

## Insecurity and militancy in the Middle Belt grew in 2016 threatening many but remaining largely overlooked

In 2016, Sectarian Actors killed **2x** as many as Boko Haram<sup>1</sup>

In 2016, **47 LGAs** experienced militant attacks<sup>2</sup>

### Working Thesis and 4 Trends Threatening the Middle Belt

Violence in the Middle Belt is an evolving conflict with significant geographical distribution. Minimizing this as a conventional farmer-herdsmen conflict does not adequately address a reality where thousands have been killed, weaponry and sophistication of attacks are increasing, dozens of villages have been destroyed, and tens of thousands have been displaced. Should this violence further escalate, its impact on Nigeria will be substantive.

Working thesis: Militancy among Fulani seems to be primarily driven by economic interests of securing additional and permanent grazing territory. However, they are almost exclusively attacking LGAs that have high percentages of Christians, a minority religion. It is therefore an economic driver being played out along religious lines in an environment of general insecurity and impunity that threaten further escalation and reprisal.

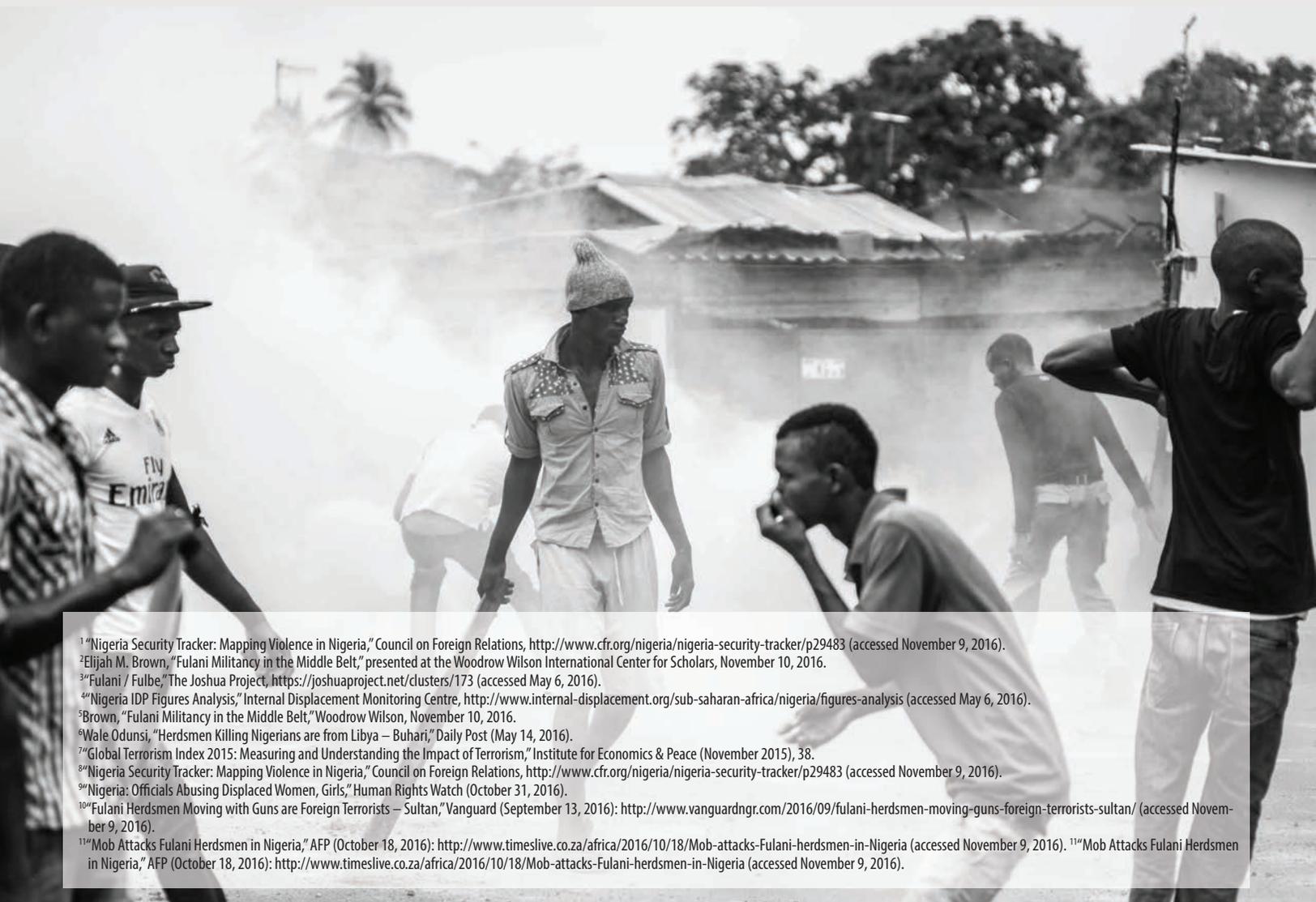
**1. Trend 1: Accelerating Attacks, Casualties, and Humanitarian Crises.** Since 2014, the conventional understanding of conflict in the Middle Belt through a farmer-herdsmen lens no longer accurately describes the parameters of the violence. In 2015, the Global Terrorism Index listed Fulani militants as the fourth most lethal in the world.<sup>7</sup> For 2016 the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker indicates that Sectarian Actors – of which Fulani militants are the largest – have led to twice as many deaths in 2016 as has Boko Haram with most of those deaths almost exclusively asymmetric.<sup>8</sup> From January – October 2016, there were 1,076 deaths. 97% of those killed were non-Fulani victims. These attacks have significantly added to the IDP crisis in Nigeria, which has the highest number of IDPs in the world outside of Syria. Since 2015 these acts have tended to involve the burning and eradication of entire communities as well as rampant destruction of crops in “the bread basket of Nigeria.” This acceleration corresponds with increased use of small arms and sophisticated tactics including AK47s, small explosive devices, guns mounted to vehicles, resupply helicopters, and multi-day attacks.

