All about scarce resources?

Untangling the Dynamics of Farmer-Herder Violence in Nigeria

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Abstract

The violent clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria have sharply intensified over the last couple of years. Not only has the number of clashes and casualties increased but the violence has also dramatically evolved, from spontaneous reactions and minor disputes to carefully planned attacks where militias eradicate whole villages. The predominant explanation is that the violence is caused by the forced migration of herders to the central and south regions, leading to a competition for scarce environmental resources with the farmers already residing in these areas. Even if grievances due to the scarcity of resources is a significant factor in understanding the violence, this study position situates itself in opposition to the predominant explanation by exploring the causes behind the conflict and the recent escalation of violence. By applying a multi-causal theoretical framework, this in-depth case study constitutes a subtle critique of the predominant explanation by demonstrating that it creates a narrow reading of the conflict. Through reports, statistics, and previous research, the study suggests that the causes and dynamics of farmer-herder violence in Nigeria must be understood in the light of ethnic and religious polarization, widespread poverty, and the fragile and overstretched government institutions which struggles to contain the spiraling violence.

Key words: Nigeria; conflict; violence; resource; scarcity; farmer; herder;
Words: 20,000

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List of Acronyms

ADB	African Development Bank
APC	All Progressive Congress
AU	African Union
CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CILLS	Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MURIC	The Muslim Rights Council
NLTP	National Livestock Transformation Plan
NSCIA	Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PSC	Protracted Social Conflict
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
TNC	Transnational Conflict
UN	United Nations
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNREC	United Nations Regional Center for Peace and Disarmament in Africa
WAEMU	West African Economic and Monetary Union

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background

Nigeria has the last couple of years experienced a dramatic increase in the violent clashes between farmers and herders[1]. Tense relations and recurring violence have been existing for decades, but the recent escalation now makes it one of the gravest security challenges the country is facing, causing nearly six times more causalities in 2018 than the Boko Haram insurgency (ICG 2018:1). Since 2016, the violence has claimed several thousands of lives and forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee from their homes[2], creating large numbers of internally displaced with no source of livelihood. Not only has the frequency of clashes increased, but the type of violence has also dramatically evolved. From being mostly spontaneous reactions and minor disputes, the violence between farmers and herders now involves attacks where heavily armed militias eradicate whole villages. Since farmers and herders usually belong to different ethnic and religious factions[3], the violence has also sharpened polarization and become a threat against political unity. Prominent politicians and religious leaders have contributed to polarization by emphasizing ethnic and religious differences and by the exploiting the growing insecurity with farmer and herder communities (Bagu & Smith 2017:12). This has spurred the spread of various conspiracy theories and accusations fly on who is to blame for the attacks (ICG 2018:14). The violence has also had severe economic implications by contributing to food insecurity and costing the Nigerian economy up to USD 13 billion a year (OECD 2018:53).

The predominant explanation is that violent clashes are caused by the competition of environmental resources such as land and water[4]. Because of irregular weather patterns and widespread insecurity in the north of Nigeria, herders have been increasingly forced to migrate south. Since there already is a large

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[1] Farmers refer to members of a community whose major occupation is farming, while herders refer to members of a community whose primary source of livelihood is rearing livestock, commonly adopting a semi-sedentary or nomadic lifestyle. Altough being somewhat simplified categories (Moritz 2006:22), it follows the most common way to partition the conflict's main actors.

[2] According to Amnesty (2018:6), at least 3,641 people was killed between January 2016 and October 2018. International Crisis Group reports at least 1,500 people dead and about 300,000 displaced between September 2017 - June 2018 (ICG 2018:12).

[3] A majority of farmers are Christians of various etnicities, mostly located in the central or south of Nigeria. About 90 % of all pastoral herders are Fulani Muslims, which traditionally reside in the northern regions (Muhammed et al. 2015:23, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:9, ICG 2018:1).

[4] E.g., Akinyemi & Olaniyan 2017, Abugu & Onuba 2015, Ubelejit 2016, Amnesty 2018, Bagu & Smith 2017, Chukwuma & Atelhe 2014, Ducrotoy et al. 2018, Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko 2018, Higazi & Yousuf 2017, ICC 2018, Idakwoji et al. 2018, GTI 2018, Shehu 2018, Muhammed et al. 2015, ICG 2018, MercyCorps 2015.

number of farmers living in the areas where are herders are migrating to, it is believed to create increased pressure on the resources that farmers and herders need to sustain their livelihood (Akinyemi & Olaniyan 2017:16-17). Although ethnic and religious tensions are a considerable feature of Nigerian society (EPR 2018:1283), the government have repeatedly emphasized that conflict between farmers and herders is caused by the scarcity of resources and has nothing to do with neither ethnic nor religious divisions (Vanguard 2018a, Vanguard 2019).

The scarcity of environmental resources is a significant and discernible factor in understanding the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria. The explanation is furthermore well-founded since herders have been more and more forced to migrate to areas where many farming communities are living. However, considering the dramatic escalation of the conflict, the emergence of armed militias, and the sharpened polarization between identity groups – seeing competition of scarce resources as the primary cause may create a reductionist and narrow reading of the conflict. Such an understanding furthermore overlooks the long history of violence and fails to provide plausible answers on why the violence has intensified in such a remarkable way since 2016. Considering that only 46 % of all arable land has been cultivated (IFAD 2019), one could also argue that the lack of resources is less acute than what is put forward by scarcity theorists[5] (Adisa & Adekunle 2010:1, Akov 2017:300). Neither must the migration of herders and the scarcity of environmental resources automatically lead to the magnitude of violence that is present in the conflict (Moritz 2006:5). Beyond the possibility that the predominant explanation creates a simplified reading of the conflict, it may also work as a way for governing entities to renounce liability by referring to the issue of resources.

Considering these contradictions with the predominant explanation, there are reasons to suspect a more complex and multi-faceted empirical reality. The aim of this academic inquiry is, therefore, to conduct an in-depth case study to locate potential factors that explain why the migration of herders lead to violent clashes and why the conflict has intensified since 2016. By using a theoretical framework designed to identify the sources and dynamics of contemporary conflicts, the intention is thus to move beyond the predominant explanation and investigate if there are additional factors that can illuminate our understanding of the spiraling violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria.

1.2   Purpose

One of the purposes of this study is thereby to provide a thorough understanding of the conflict and its primary sources and controversies. Underlying this broad objective is the specific intention to move beyond the scarce resources explanation and distinguish if there are additional factors that can elucidate our understanding

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[5] Although one should note that the agricultural sector faces additional challenges beyond the availability of land resources, such as the rapid population growth, over-cultivation, overgrazing, soil degradation and recurring droughts (IFAD 2019).

of the violent clashes between herders and farmers in Nigeria. By extension, such an analysis also aims to provide an answer on which factors that enabled the intensification of violence since 2016. However, the aim is not to review the governmental responses to hinder the violence, but to focus on certain analytical factors that might create a more fully-fledged understanding of the known outcome; (the intensified) violence between farmers and herders. Neither is there any intention to provide policy recommendations on how the conflict should be managed, unlike a majority of the previous literature on the issue. That being said, it should nevertheless be noted that the theoretical framework departs from certain normative assumptions on how a society should function (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:314), meaning that there will be an inevitable normative perspective in the analysis.

Although the study intends to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria, it does not intend to be completely exhaustive. Instead, it is a theory-using study where the analysis is dependent on the analytical perspective that is applied. Given that approach, an additional purpose is to further knowledge and insights regarding the theoretical framework and contribute to the debate on the causes and dynamics of violent conflicts. Following this, there is also a conviction that the study can contribute to our understanding of similar conflicts[6] and the future studies of these. Moreover, the aim to move beyond the resource scarcity explanation makes the study an insertion in the ongoing academical debate between parsimonious and complex theories of conflict – and more specifically the resource-debate which revolves around the causality between resources and violent conflict. In trying to fulfill these purposes, the study is guided by the following research questions:

> *What are the root causes behind the recurring violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria?*
> *Why has violence intensified since 2016?*

1.3 Relevance

If there are additional factors that can enhance our understanding of the increased violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria, that contribution can undoubtedly benefit actors that try to find peaceful solutions to the conflict. Although it is not a specific purpose to provide policy suggestions, there is an underlying conviction that any solutions towards solving the violence must be as multi-faceted as the conflict it seeks to address (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:140). If the scarcity of resources thesis continues to seem the most plausible, that can also benefit the process towards a solution by providing more evidence to support this argument. A greater understanding of the factors that enabled the intensification of violence will

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[6] E.g. farmer-herder conflicts in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and the Central African Republic (Bagu & Smith 2017:7).

serve the same purpose. Empirical findings will moreover be relevant in the sense that it will provide a snapshot of influential actors and developments in Nigeria. As already mentioned, similar social conflicts between farmers and herders are found in several other states (Bagu & Smith 2017:7) – meaning that an in-depth understanding of this specific case has a degree of transferability to other contexts. This reasoning will be further developed when elucidating the choices made in regards to research design[7], but it is founded on the fact that lessons can be drawn empirically from the case of Nigeria to better understand other violent conflicts.

Beyond the social relevance in understanding the causes and dynamics of the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria, the study also provides opportunities for accumulating theoretical and analytical insights that enhances our understanding concerning other violent and intractable conflicts. One such is discerning the sources and controversies within violent conflicts; another is distinguishing factors and circumstances that enable the intensification of violence. The academic relevance of the study is also, as mentioned previously, the possibility to accumulate knowledge regarding the theoretical framework and how it can be used to analyze contemporary conflicts. The specific intention to situate the study in opposition to the predominant explanation also makes the study relevant in the broader debate on the sources and dynamics of violent conflicts, and more specifically in the controversy concerning the influence of resources in farmer-herder conflicts. Beyond that, the academic inquiry can serve as an in-depth empirical foundation for future studies relating to the violence between farmers and herders, and to research concerning the social, economic, and political context of Nigeria.

1.4   Disposition

The study is divided into five chapters. The second chapter will present the theoretical foundation of the study, starting with an account of the previous literature before elucidating the framework that will guide the analysis. The third chapter concerns methodological choices and initially contains a discussion regarding the research design and elaborates why the chosen course of action is appropriate in answering the research questions. The third chapter continues with accounting for how the theoretical framework is operationalized and concludes with a discussion concerning empirical material and demarcations. The fourth chapter consists of the analysis and is made up of six different sections. The first provides a brief background on Nigeria, while the additional five sections are the different levels of analysis, as stated in the operationalization of the theoretical framework[8]. The fifth and last chapter will draw the findings together in a concluding discussion on how the analysis helps us answer the research questions.

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[7] See section 3.2 Research design, in particular the second paragrahp which clarifies case selection.
[8] Following the theoretical framework by Ramsbotham et al. (2016:123), the analysis is divided into five levels of analysis: global, regional, state, identity-group, and elite/individual.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Previous literature

There has been a continuous debate on the causes and dynamics of violent conflicts and civil violence. Behind every theory of violent conflict is a set of assumptions that are inevitably and fundamentally subjective. These assumptions are made up of a predetermined view on agency, interests, and the influence of structures on human behavior – and ultimately, why and how conflicts emerge. This study is situated in this broader controversy but also more specifically in what can be referred to as the 'resource debate' (Akov 2017:289).

Thomas Malthus can be considered one of its ancestors since he in the late 18th century proposed a thesis where he argued that increased population pressure in combination with the scarcity of resources would lead to violent conflicts. Neo-Malthusian theorists like Homer-Dixon (1999) and Baechler (1998) mean that resource scarcity leads to a societal development that ultimately makes them likely to experience violent conflicts. For these theorists, there are causal linkages between environmental scarcity and the onset of violence. Basically, the scarcity of environmental resources is believed to create 'grievances' which makes people turn to violence to change their predicament (e.g., Cederman et al. 2013). However, at the other end of the debate are those that argue that there is little empirical support for the resource scarcity thesis, meaning that it is resource abundance that leads to violent conflicts (such as de Soysa 2002, Auty 2004). In essence, resource abundance is believed to lead to violence since it provides things to fight over as well as resources to engage in violent conflicts. While the scarcity of resources is linked to the onset of violence through the 'grievances' it creates, resource abundance is believed to trigger violence through the 'greed' it activates with conflict parties (Collier & Hoeffler 2004). However, Le Billion denounces both the resource-scarcity and resource-abundance thesis and argues that violent conflicts that relate to resources are the 'result of specific social processes' (2001:581). What this means is that the historical context and social patterns are determining what the availability of resources lead to, which hence can explain different outcomes in different countries. Fearon and Laitin (2003) also argue for de-emphasization of the causal linkages between resources and violent conflicts. Rather, certain conditions are believed to favor insurgencies because it creates 'opportunities' for human agency (Fearon & Laitin 2003).

The resource-debate is very much present in the literature that concerns violent conflicts in Africa, relating both to the lack of resources and to the 'curse'

of resource abundance[9]. However, the extensive amount of literature that has sought to explore the violent conflicts between farmers and herders across the African continent commonly depart from the scarcity of environmental resources. While many of these are in-depth case studies that focus on specific countries (e.g., Bukari 2018, Benjaminsen & Ba 2009), there are also studies that compare environmental conditions and historical development in different countries (e.g., Cabot 2017). Some, such as Brottem (2016) and Moritz (2006), depart from a regional perspective and investigates environmental changes and its linkages to farmer-herder conflicts in regions such as West Africa. There is also a considerable number of studies that are specifically focused on the case of farmer-herder violence in Nigeria. Not seldom are these produced to promote certain policies on how the conflict should be managed. Amusan et al. (2017) and Taiye et al. (2017) does for example advocate for the implementation of grazing policies to manage the herders' movement, while Ajibo et al. (2018) mean that social work policies must be elaborated to promote reconciliation between farmers and herders in Nigeria.

Numerous studies are also trying to distinguish what is causing the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Generally, it is possible to divide these studies into two theoretical approaches; environmental security and political ecology. The Malthusian perspective of environmental security sees causal linkages between violence and environmental scarcity, and are thus following scholars like Homer-Dixon (1999) and Baechler (1998). An essential assumption is that the scarcity of environmental resources creates a forced competition over these, thus explaining the frequent clashes between farmers and herders. Studies such as Idakwoji et al. (2018), Shehu (2018), Akinyemi & Olaniyan (2017), Ubelejit (2016), Muhammed et al. (2015), and Abugu & Onuba (2015), can be categorized to that approach since they argue that the forced struggle for scarce environmental resources is the primary factor causing the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria. From this perspective, environmental resources are becoming increasingly scarce because of the forced migration of herders to densely populated areas in the south and central parts of the country. In a Malthusian spirit, these studies hence depart form a linear or declining access to essential resources and link the scarcity of resources to population growth. However, there are differences in how much emphasis these scholars put on causal linkages between climate change and the competition for scarce resources. As an example, Ubelejit (2016) and Akinyemi & Olaniyan (2017), views climate change as the very cause for the struggle for environmental resources between farmers and herders, while Oli et al. (2018) argue that the resource conflicts between farmers and herders are exacerbated by climate change rather than caused by it.

