With a population of approximately 40 million, the Fulani people are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa and the Sahel and are predominantly Muslims (Lewinson, 1996). They speak the Fulfulde language which bears great semblance with the languages of Senegal. It was thus, suggested that they migrated from the Middle-East through North-Africa to Senegal (Anter, 2013). Tracing their history to the Barbers of North Africa in the 11th century, Anter (2013) posited that the Fulani people spread to most parts of West and Central Africa from 900 to 1900 AD. The Fulani people are nomadic, with raising and rearing of livestock such as cattle, sheep, goats and sometimes camel as their primary occupation (Iro, 1994). In contemporary times, the Fulani ethnic group can be found in almost all African countries but are highly concentrated in Nigeria, Niger, Senegal Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and Cameroon.

The Fulani ethnic group are itinerant people who move from one place to the other in search of pasture (food) and water for their livestock (herds). Essentially therefore, their lifestyle is largely designed by the nature of their occupation. While



they can be found in all parts of the country, the Fulani herdsmen are more concentrated in the North-Central geo-political zone of the country which houses states such as Benue, Plateau, Taraba, and Nassarawa. The North-Central zone also known as the Middle-belt is considered to be the "food basket" of the nation owing to its fertile and temperate climate. These characteristics provided a favourable environment for both farmers and herders to blossom in their various farming activities thus it was inevitable for the herders and farmers not to come in contact with each other for mutual interdependence (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2017). While farmers depended on herders' livestock for manure to fertilize their crops, herders benefitted from crop refuse to feed their livestock. This symbiotic interdependence for centuries formed the basis of the existence and interrelationship between the Fulani herdsmen and sedentary farmers in Nigeria and made it possible for disputes to be resolved peacefully through traditional mediating methods (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2017).

Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic a relationship that was known to be peaceful and symbiotic has turned to be that of violent confrontations leading loss of lives and displacement of people. Muhammed, Ismaila and Bibi (2015) noted that the farmer-herder relationship which used to be peaceful has gradually been deteriorating since 2000 largely due to increasing population, climate change, dwindling natural resources and socio-economic realities. In a similar vein, International Crisis Group (2017) found out that drought and desertification, loss of grazing sites, changes in pastoralism and farming practices, rural banditry and cattle rustling, escalating conflicts across Northern Nigeria and erosion of traditional mechanisms are part of the dominant factors which trigger violent conflicts between herders and farmers. Owing to these factors farmer-herder relationship have been highly characterized by violence.

Both the farmers and herders have been puzzled by the sudden breakdown in the harmonious coexistence which has long defined their symbiotic relationships. Both camps claimed that they have lived in peace for years and that what is happening now is like a mystery to them (Amnesty International, 2017). Buttressing this assertion, a farmer affirmed that:

We still ask ourselves what happened. What have we done? We had no history of violence. We never had any clashes with them. The 19 February attack was the first. My house is like a home for the Fulanis, they come to play or watch movies with me and my family. So I still don't know why it happened. We were all living in



peace, there was a cordial relationship. They always came here and if not for their marks and looks you would not know they were Fulani, because they watched films with us and ate with us (*Interview Conducted by Amnesty International (2017) with a 65-year-old farmer in Kanikon Village, Jemaa local government area of Kaduna State*).

In another separate interview, a Fulani herdsman corroborated the farmer's claim when he reiterated that:

Although there had been occasional conflicts in the past, they were managed and amicably resolved either by the people themselves or by the village heads. There were problems in the past that had to do with cattle grazing on farmlands but these were settled amicably. But now there is no peace, no cooperation (*Interview Conducted by Amnesty International (2017) with an official of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria in Adamawa state*).

In an attempt to give an account of what led to violent conflicts in the state the official stated further that:

We have been trying to manage the crisis by creating grazing areas because a number of the grazing routes have been occupied. Farmers farm on the cattle routes. There are international cattle routes that other Fulani [herders] from Mali and other countries frequently use and once they find the routes have been occupied [and used as farmlands], they go ahead and pass along the routes because to them, that is supposed to be their way (*Interview Conducted by Amnesty International (2017) with an official of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria in Adamawa state*).

