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# FARMERS-HERDERS CRISIS AND IMPLICATIONS ON NIGERIA'S NATIONAL IMAGE: A CRITICAL CONTEMPORARY ISSUS ANALYSIS

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## Abstract
The study critically examines the farmers–herders crisis and its implications for Nigeria's national image. The study was motivated by the increasing incidence of violent conflicts, displacement, food insecurity, livelihood disruption and negative media narratives associated with farmer–herder relations in Nigeria. Using a conceptual critical-analysis design, the study relied on secondary evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government and institutional reports, humanitarian documents and relevant media literature. The analysis was guided by Framing Theory and Image Repair Theory to explain how conflict realities are represented, interpreted and managed as reputational challenges. Findings indicate that farmers–herders conflicts are driven by interacting factors, including competition over land and water, population growth, changing land-use patterns, climate-related pressures, pastoral mobility, insecurity and institutional weaknesses. The crisis has consequently undermined human security, social cohesion, agricultural livelihoods and food security. The study further finds that sensational and conflict-oriented media framing can reinforce negative perceptions of Nigeria among domestic and international audiences, with potential implications for the country's international reputation, investment attractiveness, tourism, diplomatic relations and soft power. The study recommends integrated conflict prevention, climate adaptation, conflict-sensitive journalism, improved governance and strategic international communication to support Nigeria's reputational recovery.

**Keywords:** Farmers–herders conflict; Nigeria; national image; media framing; international reputation; human security; Image Repair Theory.

## 1.1 Background of the Study
In the olden days, the relationship between farmers and pastoralists or herders in Nigeria was not antagonistic, but mutually cordial. Crop farmers and mobile pastoralists often occupied complementary economic spaces, and while farmers cultivated their land, the pastoralists moved livestock seasonally in search of pasture and water. In some areas, there were agreements based on customary institutions, traditional authorities and negotiated grazing arrangements, which helped regulate the herders' access to land and water on a mutually beneficial basis. Extant

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literature indicates that Fulani pastoralists had been moving into Nigeria's Middle Belt as far back as the nineteenth century, while formal and informal livestock routes developed over time to facilitate seasonal migrations (Moritz, 2012; Turner, 2011).

Over the years, however, this historical relationship was affected by demographic expansion, agricultural intensification, environmental change, changing land-tenure arrangements and the gradual disappearance or obstruction of traditional grazing corridors. Thus, by the twentieth century, the increase in population, expansion of settled agriculture areas, brought farmers and herders into direct competition over land, water and other natural resources, leading to violent disputes involving crop destruction, cattle theft, obstruction of grazing routes, access to water and competition over markets (Olaniyi, 2015). Sometimes, traditional rulers, community leaders and pastoralist representatives do intervene, to negotiate settlements.

In the 1960s, the Northern Regional Government reportedly designated 417 grazing areas/routes in 1965, alongside provisions for water and veterinary services for pastoralists. This arrangement was intended to create an institutional framework for livestock production and reduce conflicts between pastoralists and farmers. However, the system gradually weakened as agricultural expansion, urbanisation, population growth and changing land-use patterns increased pressure on available land. The post-oil-boom period also witnessed declining policy attention to agriculture and pastoral infrastructure, while many traditional grazing routes became occupied or cultivated (Blench, 2024).

More so, the Land Use Act of 1978 further transformed the land-tenure environment by vesting land in each state in the governor, subject to statutory provisions. Research on pastoralism argues that the new tenure system created additional difficulties for mobile pastoralists who historically depended on customary access to grazing corridors rather than formal land ownership (Moritz, 2012). The consequence was an increasingly complex interaction between land ownership, indigene-settler relations, pastoral mobility and agricultural expansion. Hence, by the 1980s and 1990s, farmer-herder conflicts had become observable in several parts of the country. For example, Olaniyi (2015), in his study of conflicts between Bororo Fulani pastoralists and Yoruba farmers in Oyo State between 1986 and 2004, identified economic, social and communal dimensions as causes of the conflicts. These resulted in crop destruction, cattle killing, murder, rape, armed violence, destruction of settlements and disputes over grazing, water and markets.

The crisis intensified considerably from approximately 2011 onward, particularly across Nigeria's Middle Belt and parts of the North-West. Environmental pressures became increasingly important. Desertification, declining water availability, drought, high temperatures and changing rainfall patterns have altered pastoral migration patterns, while agricultural expansion and population growth have reduced the amount of land available for both farming and livestock production. George et al. (2022) found that climate-related factors, grazing constraints, land-use pressures and insecurity, including Boko Haram attacks, helped push the pastoralists away from their traditional grazing areas, consequently leading to an increase in the conflicts in certain areas of the country.

