

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cattle Settlement Policy and Nigeria's troubled federation: Ethno-religious politics through other means

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Abstract

This article argues that the policy of the federal government of Nigeria in establishing settlement for herders who are mostly Fulani in different states of the country is perceived by other ethnic groups as advancement of ethnic and religious politics. This perception has led to counter ethno-religious narratives with accompanying increased tensions for the country. Ethno-religious politics has not only become the defining character of Nigerian federation overtime but its continuous unbridled expression, manifestation and dire consequences are currently threatening the existence of the country as a sovereign polity. This article through qualitative secondary data from media reports, scholarly articles, government publications and internet resources examines the Cattle Settlement policy, its merits and demerits within the context of a troubled federation. The articles concludes on ways of resolving the emerging crisis through proper framing of the policy for wide acceptability taking into cognizance the diversity that defines the country's existence and the need to pursue enduring peace in the polity.

Keywords: *Cattle Settlement, Policy, Troubled Federation, Ethno-religious politics and Nigeria*

1. INTRODUCTION

This article argues that the policy of the federal government of Nigeria in establishing settlement for herders who are mostly Fulani in different states of the country is perceived by other ethnic groups as advancement of ethnic and religious politics. This perception has led to counter ethno-religious narratives with accompanying increased tensions for the country. Ethno-religious politics has not only become the defining character of Nigerian federation overtime but its continuous unbridled expression, manifestation and dire consequences are currently threatening the existence of the country as a sovereign polity. This article examines the Cattle Settlement policy, its merits and demerits within the context of a troubled federation and how such policy can be framed in future for wide acceptability taking into cognizance the diversity that defines the country's existence and the need to ensure sustainable peace in the polity.

The paper is divided into eight sections; the introduction, conceptual clarifications, theoretical framework, review of literature on theory of federalism and policy making, policy making and Nigerian brand of federalism, the context of the emergence of Cattle Settlement policy, Cattle Settlement policy and its controversies, the way out of for a sustainable cattle settlement policy and conclusion.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

A. *Federalism*

According to K. C. Wheare, a federal system of government refers to the method of dividing governmental powers so that general and regional governments are each; within a sphere are coordinate and independent (Wheare, 1963: 183). This definition revolves around formal division of powers between levels of government as a way of expressing the inherent plurality in a federal system of government (Jinadu, 1979), other features of a federal system of government includes party system, free press, supremacy of constitutions among others.

B. *Federation*

Federation is a governmental system that is based on federalism and thus, federation is supposed to be a union

without uniformity or country expressing unity in diversity. In order to uphold the tenet of federalism, which often involves shared ruled and self-rule, (Kincard, 2001:29), a conscious attempt is made to give a clear-cut demarcation between the areas of responsibility of the federal government and states as well as areas of necessary cooperation.

C. Ethno-religious politics

Ethno-religious politics refers to a situation where people or communities who define their ethnic identity not only by ancestral heritage nor simply by religious affiliations but normally through a combination of both pursue a political interest using such identity. In the case of this paper, the Fulani as a group combines both ancestral heritage and Islamic identity shared by the majority to pursue political agenda within the Nigerian state.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This article combines both group and elite theories in its theoretical framework. The origin of the group theory can be traced to scholars like Arthur Bentley and David Truman. The theory can be found in the doctrine of pluralism which asserts that the society is seen as a composition of group interaction (Varma, 1982). Bentley (1908) also argued that "the raw materials we study in politics cannot be found in one man, cannot be stated by adding men to men and that it must be taken as it comes in many men together". The group is a collection of individuals with shared attitudes and interests on the basis of which certain claims and demands are made for the establishment, maintenance or enhancement of preferred values (Onah, 2010). From the foregoing, the group theory views the society as pluralistic and made up of many industrial, cultural, economic, educational and religious groups, competing against one another in their quest to influence government decisions.