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[9] 'The resource curse' refers to the idea that abundance in certain natural resources, such as oil, tend to have negative implications in societies with weak institutional capacitites (African Development Bank 2016:109) since it often mean that these are less democratic, experience higher levels of corruption and have a lower quality of public services (Crivelli & Gupta 2014:88).

Studies from a political ecology approach reject the explanations given by environmental security theorists as too parsimonious and simplistic. While not excluding the factor of environmental scarcity, political ecology argues that the social, political, and economic context cannot be excluded from the analysis (Dimelu et al. 2016:149). Olaniyan & Okeke-Uzodike (2015) does, for instance, see a causal link between climate change and competition for resources - but argues that the violence must be understood in the light of the Nigerian state's incapacity and ethnic divisions between farmers and herders. Studies by Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko (2018), Akov (2017), Amusan et al. (2017), Olaniyan & Okeke-Uzodike (2015), and Chukwuma & Atelhe (2014) can also be categorized to this approach since they argue for a more complex empirical reality while still putting the factor of scarce environmental resources at the core of the analysis. The key argument is that the competition over scarce resources cannot be disentangled from its context seeing as some areas with fewer environmental resources have less violent conflicts, while some regions with a relative abundance have more violence between farmers and herders(Dimelu et al. 2016:149, Moritz 2006:7).

Both environmental security and political ecology are fundamentally structural theories that depart from certain assumptions on how the scarcity of resources influence human action by creating grievances. Political ecology is to a larger extent including other variables since it seeks to complicate the claims that environmental scarcity inevitably leads to violent conflicts between farmers and herders. The theoretical framework in this study follows scholars such as Cederman et al. (2013:10) which argued that 'political and economic inequalities following group lines generate grievances that can motive civil war'. As such, the study contests with the arguments of 'greed' by Collier & Hoeffler (2001) and situates itself in contrast to environmental security by seeking to move beyond scarce environmental resources as the sole cause. While the theoretical framework applied in this study is not political ecology per se, there is a common intention of trying to argue for more 'complex empirical realities' by situating the scarcity of resources in a certain context (Moritz 2006:3). It is thereby not assuming that scarcity of resources must lead to violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria, nor that increased migration by herders automatically leads to an intensification of the conflict. Since it also seeks to answer why the violence has intensified, it rather departs from an assumption that there have been 'opportunities' and human agency that has enabled the rise of militias and contributed to the spiraling violence. The study hence intents to situate itself against the structural theories by involving a larger emphasis on agency.

2.2   Theoretical background

This study has applied the theoretical framework of *transnational conflict analysis* (TNC), which was developed 'for locating the chief sources of contemporary conflict and the controversies associated with them' (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:142).

Since the framework is an extension of *Protracted social conflict* (PSC) by Edward Azar, some contextual background are necessary in order to understand its core assumptions. PSC was developed as a multi-causal and multi-level framework to explain the conflicts that had started to emerge within states at the time. This was happening during a period when several other scholars also tried to make sense out 'internal conflicts' (Brown 1996:14), 'ethnic conflicts' (Stavenhagen 1996:1-2), and the 'new wars' (Kaldor 1999). Azar argued that traditional theories were unable to explain contemporary conflicts since these are characterized by:

> ...a blurred demarcation between internal and external sources and actors. Moreover, there are multiple causal factors and dynamics, reflected in changing goals, actors and targets (1990:6).

Azar, therefore, argued that contemporary conflicts demanded a more far-reaching spectrum of analysis (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:110). Although somewhat simplified, most theories of conflict are either primarily internal, relational, or contextual. Internal theories mainly focus on aspects within actors, relational theories predominantly emphasize relations between and within actors, and contextual theories focus primarily on structures;
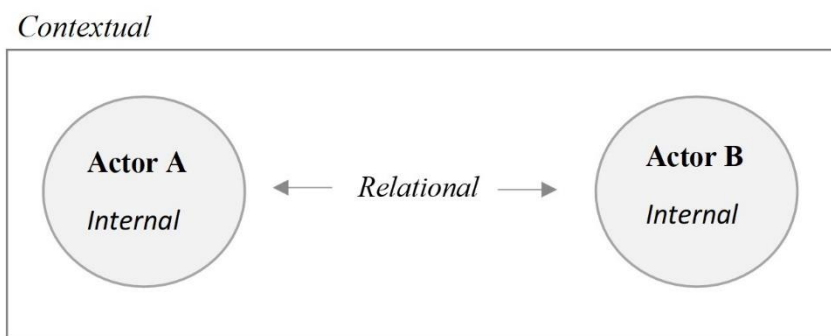

Figure 2.2.1 –Theories of conflict   Source: Author

In contrast to most general theories of conflict, PSC was developed to include *internal*, *relational* as well as *contextual* sources of conflicts (Ramsbotham et al. 2005:117). That inevitably entails a broad analytical scope with several levels of analysis and attempts to emphasize both agency and structure (Demmers 2017:84).

The first step of PSC analysis identifies four clusters of variables that act as preconditions for a conflict to emerge; *communal content, deprivation of human needs, governance,* and *international linkages* (Ramsbotham 2005:114-116). *Communal content* refers to a possible disjunction between identity groups and the state, based on the assumption that multi-communal societies often are 'characterized by a single communal group or a coalition of a few communal groups that are unresponsive to the needs of other groups' (Azar 1990:7). This is assumed to foster societal fragmentation and polarization, which creates a hotbed for violent conflicts. Not seldom are disjunctions between society and state traceable back to uneven access to power or colonial policies of divide-and-rule (Demmers 2017:86).

Deprivation of human needs is related to communal content since 'grievances resulting from need deprivation are usually expressed *collectively*'

(Azar 1990:9, my italics). Since individual needs are linked with one's identity, they are often perceived as non-negotiable, which can explain the protractedness and 'irrationality' in many conflicts (Ramsbotham 2005:115). Azar draws upon Henry Shue's three basic rights (1980) and categorizes needs as; *security, acceptance,* and *access* (Ramsbotham 2005:115, Demmers 2017:87). As human beings, we are all assumed to strive after fulfilling our basic physical needs (security), our need to belong to a socially accepted and recognized communal identity (acceptance), and to be able to participate on equal terms in political institutions (access). Deprivation of human needs is furthermore seen as fundamentally rooted in the perception of other groups *communal identity* (Demmers 2017:87).

If the needs are being satisfactory fulfilled is dependent on the third cluster; *governance*. Since the state is the one that 'is endowed with authority to govern and to use force when necessary to regulate society, to protect citizens, and to provide collective goods' (Azar 1990:10), the strength and effectiveness of governance are directly connected to its ability to accommodate people's basic needs (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:118). A weak and fragile state is thus prone to violent conflicts since it usually struggles to accommodate basic needs. Here it is also possible to discern a Malthusian perspective since Azar argues that societies with conflict often are 'characterized by rapid population growth and a limited resource base' (Azar 1990:11).

International linkages refer to the influence of the international context on governance. Economic dependency in the international system might foster states 'to pursue both domestic and foreign policies disjoined from, or contradictory to, the needs of the public' (Azar 1990:11). Hence, the influence of the international context can contribute to creating grievances. Preconditions for protracted social conflicts, according to Azar, hence revolves around needs deprivation as a consequence of a disjunction between the political authority and segments of society;
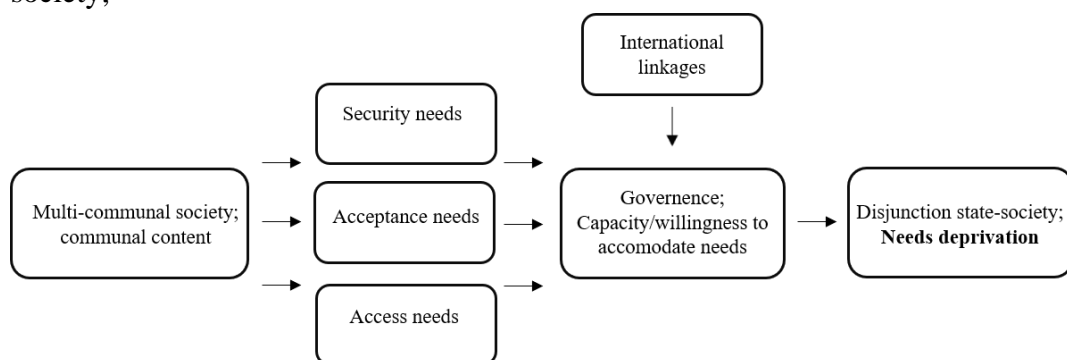
Figure 2.2.2 – PSC analysis – Step 1   Source: Author

The second step of PSC analysis seeks to identify actions and events that activate overt conflicts (Demmers 2017:88). Under 'process dynamics', three clusters of interactive variables are seen to act as determinants; *communal actions and strategies, state actions and strategies,* and *built-in mechanisms of conflict* (Azar 1990:12-15). Communal actions and strategies aim to capture how identity groups

have acted, such as identity formation, organization, type of leadership, political goals, etc. (Ramsbotham 2005:116).

The second determinant revolves around the responses and tactics from the political authorities. Governing entities may, for instance, try to accommodate grievances or choose to repress disadvantaged groups. Such responses may consequently lead to violent responses and create a vicious circle of violence (Demmers 2017:89). Here it also becomes important to analyze eventual external parties brought in by the state since such maneuvers 'not only amplifies the scope of the conflict, but also make it more protracted' (Azar 1990:15).

The third and final determinant, *built-in mechanisms of conflict*, refers to self-reinforcing characteristics that usually are a part of violent conflicts (Ramsbotham 2005:117). There is, for instance, usually a widespread mistrust in conflicts where all actions by the other party are perceived 'as mechanisms for gaining relative power and control' (Azar 1990:15). There is also often negative and antagonistic perceptions of the 'other'. These reinforcing mechanisms are assumed to intensify and sustain conflicts, ultimately making them protracted and difficult to solve (Ramsbotham 2005:117). The three interactive clusters of variables within Azar's process dynamics hence revolve around mapping the interaction between need deprivation and factors determining a development into violent conflict;
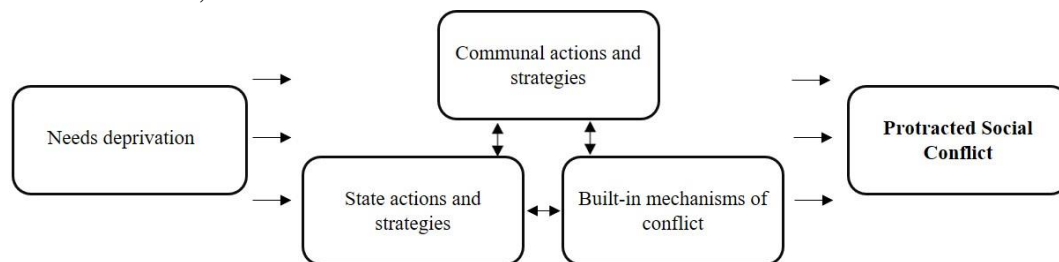
Figure 2.2.3 – PSC analysis – Step 2   Source: Author

The very core of PSC analysis could, therefore, be argued to be concentrated around social causes of conflict (*needs deprivation*) and (the failure of) governance.

2.3   Transnational Conflict Analysis

Transnational conflict analysis extends on the theoretical insights in Azar's framework and supplements it with 'global changes that have occurred since the end of the Cold War' (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:120-121). The framework is structured differently than its predecessor and is instead made up of five levels of analysis; global, regional, state, identity group, and elite/individual, each consisting of several factors that may cause and shape contemporary conflicts.

2.3.1 Global-level

Transnational conflict analysis departs from identifying the *type of conflict* since this is assumed to be related to *global drivers* of conflict. The idea is that it is possible to categorize contemporary conflicts as any of the following 'ideal-types';

- ➢ *interstate conflict*
- ➢ *economic/resource conflict*
- ➢ *identity /secession conflict*
- ➢ *revolution/ideology conflict*

The first ideal-type, *interstate conflict*, refer to the classic Clausewitzian notion of a war between sovereign states. The second ideal-type, *economic/resource conflict*, aims to involve conflicts where the controversy mainly revolves around seizing or retaining state power or resources. That may be conflicts characterized by elite power struggles, warlordism, *coups d'état* or brigandage (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:90-91). *Identity/secession* conflicts refer to struggles between communal (identity) groups and governing entities, usually as a result of groups aiming to alter their status vis-a-vis the state. Such conflicts may include conflicts which revolve around contention for autonomy, access, control or secession. The fourth ideal-type, *revolution-ideology conflict*, includes struggles where the end-goal is to change the type of governance. That may be from an authoritarian state to democratic rule or from aiming to change the state's religious/ideological orientation (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:91). Clearly, the last three ideal-types are distinctions between different types of intra-state conflicts. However, the idea is not that one ideal-type can exhaustively capture a conflict but that these can act as guides in understanding a certain phase or aspect of the violence (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:123-124).

The *type of conflict* is then assumed to be related to the *global drivers* of conflicts;

- ➢ *geopolitical transition*
- ➢ *north-South economic divide*
- ➢ *a discrepancy between state system and distribution of peoples*
- ➢ *global ideological contestation*

Geopolitical transition is assumed to shape conflicts through global interconnectedness and linkages between local conflicts and global power politics. Transnational conflict analysis is drawing on assumptions from realist theories such as Waltz (1979) and Mearsheimer (2001) and departs from ideas of relative power and the influence of 'great' powers in the anarchical system. The end of the Cold War and the shift from a bipolar to unipolar world order are assumed to have had a profound effect on how, for instance, international conflict management was conducted. It also had an impact on how the only remaining superpower, the US, behaved in the international arena. However, developments in the 21st century with an economic crisis and costly conflicts has made that position less clear. The advent

of Russia, India, and China in the economic system has meant an emerging multipolar and complex world order where no great power is either interested or have the capacity to manage contemporary conflicts. Consequently, transnational conflicts can thrive in power vacuums and be sustained through linkages to great powers (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:124).