The herders-farmers conflict has indeed being bloody. Anytime violent feuds occur between the two several lives are lost, people are displaced and farm produce worth millions are destroyed. During violent feuds, men are the primary target, though children and women also fall victims, people's property and means of sustainability are destroyed (Amnesty International, 2017). In one of the violent attacks, a victim gave her ordeal as follows:

When they approached where we were hiding, my daughter sneezed and they heard her voice. So, they dragged us out. While they dragged us, I held on to the child. They told me to let go of 'him' but I refused and held her because I thought they wanted to kill her. They told me to



'leave the boy' but I shouted that it's not a boy, 'it's a girl' and I kept shouting that. One of them brought out his gun and aimed at me but the rest told him not to shoot me since I said the child was a girl. A second person used his cutlass on my arm, he cut me again but I held on to the child. They injured me with their cutlass and my little child was also cut on the cheek and head but she did not die (Interview Conducted by Amnesty International (2017) with a 60-year-old woman from Dong Village in Demsa LGA of Adamawa State).

Between 1999 and 2010 farmer-herder violent conflicts have been responsible for the death of 10,000 people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. The Fulani militants were regarded as the fourth deadliest group in 2014 using sophisticated weapons in attacks on villagers and farmers (Global Terrorism Index, 2015). It was observed that between 2010 and 2013 deaths from violent clashes between the two opposing groups stood at 80. Between 2013 and 2014 the death toll increased drastically from 80 to 1,229. Most of the deaths occurred in the North-Central geo-political zone of the country particularly in Benue, Kaduna, Adamawa, Taraba Plateau and Nasarawa. By the end of 2015, 847 deaths were recorded as a result of the violent conflict between the two warring camps in Eggon, Jukun and Tiv farming communities (Global Terrorism Index, 2015). In Benue one of the states in which violent feuds predominantly occur between the groups it was reported that between 2014 and 2016 approximately 1,878 people were killed (Premium Times, 2017).

In its own findings and documentation of violent incidences involving herders and farmers, Amnesty International (2018) noted that in 312 violent incidences of attacks and reprisal attacks, nothing less than 3,641 people have been killed, 406 have been injured, 5,000 houses were burnt and 182,530 people were displaced. The Centre for Democracy and Development (2018) noted that between January and July 2018, 183 incidents of herders-farmers violent attacks have been recorded in Nigeria. It further noted that in January 2018, a total of 17 violent attacks resulting in 108 deaths were recorded in Benue State alone. In addition, in the month of April 2018 54 attacks resulting in 409 deaths were recorded. Since January 2018, approximately 300,000 people have been displaced Adamawa, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba states (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2018). It is important to note that the farmers were not the only ones at the receiving end as Fulani herders were also victims of violent attacks. In one of the attacks, a victim in an interview narrated the ordeal of how his father, two-year-

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old son, four-year-old daughter and seven months pregnant wife were all killed. He explained this in the following words:

I was at home during the attack. We were all at home after the evening prayers at around 4pm when we saw the Mambillas surrounding us. We saw them entering houses. In my households they killed 25 people, including my wife and two kids. Some were slaughtered while others were burnt. My father was burnt (*Interview Conducted by Amnesty International (2017) with a 35-year-old Fulani herder from Kwarakwara village in Taraba state*).

Within ten days, from 8th to 18th October, 2018 suspected Fulani gunmen launched attacks on six villages in Bassa LGA of Plateau State killing 50 people. This prompted the state government to impose a dusk to dawn curfew in the local government area. Despite the curfew, 27 villagers were killed in Nkiedowro village on the 16th of October, 2018. In addition, on the 20th of November, 2017 armed men suspected to be of the Bachama tribe a major ethnic group in Numan Adamawa state attacked a Fulani village known as Shelewol. In the attack 80 people mainly comprising of women and children were killed. What could be regarded as a reprisal attack took place on the 4th of December, 2017 when seven villages in Numan and Demsa local government areas of Adamawa state were attacked by gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen. In the attack at least 51 people were killed (Amnesty International, 2018). On the 14th of July, 2018 some Fulani villages in Mayo-Belwa local government area of Adamawa State were attacked by suspected gun men of the Bile tribe. Approximately 27 people of Fulani tribe were reported killed (Amnesty International, 2018).