However, what prevents any group from dominating the political system is the balance of group pressure that results from different interest groups pushing their claims and viewpoints (Roskin et al, 2010). Although government itself is composed of groups and reflect group interest, the role of government will be that of a mediator of group interest in order to maintain the relationships amongst

groups so that the society can enjoy stability. But conflict and instability may arise if government fails to maintain a balance of group interest. It is worthy of note however to clearly state that on the long run, the activities that defines a group can be hijacked by a few elites within the group. These elite however overtime erode the group interests and replace it with their own selfish interest. This will lead us to the elite theory.

The elite theory can be traced to scholars like Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) and Robert Michels (1876-1936). The elite theory seeks to explain that each society is ruled by a minority that enjoys the qualities required for its attainment to full social, economic and political powers (Onah 2010). According to Gaetano Mosca (1939), he emphasized the sociological and personal characteristics of elites. He was of the view that elites are an organized minority and that the masses are an unorganized minority. Mosca went ahead to divide the world into two groups i.e. the ruling class and the class that is ruled. Mosca asserts that elites have intellectual, moral and material superiority that is highly esteemed and influential. Robert Michels (1911) in explaining the elite theory came up with the iron law of Oligarchy where he is also of the view that social and political organizations are run by few individuals. In explaining the link between the group and elite theory in analyzing Cattle Settlement Policy and Nigeria's troubled federation: Ethno religious politics through other means; it is important to note that Nigeria as a country is made up of diverse groups ranging from ethnic, religious, economic groups among others. and these groups are jostling for their diverse interests. The interests pursued by diverse groups in a polity like Nigeria ends up been hijacked by the few elites through cunning means and these circumstances usually bring about intense rivalries. Regrettably, the interactions that forms the basis of group activities in Nigeria has been branded by different forms of anti-democratic behaviors such as lawlessness, illegalities, oppression, incumbency factor, religious bigotry and ethnic divisions (Okereka, 2015). This tendency again has manifested in the Cattle Settlement policy of the federal government and has led to some groups (Northern Christian Groups, Southern Muslim Groups, Middle Belt Groups, Southwest Groups) believing that the ethnic group whose member dominates the

presidency (Fulani) want to achieve its ethno-religious interest (Fulanisation and Islamisation) using the Cattle Settlement Policy.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Review of theory of federalism and policy making

It has been observed that federalism is a commonly accepted constitutional answer to the problem of centralization (Blondel, 1969). The ideal federalism thus takes away a very large percentage of rule-making decisions from the central authorities and gives a much higher percentage of rule-making to local authorities. Thus, federalism states general conditions which appear likely to lead to at least some form of decentralization (in decision making) (Blondel, 1969:284). The level of decentralization achieved in a federation to a great extent is a function of emergence of such a federation. Federations that emerged through aggregation, which consists of formal independent units, often emphasise the non-centralisation compact more than in disaggregative federations, which emerged from decentralisation of erstwhile unitary or centralized polity (Bord, 2001; Blondel, 1969).

It has been observed that in any ideal federalism, policy making should follow the logic of power sharing but, this is not often the case (Sturm, 2015). In policy making in federal states, there are likely to be two extremes of regionalization or centralization. However, it has been observed that the "secret" of successful policy making in federalism is to make good use of diversity. Diversity helps to integrate centrifugal (decentralizing) forces in societies especially in ethnically divided states (Sturm, 2016: 2).

It has also been argued that state and local governments within a federal structure can serve as semi-independent and entrepreneurial poles of development, both for resource mobilization and for the provision of public goods and services in a manner that is more responsive to citizen's needs and demands than provision by a single central government (Adamolekun & Kincard, 1991: 183).

In essence, federalism by bringing government nearer to the people through states and local government apparatus, ensures that people have a more direct access to monitor and hold their political and public servants

accountable for their respective actions and policies (Kincard & Anwah, 2008; Weingast, 1995; Oliver, 1985).