In contrast to the first global driver, the second of *north-south economic divide* draws on insights from critical political economy and Marxism (e.g., Cox 1981, Gill & Law 1989, Wallerstein 1996). The central assumption is that conflicts arising in peripheral regions are not due to do failures in governance but rather in the oppressive and unequal capitalist system. The structural injustices inherent in the current world order are assumed to foster social conflicts and exacerbate regional differences because of the unequal allocation of resources (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:124). The capitalist logic sustains the economic domination of the periphery by promoting an economic development that maintains dependency and preserves the status quo. However, people are increasingly becoming aware of the unequal distribution of resources because of technological advancements. This is believed to increasingly shape contemporary conflicts since it spurs grievances and resentment (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:124-125).

The third global driver of transnational conflicts, *the discrepancy between state borders and the geographical distribution of peoples,* is related to ethno-nationalist explanations of violent conflicts (e.g., Stavenhagen 1996:1-2, van Evera 1994). It departs on the one hand on the increased number of states since 1945 through the process of decolonization, and on the other hand on many ethnic groups that could claim autonomy (some estimates up to 5,000). Many of these groups are furthermore dominated as a minority or divided by colonial borders, which in turn are assumed to form the basis for and shape conflicts (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:125).

The fourth global driver, *global ideological contestation,* refers to conflicts which are related to challenges against the current world or state order. Just as in a *revolution/ideology conflict*, that often means an intention to change the governance or ideological orientation (political or religious) in a particular state. This factor can shape contemporary conflicts since interconnectedness has increased the ability to recruit and radicalize supporters for such causes. Conflicts might, therefore, be easily diffused to other areas and sustained through external reinforcements (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:125).

The next step in transnational conflict analysis is the factor of *transnational connectors.* These transborder linkages are connecting all levels of analysis since they are made up of complex flows of;

> ➢ People (e.g., migrants, diaspora, refugees)
> ➢ Resources (e.g., commodities, money laundering)
> ➢ Corporate investments (e.g., foreign direct investment)
> ➢ Weapons
> ➢ Criminals and terrorist networks
> ➢ Images, ideas, and beliefs

The idea is that transnational conflicts must be understood by involving the conditions and opportunities that start and sustain violent conflicts. The factor of *transnational connectors* is thus an extension of *international linkages* in a PSC analysis, but with the additional assumption that such interconnectedness has significantly increased since the end of the Cold War (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:126-127).

2.3.2 Regional-level

The following level of analysis departs from *complex regional conflict systems.* It draws on research that points to the increasing importance of regional patterns of conflict since the end of the Cold War (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:93). The assumption is that some regions are more vulnerable to experience violent conflicts while others can be distinguished as 'zones of peace' (Kacowicz 1995). The framework incorporates what Buzan & Weaver calls 'regional security complexes' (2004) in order to capture states in a region with interconnected security concerns. A region can according to this perspective be explained as being somewhere in between a turmoil with several conflicts to being a pluralistic security community (where mutual insecurities are more or less eradicated). Somewhere in between these opposites are 'security regimes' where tensions exist but where there are formal or informal arrangements to lower collective insecurities (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:127). Critical factors in understanding a regional security complex are internal patterns of amity and hostility, distribution of power, relation to neighboring regions, and the interplay between global and regional security structures (Buzan & Weaver 2004:51-53). By trying to capture the distribution of conflicts and regional dynamics, the idea is to understand how this is shaping a conflict (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:94).

The regional-level then moves to the factor of *intra-regional dynamics.* A key assumption relates to the global driver of *discrepancy between state borders and the geographical distribution of people* since it draws on the work of Cederman et al. on how kin groups influence intrastate wars by transgressing borders (2009). *Intra-regional dynamics* distinguish between outwards (contagion, spillover, diffusion), and inwards (influence, intervention, interference) in order to capture how states and regions affect each other. An intra-state conflict might, for instance, have severe consequences for neighboring countries by causing refugee flows, spreading of weaponry, and inspiring kin groups to take similar actions (Lake & Rothchild 1996a:19-20). In turn, regional instability might entail the reverse effect and create difficulties for an otherwise peaceful state (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:128). The outwards and inwards dynamics are hence interconnected with *transnational connectors* since these factors may serve as an explanation to the flows of, for instance, migrants or weapons. If significant environmental conditions exist, these are also believed to shape the patterns of conflicts (Ramsbotham 2016:128), such as the sharing of freshwater resources between different states (e.g., Buhaug & Gates 2002, Gleick 1995).

2.3.3 State-level

The framework now moves from contextual factors at the global and regional level to structural factors at the state level. It departs from the factor of *state fragility* in order to assess the capability of the state to govern and distinguishes four critical areas; *social sector, economic sector, political sector,* and *geography*. If a conflict has escalated into a struggle for the state itself, two additional factors also come into play; *law and order,* and *security* (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:129-132). The key assumption is that 'fragile' or 'weak' states which struggle to govern are more likely to experience conflict, hence resembling the cluster of governance in a PSC analysis. *State fragility* links to studies that argue that 'new wars grow out of and end in the disintegration of states' (Münkler 2005:8), and that conflicts trap states in poverty by creating 'a pattern of violent internal challenges to government' (Collier 2008:17).

The factor of the *social sector* refers to analyzing the major social divisions in society. That may, for instance, be between identity groups adhering to a particular ideology, class, or ethnicity (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:130). Since all societies have social divisions these are not per definition viewed as a source for conflict, but it rather connects to Azar's *communal content* and *deprivation of human needs;* if a social group perceive themselves as being politically disadvantaged or dominated it creates grievances and forms the basis for conflict (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:130).

The *economic sector* links patterns of development or uneven development since this is assumed to create need deprivation. It departs on the one hand from a correlation between violent conflict and absolute levels of underdevelopment (e.g., Stewart & Fitzgerald 2000, Collier 2008), and on the other hand that uneven allocation of development resources are associated with the emergence of conflicts (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:130). These correlations are hence connected with deprivation of human needs since it revolves around the state as either unwilling or incapable of accommodating people's basic needs.

The *government sector* is where eventual social and economic grievances are (supposed to be) expressed. This factor connects to Azar's *state actions and strategies* since it revolves around how political authority manage the state apparatus and handle groups with grievances. Conflict is viewed as more likely if; party politics are based on communal identity and one identity group has managed to capture state power, an authoritarian regime block access to and exploit state power, or where the state disintegrates under the pressure of scarce resources and an untenable security situation (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:131). All these scenarios may consequently lead to an outright challenge of the state, simply because groups come to perceive violence as the only solution to change their situation.

The following factor of *geography* relates to the *government sector* since it refers to the state's governance in remote areas. The critical factor here is the relation between the center and periphery since there often is a minimal governance capacity in remote provinces. Communities in such areas seldom gain benefits from

the central government and feel neglected, consequently enhancing feelings of a disjunction between the identity group and the state (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:131-132).

The *law and order section* refers to identify a possible bias within the legal system and security sector. They might have aligned themselves with certain interests and can therefore no longer seen as an impartial and legitimate authority. The factor of *security sector* revolves around the tipping point when armed militias emerge and the security situation escalates even further. It relates to the notion of a 'security dilemma' since it is assumed to lead to a spiral of insecurity and rearmament that makes the conflict difficult to de-escalate (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:132).

2.3.4 Identity-group

The identity-group level departs from Azar's *needs deprivation* and aims to identify a disjunction between identity groups and the state. Reminding us that 'grievances resulting from need deprivation are usually expressed *collectively*' (Azar 1990:9), the first factor, *nature of conflict parties*, draws on studies on why identity groups are created; i.e., the very bases for group formation. Following scholars like Anderson (1983), communities based on identity traits are seen as social and political constructions rather than pre-existing givens. That also means that these identity constructions are constantly changing depending on context and through conscious manipulation. Since identities in conflicts often are based on traits such as ethnicity, ideology, or class, *the nature of the conflict parties* often correspond to societies major social divisions (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:130-133).

The second factor, *intergroup dynamics,* departs from Azar's process dynamics and maps the relational aspects within and between conflict parties. A key assumption is that conflicts escalates or de-escalates unevenly depending on how the conflict parties act (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:133). Drawing on McAdam et al. (2001) and their theory of mobilization, a first step is to explore how a group frames their collective grievances and goals. Depending on the type of conflict, end goals may vary from autonomy, political access, or control of resources – which in turn triggers different kinds of mobilization. Threats to a group's security or new opportunities are specially believed to trigger mobilization around collective goals (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:133). Since deprivation of needs often is a key ingredient, mobilization is also believed to be 'caused by collective fears of the future' (Lake & Rothchild 1996b:41). More than triggering mobilization, it is also believed to make people more receptive to manipulation and biased framings. Polarization might then evolve quickly and trigger *in-built mechanisms of conflict,* fostering a situation of mistrust where all actions by the 'others' are perceived 'as mechanisms for gaining relative power and control' (Azar 1990:15).

2.3.5 Elite/Individual

At the elite/individual level, transnational conflict analysis look at the factor of *leadership* to understand how individuals might have influenced the conflict. Prominent leaders often act as political entrepreneurs and build support by exploiting communal differences and collective fears. Such individuals thereby enhance social polarization and act as instigators of violence. While collective grievances and goals are believed to trigger different kinds of mobilization (*intergroup dynamics*), the level of militancy and violence often comes to be determined by the nature of the *leadership* (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:133). The analysis thus tries to link the factors of *nature of conflict parties* and *intergroup dynamics* to elite-level actions and strategies. It thereby follows Horowitz (2000:140) by asking the questions; how have the leaders been leading, and why have the followers followed? Leadership is considered a crucial factor in understanding conflicts since 'most major conflicts are triggered by internal, elite-level activities, to put it simply, bad leaders' (Brown 1996:23).

2.3.6 Summary

The global and regional level of analysis makes up the most explicit extension from the original framework, while the identity-group and elite/individual level correspond to the core of a PSC analysis. The state-level is mediating between the other sections and relate closely to Azar's concepts of *governance* and *state actions and strategies.* One can also note how a transnational conflict analysis brings together *contextual*, *relational*, and *internal* factors into one framework. The global and regional level are primarily made up of contextual factors, while the state level combines contextual with relational factors. The identity-group is made up of one internal and one relational factor, and the elite/individual is focused on the internal factor of the conflict party's leadership. It is thereby also aiming to emphasize agency *and* structure by creating situated agents: identity groups and individuals are viewed as being able to make choices and shape the trajectory of conflicts, but at the same time enabled and restricted by structures.

3 Methodological Framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to clarify how the methodological framework is designed to produce credible answers to the research questions. As reflected in the structure of the study, the analysis is a product of conscious choices on research design, what theoretical framework is applied, and how the empirical material is analyzed. A discussion regarding these choices will make up the initial part of this chapter, while the following part consists of the operationalization of the theoretical framework. The concluding section is made up of an account of empirical material, limitations, and demarcations.

3.2 Research design

Considering that a central purpose is to provide an in-depth and thorough understanding of the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria, pursuing this aim through a case study approach are both suitable and useful (Moritz 2006:17). The choice of a case study approach corresponds to the purposes of the study since it allows for prioritization of depth before breadth (Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls 2014:66). It is also appropriate seeing as the study needs to be context-specific in order to move beyond the predominant explanation of resource scarcity (Moritz 2006:16). Other possible choices, such as including comparative cases, would mean somewhat greater transferability, but it would not automatically provide a better understanding of the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Using several cases also entail that indicators need to be more generalized in order to make credible comparisons, which consequently brings implications for the possibilities of being context specific (George & Bennett 2004:69). However, as mentioned, the choice of a case study approach has some effect on the ability to make general statements outside the specific case. Even though this criticism against case study analysis is well-founded, the choice of case and theory create possibilities to draw connections to other violent conflicts. The same reasoning lies behind combining a case study approach with the framework of *transnational conflict analysis* since this provides opportunities for gaining in-depth knowledge at the same time as enhancing the transferability of the findings. By analyzing empirical facts through this particular theoretical perspective, the study can go beyond merely describing the case and also explain context-specific observations (Toschkov 2018:234). It is also possible to argue that case-studies, in combination with a suitable and appropriate theory, can provide knowledge of the general even though it draws upon

case-specific observations (George & Bennett 2004:123-124). In this case study, the research design in combination with the theoretical framework will first and foremost mean a close reading of contextual, internal, and relational factors in Nigeria, but the observations from the study can nevertheless provide a greater understanding of other farmer-herder conflicts.

Before moving to a detailed discussion regarding the choice of the theoretical framework, the selection of case also merits some explanation. The violence between farmers and herders are increasingly becoming a threat against the political and economic stability of the whole country, and the case selection is partly based on the 'substantive, real-world importance' of the case itself (Toshkov 2018:234). Beyond that, it is also founded on its ability to contribute to the ongoing academic debate regarding the sources of violent conflicts. Going one step further regarding the study's social relevance[10], the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria also have substantive importance beyond its context. Of 120 million pastoral herdsmen globally, about 50 million are living in sub-Saharan Africa. As mentioned, violent conflicts between farmers and herdsmen are a recurring pattern in the region and many of the nomadic herdsmen are continually moving across the sovereign borders (Akinyemi et al. 2017:8). Further instability in Nigeria can also have severe regional implications seeing as the country has the largest economy on the African continent (IFAD 2019), and contains around 25 % of the entire livestock population in West and Central Africa (Akinyemi et al. 2017:8). There are hence several transnational dimensions which contribute to making the case relevant. Given that the predominant understanding of the conflict departs from the scarcity of resources, the case is consequently also suitable for contributing to the 'resource debate' discussed earlier.

Considering that the research puzzle consists of inconsistencies between the prevailing theory for explaining the conflict and empirical contradictions, the theoretical framework was selected based on its ability to make sense of those contradictions. A starting point was, therefore, to choose a theoretical framework that not only 'engaged in a two-cornered fight between a theory and an aberrant fact', but that goes beyond the predominant explanation to create a three-cornered fight between the old theory, empirical facts, and the new theory (Hancké 2010:235). Since the predominant explanation of the conflict departs from grievances due to *structural* conditions (the scarcity of resources), a fundamental selection criterion for the 'new theory' was that it would also incorporate *agency* to also shed light on human action and its influence in the conflict. More than that, it was also chosen based on the aspiration of trying to explain the 'opportunities' that have enabled the intensification of violence. Considering that previous literature from a political ecology approach points to factors such as ethnic divisions and state incapacity, the 'new theory' was also selected based on its multi-causal approach to identify several factors that create and shape violent conflicts.