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The deterioration of security in some neighbouring countries has compounded these pressures, leading to incessant cattle rustling, banditry, kidnappings and insurgency, all of which have disrupted established pastoral routes. Thus, traditional pastoralists displaced by insecurity, move into areas where their arrival is perceived by farming communities as a threat to their land, farming and livelihood. Consequently, the problem escalates from disputes over damaged farms, blocked route or access to water, into communal violence involving ethnic, religious and political colourations. The scale of the crisis is now particularly visible in Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, Taraba, Kaduna and other northern states. For example, in February 2016, about 300 people were reportedly killed in Benue through violence, which also displaced more than 100,000 people (UNHCR, 2017). The organisation noted that farmer-herder clashes had increasingly intensified since 2011, with approximately 400,000 people forcibly displaced in sporadic episodes of violence by that period (UNHCR, 2017).

Still in Benue State, the crisis witnessed another major escalation between 2017-2018, with the implementation of the state's open-grazing prohibition law in November 2017, which became a source of irritation to some people, and crisis flashpoint. International Crisis Group reported that attacks in January 2018 killed more than 80 people in Logo and Guma LGAs of Benue State, while subsequent violence resulted in hundreds of additional deaths. In Plateau State, more than 300 people were reportedly killed in attacks between January and mid-2018, while the June 2018 violence in Barkin Ladi and subsequent reprisals resulted in more than 200 deaths. (Crisis Group, 2018). These crises have continued despite government interventions, security operations, legislation and dialogue initiatives. UNHCR reported that attacks in Benue between October and December 2023 killed more than 30 people, including internally displaced persons, and forced additional populations to relocate to safer communities and camps.

All these have brought serious humanitarian consequences in the affected areas, (UNHCR, 2024). For instance, in 2024, the UNHCR estimated that farmer-herder violent clashes and associated land pressures had displaced approximately 500,000 people in Benue State alone. It further linked the crisis to declining grazing resources, desertification, erratic rainfall and flooding, demonstrating that the conflict increasingly operates at the intersection of environmental change, livelihood insecurity and communal violence (UNHCR, 2024).

The significance of the crisis extends beyond its immediate humanitarian and security consequences. In the contemporary international environment, a country's image is influenced by how foreign governments, investors, tourists, international organisations, media institutions and global publics perceive its security, governance, stability, human rights, economic opportunities and social cohesion. Consequently, recurrent reports of killings, mass displacement, destruction of communities, attacks on agricultural populations and inadequate state protection arising from the farmers-herders' conflict can shape international perceptions and narrative about Nigeria. Recent research argues that persistent terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and other forms of insecurity have affected Nigeria's international image, diplomatic relationships and investment attractiveness (Onyendi, 2025).

There is also an important communication dimension of the farmers'herders' clashes. This is because, contemporary international audiences do not experience Nigerian conflicts only through direct observation. They encounter them through international news organisations,

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social media, diplomatic statements, humanitarian reports and advocacy campaigns. Consequently, individual incidents can become symbolic representations of the country. Research on Nigerian insecurity reporting indicates that sensationalist and highly conflict-oriented media framing can influence perceptions of insecurity, trust and national cohesion (Osisanwo, 2025).

The implication is that the farmers–herders crisis is both a security problem, livelihood problem, governance problem, humanitarian problem, a national image problem, and a strategic communication problem. Therefore, a conceptual critical analysis of its implications for Nigeria's national image is thus, necessary to establish how the persistence, framing and international visibility of the conflict may affect perceptions of Nigeria abroad.

**1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria, which hitherto historically enjoyed considerable demographic, economic, and cultural peace amongst its ethnic groups, is today saddled with persistent insecurity, which has increasingly complicated the country's efforts to project an image of stability, unity, safety and responsible governance. One of the most persistent manifestations of this insecurity is the farmers-herders crisis. Although disputes between agriculturalists and pastoralists are historically rooted in competition over land, water, grazing routes and livelihood resources, the contemporary crisis has become considerably more violent and geographically extensive. What were previously manageable local disputes have now developed in many locations, into violent attacks, destruction of settlements, deaths, displacement and prolonged humanitarian emergencies (UNHCR, 2024). The UNHCR report indicates that the farmer-herder violence has contributed to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, including an estimated 500,000 people in Benue State alone (UNHCR, 2024).