Federalism encourages multi-level policy making which guarantee political participation in decision-making. This will require federal government to rely more on intergovernmental relations. Intergovernmental relations refer to various levels of engagements between the federal government and the other constituent units in a country. The hallmarks of intergovernmental relations in a federal state are interdependent, bargaining and consensus building among the various levels of government especially in areas of policy making (Akinsanya, 2014).

The need for recognition and adoption of diversity in policy making is informed by various factors. One is the respect for regional productive forces which allows for innovation; two, is the respects for elements of regional identities, traditions, or culture (Sturm, 2016: 5). Policy making in federal states are therefore compromises of regional world views and not any pragmatic solution to policy problems (Sturm, 2016:5).

However, in some cases especially in Federal states like India and Nigeria among others, federal states are tempted to use their national control over resources as instrument to undermine autonomy in regional policy making (Sturm, 2016: 10).

Nigeria federation no doubt, falls under the latter category, hence the tendency towards greater centralize policy and decision making. This is not inevitable considering the relatively low nature of development of her democratic practice. There is no doubt that the centralized nature of Nigerian federalism undermines all the major and commonly recognized attributes of a federal polity (Asobie, 1997).

B. Policy making and Nigerian brand of federalism

Nigerian brand of federalism is anything but ideal. Nigerian federation becomes immediately troubled from inception thanks to the lop-sided nature of its structure at creation which made a part bigger than the rest put together. An attempt to address this structural imbalance through military artificial political restructuring devoid of consultation with the people aided by the oil wealth increasingly available at the center led to another problem

of extreme centralization as the states become miniature entities existing at the mercy of an almighty and all-encompassing federal government. In a concrete terms fear of ethnic domination of three regions by majority groups of Hausa-Fulani, Ibo and Yoruba at independence has given way to fear of ethno-religious domination of the whole country by the Fulani group.

Nigerian federation is highly centralized so much that uniformity has become the order of the day without adequate disregard for consultations and consensus building in policy making. It is within this structural deficiency that policy making rather than reflects aggregate of diversities that express the country becomes the expression of world view and mindset of those controlling the statecraft at any period.

Any analysis of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria will reveal that too many powers are vested in the hands of the Federal Government. Thus, Akinsanya, (2014: 249), observed "that the principle of federalism is more honored in the breach than in observance as to suggest that Nigeria operates a de jure federalism and a de facto unitarism".

The 1999 Constitution makes provision for exclusive and concurrent legislative lists. Sixty-eight items are areas that the Federal Government can legislate upon while there are thirty items on the concurrent list where both the Federal and State governments can legislate upon. Unlike the practice in some other federal states, the 1999 Constitution makes no provision for Residual legislative list that States and Local governments can legislate upon. This made the Federal Government to have wide powers and the constitution further gave an open-ended provision for the Federal Government to dabble into any activity even where States have decided to act upon (Akinsanya, 2014: 249).

To further strengthen the powers of the Federal Government vis-à-vis the States within the country, Section 4(5) of the Constitution states that

If any law enacted by the House of Assembly of a State is inconsistent with any Law validly made by the National Assembly the law made by the National Assembly Shall prevail, and that other laws shall to the extent of inconsistency be void.

It is therefore possible giving a highly centralized and uniform federation that Nigeria operates for ethnic groups

in the country to suspect others especially the group in powers such as the Fulani of pursuing ethno-religious agenda without taking into cognizance the diversity that express the country's existence.

C. Fulani herdsmen and Farmers/host communities' conflicts

It must be stated that Fulani group are not the only people that are herders and not all Fulani are herders, but majority of Fulani have as their primary occupation cattle breeding and they are either the owners/or are responsible for taking care of most of the cattle in the country.

The Fulani has dominated the North politically since the Othman Dan Fodio Jihad of the 19th Century however the majority of the Fulani remains largely pastoral and poor. The semi-nomadic and nomadic groups like the settled group are dispersed among the various communities in Nigeria and are found mostly in several states including the North central states of Nassarawa, Kogi, Benue, Plateau, Kwara and Taraba.