However, even if the reasoning behind understanding the conflict through a multi-causal approach might seem somewhat self-evident, it is also fraught with

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[10] See 1.3 Relevance

difficulties. The approach with several interconnected factors consequently makes it difficult to weigh these against the outcome and identify the interaction between different factors (Demmers 2017:84). Since several factors might be present in any given conflict, such an approach also easily creates an analysis that is likely to confirm the theoretical bias. A mono-causal explanation of conflict might, on the other hand, seem somewhat implausible but it is often more theoretically feasible and stronger in its ability to point to a relation between cause and effect. Even so, the comprehensive perspective needed in order to make sense of the contradictions in the research puzzle makes a multi-causal approach the most appropriate for answering the research questions. The chosen framework of transnational conflict analysis is furthermore naturally corresponding to the purpose of the study since it is elaborated 'for locating the chief sources of contemporary conflict and the controversies associated with them' (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:142).

3.4   Operationalization

Given the choice of research design and theoretical framework, further clarifications are required with regards to how the empirical material will be structured and analyzed. Considering the multi-level and multi-causal approach, an appropriate start is to organize the different factors in a conceptual table;

Level of analysis	Factors
1. Global-level	*Type of conflict; Global drivers Transnational connectors*
2. Regional-level	*Complex conflict systems Intra-regional dynamics*
3. State-level	*State fragility; social sector economic sector government sector geography* *Law and order (if applicable) Security (if applicable)*
4. Identity-group	*Nature of conflict parties Intergroup dynamics*
5. Elite/Individual	*Leadership*

Figure 3.4.1 – Transnational Conflict Analysis   Source: Author

The analysis will follow the structure of the conceptual table by moving from the global to the elite/individual level of analysis. The analysis is hence divided into five sections, each containing one level of analysis. The factors will then be analyzed separately, and each level of analysis will conclude with a summary of its main findings. This structure is chosen partly as a way to manage the difficulties previously mentioned with multi-causal approaches, and partly in an attempt to provide an analysis that is clear and accessible.

How the factors will be measured also needs further elucidation. Considering the choice of an in-depth case study approach, measurement does not refer to appointing numerical values on each of the factors. According to Toshkov, operationalization in such studies can instead be done through 'linking concepts with empirical evidence that would be searched for and collected in the process of research' (2018:227). Concerning this study, this technique is pursued by searching for and analyzing empirical material and thereafter either *confirm* or *disregard* each of the factors. Each factor is hence managed as a concept, and the research process consists of gathering empirical evidence that either supports or contradicts the theoretical assumptions of each concept. As an example, the research process may not be able to link empirical evidence to social divisions and the violence between farmers and herders - meaning that the factor of *state fragility - social sector* are disregarded as playing a significant part in the conflict. The analysis may, however, find empirical data that link uneven development patterns to the violence between farmers and herders – meaning that the factor of *state fragility – economic sector* can be confirmed as significantly influencing the conflict. The research process is hence characterized by an exploratory perspective since it is conducted with an open-mindedness that the factors cannot be confirmed (Stebbins 2001:8). It should also be mentioned that the approach to *confirm* or *disregard* each factor is a course of action chosen on the part of the author, and not something inherent in transnational conflict analysis.

To avoid that links between empirical evidence and factors are perceived as arbitrary or biased, further explanation is necessary regarding the research process and indicators for each factor. Before initiating the research process, the assumptions underlying each factor was rephrased into working hypotheses that guided the collection and analysis of empirical material. What this means is that the factors were interpreted in a way that connected them to the research questions. As an example; *State fragility in the social sector is a root cause behind the recurring violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria.* Following the assumptions underlying each factor, indicators are then used to either confirm or disregard each factor. While the working hypotheses are not expressly spelled out in the analysis, it becomes clear under each level of analysis what empirical evidence that either support or contradict the assumptions of each factor. In combination with empirical material that concerns the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria, links between empirical evidence and factors will be further strengthened by drawing on previous research and similar cases. Relating to the operationalization is also the

collection and utilization of empirical material, which are elucidated in the following section.

3.3   Empirical material, limitations & demarcations

Ramsbotham et al. (2016), provides useful guidance on suitable empirical material and how to assess the factors within a *transnational conflict analysis*. The interdisciplinary nature of the framework means that an appropriate approach is to utilize several different kinds of sources and to combine both qualitative and quantitative data (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:68-108). In following this guidance, the empirical foundation of the case study is created from both primary and secondary sources. Relevant empirical data will be derived from official sources and include documents from government entities, non-governmental organizations, and policy-making agencies. Beyond such qualitative material, quantitative data will be gathered from recognized sources such as the *Global Terrorism Index*, *OECD*, *UNHCR,* and the *GROW^{up} Project* (ETH Zürich). The purpose of incorporating that kind of material is to make the analysis more credible and robust by presenting data such as degree of violence, state fragility, amounts of displaced, or ethnic tensions. In addition, the case study will include empirical material from books, articles, and journals. The intention of including such supplementary sources is to link the analysis to previous research in an attempt to strengthen credibility and enhance academical relevance (Teorell & Svensson 2007:274, Bjereld et al. 2009:21).

The broad approach in research design, theoretical framework, and empirical material entail specific challenges that require methodological responses. One challenge relates to replication since intermingling between some factors might bring a skewed conclusion; i.e., the same material might be used to link empirical evidence to more than one factor. A second challenge to consider is the amount and kind of material required in order to claim credible links between empirical evidence and each factor. A third challenge revolves around selection bias seeing as the theoretical framework will point the analysis in a certain direction, which ultimately might mean that conflicting material can be overlooked or missed (Vromen 2010:262). These challenges will be partly managed by aiming to link empirical evidence from several sources before claiming any convergence (Yin 2016:160-161). In regards to selecting and utilizing different empirical material, the study will assess material on the following four criteria before its incorporated in the analysis (elaborated by Scott 1990):

1. Authenticity (origins, recognized authorship, internal consistency);
2. Credibility (accuracy, reliability);
3. Representativeness (typical vs. 'untypical, inclusion vs. exclusion);
4. Meaning (clarity, comprehensibility, social/political context) (Vromen 2010:262-263).

Such an assessment hence creates an appropriate justification for the inclusion of empirical material in the analysis. It is also necessary considering the presence of biased reporting that surrounds the conflict between farmers and herders (ICG 2018:14). In trying to avoid that conflicting material are overlooked during the research process, the collection of material will furthermore follow what Stebbins argue are essential to an explorative perspective, namely to approach data collection 'with two special orientations: flexibility in looking for data and open-mindedness about where to find them' (2001:5). In a practical sense, that means to be willing to present empirical evidence that contradicts with the assumptions in the theoretical framework.

It is also necessary to discuss the study's demarcations. The theoretical framework together with the chosen research design creates a far-reaching approach that somewhat limits the study's ability to be situated in a particular time and space. Seeing as the theoretical framework, for instance, draws on historical reasons (such as ethnic domination) for violent conflicts, it would be to divert from the framework to not include such aspects in the analysis. Considering that the conflict has lasted for several decades, it would furthermore be misleading not to discuss how earlier events might have shaped what is happening now. The question then revolves around how far back in history that something ought to have happened to be linked to the present violence between farmers and herders. Unfortunately, there is no course of action in the demarcation that is not in some way arbitrary. That being said, the analysis is not only aimed at understanding the root causes of the conflict, but also the intensification of the violence. The overall intention is, therefore, to depart from as recent empirical material as possible and primarily use sources that explain the development in Nigeria since the transition to a civilian government in 1999. The reasoning behind choosing the period after 1999 is because several factors concern the nature and action of the state authorities, making it appropriate to primarily focus on the democratic period where ethnic and religious factions have had more equal access to power. However, the analysis will at the same time follow the theoretical framework and consider factors that entail a more stretched perspective – but only if it in some way are believed to have influenced the violence between farmers and herders.

4   Analysis

4.1   Background

Considering the comprehensiveness of the theoretical framework, providing a lengthy account of the conflict's context would easily become redundant. However, some initial points should be made to make the analysis more accessible.

Nigeria achieved independence in 1960 and the following decades was characterized by civil war, military rule, and coups. In 1999, Nigeria went through a peaceful transition to a civilian government and has now experienced several successful elections. The election held in early 2019 gave renewed confidence to the All Progressive Congress (APC) and President Muhammed Buhari, which formed a government in 2015 after defeating Goodluck Jonathan from the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Nigeria's land mass is about 920 000 square kilometers, roughly twice as large as Sweden, providing relatively vast land resources for agriculture and industrial activities (Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko 2018:38). Its geography is characterized by significant variations between different ecological zones, especially between the arid regions in the north and the humid parts of the south (Akinyemi & Olaniyan 2017:7). Since the 1970s, the Nigerian economy has been dependent on its revenues from exporting oil, making it both volatile and in need of diversification (Dimelu et al. 2016:147). Nigeria's population has increased rapidly in the last decades and grown almost fourfold, from 57 million people in 1963 to 198 million people in 2018 (ICG 2018:4, Amnesty 2018:14). The population is one of the most ethnically diverse in the world (Blench 2003:2) and consists of several hundred ethnic groups. The following figure shows the largest ethnic groups and their relative size;

Ethnic Group	Proportional size
Hausa-Fulani[11]	0.29
Yoruba	0.21
Igbo (Ibo)	0.18
Ijaw	0.10
Tiv	0.025
Other	0.19

Figure 4.1.1 – Largest ethnic groups in Nigeria   Source: EPR 2018:1294

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[11] The Hausa and Fulani are two ethnic groups referred to as one, based on cultural adaption and similar political goals (EPR 2018:1276). The ethnic group of Fulani makes up roughly 6.3 % of the total population (CIA 2019).

While roughly 52 % in Nigeria are Muslims and primarily live in the northern regions of the country, about 47 % of the population adheres to Christianity and mainly live in the south of Nigeria (CIA 2019).

As mentioned previously, violent clashes between farmers and herders are neither a new phenomenon nor unique to Nigeria (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin 2018:6). Similar conflicts are present in several countries across West Africa and nearby states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic (Bagu & Smith 2017:7). Even though several studies point to a history of 'symbiotic relationships' between farmers and herders where they shared resources such as land and water (Ducrotoy et al. 2018:3, Li 2018:1), virtually all states have in recent years experienced violent clashes (Idakwoji et al. 2018:593). The majority of violent clashes has occurred in the Middle Belt[12] of Nigeria, which is located between the herder regions of the north and the farming areas of the south (ICG 2018:1). The most common ethnic group involved with herder activities are the Fulani, which owns about 90 % of the total livestock population in Nigeria (Ndubuisi 2018:1, Muhammed et al. 2015:23-24). The labels of 'herder' and 'Fulani' are therefore often used interchangeably and viewed as synonymous (Moritz 2006:23). The following analysis will primarily refer to the more general term of 'herders' while using 'Fulani' only in those cases it is deemed necessary.
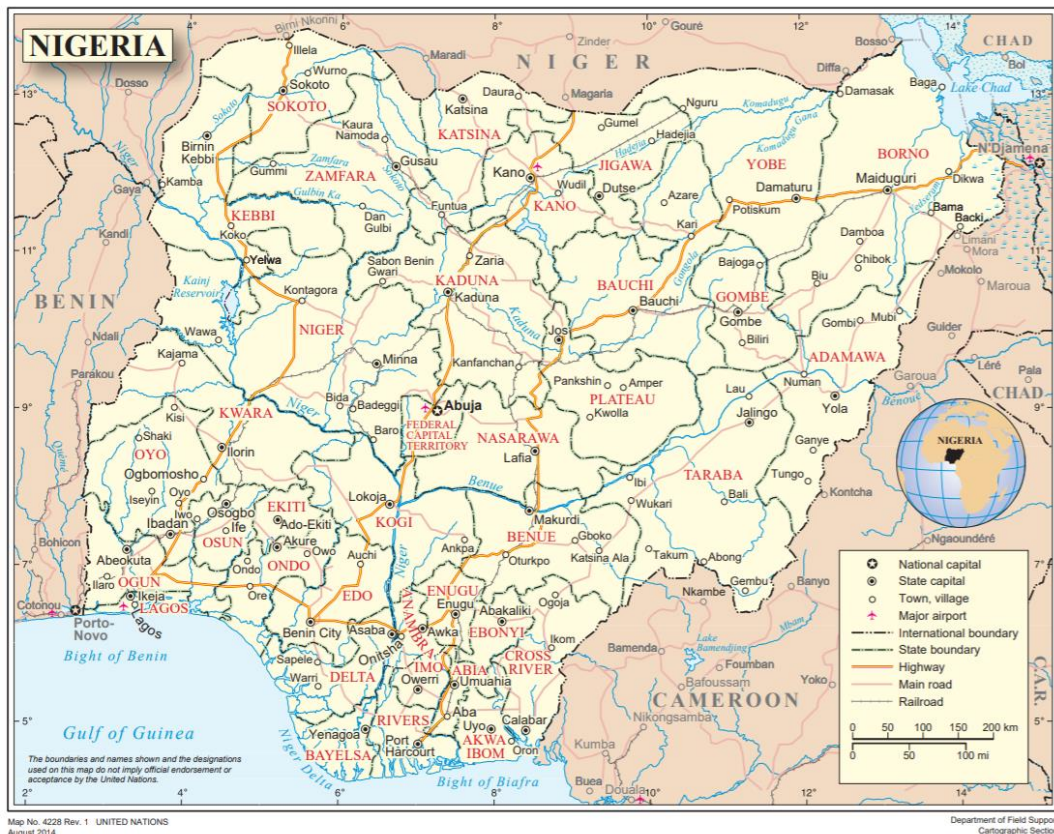

Figure 4.1.2 – Map of Nigeria   Source: UN GIS (2019)

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[12] 'The Middle Belt' is made up by states in the central region of Nigeria, broadly meaning Niger, Kwara, Kogi, Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau (ICG 2018:1).

4.2   Global-level

1. Global-level	*Type of conflict; Global drivers*
	Transnational connectors

Type of conflict

At the global level of analysis, the first point of departure is to identify what characterizes the violence between farmers and herders in order to understand the *type of conflict*. However, the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the conflict makes it difficult to categorize the violence into a particular ideal type. Those that emphasize a competition of scarce resources would probably view it as being primarily an *economic/resource conflict* (Akinyemi & Olaniyan 2017), while those that argue for an emphasis on ethnic and religious divisions might primarily see the violence as an *identity/secession conflict* (Amusan et al. 2017:40). Some, such as Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko (2018), argues that the violence by Fulani herders are a part of an ongoing challenge against the Nigerian state, meaning that the violence can also be seen as a *revolution/ideology conflict*. None of the ideal types can hence adequately capture all of the various aspects of the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria. It furthermore means that it is likely that several of the connected *global drivers* of conflict are shaping the violence and the context in which it is played out.