Unfortunately, the repeated occurrence and international reporting of farmer-herder violence may have contributed to the negative perceptions of Nigeria among external audiences. Regular images of burned villages, displaced populations, armed pastoralists, communal reprisals and poor government responses may have reinforced the perceptions of Nigeria as a country characterised by insecurity, weak conflict management, communal divisions and inadequate protection of citizens and property, including business assets. This could scare away foreign investors. Furthermore, the ethnic and religious interpretations attached to some farmers'-herders' conflicts make the problem particularly sensitive for national image management. This is because, when conflicts are represented internationally through ethnic or religious narratives, the complexity of international understanding of the problem becomes ambiguous, and such representations can contribute to stereotyping and undermine the perceptions of the national image.

There is, however, an apparent gap between the severity of the conflict and systematic scholarship examining its national-image consequences. Much of the existing literature concentrates on causes, fatalities, displacement, land competition, climate change, pastoral mobility, security and conflict resolution. Comparatively, less attention has been devoted to examining how the persistent crisis is communicated and interpreted externally and how those interpretations may affect Nigeria's reputation, diplomatic attractiveness, investment climate,

tourism potential and broader soft power. The central problem of this study, therefore, is that while the farmers–herders crisis has generated substantial human, economic and security costs, insufficient critical attention has been given to its implications for the construction and management of Nigeria's national image in the global community. This study consequently seeks to critically analyze the contemporary manifestations of the farmers'- herders' crisis and determine its effect in shaping external perceptions of the country.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to critically analyse the farmers–herders crisis and its implications for Nigeria's national image. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. examine the historical evolution and major drivers of farmers–herders conflicts in Nigeria.
2. critically analyse the effects of farmers–herders violence on Nigeria's security and humanitarian conditions.
3. examine how the domestic and international media framing of farmers–herders conflicts have influenced perceptions of Nigeria's national image; and
4. assess the implications of the farmers–herders crisis for Nigeria's international reputation, tourism and investment attractiveness.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the historical evolution and major drivers of farmers–herders conflicts in Nigeria?
2. What are the major implications of farmers–herders violence for Nigeria's security and humanitarian conditions?
3. How does domestic and international media framing of farmers–herders conflicts influence perceptions of Nigeria's national image?
4. What are the implications of the farmers–herders crisis for Nigeria's international reputation, tourism and investment attractiveness.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Image Repair Theory and Framing Theory. Image Repair Theory explains how individuals, organisations and institutions respond to reputational threats arising from crises, while Framing Theory explains how the selection and presentation of information influence audience understanding of social and political events. Their combination is appropriate because the farmers–herders crisis represents both a security and governance crisis and a communication crisis capable of influencing Nigeria's reputation among domestic and international audiences.

#### 2.1.1 Image Repair Theory

Image Repair Theory was developed by William L. Benoit to explain strategies used by individuals, organisations and other entities to restore damaged reputations following accusations, controversies or crises. Benoit (1995) argues that reputation is shaped by

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stakeholders' perceptions of an entity's actions and its responses when those actions become problematic. The theory identifies five broad image-repair strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification (Benoit, 1995). Denial rejects responsibility; evasion reduces perceived responsibility by portraying an event as accidental, provoked or uncontrollable; reducing offensiveness seeks to minimise negative perceptions; corrective action involves measures to prevent recurrence; and mortification involves acknowledging responsibility and seeking forgiveness.

Although developed largely in organisational and rhetorical contexts, the theory applies to national reputation because states are also evaluated by multiple publics. Governments use public diplomacy, international communication, reputation management and crisis communication because their actions and responses influence perceptions of the country. In Nigeria, recurring farmers–herders violence constitutes an image-threatening crisis. Killings, displacement, destruction of communities, food insecurity and perceived governmental inability to protect citizens may generate broader concerns about governance and security. Consequently, government responses are relevant to national image. Conflict prevention, justice, humanitarian assistance and transparent communication may support reputational recovery, whereas denial, delayed responses, contradictory narratives or inadequate intervention may reinforce negative perceptions. Onyendi (2025) similarly argues that persistent security challenges have implications for Nigeria's international image.

A limitation, however, is that Image Repair Theory can overemphasise communication strategies when national image is also shaped by objective conditions. Nigeria cannot sustainably repair its image through public-relations messages while violent conflicts remain unresolved. Thus, this study considers image repair as involving both substantive actions and strategic communication.