However, with biting effect of climate change and increased inability to find pasture for their cattle (Bello, 2013) worsen by increased mining activities in some North West, North East and North Central states, the herders are further driven to the Southern states. The herders increased movement to the Southern states has generated immense conflicts with farmers and other people in the host communities.

The herdsmen and farmers and host communities conflicts have been worsened by other developments that are not necessarily the making of the two parties but more of breakdown of governance and political leaders' irresponsibility in Nigeria.

One of such developments is the transhumance migration of Fulani from other countries in the West African sub-region to Nigeria. The influence of foreign Fulani groups in search of pasture accounts for the irreconcilable conflicts being witnessed between the Fulani and their host communities (Folami, 2010). Due to cultural and religious affinity, it is practically difficult to distinguish between Nigeria Fulani and Fulani from other countries across the Sahel region moving into Nigeria.

There have been arguments that bandits from other countries in attempt to defend the interests of foreign Fulani herdsmen operating in Nigeria are responsible for various conflicts within the country. This led the umbrella Fulani Miyetti Cattle Breeders Association to claim that the members of the group are not responsible for the wanton killings and destruction going on in various areas of conflicts. Another argument is that transhumant Fulani from neighboring countries aided by groups armed with small arms and light weapons looted from Libya armory and/or obtained from black market should be held responsible for the spate of conflicts between herdsmen and their host farming communities. This is further corroborated by the Gombe State (North-eastern Nigeria) House of Assembly legislative Committee on Security findings. The chairman of the committee claimed arising from investigation of chairman of the cattle breeder's association in the state that those carrying out attacks on farmers are immigrant Fulani herdsmen mostly from Mali, Chad etc. This fact is corroborated by the Divisional Police officers in the affected communities that the insurgents are aliens who do not have respect for the law of the land ([Galaxy Television News, 2013](#)).

Another line of argument of the frequent clashes of herdsmen and host communities can be traced to the high level of poverty in most of the core Northern states which is high as above 70 percent in Sokoto state and without necessary and concrete steps taken to turn around the situation ([Nigeria infopeadia, 2019](#)). The boomerang effect of this is that criminals mingle with herdsmen to commit crimes especially in the more prosperous southern states. Also, evidence in recent times has revealed that criminal elements are collaborating with Fulani to carry out attacks ([Sahara Reporters, 2019](#)). Thus, marauders attack various communities under the guise of being herders.

It should be noted that under the prevailing heat and tension generated by the activities of Fulani herdsmen as worsened by other extraneous developments that the policy of Cattle Settlement was introduced by the Buhari's administration. To worsen the already bad situation, the policy was named *Ruga* which in Fulani language is referred to as rural grazing area while it is also the Fulani word for village. If *Ruga* is defined as rural grazing area it would not

have generated much heat but by the time a lot of Nigerians interpret it as Fulani village then the usual mutual suspicion among various ethnic groups and especially the ethnic entrepreneurs among the Nigerian political elite would arise.

D. Cattle Settlement policy and its many controversies

Cattle settlement policy contrary to attempt to single it out for flogging is a component of the National Livestock Transformation Plan of the Buhari administration. The implementation of the policy is directly under the supervision of the office of the Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbanjo.

As stated earlier, Cattle Settlement is a component of the National Livestock Transformation Policy (NLTP), this is a comprehensive policy aims at not only transformation of Livestock business but also creating value chain along industrial and socio-economic developments and empowerment of the various stakeholders. However, Cattle Settlement was taken out by some authorities of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture in Nigeria without considering its other components. In the often top-bottom approach to conceiving and implementing government policy in the country, the people that the settlements are meant for and those states and communities to provide the land are not well consulted hence the overwhelming resistance. The Federal government of Nigeria has no land of its own and so depends on the land from the states for any of its projects as stated in the Land Use Decree of 1978 as entrenched in the Constitution under section 315. The federal government therefore cannot implement the policy without the express consents of the states as States are to provide the land needed for its implementation.