Global drivers

The *global driver of the north-south economic divide* can, for instance, work as a backdrop to understanding the economic fragility at the state-level[13]. Although being categorized as resource-rich due to its large amounts of oil (OECD 2018:77), roughly 46.5 % of Nigeria's population is living in extreme poverty (World Poverty 2019). Not only is that the highest number of impoverished people in the world but the amount of extremely poor people is also steadily rising (Vanguard 2018b). Considering the vast wealth carried by the billionaires in Nigeria, there is no doubt that the large gap between the ultra-rich and extreme poor contributes to making Nigeria rank as the least equal country in the world (Oxfam 2018). Rather than lifting the country from poverty, the discovery of oil has contributed to political instability, corruption and the deterioration of other sectors (Akov 2017:294, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:9, Dimelu et al. 2016:147). Following transnational conflict analysis, the unequal allocation of resources can be understood as stemming from the capitalistic system that fosters an economic development that preserves the status quo and maintains dependency on oil revenues. According to OECD, natural resources continue to be the primary driver of foreign direct investments (FDI) in fragile countries. In 2016, Nigeria received as much as 8 % of all FDI towards fragile contexts, with only Egypt absorbing a more significant share (OECD

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[13] Further discussed under 4.4 – State level.

2018:176). Even if FDI should not be seen as purely negative, the continued focus on oil contributes to maintaining an economic development that increases the gap between the rich and the poor.

In turn, the *global driver of a discrepancy between state system and distribution of people* can enhance our understanding of the underlying causes behind the social divisions found in Nigerian society. According to Blench, 'Nigeria is the third most ethnically and linguistically diverse country in the world, after New Guinea and Indonesia' (2003:2). More than that, the significant variations between the ethnic groups in size, education, resources and access to power makes the 'ethnic situation perhaps the most complicated in Africa' (Osimen et al. 2013:79). When the country was formed as 'Nigeria' in 1914, it was the result of the British rulers wanting to create one colony from the Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria, and the Lagos Colony (Amusan et al. 2017:37). The amalgamation of these areas meant the amalgamation of people who were ethnically, culturally, and religiously different – which worked as an advantage for the colonizers (Osimen et al. 2013:79). Beyond that, the British used divide-and-rule strategies between the ethnic groups to keep them in line, a legacy still visible today in the struggle for power between different ethnic groups (Amusan et al. 2017:37, Akov 2017:297). The heterogeneity and complex intergroup relations in Nigeria have also entailed large impacts on the ability to govern the country and created a conducive environment for conflicts (Blench 2003:2, Amusan et al. 2017:37). While not causing the violence between farmers and herders, this global driver is a necessary contextual factor that contributes to the internal challenges of governing Nigeria, something further developed under the factor of *state fragility*.

The final driver to be considered is *global ideological contestation.* It is aimed at locating if there is an underlying driver of conflict that relates to a group intending to change the kind of governance or ideological orientation, which for instance Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko (2018) argues that Fulani herders are involved in. The foundation of such arguments is that herders are a part of a campaign by powerful Hausa-Fulani individuals to dominate the central regions and spread Islam (Li 2018:5, Okeke 2014:71, Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko 2018). Similar arguments also claim connections between Fulani herders and Boko Haram. However, such statements are most commonly found from advocates that blame the violence primarily on herders and disregards attacks against herder communities (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:18). Considering that there is no substantial empirical evidence to support such statements (Idakwoji et al. 2018:597, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:8), they can also be perceived as parts of the many conspiracy theories and accusations that are present in the conflict (ICG 2018:14). Whether Fulani herders should be viewed as a group mobilized around a single cause also divide observers, and some label them as an active terrorist group and some not. According to the Global Terrorism Index, approximately 3,000 deaths can be related to terror acts performed by Fulani extremists. However, they do not argue that there is an intention of the group to change the kind of governance or ideological orientation (GTI 2018:56). Beyond that, it should also be noted that farmer and herder communities alike have created

militia groups and been victims of attacks (ICG 2018:5). The alleged linkages between Fulani herders and Boko Haram also contradict with the fact that a large number of herders in the north of Nigeria have been assaulted, robbed and displaced by the terrorist group (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:18). Considering the above, it is not credible to argue that *global ideological contestation* is a significant driver of the conflict between farmers and herders in Nigeria – even if there are differences between the conflict parties' ideological convictions.

Transnational connectors

The next factor at the global level of analysis is *transnational connectors*. More than being ethnically and linguistically diverse, there is also continuous flows of people into Nigeria from neighboring countries. As seen in the following figure, Nigeria is together with Côte d'Ivoire the primary destination to which people from West Africa emigrate;
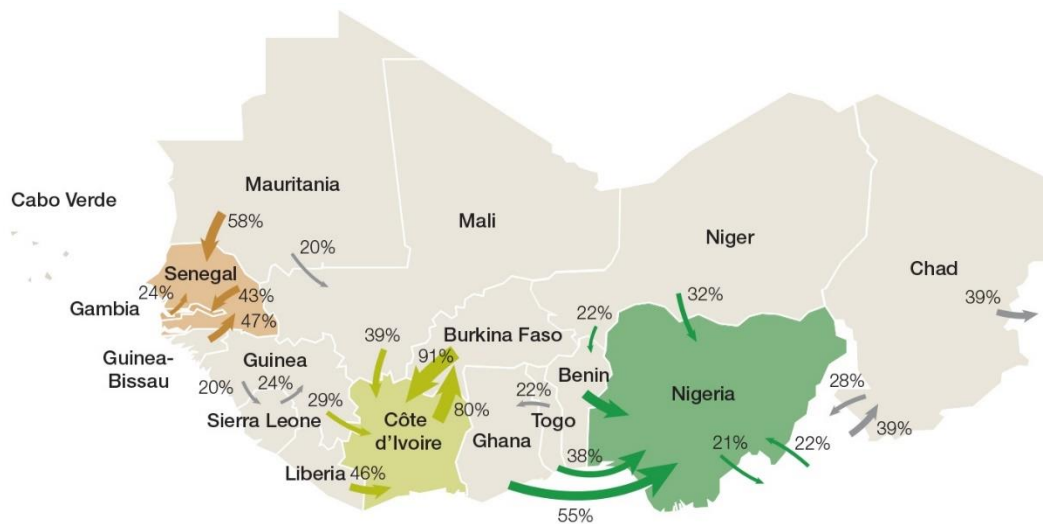
Only values greater than 20% of the emigrant workforce from each country present in the other countries of the region are represented.

Figure 4.2.1 – Emigration within West Africa (2015)   Source: West Africa Brief 2016

In 2016, roughly one million ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) nationals were officially registered as living in Nigeria, but with estimates going up to 3-4 million people (West Africa Brief 2016). That being said, there are also significant numbers of Nigerian nationals that are either IDPs (roughly 2.2 million people at the end of 2016) or that leave Nigeria to seek asylum in other countries (UNHCR 2016:6). There is also a sizeable Nigerian diaspora, visible by the fact that the country received the highest amount of remittances of all fragile countries in 2016 (OECD 2018:173). The high numbers of internally displaced people together with many immigrants, of course, contributes to the high level of poverty and need deprivation since it puts further strain on the fragile state. Such contextual factors hence also play a part in why farmers and herders basic needs

cannot be adequately accommodated, and why the government is struggling to manage the conflict.

Beyond people migrating or fleeing into, within and from Nigeria, there is also continuous flows of people and livestock across the borders because of the nomadic movement of herders, as seen in the following figure;
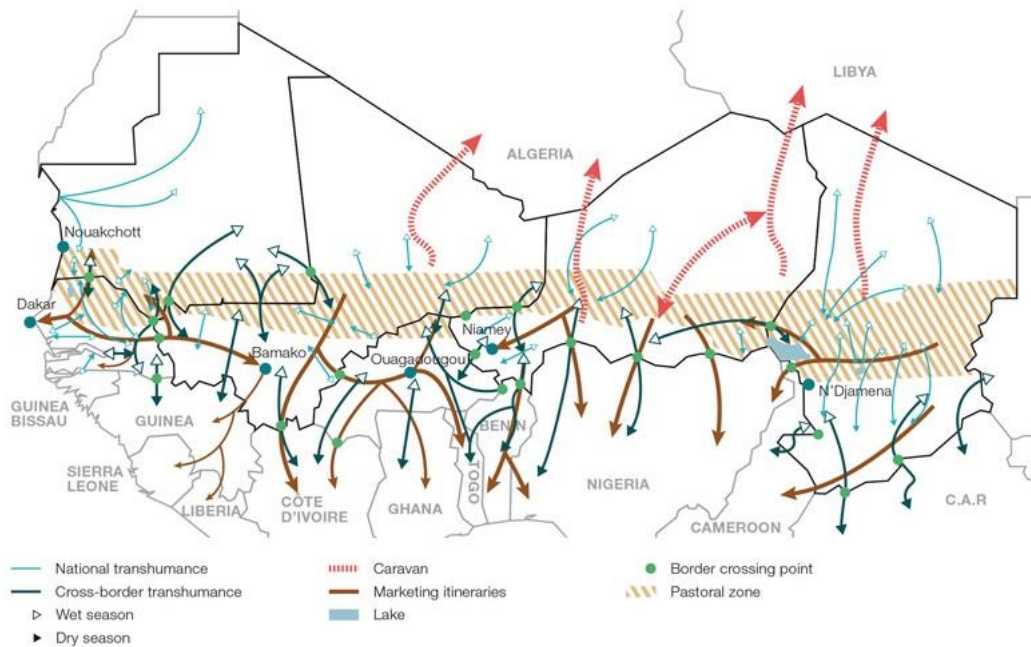

Figure 4.2.2 – Transhumance movement in West Africa   Source: OECD-SWAC 2018

Because of the porous borders, people and livestock moving across the borders are mostly uncontrolled, meaning that it is difficult to asses any exact numbers (Akinyemi & Olaniyan 2017:8). The transhumance movement [14] of herders contributes to creating the view that herders are strangers who intrude on the land where farmers perceive themselves as being indigenous (Li 2018:4, Idakwoji et al. 2018:597).

Other transborder linkages that shape the conflict between farmers and herders relates to the recent intensification of violence. Not only has there been a rapid growth of ethnic militias and community vigilante groups, but these have also been increasingly heavily armed (ICG 2018:4-5). Weapons analysis performed in villages show that militias have used military-grade weapons, most often different types of AK-rifles (Amnesty 2018:35-36). The type of weapons used in the attacks thus raises the questions of how the militias have acquired such quality arms (ICG 2018:5). According to UNREC, Nigeria's size, positions and oil wealth have made it a passing point for flows of illegal small arms and light weapons (SALW) for the entire African continent (2016:5-7). Even though there is a lack of data, roughly 70 % of the total amount of illicit SALW are believed to be in Nigeria (3-7 million). Many of the illegal weapons are brought into the country through transnational trade via ports and harbors, but also through the porous borders where there is little or no border controls (UNREC 2016:5-7). Instability in nearby countries like Mali and

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[14] Transhumance movement refers to the seasonal migration of herders.

Libya also led to an influx of SALW into Nigeria (Akov 2017:301, UNREC 2016:6), thus creating even easier access to weapons (Idakwoji et al. 2018: 598). The large numbers of arms circulating in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon and cannot alone explain the intensification of violence between farmers and herders. However, in combination with the uncertain security situation and rise of militia groups, it can to some degree explain the militancy and recent magnitude of violence.

Summary
To conclude the global level of analysis, it can be argued that several of the factors can be regarded as shaping the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria. While none of the aspects brought to light can be said to make up a root cause behind the recurring violence, some of the *global drivers* of conflict are essential contextual dimensions since they together create a conducive environment for violent conflicts. While the *global driver of north-south economic divide* can contribute to the understanding of why Nigeria is economically fragile and unequal, the *global driver of a discrepancy between state system and distribution of people* provide a similar account for understanding the deep societal divisions in Nigeria. The high levels of migration into and within Nigeria can furthermore be seen as important contextual factors for why the state is struggling to accommodate peoples' basic needs. Lastly, it can be argued that the large flows of illegal weapons through Nigeria is a significant factor in understanding the dramatic intensification of violence since it has contributed to insecurity and enabled the easy access of arms to civilians and militias.

4.3   Regional-level

2. Regional-level	*Complex conflict systems*
	Intra-regional dynamics

Complex conflict systems

At the regional level, the first factor is *complex regional conflict systems*. Roughly 42 % of the total population in West Africa are living below the poverty line (World Bank 2017:22-24), and the majority of countries are facing severe challenges when it comes to food security and armed conflicts (Ujunwa et al. 2019:182, Nwokedi et al. 2019:789). Difficulties in finding viable livelihoods and blurred distinctions between legal and illegal activities have moreover contributed to widespread criminal economies and illicit trade within the region (OECD 2018b, OECD 2012:44-45). According to OECD, it is only four countries in West Africa that are not considered as fragile contexts; Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Senegal. Mali and Chad are categorized as extremely fragile contexts, and so are several nearby states in Central Africa, such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and South Sudan (OECD 2018:85).

Considering these common structural challenges, there is no doubt that the region surrounding Nigeria have interconnected security concerns (OECD 2012:36) and can be understood as a regional security complex. Beyond structural fragility, the majority of countries in West Africa has a recent history of significant intrastate conflicts. Even if some countries have become relatively stable in recent years[15], there has been an overall upsurge in violence and conflicts since 2010. In contrast to earlier intrastate wars and large scale conflicts, the violence has instead shifted towards low-level insurgencies and terrorism (Marc et al. 2015:1, 7). Several of the states in the region are struggling with active terrorist organizations which regularly perform deadly attacks, most notably in Nigeria and Mali (Akanji 2019:95). The fragile states and interconnectivity also create a conducive environment for spillovers and diffusion of conflicts. According to Marc et al., there are several conflict systems in West Africa that pose challenges that transcend the borders of sovereign states (2015:18-19). There are, for instance, the organizations of Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb who are creating insecurity for the whole region (Atanga 2018:207, OECD 2012:43). Another example is militias from Nigeria's Delta region that are creating insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea, particularly affecting Benin and Togo (Marc et al. 2015:21). Violence between farmers and herders are, as mentioned, also found in several countries in West Africa and Central Africa (Bagu & Smith 2017:7).