### 2.1.2 Framing Theory

Framing Theory is associated particularly with Goffman (1974) and was developed within communication scholarship by Entman (1993). Framing involves selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in communication. It can define problems, identify causes, make moral evaluations and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993). Because media cannot report every aspect of a complex event, they select particular actors, causes, consequences and solutions. Thus, the same conflict may be framed as ethnic, religious, environmental, political, security, land, food-security or governance crisis.

The theory is particularly relevant to the farmers–herders crisis because it involves multiple causes and actors. Chukwuma (2020) argues that the conflict is not merely physical violence but is also constructed and represented as a security issue through particular narratives. Ogunkunle et al. (2026), analysing newspaper coverage from 2017 to 2021, found differences in framing among newspapers: Southern newspapers gave greater attention to ethnic explanations, whereas Northern newspapers more strongly emphasised climate change. This demonstrates that the crisis does not have a single uniform media narrative.

Similarly, Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2022) found substantial differences between Nigerian and foreign press representations. Nigerian reporting could be sensational, divisive and ideologically

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loaded, while foreign reporting also reflected particular evaluative perspectives. Therefore, the way international media describe farmers–herders violence may influence external perceptions of Nigeria, particularly when the conflict is repeatedly framed as evidence of ethnic fragmentation, religious hostility, lawlessness or governmental incapacity.

### 2.2 Application of the Theories to the Study

The two theories complement each other in explaining the relationship between farmers–herders crisis and Nigeria's national image. The Image Repair Theory provides a basis for analysing Nigeria's responses to the reputational consequences of the crisis, including government actions, public diplomacy, crisis communication, conflict resolution, humanitarian intervention and efforts to restore confidence.

The Framing Theory, on the other hand, explains how information about the crisis is selected, organised and presented to audiences. It is useful for examining how domestic and international media portray the causes, actors, victims, consequences and possible solutions associated with farmers–herders violence.

Together, the theories distinguish between the reality of the crisis and its representation. A violent incident may be an objective security problem, but the manner in which it is communicated can influence its reputational consequences. Nigeria's national image is therefore shaped by both what happens within the country and how those events are communicated and interpreted internationally.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

#### 2.3.1 Nigeria's National Image

National image refers to the overall perception held by domestic and international publics about a country, including its people, institutions, culture, economy, political system and international behaviour. It represents a collective mental picture through which external audiences evaluate a nation and is related to country reputation, nation branding, public diplomacy, soft power and international reputation. National image emerges from the interaction between actual national characteristics and perceptions created through personal experience, international relations, media coverage, cultural exchanges and political communication.

Anholt (2007) identifies governance, people, culture, tourism, investment and immigration, exports and international relations as dimensions of national reputation. This is relevant to Nigeria because farmers–herders violence may affect several dimensions simultaneously through perceptions of insecurity, displacement, humanitarian governance, food security and national cohesion.

Nigeria also possesses positive image resources, including its population, cultural diversity, creative industries, diplomatic influence, entrepreneurial population and regional political importance. However, these attributes coexist with negative perceptions associated with insecurity and governance challenges. The farmers–herders crisis should therefore be viewed as part of a broader reputational environment rather than the sole determinant of Nigeria's international image.

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### 2.3.2 Concept of Farmers–Herders Conflicts in Nigeria

Farmers–herders conflict broadly refers to disputes and violent confrontations between sedentary agricultural communities and mobile or semi-mobile pastoralists over land, pasture, water and other resources. Historically, relations were not necessarily conflictual, as seasonal livestock movement created opportunities for economic interaction. However, agricultural expansion, population growth, changing land-use patterns, environmental pressures, resource competition and weakening traditional grazing arrangements have increased confrontation (Moritz, 2012).

The conflict became particularly severe in Nigeria from the 2010s, affecting states including Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Taraba, as well as parts of the North-West and other regions. Its causes are multidimensional and include land competition, crop destruction, cattle rustling, water disputes, blocked migration routes, climate change, environmental degradation, population growth, agricultural expansion, weak conflict-resolution mechanisms, small arms proliferation, political mobilisation, ethnic and religious narratives, and broader insecurity and criminality (UNHCR, 2024).

George et al. (2022) show that transhumance-related violence cannot be explained by a single variable, as pastoral movement interacts with environmental, political, security and livelihood pressures. Religious and ethnic identities may also be mobilised, while violence affects agricultural production and food availability. The conflict has consequently developed beyond a simple farmer-versus-herder livelihood dispute into wider struggles involving identity, land rights, political representation, insecurity and state legitimacy.