Also, the Cattle settlement policy involves introducing new settlers into an existing communities and considering the attachment to land in Africa including Nigeria which often borders on spirituality and ancestry; it would have been necessary for the federal government to consult adequately the stakeholders which should not be limited to state governors only but the traditional rulers and the communities on the inherent benefits of the policy to these communities.

The policy which involves settlement of Fulani and other herders among already existing communities in the light of the highly contentious ethno-religious politics has been reduced by other suspecting ethnic groups to Fulanisation and Islamisation.

From some southern Muslim's perspective, Cattle settlement policy is feared as attempt to extend Fulani hegemony beyond the North. This claimed is referenced by the experience of Southern Kaduna in the North central Nigeria where areas that were not originally under the Fulani control has now been transformed to Fulani Emirate. For instance, in the old Kachia Local Government area of Kaduna state, the Fulani settlement in form of *Ruga* in 1987 eventually transformed to Emirates exclusively for the Fulani.

The conspiracy theory of Fulani appropriating other people's ancestral land apart from receiving justification from historical experiences of Hausa and Yourba encounters with Fulani is further entrenched by pronouncements of groups such as *Miyeti Allah*, the Cattle Breeder's Association threatening other ethnic groups in the country. Coupled with this is the pronouncement of some Northern educated elites including likes of Prof. Ango Abdullah, the former Vice-chancellor of Ahmadu Bello University. This situation in the words of Ikechukwu, ([This Day Live July 17, 2019](#)) presents the Fulani as "a marauding, warring band of survivalists, who are ready to mete out inhuman killings at the slightest provocation".

For some Christians in Nigeria, Cattle settlement is regarded as Islamisation. This fear derives not only from the historical experiences of the covert extension of Fulani jihad to the minorities ethnic groups in the North through the instrumentality of State by Sir Ahmadu Bello but also due to the federal government action of making Nigeria a full member of Organization of Islamic Countries. This action has sown the seed of mistrust so much that any policy of the federal government that has religious undertone is opposed without any meaningful consideration of the accrue benefits to the nation. Such has been the trend in the country that policies such as membership of Islamic Development Bank, Islamic banking and Skuk bond are opposed vigorously by the Christians groups without considering their secular advantages.

Thus, the Cattle settlement policy has been given the tag of Fulanisation and Islamisation by various ethnic and religious groups in the country before the policy could see the light of the day. However, beyond the name callings, there are some challenges with the way the policy was presented to the nation which led to the hue and cry, heat and tension generated and its being hijacked by ethnic entrepreneurs among the political elites.

The policy also met with resistance because in the opinion of some Nigerians, cattle breeding is a private business and it should remain so without the intervention of government or using government resources to further individual business or business that are identified with a particular ethnic group in the country.

Another disturbing dimension to the implementation of the policy is the fear of insecurity by the conspiracy theorists to oppose its implementation. The argument is that the herders' settlements especially of the Fulani tribe have led to upsurge of insecurity among the host communities. However, this ethnic profiling is the handiwork of ethnic entrepreneurs and as stated earlier, insecurity and several attacks can be subject to multifarious explanations. Such profiling will only excuse government from an aggressive commitment to fighting insecurity that is already threatening the continuous existence of the country as a sovereign polity. Therefore security must not be solely for the elite but it must penetrate the sub-urban and the rural areas, already a trend has emerged whereby the people in the absence of adequate security has resort to self-help in establishing several vigilante, night watchmen and hunters. The most recent of such self-help in providing security outside the conventional security apparatus in the country is south western Nigeria security network code named *Amotekun*. However, these groups need to be well regulated and given direction to avoid them becoming harbinger of terror rather than peace.

From the above it is obvious that the cattle settlement policy in design as taken out of National Livestock Transformation Plan has fell under the usual mistrust that has characterized the Nigerian federation.