There are several regional organizations established to promote peace and cooperation around the challenges of trade, poverty, and food security. There are,

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[15] Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone has, for instance, transitioned from war to peace (Marc et al. 2015:1).

for instance, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU/UEMOA), and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILLS) (Nwokedi et al. 2019:777);
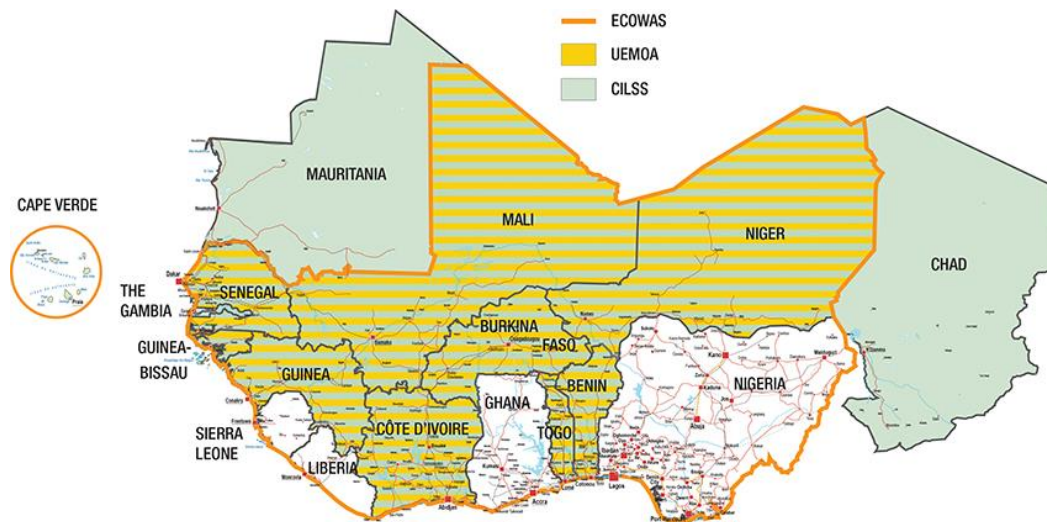

Figure 4.3.1 – Regional Organizations West Africa   Source: OECD-SWAC 2015

It is thus possible to understand West Africa as a security regime where multilateral institutions have been established to lower collective insecurities. However, as seen in figure 4.3.1, Nigeria is only a member of ECOWAS. The multilateral institution was founded in 1995 to promote economic integration and development, but its mandate has since then grown also to include security concerns (Akanji 2019:100-101). Even though the institution was founded on the principle of non-interference, the expansion of its mandate became natural seeing as economic development is dependent on a stable and secure environment (Agbo et al. 2018:19). However, despite its efforts, the member states of ECOWAS have been unable to create stability within the region (OECD 2012:36).

According to Akanji, the efforts by ECOWAS have been constrained by two factors. For one is the ability and willingness of the member states to honor its agreements and commitments. This must, of course, be understood in the light of the fragile contexts and financial constraints of the member states (Akanji 2019:104), since such factors consequently affect the members' ability to contribute to the function of the institution (Agbo et al. 2018:30). The second factor is the international political environment in which ECOWAS needs to operate, such as its relation to the African Union (AU) and the UN. Since ECOWAS needs to seek the approval of these overarching security structures, it creates legitimacy problems and hampers the institution's ability to act efficiently in regards to security enforcement (Akanji 2019:105). The fragility of the member states has furthermore made ECOWAS dependent on support from the international community to perform security operations (Agbo et al. 2018:30).

The question is how the structural challenges in the region, distribution of conflicts, and efforts to create a security regime is shaping the violence between

farmers and herders in Nigeria. The violence between farmers and herders in several countries in combination with the transhumance movement across borders entails that it is more than just a Nigerian concern. It is, therefore, possible to argue that the need deprivation of farmers and herders are impossible to separate from the levels of poverty, widespread criminality, and fragile contexts in the region. The insecurity that characterizes the north of Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Mali, can furthermore be viewed as one factor explaining why herders are migrating to the south of Nigeria. Even if the region can be described as a security regime, it is clear that multilateral institutions like ECOWAS have been unable to create a stable and secure environment due to the fragile contexts of its member states. West Africa can be described as caught in a loop of fragility where governments struggle to govern their sovereign territories as well as forming a pluralistic security community to eradicate collective insecurities. Ultimately, it creates a region prone to violent conflicts – just as the one between farmers and herders in Nigeria.

Intra-regional dynamics
The instability and fragility of the region (OECD 2012:50) is also related to the factor of *intra-regional dynamics*. The question here revolves around if regional instability and fragility can be argued to have influenced the conflict. For one it can explain the *transnational connectors* at the global level since it can explain the flows of people emigrating to Nigeria, further enhancing population pressure and straining available resources. It can also to some degree explain the enhanced militancy found with conflict parties (Idakwoji et al. 2018: 598) since instability in nearby countries like Mali and Libya led to an influx of SALW into Nigeria (Akov 2017:301, UNREC 2016:6). When considering *intra-regional dynamics,* one must also take into account the transhumance movement of the herders since it means that they frequently cross the borders within West Africa. This relates to the *discrepancy between state borders and the geographical distribution of people* since the Fulani are fundamentally divided by sovereign borders. Even if the Fulani is a relatively small ethnic group in Nigeria (6.3 % of the total population), the Fulani are the largest pastoral group in West Africa with significant populations in Guinea, Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Niger, and Burkina Faso (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:9). Even if the distribution of Fulani together with their transhumance movement can be seen as both outwards influence ('contagion', 'spillover', 'diffusion'), and inwards influence ('influence', 'intervention', 'interference') – the research process has not been able to identify any empirical evidence that point towards a connection between kin groups and the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria. Even if farmer and herder conflicts are present in several countries across Africa, it is not possible to identify a specific area where they started. Rather, these 'ancient' conflicts seem to have been a longstanding feature all over the region (Moritz 2006:2-3).

Summary

The regional level of analysis is primarily pointing towards the widespread insecurity and fragility that is characterizing West Africa. While it is possible to locate several *complex conflict systems* within the region, the distribution of conflicts does not seem to have created nor significantly shaped the violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria. However, the failed attempts to create a pluralistic security community to eradicate collective insecurities can be said to contribute to an environment where social groups need to struggle to survive, which ultimately may lead to violent conflicts. Neither does the factor of *intra-regional dynamics* make any significant contributions in understanding the root causes or dynamics of the conflict, even if it does provide an explanatory context regarding the *transnational connectors* that were brought up at the global level of analysis.

4.4 State-level

3. State-level	*State fragility;* *social sector* *economic sector* *government sector* *geography* *Law and order (if applicable)* *Security (if applicable)*

At the state level, it is possible to discern several factors that link *state fragility* with the increased violence between farmers and herders. According to OECD, Nigeria is one of 27 chronically fragile states in the world[16], being somewhat fragile in every dimension they measure[17] (2018:26). However, it would be an overstatement to argue that the violence grows out of a disintegration of the state, or that the conflict has escalated into a struggle for the state itself. Consequently, the factors of *law and order* and *security* are not applicable in the conflict between farmers and herders. Even so, it is possible to discern several 'internal challenges to government' (Collier 2008:17) that trap Nigeria in a state of fragility and impede its ability to manage the violence between the farmers and herders.

Social sector

State fragility is, for instance, present within the *social sector*. As previously mentioned, Nigeria is a 'heterogeneous state' with complex divisions along ethnic, religious, and regional lines (Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko 2018:41). As observed in several postcolonial contexts, deeply divided states with complex social divisions tend to suffer from continuous fragility and instability because of inherent difficulties to cooperate and govern (Akov 2017:295). Even though politics have become increasingly multi-ethnic in Nigeria, social 'belonging' continues to be central for understanding the political life and electoral competition for political power have repeatedly increased social divisions (EPR 2018:1283, OECD 2018:44). Demarcations between farmers and herders are furthermore following these same social divisions between ethnicity, religion, and regions (ICG 2018:14).

Because of the different ecological zones in Nigeria, herders have traditionally been active in the northern regions, as seen in the following map over production systems in West Africa;

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[16] The OECD *States of Fragility* report have provided the current state of fragility in the world since 2008. Since its inception, 75 countries and contexts have been considered fragile at least once. 27 are considered chronically fragile, meaning that they have appeared in every report since 2008.
[17] OECD measures fragility in the following sectors: political, societal, economic, environmental, and security.
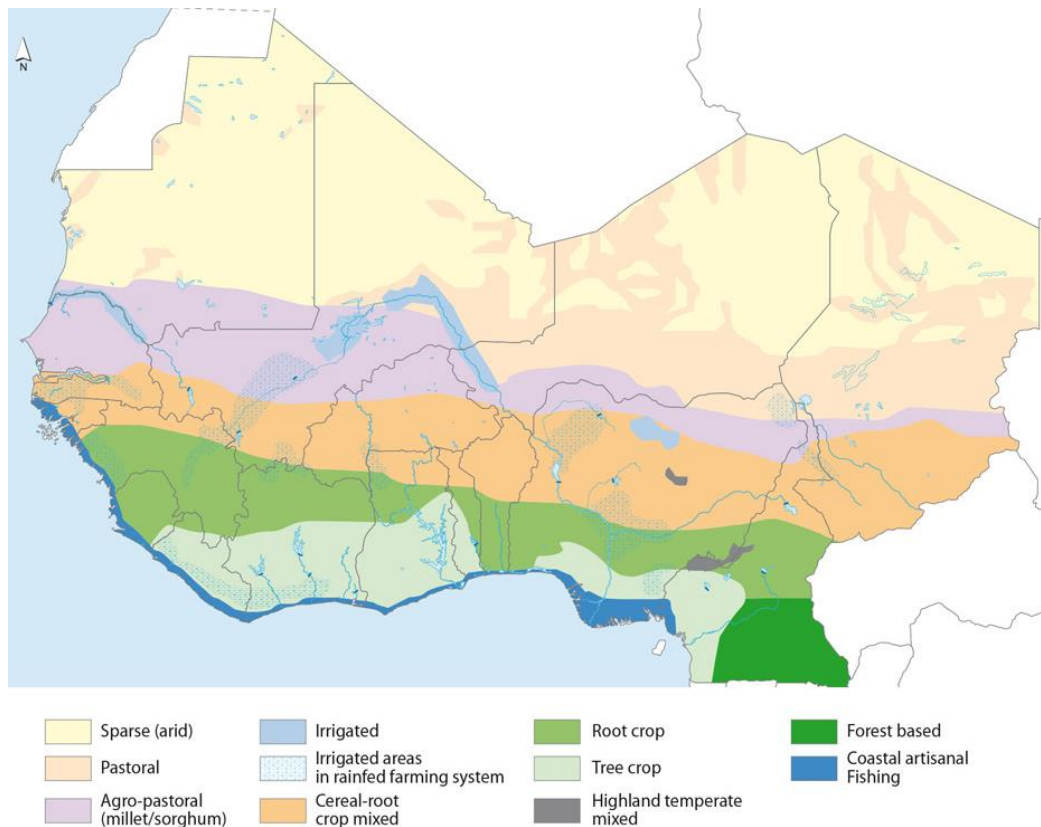
Figure 4.4.1 Production systems in West Africa   Source: OECD-SWAC 2019

Herders have for centuries followed the variability of seasons, migrating south on traditional routes during the dry season and then back north when the wet season arrives (Akov 2017:294-295). However, herders have increasingly migrated further and further south (Akinyemi & Olaniyan 2017:8). This migration has several reasons (ICG 2017:3). For one, it is the fewer days of rainfall and increased desertification in the northern regions that creates a harsher environment (Bagu & Smith 2017:15). The advancements of animal medicine have also made it easier for the herders' livestock to survive in the humid regions than they have been able to before (Ofuoku & Isife 2009:047). There is moreover the widespread insecurity that characterizes the northern regions (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:17-18), with the Boko Haram insurgency, rural banditry, and criminal cattle rustling (ICG 2018:4). The widespread insecurity in the north has also meant more lucrative markets in the south of the country (Olaniyan & Okeke-Uzodike 2015:27).

Herders' migration can, therefore, be discerned as a factor explaining why they are clashing with the predominately Christian farmers that reside in the central and southern regions (Akinyemi & Olaniyan 2017:16-17). Typically, such an understanding is based on the assumption that the migration leads to a competition for environmental resources. Since the migration is believed to have increased, it can also answer the question of why the violence has intensified. However, it is also possible to argue that the migration in itself does not explain the violence, especially considering that that farmers and herders in some areas have a history of peaceful coexistence with symbiotic relationships (Amnesty 2018:11, Bagu & Smith 2017:8, Ducrotoy et al. 2018:3, Li 2018:1). While the pressure on resources has increased,

agriculture and herding activities are neither necessarily mutually exclusive since they use land during different seasons (Moritz 2006:5). Some would also argue that the scarcity of resources explanation is 'unhelpful' considering that roughly 46 % of all arable land in Nigeria is uncultivated (Adisa & Adekunle 2010:1, Akov 2017:300). Although competition of scarce resources is a vital factor in understanding the violence, it must not automatically lead to an intensification of farmer-herder conflicts. Some areas with fewer resources suffer from less violence (such as regions in the Sahel), while some areas with a relative abundance of resources have more conflicts (Moritz 2006:7). From that follows that the migration in itself cannot adequately explain what is causing the violence or the recent intensification. Correlations between social divisions and the violence is furthermore dividing the literature, and some argue that identities such as ethnicity and religion are not a significant factor in the conflict (Idakwoji et al. 2018:604, Bagu & Smith 2017:5), while others claim the contrary (Amusan et al. 2017:40, Akov 2017:297).

However, it is not social divisions that create violent conflicts but rather if an identity group perceive themselves as being politically disadvantaged or dominated. Beyond the three largest ethnic groups of Hausa-Fulani[18], Yoruba, and Igbo, three additional minority groups can be considered as 'politically relevant'[19]; Ijaw, Ogoni, and Tiw (EPR 2018:1276). These six groups make up roughly 70 % of Nigeria's population, while the remaining 30 % of the population is smaller ethnic groups (CIA 2019, EPR 2018:1294). Since the transition to a civilian government in 1999, there has been a form of power sharing between the three largest ethnic groups. There have also been several transfers of power between political parties and recurrent shifts among the highest positions in the executive government (Girardin et al. 2017). Political parties and governments have moreover been increasingly multi-ethnic (EPR 2018:1282-1285), meaning that neither of the large ethnic groups has been politically dominated or disadvantaged since 1999 (Girardin et al. 2017). The remaining ethnic groups are not considered as having any significant political power, but this seems dependent on their relatively small size rather than conscious exclusion or discrimination (Girardin et al. 2017, EPR 2018). Even if such domination or disadvantages exist, the analysis of empirical material does not point towards any widespread political discrimination based on social divisions, which probably is due to the existence of a multi-ethnic civilian government.