### 2.3.3 Concept of Security and Humanitarian Conditions

Contemporary security extends beyond territorial defence to include protection from threats to food, health, livelihoods, personal safety and community wellbeing. This broader human-security perspective is relevant because farmers–herders conflict produces consequences beyond physical attacks. The conflict has resulted in deaths, destruction of homes and farms, displacement, livelihood losses, food insecurity, poverty, disrupted education, reduced agricultural production, psychological trauma, market disruption and increased humanitarian dependence. Nnam (2025) specifically links violent farmer–herder clashes to food-security threats through their effects on agricultural activities, livelihoods and productive resources.

Displacement also has international implications because large internally displaced populations can attract humanitarian attention and place additional pressure on government institutions. Consequently, farmers–herders violence has both domestic and reputational implications. Persistent inability to protect communities or resolve security problems may reduce confidence in Nigeria internationally.

### 2.3.4 International Media and Framing of Nigeria's National Image

International media framing refers to how foreign and internationally accessible media select, emphasise and interpret information about Nigeria for global audiences. For people who have never visited Nigeria, media may be an important source of national perceptions. Repeated coverage of violence, terrorism, communal conflict, corruption and humanitarian crises can therefore contribute to negative perceptions.

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Ogunkunle et al. (2026) found that newspaper representations of the farmers–herders conflict varied according to outlet and geographical orientation, with ethnic, political, economic, security and climate-related frames emerging rather than a single explanation. Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2022) similarly found differences between Nigerian and foreign media representations, with Nigerian reporting sometimes employing sensational and divisive portrayals. Thus, reputational consequences partly depend on how the conflict is narrated.

### 2.3.5 International Reputation, Tourism and Investment Attractiveness

International reputation refers to the accumulated judgement of external audiences regarding a country's credibility, attractiveness, reliability and behaviour. For Nigeria, reputation can have economic consequences because investors consider political stability, security, institutional reliability and investment protection, while tourists are influenced by safety, infrastructure, cultural attractiveness and political stability.

Persistent farmers–herders violence may indirectly affect investment and tourism when international audiences associate parts of Nigeria with insecurity, rural violence, kidnapping or communal conflict. However, the conflict is not the sole determinant of such decisions; economic policies, exchange rates, infrastructure, taxation, political stability, cultural attractions and international economic conditions are also relevant.

National reputation also influences diplomatic relations and soft power. A country perceived as stable and capable of managing internal diversity may project greater credibility internationally, while persistent conflict can complicate diplomatic communication. The conceptual relationship may therefore be expressed as:

Conflict → insecurity → negative media visibility → negative perception → reputational risk → possible reduction in investment/tourism attractiveness → weakened soft-power projection.

This relationship provides a basis for critically examining the national-image implications of the farmers'-herders' crisis in Nigeria.

## 2.4 Empirical Review

Moritz (2012) found that competition over land and resources does not automatically produce farmer–herder violence; institutional arrangements governing access to resources influence whether interactions become cooperative or confrontational. Again, Olaniyi (2015), examining Bororo Fulani pastoralists and Yoruba farmers in Oyo State from 1986 to 2004, identified economic, social and communal dimensions involving crops, livestock, water, grazing and markets. The study also demonstrates that farmer–herder conflict predates the intense violence of the 2010s.

On the other hand, George et al. (2022) found that transhumance-related violence interacts with environmental, political and security conditions, challenging explanations based solely on ethnic hostility. More so, Efobi et al. (2025), using a pre-registered survey experiment involving 550 residents of a Nigerian conflict zone, found that information presenting climate change as a driver of herder migration increased support for accommodative policies toward herders. This

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indicates that how conflict causes are communicated can influence attitudes toward possible solutions.

Nnam (2025) examined farmer–herder violence from a human-security perspective and found important threats to food security through disruptions to agricultural activities and livelihoods. This is relevant because food security can influence perceptions of Nigeria's capacity to protect agricultural production and rural communities. Also, Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2022), through corpus-based discourse analysis of Nigerian and foreign newspapers, found that Nigerian representations could be sensational and divisive, while foreign media constructed the conflict through their own interpretive perspectives. Chukwuma (2020) similarly showed that the construction of the conflict as a security problem involves narratives, representations and political reactions to perceived threats.

Ogunkunle et al. (2026), using topic modelling and qualitative content analysis of newspaper coverage from 2017–2021, identified diverse frames concerning causes, consequences and solutions, including differences between Northern and Southern newspaper representations, particularly regarding climate change and ethnic explanations. Again, Sholola et al. (2025), analysing 150 online reports and surveying 251 journalists in Kwara State, found that coverage was predominantly characterised by panic- and fear-inducing narratives, while solution-oriented and peace-oriented frames received comparatively less attention. Such framing provides a mechanism through which domestic conflict can acquire international reputational implications.