- **38 million Fulani** live across West Africa with **18 million**, the largest grouping, in Nigeria<sup>3</sup>
- **85% of all Internally Displaced Persons** in Nigeria are “a result of insurgency attacks by Islamists” with “religious violence” uniquely mapped across the Middle Belt<sup>4</sup>
- **1,076 have been killed in 2016** in militant and reprisal attacks, with 1,052 non-Fulani killed, 24 Fulani killed, 82 different attacks, impacting 47 LGAs and 19 States<sup>5</sup>
- **Leaders such as President Buhari** and the Sultan of Sokoto have recently begun to describe activities in the Middle Belt as crimes committed by terrorists or those from outside the country<sup>6</sup>

**2. Trend 2: Lack of Forces Stationed in Impacted Areas and a Climate of Impunity.** Though some communities have been attacked repeatedly, the security presence remains limited or nonexistent. As has been the case elsewhere, when rule of law is undermined by injustice, a climate of impunity emerges. While a security presence in impacted communities is needed, parts of the Nigerian security apparatus are accused of human rights abuses that escalate tension.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, a main request of impacted communities remains a more robust security presence.

**3. Trend 3: Changing Narrative within Nigeria.** Some within Nigeria see escalating violence and use of sophisticated weapons and tactics as no longer a conventional farmer-herdsmen conflict. Notably, the influential Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar III, said in September 2016 for the first time that he believed that heavily armed Fulani herdsmen were in fact "foreign terrorists" who should be treated as terrorists "by the Nigerian security agencies."<sup>10</sup> This is a significant shift within Nigeria describing an evolving situation that demands new policy approaches. It is a further acknowledgment that what is occurring is not a reflection of the Fulani as a whole, many of whom reject those engaged in militant activity.

**4. Trend 4: Rise of Vigilante and Reprisal Attacks.** In an ongoing context of insecurity, there are early indications of significant vigilante movements and reprisal attacks. Perhaps the most egregious example occurred in November 2016 when a commercial bus carrying ethnic Fulani individuals broke down in Kaduna State.<sup>11</sup> A mob formed around the bus, hacked the passengers to death, and then set the bus and one other vehicle on fire, killing 14.



<sup>1</sup> "Nigeria Security Tracker: Mapping Violence in Nigeria," Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483> (accessed November 9, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Elijah M. Brown, "Fulani Militancy in the Middle Belt," presented at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, November 10, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Fulani / Fulbe, "The Joshua Project," <https://joshuaproject.net/clusters/173> (accessed May 6, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Nigeria IDP Figures Analysis, "Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre," <http://www.internal-displacement.org/sub-saharan-africa/nigeria/figures-analysis> (accessed May 6, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Brown, "Fulani Militancy in the Middle Belt," Woodrow Wilson, November 10, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Wale Odunsi, "Herdsmen Killing Nigerians are from Libya – Buhari," Daily Post (May 14, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism, "Institute for Economics & Peace (November 2015), 38.

<sup>8</sup> Nigeria Security Tracker: Mapping Violence in Nigeria, "Council on Foreign Relations," <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483> (accessed November 9, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls, "Human Rights Watch (October 31, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Fulani Herdsmen Moving with Guns are Foreign Terrorists – Sultan, "Vanguard (September 13, 2016): <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/09/fulani-herdsmen-moving-guns-foreign-terrorists-sultan/> (accessed November 9, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> "Mob Attacks Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria," AFP (October 18, 2016): <http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/2016/10/18/Mob-attacks-Fulani-herdsmen-in-Nigeria> (accessed November 9, 2016). <sup>11a</sup> "Mob Attacks Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria," AFP (October 18, 2016): <http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/2016/10/18/Mob-attacks-Fulani-herdsmen-in-Nigeria> (accessed November 9, 2016).