E. Cattle settlement policy and options for peaceful resolution

Our submission is that Cattle settlement policy should be allowed to continue however within the context of the National Livestock Transformation Plan of the Federal government. The reason for canvassing for such policy can be seen in the inherent benefits if well-articulated and implemented for the country.

The ranching aspect of the policy for instance if adequately implemented will eliminate the roaming of cattle around which has constituted the main cause of conflicts between herders and farmers. Ranching will also stop cattle rustling as adequate security will be provided for the ranches, cattle rustling has been the major conflicts between herders and the various host communities. Other possible benefits of ranching can be seen in the multi-purpose use of cattle dung for manure for farming and electricity generation and employments to supply of fodders for the cattle and other activities around the ranches.

Also, establishment of cattle settlement in form of ranches according to expert is believed to attract a lot of advantages which include a healthier, fatter and more profitable livestock, more milk yield per cow, more beef. The price of the cattle will not only be affordable but within reach of the people as they are not necessarily transported over a long distance (Ogbeh, 2018). It should be noted that the idea of ranches and cattle settlement within the local context is not new in the country, since the three regions of the first republic established cattle ranch at different locations, Mokwa for the Northern Region, Obudu for the Eastern region and in the Western region. These ranches collapsed as a result of successive government neglects especially under military administration and the oil boom of the 70s.

Another way out is that *Ruga* and its associated business should be business oriented so that the usual suspicion of ethnic and religious groups to government policies in the country would not be read into it. A related issue is that it will be inappropriate to continue to refer to Cattle settlement as *Ruga* which to some rightly or wrongly has been associated with the Fulani; it would do well for Federal government to use a non-controversial word to

describe the cattle settlement and the National Livestock Transformation Policy.

Federal government of Nigeria should rethink the cattle settlement policy within the context of real federation which will be subject to state's individual needs, preferences and strategy and thus allow for healthy competition, innovation and profitability rather than turning it to avenue to dispense non accountable federal largesse. In other word, ownership of the policy matters a lot if it must be successful through wide acceptability by all the stakeholders in the country, thus states should be given free hand to operate the policy however with emphasis on accountability. For instance, it has been reported that the Jonathan administration (2010-2015) released 100 billion naira to the states for a similar scheme which is yet to be accounted for ([The Punch, January 20, 2018](#)). Thus, cattle settlement or any such intervention in livestock business should not be turned in to another subsidy like the recurring petroleum subsidy in Nigeria.

5. CONCLUSION

Whilst the process of policy-making in a federation should ideally reflect the unique specificities of federalism such as intergovernmental relations and decentralization, realities in Nigeria has suggested otherwise. It is a postcolonial federation where various ethnic groupings battle for resource appropriation through the instrumentality of the State. Hence, the prevailing politics is ethno-religious politics that is embedded not only in the egoistic contestation for resource appropriation but also one that seeks to see the business of governance and policy-making from the lens of ethnical leanings. This explains the level of condemnation, hues and cry that greeted the proposed cattle settlement from other ethnic groupings other than the Fulani tribe in Nigeria. The basis of some peoples' rejection and condemnation of cattle settlement may be difficult to fault given the failure of the government to explore and adhere to the basic federalist precepts in the making and introduction of the cattle settlement initiative. It is therefore our conviction here that the fate of cattle settlement as a policy may await yet to be introduced policies of the government if the basics of a federation are not in Nigeria. In this wise, the intergovernmental relations

among the federating units must be strengthened while ensuring adequate guarantees for the launching and sustenance of true decentralization in the federation, albeit, a federation without a collective unity and identity that epitomize an incontestable negative unity and a federation of disjointed resource-takers rather than resource-givers.

6. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The Author declares that there is no potential conflict of interest in the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Quote

The Revolution introduced me
to art, and in turn, art
introduced me to the
Revolution!

Albert Einstein

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