On the 10th to 11th of February, 2019 approximately 141 people were killed in Kajuru Local Government Area of Kaduna state. The attack took place shortly before the commencement of the 2019 general elections. The death toll was reported to have included 11 People of Adara origin and 130 people from the Fulani tribe (Busari & Udo, 2019). Since the attack it was stated that over 130 people have been killed in what can be described as series of reprisal attacks (Busari & Udoh, 2019). The human and material losses associated with the increasing spate of killings by the farmers and herders are indeed enormous. A study reported that the Federal Government was losing about \$13.7 billion annually as revenue owing to the herder-farmer conflicts in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states. The study further stated that averagely the four states lost 47 per cent of their internally-generated revenues (Mercy Corps, 2015). Between 2012 and 2014,



Benue state was reported to have lost about \$634 million to farmer-herder feuds (Uja & Ehikioya, 2017).

Farmer-Herder Conflict and the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria: A Prognosis

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria were the sixth consecutive elections to be conducted since the country's return to multi-party democracy. The elections were initially scheduled to hold on the 16th of February and 2nd March, 2019 for the Presidential and National Assembly elections and Gubernatorial and States Houses of Assembly elections respectively (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019). On the eve of the initial dates of elections, the nation's electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission announced the postponement of the elections due to logistics reasons. The elections were consequently rescheduled to hold on the 23rd of February and 9th March, 2019 for the Presidential and National Assembly elections and Gubernatorial and States Houses of Assembly elections respectively (Ogundipe, 2019). The elections were unique for a couple of reasons. One, it was the first elections to be contested by 91 political parties and with 84,271,832 registered voters - the highest in Nigeria's electoral history. Second, it is the first general election that the former opposition party, All Progressive Congress (APC), now the ruling party will oversee. Third it provided the first opportunity for people born since the nation's return to democracy to vote at an election (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2018).

Despite its unique characteristics, the 2019 general elections were held within the context of heightened spate of insecurity largely occasioned by persistence of violence emanating from armed banditry, activities of Niger-Delta militants, Boko Haram insurgency, political thugs and activities of cultist particularly in the south-south region of the country and most essentially farmer-herder conflict (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2018). Given the rate of killings associated with violent conflicts between herders and farmers in the country there were concerns among political stakeholders, security agencies as well as electorate on the dangers the conflict portended for the general elections. Mercy Corps (2019) noted that the escalating conflict between the farmers and herders is a serious prospect for electoral violence in the 2019 general election.

Similarly, Kwaja, Onubogu and Verjee (2018) posited that the violent conflict between farmers and herdsmen is the most potent threat to the peaceful conduct of the general elections. They further claimed that though there are other sources of

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violence apart from the herders-farmers conflict but such violence are peculiar to a specific area, for instance the Boko Haram insurgency which is primarily peculiar to the North-Eastern part of the country. They noted that the conflict between herdsmen and sedentary farmers has affected a wider part of the country. Prior to the general elections the conflict succeeded in deepening and worsening the Muslim-Christian divide in the country. The Christians saw the conflict as being directed at the Christians as there was a general perception that President Muhammadu Buhari did not sincerely put in place strategies to curb the conflict because he shares the same ethnic origin and religion with the Fulani herdsmen. This trend was described as having serious potential implications for voting pattern (Kwaja, Onubogu & Verjee, 2018).