Onyendi (2025), examining national security challenges and perceptions of Nigeria's international image between 1999 and 2023, demonstrates that security challenges constitute an important component of Nigeria's external image. However, the literature reveals a conceptual separation between studies treating farmers–herders conflict as a security, environmental, agricultural or humanitarian issue and studies examining Nigeria's international image, reputation and public diplomacy. Few studies directly connect the two.

### 2.5 Summary of and Gap in Literature

The literature establishes that farmers–herders conflict in Nigeria is a complex phenomenon involving land competition, pastoral mobility, climate change, population growth, agricultural expansion, insecurity, cattle rustling, political interests, ethnic and religious narratives, and weaknesses in conflict-management institutions. Its consequences extend beyond physical violence to human security, food production, livelihoods, displacement and social cohesion.

Research also shows that media representations shape meanings attached to the conflict through security, ethnic, political, economic, environmental, humanitarian and conflict-resolution frames. Different newspapers may therefore emphasise different explanations of the same crisis.

Despite these contributions, important gaps remain. Conceptually, many studies treat farmers–herders conflict mainly as a security, environmental, agricultural or resource-competition problem, with less attention to its implications for national image and international public relations. Again, studies of Nigeria's international image have generally examined broader security and governance challenges rather than farmers–herders conflict specifically.

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There are also limited studies on the implications of the crisis for Nigeria's international reputation, tourism attractiveness, foreign-investment perceptions and diplomatic credibility. Consequently, this study moves beyond asking why farmers and herders fight or how the media report the conflict to examine what the persistence and representation of the conflict mean for Nigeria's image and reputation in the international community.

## 3.0 Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a conceptual literature review and critical analysis design to examine the farmers–herders crisis and its implications for Nigeria's national image. The design is appropriate because the study does not seek to collect primary data from farmers, herders, government officials, journalists or members of the public. Rather, it critically interrogates existing scholarly literature, empirical studies, policy documents, institutional reports and other credible documentary evidence relating to farmers-herders conflicts, insecurity, humanitarian conditions, media representations, national image, international reputation, tourism, investment attractiveness and Nigeria's external relations.

A conceptual critical analysis differs from a conventional empirical research design in that its principal objective is to interrogate, synthesize, compare and reinterpret existing knowledge in order to develop a reasoned explanation of a phenomenon. The justification is because this research approach enables the researcher to bring together evidence from different disciplinary perspectives and identify relationships, inconsistencies, limitations and gaps in the existing body of knowledge. The approach is also particularly useful because farmers–herders conflict is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot adequately be understood from a single disciplinary perspective. It involves questions of land use, pastoral mobility, climate change, agriculture, security, displacement, governance, ethnicity, religion, media representation and international perception. The critical-analysis design therefore provides an opportunity to connect all these dimensions to the broader question of Nigeria's national image. The study does not attempt to establish statistical causality between farmer–herder violence and Nigeria's national image. Instead, it critically examines the mechanisms through which persistent conflict and its representation may contribute to perceptions of Nigeria among domestic and international publics.

### 3.2 Sources of Data

The study relies exclusively on secondary sources of evidence and data, from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books and book chapters, empirical research reports, government publications and policy documents, reports from international organisations including humanitarian and development organisations. Others include relevant national and international media reports, credible institutional and policy databases; and other authoritative documentary materials relevant to the subject matter.

Particular attention is given to publications addressing farmer-herder conflict in Nigeria, pastoralism and land-use relations, climate change and resource competition, human security and displacement, conflict communication, media framing, national image, nation branding,

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public diplomacy, international reputation, tourism and foreign investment. The study gives greater weight to peer-reviewed and authoritative sources, while institutional reports are used where they provide important information on fatalities, displacement, humanitarian conditions, security developments or policy responses that may not be available from academic publications.

### 3.3 Literature Search and Selection Procedure

The literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant academic and institutional sources using combinations of keywords such as "farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria," "farmers and pastoralists conflict," "herder–farmer violence," "pastoral conflict Nigeria," "farmer–herder crisis and insecurity," "Nigeria national image," "Nigeria international reputation," "media framing farmer–herder conflict," "Nigeria media framing," "Nigeria public diplomacy," "Nigeria tourism and insecurity," and "Nigeria foreign investment and insecurity."