Even if no group has been politically dominated, the social divisions have created fragility in the sense that there have been difficulties to reach an agreement on how to manage the conflict (Amnesty 2018:40). Although there have been several attempts to create legislative solutions at the government level, with for

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[18] The Hausa and Fulani are two different ethnic groups that sometimes are combined into one politically relevant group, based on cultural similarities and coherent political goals at the national level (EPR 2018:1276).

[19] According to Girardin et al. (2017), politically relevant groups means having representatives making political claims for a specific ethnic group, or those groups which have been singled out by the state through discrimination.

instance grazing routes or reserves, these have seldom made it through because of the divisions between politicians (Amusan et al. 2017:38-39). The different opinions on how to manage the conflict have been divided by politicians' ethnic, religious, and regional belonging, and most propositions have been considered as favoring either farmers or herders (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:15, Akov 2017:301, Bagu & Smith 2017:21). There is, thus, 'mutual mistrust and animosity' that can be linked to the social divisions between farmers and herders (Chukwuma & Atelhe 2014:84). These differences are furthermore visible by the fact that several states[20] have implemented anti-grazing laws (Amnesty 2018:40). The enactment of these laws has been followed by strong opposition by herders which intend to continue with open grazing practices (Ajibo et al. 2018:162). Consequently, the prohibitions against open grazing have resulted in even more tensions. They have also contributed to the influx of herders into nearby states like Nasarawa, with heightened tensions and increased violence in those states as well (ICG 2018:8, 11).

Fragility in the *social sector* can thus be linked to the conflict between farmers and herders in several ways. Not only are farmers and herders divided by different occupational cultures but also typically along ethnic, religious, and regional fault lines. Since these social divisions is a vital part of understanding the conflict between farmers and herders[21], it is argued that the migration south by herders can explain the onset of conflicts as well as the recent intensification of violence. More than that, deep social divisions have contributed to state fragility by creating difficulties for the government to find solutions. While not causing the conflict, such internal challenges can be seen to have enabled the intensification of violence since it has meant little government action.

Economic sector
In the *economic sector,* the Nigerian state can be considered fragile in the sense that it is incapable of accommodating people's basic needs – creating need deprivation and a fear of survival with both farmer and herders (Oyedokun & Lawal 2017:61, Bagu & Smith 2017:15). In 2018, Nigeria surpassed India in being the country in the world with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty (Vanguard 2018b), amounting to roughly 91.5 million people in 2019 (46.5 % of the total population). Nigeria is also one of the countries where poverty is steadily rising (World Poverty 2019). According to OECD, Nigeria has experienced considerable improvements in its economic sector by, for instance, moving to the category of a lower middle-income country (2018:26), and by decreasing the resource rent dependence (2018:89). These improvements have mainly been possible by the fact that Nigeria is categorized as 'resource-rich' because of the access to oil (OECD 2018:77).

It is also possible to link Nigeria's access to oil to 'uneven development patterns' (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:9, Oyedokun & Lawal 2017:61). Even if large amounts of natural resources can serve as catalysts for lasting change, being

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[20] The law has taken effect in the states if Benue, Ekiti, and Taraba (Ajibo et al. 2018:162).
[21] Reasoning further developed under the following sub-section; 4.5 Identity-group.

resource-rich often tends to be a curse in fragile states with weak institutional capacities (African Development Bank 2016:109). Countries with a high dependency on natural resources are often less democratic, experience higher levels of corruption, and have a lower quality of public services (Crivelli & Gupta 2014:88). In 2018, Nigeria was ranked as being highly corrupt with a total CPI[22] score of 27 out of maximum 100 (Transparency International 2018). Being resource rich and with high levels of corruption tend to be followed by weak tax systems (OECD 2019:194), and in Nigeria, the ratio of tax revenues to GDP is significantly lower relative to peer countries[23] (IMF 2018:5).

The prioritization on oil revenues has not only resulted in mismanagement and corruption but also a deterioration of other sectors, such as the sector for agriculture (Oyedokun & Lawal 2017:61, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:9). Before the discovery of oil, the agricultural sector produced enough commodities to feed Nigeria and to export excesses. Today, Nigeria is dependent on importing essential commodities to feed its population (Dimelu et al. 2016:147). The historical focus on oil has created a resource-dependent economy with little diversification, making it both uneven and volatile (Akov 2017:294, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:9, Dimelu et al. 2016:147). This has led to a nationwide promotion of agriculture in order to diversify the state's revenues (Ajibo et al. 2018:158). In particular, there is a focus on subsistence farming, which has meant an uneven allocation of resources between farmers and herders (Amusan et al. 2017:38). As an example, 370 boreholes were appropriated in the area of Riyom, but only two were located in communities with a majority of Fulani herders (Bagu & Smith 2017:10). Little respect has also, in some cases, been taken to traditional grazing routes when creating new infrastructure (Amnesty 2018:15). Herders have therefore been forced to move their livestock through this infrastructure, consequently creating tensions and conflicts (Bagu & Smith 2017:15). According to Moritz, African states do, in general, tend to favor the development of agriculture over pastoral herding (2006:18). In Nigeria, this is visible by the focus on subsistence farming but also through the fact that herders have little legal access to land and typically have to seek the permission of traditional local authorities (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:9).

It is hence possible to locate both high absolute levels of underdevelopment and uneven development patterns in Nigeria. Considering that farmers and herders express a fear of their livelihood and survival (Ubelejit 2016:30, Bagu & Smith 2017:15), it is not far fetched to assume that the need deprivation is linked to the incapability of the state to accommodate their basic needs. The need deprivation can hence be linked as a root cause behind the recurring violence between farmers and herders. According to Chukwuma & Atelhe, it is also this very fear of survival that explains the high levels of violence between the conflict parties (2014:80). Since

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[22] CPI - Corruption Perceptions Index, indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). In 2018, Nigeria ranked as number 144 out of 180 countries (Transparency International 2018).
[23] Tax-to-GDP ratio is widely used measurement of tax systems. In 2016, Nigeria had the lowest revenue ratio at 5.3 % of GDP compared to similar countries (average revenue ratio in the sample was 22 % of GDP) (IMF 2018:5).

the number of extremely poor people is steadily rising, it is thereby also possible to link the economic fragility to the intensification of violence.

Government sector

In the *government sector*, fragility is prevalent in Nigeria in the sense of a weak state power which struggles under the pressure of scarce resources and multiple security threats[24]. Some even go as far as claiming a current governance crisis because of the state's inability to tackle the widespread poverty and infrastructural decay (Akov 2017:298), while others rather view the Nigerian state as 'fragile and overstretched' (Bagu & Smith 2017:16). However, it can be noted that Nigeria has experienced substantial improvements over the last couple of years with increased control over its territories and a decrease in the public perception of corruption and political terror (OECD 2018:89). The fragility of the *government sector* should furthermore be understood in the light of the internal challenges mentioned previously, as being a deeply divided state with high levels of absolute underdevelopment.

Nevertheless, the fragility of the *government sector* must not automatically lead to violent clashes between farmers and herders. The critical aspect is rather how the government have tried to manage grievances and resentment connected to need deprivation. Most government responses to manage the conflict between farmers and herders have been reactive and perceived as favoring either side (Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko 2018:43), which is, as mentioned above, linked to the profound social divisions between politicians (Bagu & Smith 2017:16). The government's main action to address the conflict between farmers and herders is the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP), which was approved in January 2019. The NLTP is a broad 10-year plan aimed at ending the violence as well as develop the livestock sector, and the idea is to transform the traditional way of grazing livestock by creating ranches with grazing reserves (Amnesty 2018:39). The plan will begin with pilot projects in several states, including some of the most affected ones in the Middle Belt. However, earlier attempts at creating ranches and grazing reserves have been met with fierce opposition where farmers question why the government should appropriate land for herders (Ducrotoy 2018:13, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:15). It is also uncertain if herders are willing to adjust to ranching instead of their traditional practices. Some of the states that will host pilot projects, such as Benue (Amnesty 2018:40), is also the very states that have implemented open grazing prohibitions (Ajibo et al. 2018:162). Whether those states are welcoming these projects and how the implementation will play out thus remain to be seen.

Beyond government responses to manage the conflict by legislative solutions, it is also clear that state authorities have been unable to manage the security situation between (Chukwuma et al. 2014:83, Ndubuisi 2018:5). Several

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[24] Most notable are the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-east, widespread criminality and politically motivated violence in the oil-rich South, election violence and high levels of banditry (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:16).

observers claim that security forces have been unresponsive to warnings of imminent attacks and even left areas when attacks began (Bagu & Smith 2017:17, ICG 2018:7, Ducrotoy et al. 2018:11, Amnesty 2018:54). According to ICG, this is simply because the security forces do not have the capacity to secure the remote and rural areas where the attacks usually happen (2018:22). In addition to that, there are also reports which state that security forces have been aiding attackers and performed violations of their own (Amnesty 2018:57-60, Bagu & Smith 2017:17). Weak institutional capacity has also meant that few perpetrators have been arrested and prosecuted for crimes related to the conflict, which has fostered a culture of impunity and violence (Akov 2017:298, Chukwuma et al. 2014:83). The inability to manage the security situation together with the widespread impunity has eroded peoples' trust in government and contributed to increased polarization (ICG 2018:15, Bagu & Smith 2017:17).

The fragile *government sector* can probably explain why Akinyemi and Olaniyan found that farmers strategies to address conflicts with herders was primarily 'traditional authority' (37.5 %) and 'self-defense' (30 %), while only one out of ten recoursed to state authorities (2017:15). The traditional authorities[25] have a long tradition of being influential in Nigerian society, which thereby also explain the low trust in the state (Dimelu et al. 2016:152). However, it can be noted that some argue that traditional authorities have become increasingly compromised and corrupt (Akov 2017:297, ICG 2017:6, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:17). Findings by Adisa & Adekunle even points towards a break down of the traditional authorities (2010:7). If this is accurate, it might mean that farmers and herders do not perceive any possible institutions to channel their grievances. Consequently, self-defense and violence might be perceived as the only solution to their concerns.

Transnational conflict analysis mean that government fragility is a source of conflict if; a communal group has managed to capture state power permanently, an authoritarian regime block access to and exploit state power, or where the state power disintegrates under the pressure of scarce resources and an untenable security situation (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:131). As have been stated earlier, neither of the identity groups dominate state power, nor is the Nigerian state an authoritarian regime. Instead, fragility in the government sector can be linked to weak institutional capacity and an escalating security situation. Even if the violence is not emerging from a disintegration of the state, the weak and fragile state authority have made farmers and herders perceive violence as the only solution to deal with their need deprivation (ICG 2017:6). This is further exaggerated if communities also perceive traditional authorities as unreliable in settling disputes. The fragility in the government sector can also be linked to the intensification of violence since the state authorities have been unable to stop imminent attacks and prosecute perpetrators (ICG 2018:8, Ndubuisi 2018:5), which has eroded the trust in state authorities and created a culture of impunity (Dimelu et al. 2016:152).

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[25] Such as chiefs, elders, village heads or councils (Dimelu et al. 2016:152).

Geography

As seen in the government sector, *state fragility* is also related to the factor of *geography,* since governance and state authority is even weaker in the remote rural areas (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:9, ICG 2018:22). The lack of state presence in rural areas can thus explain why both farmers and herders perceive the state to support the other side of the conflict (Amnesty 2018:65), and why actors in the conflict rather turn to traditional authorities or self-defense (Akinyemi & Olaniyan 2017). The geographic context can also to some degree explain why it is so difficult for the government to find solutions to the conflict. Since Nigeria contains such significant ecological differences between its regions, there is no single adaption scheme or legislative solution that could apply to the whole country (Amusan et al. 20017:38).

Summary

In drawing the findings together, it is possible to argue that *state fragility* can be linked as a root cause of conflict as well as the intensification of violence. Fragility in the *social sector* has not only contributed to creating the conflict through social divisions and need deprivation, but it has also crippled the state authorities in addressing the conflict – ultimately enabling the intensification of violence. Fragility in the *economic sector* can be linked as a root cause since both farmers and herders are struggling to fulfill their basic needs and thereby are experiencing need deprivation. Since the need deprivation is steadily becoming worse, it can also be linked to the increased fear of survival and the intensification of violence. The need deprivation is also intimately connected to the fragility in the *government sector* since it has made farmers and herders perceive violence as the only solution to change their situation. The inability of the *government sector* to manage the security situation can also be linked to the intensification of violence since it has fostered a culture of violence and impunity, further adding to the conflict parties' resentment against each other and the state. Nigeria's *geography* can be seen to further complicate the context seeing as institutional capacity is even more stretched or nonexistent in the rural areas where most farmers and herders are living.

4.5   Identity-group

4. Identity-group	*Nature of conflict parties* *Intergroup dynamics*

Nature of the conflict parties

As noted previously, the *nature of conflict parties* extends beyond the different livelihoods by farmers and herders since it also intersects with social divisions of ethnicity, religion, and regions. According to Moritz, these significant differences between the conflict parties have created a mutual contempt and mistrust of the 'others' that must be taken into account to understand the violence between farmers and herders (2006:11). Some link the resentment back to the role Fulani herders have played in the history of Nigeria (Okeke 2014), where they occupied territory and performed jihads down towards the central regions of the country (Amusan et al. 2017:40). The link between identity construction and social divisions also entail strong affiliation with the group and resentment for the 'others' (Chukwuma & Atelhe 2014:85). This also means a fear of being isolated from the group, which consequently mean that perpetrators are protected and people are reluctant to give up information about their group (Bagu & Smith 2017:20). Both farming and herding communities also perceive themselves as victims that are under attack from the 'others' (ICG 2018:4-5, Onyima & Iwuoha 2015:180). Not only does this relate to the fact that both conflict parties blame the authorities and security forces for supporting the other side (Ducrotoy et al. 2018:2, Amnesty 2018:65), but it also means that both farmers and herders perceive a disjunction between their identity group and the state.