Owing to the escalating of killings, the then incumbent governor of Benue state, one of the state largely affected by the conflict, prior to the 2019 general elections defected to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) from the All Progressives Congress (APC). His defection was borne of the outcry by Benue youths that they could no longer trust APC and President Buhari, claiming that APC is Miyetti party and that Buhari himself is of the Fulani ethnic tribe, thus they stood against then creation of grazing fields in Benue state claiming that they don't have land for ranching and that their farms are not for cows. Therefore, the defection of Ortom coupled with the fact that President Buhari is a Fulani man aggravated political tension in the state in particular and the nation in general (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2018). While the scourge of violent conflict between the two camps eroded the confidence of the farmers in the Federal Government, the Fulani herdsmen though still loyal to the president frowned at Buhari's non-condemnation of anti-grazing laws made by Benue state and other critically affected states of the North-Central zone (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Though the conflict between the Fulani herdsmen and sedentary farmers created apprehension in almost all parts of the country prior to the 2019 general elections, the political effects of the conflict were much felt in the troubled states of Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, Kaduna and Adamawa. Displacement generated by the heightened spate of insecurity brought about by the conflict disrupted voter registration exercise across several towns in the states (International Crisis Group, 2018). The violent conflict was seen as potent hindrance to activities associated with the 2019 electoral process such as political campaigns, political rallies and voter orientation and sensitization programs (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2018; Kwaja, Onubogu & Verjee 2018; International Crisis Group, 2018).



International Crisis Group (2018) further noted that the persistent conflict also undermined one of the cardinal campaign promises of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015 which was to combat insecurity in the country generally and in the middle belt and the northern part of the country in particular (Tukur, 2018). The perceived inability of the Buhari administration to put an end to the persistent and rising incidences of violence coupled with the delay in visiting troubled states was widely condemned by political stakeholders in and around the states with persistent farmer-herder violent conflict. This gave ample opportunity to the opposition PDP to exploit the deficiencies in the President Buhari's quest of curbing violent conflicts in the country. Following the January 2018 killings in Benue state, key PDP stakeholders including the Chairman Prince Uche Secondus paid a condolence visit to the people of the state and persuaded them to cast their votes for the PDP so as to put an end to the scourge of violence in the state (International Crisis Group, 2018).

On the basis of the above, it was believed that President Muhammadu Buhari and the All Progressives Congress (APC) were at risk of losing the then forthcoming presidential election. It was noted that in the 2015 presidential election the ruling APC narrowly won Benue state. Thus, it was predicted that widespread dissatisfaction with the way and manner the Buhari administration managed the conflict on the part of the people of Benue state in particular and the other affected states in general could deter his ambition of winning the 2019 general presidential election (International Crisis Group, 2018). The persistent Boko Haram insurgency the North-West and North-Eastern part of the country were also seen as hindrance to the ambition of the APC of winning the 2019 presidential election. Disenchantment with the perceived inability of the APC led-federal government to find lasting solution to the ever increasing Boko Haram attacks, unending armed banditry in the Northern part and the herders-farmers violent conflict manifested in massive protests and rallies held across the country by concerned civil society and religious groups (International Crisis Group, 2018). The protests and rallies were seen as avenues to demonstrate people's dissatisfaction with the President Buhari's administration.

The display of disenchantment came to a crescendo when on the 18th of July, 2018 socio-political organisations namely: Northern Elders Forum, the Yoruba group Afenifere from the South West, the Igbo group Ohaneze Ndigbo from the South East, and the Pan-Niger Delta Forum representing various ethnic sects in the country met and jointly condemned the persistent and unprecedented killings. To

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stop the killings in their own perspective, they resolved to insist on the emergence of a visionary and dynamic leader who could proffer implementable solutions to the lingering security and socio-political and economic challenges facing the country (National Summit on Insecurity and Killings in Nigeria, 2018). In a counter response, the presidency claimed that the coming together of socio-political organizations of various ethnic sects of the country to discredit the government in its efforts at combating violent conflict in the country was nothing but "the shedding of crocodile tears by selfish leaders who felt alienated after a transparent and accountable system halted their disproportionate survival on the resources of the state" (International Crisis Group, 2018, p.17).