The search process involved four major stages. First, potentially relevant publications were identified from academic databases, scholarly search engines and institutional repositories. Second, titles and abstracts were examined to determine their relevance to the study. Third, relevant full texts were reviewed to establish their substantive contribution. Finally, selected materials were organised according to the major themes and objectives of the study.

Priority was given to recent literature, particularly studies published within the last decade, while older works were retained where they provide foundational theories, historical evidence or seminal conceptual explanations. This combination is important because a historical analysis of farmers-herders relations requires both foundational and contemporary evidence.

### 3.4 Inclusion Criteria

To ensure relevance and analytical quality, sources were selected according to clearly defined criteria. Literature was included where it:

a. addressed farmers–herders relations or pastoral conflicts in Nigeria;
b. examined causes, drivers or historical development of the conflict;
c. investigated security, humanitarian, agricultural or socioeconomic consequences;
d. examined climate change, land use or pastoral mobility in relation to conflict;
e. analysed media representation or framing of the conflict;
f. addressed Nigeria's national image, reputation, public diplomacy or soft power;
g. examined tourism, investment or other international consequences of insecurity;
h. was published in a credible academic or institutional outlet; and
i. provided sufficient information for critical interpretation.

### 3.5 Exclusion Criteria

Sources were excluded where they were irrelevant to Nigeria or the study's objectives, lacked identifiable authorship or institutional responsibility, contained unsupported claims, duplicated evidence already obtained from stronger sources, or provided insufficient information for meaningful scholarly evaluation.

### 3.6 Data Extraction and Organization

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Relevant information was extracted under thematic categories corresponding to the objectives of the study. These included:

- ✓ historical development of farmer–herder relations;
- ✓ major causes and drivers of the crisis;
- ✓ patterns and manifestations of violence;
- ✓ deaths, displacement and humanitarian consequences;
- ✓ agricultural and food-security implications;
- ✓ government and institutional responses;
- ✓ domestic and international media representations;
- ✓ media framing of the conflict;
- ✓ perceptions of Nigeria's security and governance;
- ✓ implications for national image and reputation;
- ✓ implications for tourism and investment attractiveness; and
- ✓ implications for public diplomacy and Nigeria's international standing.
- ✓ The extracted evidence was then compared across studies to identify areas of convergence, disagreement, methodological limitations and under-researched dimensions.

**3.7 Method of Data Analysis**

The retrieved literature and documentary evidence were subjected to qualitative thematic analysis and critical interpretive analysis. Thematic analysis involved identifying recurring ideas, concepts, arguments and findings across the literature and organizing them into analytically meaningful themes. Each major body of evidence was examined in terms of its assumptions, theoretical orientation, methodology, evidence, findings, strengths, weaknesses and relevance to the present study**.**

The critical-analysis procedure is consistent with the understanding of critical analysis as an evaluative process involving the decomposition of a subject into its constituent elements and the assessment of the relationships among those elements. Eleje (1982) describes critical analysis as involving reasoned evaluation rather than simple description. Similarly, critical writing requires the researcher to establish a position, provide evidence to support that position, engage alternative viewpoints and construct a coherent argument.

The study adopted the two complementary stages of critical reading and critical writing. Critical reading involved interrogating the selected literature to establish the purpose of each study, its theoretical assumptions, methodological approach, evidence base, findings and limitations. Critical writing then involved synthesising the evidence into an independent scholarly argument.

The procedure was guided by the principles of critical academic writing identified in academic writing literature, including establishing the focus of the analysis, developing an informed position, evaluating supporting evidence, engaging alternative viewpoints and organising arguments logically (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Consequently, the study avoids treating published findings as automatically correct. The evidence is considered in relation to the context in which it was produced, the methodological approach employed and the extent to which its conclusions can reasonably support the argument of the present study.

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## 4.0 Data Presentation And Analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

The study is designed as a conceptual critical analysis. Accordingly, the findings presented below are synthesised from reviewed literature and documentary/empirical evidence rather than from a primary questionnaire or experimental dataset. The empirical matrix provides the authors, publication details, publisher, methodology, major results, implications and recommendations of selected studies that directly support the four objectives.