According to MercyCorps, 94.7 % in farmer and herder communities saw the other group's identity as relevant for how they behaved (2016:16). Farmers and herders tend to reiterate negative stories and stereotypes of the other group, not seldom connected to the social divisions between the conflict parties (Ducrotoy et al. 2018:2, Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko 2018:37, MercyCorps 2016:17). The negative stereotypes can hence also be seen as a foundation for the many conspiracy theories and accusations found in the conflict (ICG 2018:4). In combination with the Boko Haram insurgency, the conflict between farmers and herders have, for instance, caused increased tensions between Christians and Muslims (Onyima & Iwuoha 2015:178, ICG 2018:4). From this follows that Christians tend to support farmers, while Muslims usually stand by the interests of herders (Akov 2017:301). While many farmers perceive herders as intruders who are occupying land that belongs to indigenous people (Li 2018:4), many herders perceive farmers as 'kado' (infidels) and mean they have a God-given right to use land and water (Idakwoji et al. 2018:597, Onyima & Iwuoha 2015:178). Advocates of farmers interests have repeatedly expressed a fear that herder's migration is an 'Islamization' of the

country (GTI 2018:56), and media and politicians have repeatedly accused Fulani-herders of connections to Boko Haram (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:18). As a result of such increased polarization, statements have been made which are calling on Christians to take up arms against the Fulani herders who are persecuting the 'Christians' in Nigeria (Bagu & Smith 2017:12).

These divisions are visible also at the national level (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:13, Li 2018:5). The Muslim Rights Council (MURIC) have stated that herders got attacked because of the negative stereotyping of Muslims, ultimately meaning that they view it as attacks against Islam (Akov 2017:295). The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) did, in a similar vein, accuse prominent Muslims to be behind a jihadist campaign. As a response, the Nigeria Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) condemned this as hate speech that 'smacks of intolerance and political brigandage' (ICG 2018:15). Such rhetoric is not only a symbol for social divisions but also further polarization. Politicians with populist rhetoric have also been stirring up resentment against the other group (Higazi & Yousuf 2017:13). Another symbol of the divisions is the difficulties mentioned earlier to create legislative solutions since proposals tend to be perceived as associated with particular ethnic, religious, and regional interests (Bagu & Smith 2017:21).

However, there are different opinions if communal identity construction can be viewed as a root cause behind the violence between farmers and herders. Some, such as Idakwoji et al., argue that neither farmers nor pastoralists perceive ethnic and religious differences as the cause for violence (2018:604-605). According to Bagu & Smith, the 'violence is neither an ethnic nor religious conflict, but rather a competition for resources playing out on ethno-religious lines in a fragile country' (2017:5). In contrast, Akov (2017) argues that ethno-religious identity construction is one of the most significant factors in understanding why farmers and herders are clashing with each other. Considering the deep social divisions together with the conflict parties' perception of the state and the other group – it is here argued that identity construction is one of the root causes behind the recurring violence between farmers and herders. It is also argued that *the nature of the conflict parties* can explain the intensification of violence since the perception of identities is linked to the sharpened polarization between farmers and herders.

Intergroup dynamics
When looking at *intergroup dynamics*, it is possible to argue that the increased polarization of the *nature of conflict parties* is related to the mobilization of collective action. International Crisis Group reports of heavily armed and well-organized militias on both sides (ICG 2018:5), and assaults against farmer and herder communities have sometimes seen several hundreds of perpetrators in carefully planned attacks (Amnesty 2018:18-32). Although no group publicly admits to having an organized militia, they commonly insist on their right to arm themselves and defend their livelihoods. This argument is of course strongly

connected to the security sectors inability to manage the situation since the increased violence most likely has encouraged the formation of militias (ICG 2018:18). The militias also tend to be supported by ethnic leaders, politicians, or traditional rulers – which might explain how they have been able to acquire military-grade weapons (ICG 2018:4-5). Beyond being heavily armed, many attacks have been well-organized and performed with a high degree of coordination (Amnesty 2018:18-32).

The increased organization of the conflict parties can be linked to the threat of their survival (Bagu & Smith 2017:15, Ubelejit 2016:30) since this is believed to especially trigger mobilization around collective goals (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:133). The 'fear of the future' have hence made the groups apprehensive, and according to Chukwuma & Atelhe, it is also this fear that can explain the 'magnitude of aggression and vindictive violence' (2014:80). The increased militancy has created fear and uncertainty and hence spurred on even more individuals to take up arms to defend their livelihoods (Akinyemi et al. 2017:10). The increased mobilization has, in other words, created a security dilemma where both farmers and herders feel the need to mobilize and arm themselves to be safe. According to ICG, the increased polarization along ethnic, religious, and regional lines can also explain why the violence between farmers and herders have intensified (2018:14).

Summary

In contrast to those that primarily emphasize the competition of scarce resources, the identity-group analysis argues that identity construction cannot be disregarded when explaining the root causes behind the conflict between farmers and herders. This assertion is based on how the groups perceive themselves, the state, and the other conflict party. The *nature of the conflict parties* is also seen as intimately connected to the intensification of violence since it has contributed to increased polarization and reinforcing features such as biased narratives. *Intergroup dynamics* is argued to be a critical factor in explaining why the violence has intensified, seeing as the increased militancy has created a vicious spiral of insecurity and violence.

4.6   Elite/Individual

5. Elite/Individual	*Leadership*

Leadership

The factor of *leadership* at the elite/individual level assumes that it is possible to distinguish certain individuals that have acted as political entrepreneurs and exploited collective fears to mobilize identity groups. According to transnational conflict analysis, the level of militancy and violence can therefore often be determined by the nature of the *leadership* (Ramsbotham et al. 2016:133). This fundamental assumption makes the factor somewhat inapplicable in the conflict between farmers and herders where there does not seem to be any distinguishable and apparent leaders. However, it would not be far-fetched to assume that some leaders exist considering the level of organization of militias (Amnesty 2018:18-32).

There have also, as previously mentioned, been accusations of particular leaders. However, many of these accusations are linked to conspiracy theories rather than empirical evidence (ICG 2018:14). One common accusation is that certain Fulani elites are supporting the attacks of farmer communities, based on the fact that they have resources to arm herders and because they own large amounts of livestock (Idakwoji et al. 2018:597). Along a similar line of argument, Ezemenaka & Ekumaoko argues that President Buhari's lack of explicit action in combination with his ethnicity as Fulani creates concerns that he has a hidden 'Caliphate agenda' (2018:21). According to ICG, there is a widespread belief in central and south Nigeria that President Buhari's ethnicity has affected his approach to the conflict (ICG 2018:8), but few seem to support the claim that President Buhari can control the Fulani population. Some are instead arguing that it is a myth that President Buhari has any authority over the nomadic herder population (2017:8). It can also be noted that connections between attacks on farming communities and Fulani elites are mainly based on speculations and lacks concrete evidence (Idakwoji et al. 2018:597, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:8).

However, what can be distinguished is that influential individuals have used their platforms to exploit the fear and insecurity in the conflict (Bagu & Smith 2017:12, MercyCorps 2016:21). Several populistic politicians have taken advantage of the violence and used the social divisions to make political points, and a clear example is how anti-Fulani rhetoric was used to motivate the laws against open grazing (Ajibo et al. 2018:160, Higazi & Yousuf 2017:15). Religious leaders have also contributed to the polarization by calling on their followers to take up arms against the 'aggressors' (Bagu & Smith 2017:12). Another point that can be made is that since traditional rulers tend to have more authority over rural communities (Bagu & Smith 2017:20), it is likely that militia leaders are found within local ethnic leaders, politicians or traditional authority (ICG 2018:4-5).

Summary

Considering that the research process was not able to link any empirical evidence to the existence of certain 'bad leaders', the factor of *leadership* cannot be regarded as significant either as a root cause or as a reason behind the intensification of violence. Even if prominent individuals have been exploiting social divisions and facilitated increased resentment towards the 'others', there is no specific incident where it is possible to link these as instigators of violence. However, since there most likely exist leaders over militias at the local level, the disregard of the factor should be read while keeping in mind the lack of credible empirical material.

5 Findings & concluding remarks

5.1 Findings

By interpreting the violence between farmers and herders through transnational conflict analysis, several factors appear as crucial for understanding the conflict's root causes and the recent intensification of violence. For an accessible overview, the following figure shows a summary of the findings and which factors that were distinguished as significant;

Level of analysis	Factors	Outcome
1. Global-level	*Global drivers* *Transnational connectors*	Contextual factor Contextual factor
2. Regional-level	*Complex conflict systems* *Intra-regional dynamics*	Disregarded Disregarded
3. State-level	*State fragility;* *social sector* *economic sector* *government sector* *geography* *Law and order* *Security*	Confirmed Confirmed Confirmed Contextual factor Not applicable Not applicable
4. Identity-group	*Nature of conflict parties* *Intergroup dynamics*	Confirmed Confirmed
5. Elite/Individual	*Leadership*	Disregarded

Figure 5.1.1 – Findings   Source: Author

Some factors, such as *global drivers* and *transnational connectors,* are labeled as contextual factors since they are not believed to be either a root cause nor linked to the intensification of violence - but still considered as beneficial for understanding the conflict and its dynamic. The foundation of this reasoning is that these factors provide an important contextual backdrop on why Nigeria is a conducive environment for violent conflicts. *Global drivers* of conflict can, for instance, be seen as directly contributing to the social and economic fragility that creates need deprivation in Nigeria. Similarly, *transnational connectors* are shaping the conflict by creating further pressure on governmental institutions by high levels of movement of people, and by contributing to the escalation of the conflict through

the flows of illicit weapons. One could argue that factors at the regional level provide similar contextual observations since they point to the widespread insecurity and fragility that characterizes the region surrounding Nigeria. While this is true, the analysis did not see any linkages between the factors at the regional level and the violence between farmers and herders, more than the explanatory linkages between the factors of *intra-regional dynamics* and *transnational connectors*. Neither does the factors at the regional level seem to be shaping the violence in the same way as the factors at the global level.

When investigating structural factors at the state level, the analysis linked *state fragility* in all critical areas to the conflict between farmers and herders. The *social sector* could be confirmed as a root cause since deep social divisions in combination with herders' migration have contributed to tensions and violence. Fragility in the *social sector* was also linked to the intensification of violence since social divisions have hampered the state's ability to govern and manage the conflict. Fragility in the *economic sector* was confirmed as a root cause and to the intensification of violence since high levels of underdevelopment and uneven development patterns are linked to need deprivation and the struggle for surviving. Because of the weak and fragile *government sector*, farmers and herders perceive the state authorities as unable to address their grievances, making the conflict parties perceive self-help and violence as the only solution to their grievances. The fragility within the *government sector* can also be linked to the intensification of violence since the inability to manage the security situation has resulted in a widespread culture of violence and impunity. Since the state presence is even weaker in the remote and rural areas where many of the farmers and herders live, the fragility of the *government sector* cannot be disentangled from the factor of *geography*. However, the vast and varying geographical conditions in Nigeria is rather seen as an aggravating contextual factor than as a root cause, or as a reason for the intensification of violence. Since the violence have not escalated into a struggle for the state itself, the factors of *law and order* and *security* are not applicable in the conflict between farmers and herders

The analysis moreover confirmed the factor of *nature of the conflict parties* as a root cause since it was able to link identity construction to social divisions between ethnic and religious groups. More than that, both farmers and herders perceive a disjunction between their identity group and the state. Identity construction and the perception of the 'others' are furthermore believed to be intimately connected to the increased polarization between the groups and the intensification of violence. The factor of *intergroup dynamics* sheds further light on the intensification of violence since it explains the mobilization around collective goals. Farmers and herders perceive themselves as under attack and are expressing feelings of fear and uncertainty regarding their livelihoods and future. Most likely, these feelings of fear and uncertainty are connected to their experiences of need deprivation. Consequently, farmers and herders have become increasingly apprehensive and receptive to biased framings and negative stereotypes of the

'others'. These *intergroup dynamics* are therefore believed to have created a security dilemma where a spiral of insecurity and violence have contributed to the intensification of violence.

Even if it is likely that leaders exist within the conflict parties, the analysis was not able to link the factor of *leadership* as a root cause for violence or as a reason behind the recent intensification. Even if prominent individuals have been seen to exploit social divisions and contribute to polarization, the research process did not identify any specific incidents of violence that have been instigated by these individuals. However, the disregard of the factor should be read while being mindful of the lack of credible empirical material.

5.2   Discussion & concluding remarks

The influence of resources on the onset and dynamics of conflicts has engaged scholars for decades. The majority of the literature on farmer-herder conflicts emphasizes the competition for scarce environmental resources, not seldom arguing for increased pressure on land and water because of population growth and the impacts of climate change. While it would be misleading and deceptive to claim that these theorists see the scarcity of resources as the only causal factor for conflicts, it is possible to argue that they depart from certain assumptions that create a privileged focus on a supposed causality between cause and effect. One of the most solid arguments in favor of more complex empirical realities is that some areas with fewer resources have less conflicts, while other regions with a relative abundance are experiencing more violence (Moritz 2006:7). Nigeria appears to be an especially conducive environment for these conflicts seeing as it is one of the countries that are experiencing the worst outbursts of violence between farmers and herders. This study has tried to deviate from the predominant explanation by assuming that there are dimensions to the violence in Nigeria that is not captured by theories that emphasize a competition of scarce resources.

The findings of the analysis render a subtle critique against the conventional literature on farmer-herder conflicts by demonstrating that it provides only a narrow reading on the case of Nigeria. While grievances due to the lack of resources is indeed a significant factor in understanding the violence between farmers and herders, this study opposes the assumption that the scarcity of environmental resources automatically leads to an increase in violent clashes. Instead, the grievances due to need deprivation must be situated in its social, economic, and political context. The forced migration of herders to the central and south parts of Nigeria are undoubtedly creating heightened pressure on the resources farmers and herders need to sustain their livelihood, but the grievances cannot be completely disentangled from the growing number of extremely poor people in the country. Neither can the relationships between farmers and herders be fully understood if

not involving the polarization between ethnic and religious groups. The (in)capacity of the state to manage the need deprivation is furthermore believed to be a significant root cause seeing as it has made farmers and herders unable to see any solution beyond self-help and violence to address their grievances. While increased need deprivation is seen as one of the reasons explaining the intensification of violence since 2016, it is also suggested to be due to the government's inability to adequately handle the grievances and security situation. The absence of decisive action has fostered a widespread culture of impunity and violence, which has furthered polarization and encouraged communities to arm themselves and form militia groups. As a consequence, increased mistrust and animosity have created a security dilemma that continually works as a reinforcing mechanism to the spiraling violence. In conclusion, it is suggested that the (intensification) of violence between farmers and herders are more complex and multi-faceted than merely a competition for scarce environmental resources.

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