Contrary to the position of the socio-political group, people, mostly of the Fulani tribe and some other social groups in the North expressed satisfaction on the efforts of the Buhari administration at countering violent conflicts in Nigeria. This enhanced his chances of winning the election among the Fulani and some other northern groups. While they debunked the claim by the socio-political groups, they vowed to ensure that President Muhammadu Buhari wins a second term as the president of the country. They pledged to resist any attempt by any group to stop Buhari from winning the election (International Crisis Group, 2018). The President of Miyetti Allah Socio-cultural Association, Bello Abdullahi Bodejo, threatened large scale chaos if President Buhari was prevented from winning the 2019 presidential elections. He said this in the following words:

Nobody should try to remove Buhari in 2019. All the Fulani in Nigeria today, our eyes are open. All of us are behind Buhari. We will not allow anybody to intimidate the federal government or to take Buhari's mandate; we will be ready to follow him and fight it. We are ready to do anything to ensure that Buhari comes back to complete the good work he is doing. The people criticising him are just a few and nothing would affect his chances of coming back (International Crisis Group, 2018, p. 17).

With the seeds of discord sown by the incessant killings resulting from the persistent violent conflict between Fulani herders and sedentary farmers mostly from the North-Central zone, the resultant declining confidence in the security forces and the Buhari Administration to put an end to the killings, malicious spread of fake news, the use and spread of hate speech particularly on social media as campaign tool and proliferation of small arms and light weapons, the stage appeared set for a turbulent and violent 2019 general elections. Various captions of



writings on the Nigeria's 2019 general elections predicted a bloody general election. Examples include: "will Nigeria's 2019 elections be peaceful? (Mercy Corps, 2018), "voting amidst insecurity" (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2018), Nigeria's 2019 elections and the risk of violence (United States Institute of Peace, 2018), averting violence around Nigeria's 2019 elections (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Given the state of insecurity in the country, there were feelings of anxiety of likely violent elections across the country. In a survey carried out by CLEEN Foundation (2019) on security threats assessment of the 2019 general elections, it was found out that While 11 states: Anambra, Cross-River, Ebonyi, Edo, Enugu, Gombe, Nasarawa, Ondo, Osun, Oyo and Sokoto states were on alert of security risk, 22 states were found to have high probability of violent elections, thus they were considered to be flashpoints of violent elections, these include: Abia, Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Borno, Delta, Ekiti, Imo, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Ogun, Plateau, Rivers, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara states. This can be explained further with the aid of tabulation.

Level of Risk	Category of States
High risk states	Abia, Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Borno, Delta, Ekiti, Imo, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Ogun, Plateau, Rivers, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara states.
Medium risk states	Anambra, Cross-River, Ebonyi, Edo, Enugu, Gombe, Nasarawa, Ondo, Osun, Oyo and Sokoto
Low risk states	Jigawa, Katsina, Niger and Kebbi

Source: Authors compilation from CLEEN Foundation (2019).

It can be observed from the table above that out of the 22 high risk states there are 4 out of 6 North-Central states (excluding Abuja) in the high risk states category. These states include: Benue, Kogi, Kwara and plateau states. The remaining two states were in the category of medium and low risk states. This implies that the entire zone is within the purview of witnessing violent elections specifically due to the fact that it is the geo-political zone in which killings from farmers and herders conflict are predominantly high. It can also be observed that 5 out of the 6 states in the North-Eastern geo-political zone of the country are in the category of high risk states. These include: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Taraba and



Yobe states. The only remaining state in the zone Gombe fell in the medium risk states, meaning that it is not free from violent elections. Out of the 33 states examined only four were in the low risk states category. Most of these states are in the North-West geo-political zone where the president hails from.

In its bid to ensure that the then forthcoming general elections were free from violence, the federal government made its intentions of deploying all security agencies including the Nigeria Army known to the public shortly before the elections (Tarkka, 2019). Despite public outcry against the deployment of offices of the Nigerian Army for the 2019 elections the Nigerian Army under the command of the Chief of Army Staff, General Tukur Buratai deployed its officers in large troops across the country. President Buhari in his bid to ensure that the votes of the masses count ordered the military to shoot-at-sight anyone who snatches or attempt to snatch ballot boxes or attempt to disrupt public peace during the voting process. The President categorically stated this shortly before the elections when he reiterated that:

I do not expect any body to cause any disturbance. The security agencies have identified hot spots and flash points and should be prepared to move. We have made as much arrangement as possible for them as much as the country can afford. Anybody who decide to snatch ballot boxes or lead thugs to disturb the process, may be that will be the last unlawful action you will take. We have directed the military and other security agents to be ruthless. I want Nigerians to be respected and let them vote whoever they want across the parties. I am not afraid of that. I went round the 36 states and the FCT and I think I have enough support across the country to vote for me. So, I want to warn anybody who think he has enough influence in his locality to lead a body of thugs to snatch ballot boxes or disturb the voting system, he will do it at the expense of his own life (Akowe & Ehikioya, 2019, p. 2).

On a general assessment of the election, it was observed that while there were pockets of violence in some states, voting day of the 2019 presidential election was relatively peaceful in the North-Central zone of the country (African Union Election Observation Mission, 2019; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2019; Campbell, 2019). African Union Election Observation Mission (2019) noted that while certain parts of the country particularly, North East, South-



South and Middle Belt regions, faced security challenges, the election took place within a relatively peaceful environment. It further noted that on the Election Day, there were reports of violence in the South-South region of Rivers and Bayelsa state (African Union Election Observation Mission, 2019). It further claimed that the collaborative relationship between INEC and the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (ICCES) contributed immensely to the generally peaceful elections (African Union Election Observation Mission, 2019). This is not however, to say that the elections in the North-Central zone were completely devoid of violence and irregularities. The farmer-herder conflict significantly affected the conduct and outcome of the 2019 general elections in parts of North Central Nigeria. For instance, it led to securitization of the electioneering process in states like Benue and Plateau. Second, it occasioned massive and widespread population displacements that, in turn, affected electoral participation of the affected population. Again, in places like Nasarawa state, the crisis led to rural insecurity and volatility, a situation which was exploited by some politicians to perpetrate electoral irregularities, including violence.

The European Union Election Observation Mission (2019) in its own report on the election noted that approximately between 20 and 35 people were killed on the Election Day in incidences related to the election. It was also observed that unconfirmed number of deaths occurred from terrorist attacks before the commencement of voting in Yobe and Borno states. While it acknowledged the occurrence of violence during the election in some states, it noted that the 2019 presidential election was relatively peaceful than what was obtained in the past (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2019). Campbell (2019) noted that the fact the election recorded lower number of deaths certainly signifies an improvement in its conduct compared to past elections. He however, noted that it is not to say that there is nothing to be worried about claiming that there is room to improve on future elections.

Conclusion

The Nigerian state no doubt is a victim of high level violent ethno-religious and sectarian conflicts. Since returning to electoral democracy, the nation's socio-political landscape has been characterised by killings, displacements and loss of properties due to incessant occurrence of violent feuds ranging from Boko Haram insurgency to the Niger-Delta militant insurgency, cult killings to herders-farmers conflicts. The farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria's Fourth Republic unarguably has

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been one of the potent causes of insecurity and one of the greatest threats to the nation's unity and survival. Owing to the circle of insecurity in the country, Nigerian elections have in most cases served as drivers of violence largely because they are usually held amidst rising spate of insecurity. Prior to the 2019 general elections the increasing spate of killings resulting from violent feuds between herders and sedentary farmers particularly of the middle belt region generated apprehensions and fear of a violent and bloody 2019 general elections among political stakeholders within and outside the country.

While the period preceding the 2019 elections was characterised by incessant killings, Election Day and post-election periods recorded low number of deaths. This is not to say that the lingering security crises in the country are not detrimental to the Nigeria's democratic and electoral process. On this basis, there is the urgent need to find a lasting solution to the security challenges particularly the farmer-herder conflict. There is the need to put in place strategies that will improve and embolden farmer-herders relationship. This is to reduce friction between the warring groups. There is also the need to revisit anti-grazing laws in state where they have been enacted. This is to repeal the aspects that are detrimental to the peaceful co-existence of the famers and Fulani herders. Lastly, there is the need to bolster security for farmers and herders most especially in the trouble areas of the North-Central zone where sedentary farmers are predominantly located.

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