**Table 4.1: Critical Analysis of the Four Research Objectives/Research Questions**

| Objective / Research Question | Explanation / Focus | Discussion of Findings | Conclusion | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Objective 1 / RQ1: Examine the historical evolution and major drivers of farmers–herders conflicts in Nigeria. What are the historical evolution and major drivers of the conflicts? | The analysis traces farmer–herder relations from earlier patterns of resource sharing to contemporary recurrent violence. It considers grazing arrangements, land-use change, population growth, agricultural expansion, pastoral mobility, climate variability, water scarcity, insecurity, weak institutions and competition over natural resources. | The literature shows that farmer–herder relations were not historically characterised by continuous hostility. Traditional arrangements facilitated coexistence, but expanding cultivation, population pressure, urbanisation, weakened grazing systems and changing land tenure reduced access to pasture and water. Environmental stress, drought, desertification and changing rainfall patterns have intensified competition. However, climate change is better understood as a conflict multiplier | Farmers–herders conflict is a multidimensional and historically evolving crisis. Its persistence reflects the interaction of environmental pressures, resource competition, demographic change, weak governance, insecurity and inadequate conflict-resolution mechanisms. | Develop negotiated land-use and grazing-management arrangements; strengthen mapping and management of livestock routes and water points where locally acceptable; expand climate-adaptation programmes for farmers and pastoralists; strengthen early-warning/early-response systems; and address institutional and political drivers alongside environmental pressures. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | rather than a single cause. Political, economic, ethnic, institutional and security factors interact with environmental pressures. | | |
| Objective 2 / RQ2: Critically analyse effects of farmers–herders violence on security, social cohesion, economic activities and humanitarian conditions. What are the major implications? | This objective moves beyond deaths and physical destruction to examine displacement, food insecurity, livelihood losses, destruction of farms and livestock, market disruption, community fragmentation, fear, reprisals and pressure on humanitarian systems. | Evidence demonstrates serious human-security consequences, including deaths, injuries, destruction of homes and farms, displacement and livelihood disruption. Loss of agricultural activity can reduce food production, while pastoral displacement damages livestock livelihoods. Repeated violence weakens social trust and can deepen ethnic, religious and territorial identities. Displaced populations may face overcrowded settlements and | The crisis undermines internal security, social cohesion, livelihoods, food security and humanitarian conditions. Its effects extend beyond directly affected communities to national economic stability and development. | Adopt an integrated human-security response; improve protection and assistance for displaced persons; support livelihood and agricultural recovery; strengthen compensation/reconstruction mechanisms where appropriate; and combine formal security responses with community dialogue, traditional mediation and peacebuilding. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | inadequate assistance, making the crisis both a security and development problem. | | |
| Objective 3 / RQ3: Examine how domestic and international media framing may influence perceptions of Nigeria's national image. How does media framing influence perceptions? | This objective examines how newspapers, online media and international information actors select, emphasise and interpret the crisis through ethnic, religious, security, climate, governance, humanitarian, economic or peacebuildin g frames. | Studies show that media representation does more than report violence: it helps audiences interpret causes, actors and significance. Nigerian coverage has sometimes been sensational and divisive, while foreign coverage may construct the crisis differently for international audiences. Recent research also finds substantial variation across newspapers: some emphasise ethnicity and politics, others climate change, security or conflict resolution. Repeated exposure to killings, displacement | Media framing can contribute to the construction of Nigeria's national image, especially when negative conflict narratives receive sustained international attention. However, media coverage is not the sole determinant; the actual security situation provides the substantive basis for many reputational narratives. | Promote conflict-sensitive journalism; reduce ethnic stereotyping and sensationalism; provide timely and contextual information through diplomatic and public-relations channels; distinguish perpetrators from entire communities; and give greater attention to peacebuilding, recovery and constructive responses. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | and weak responses can therefore contribute to negative perceptions of Nigeria, although media framing operates alongside actual conditions. | | |
| Objective 4 / RQ4: Assess implications for international reputation, diplomacy, investment attractiveness, tourism and soft power. What are the implications for these national-image outcomes? | This objective examines how persistent internal conflict can influence external perceptions of Nigeria as a safe, stable and investment-friendly country, as well as tourism decisions, diplomatic goodwill and the country's ability to exercise soft power. | The synthesis indicates that persistent insecurity can create a reputational burden. Recurrent violence, displacement, food insecurity and perceived institutional weakness may reinforce perceptions of instability and affect investment and tourism decisions. Diplomatic credibility may also suffer where the state appears unable to manage recurrent violence. Soft-power assets such as culture, entertainment, sport, entrepreneurshi | The farmers–herders crisis represents a national-image challenge whose consequences extend into reputation, investment, tourism, diplomacy and soft power. Sustainable image recovery requires substantive improvements in security and governance as well as strategic communication. | Combine substantive reforms with strategic reputation management. Coordinate foreign affairs, tourism, investment promotion and communication institutions; provide accurate security/investment information; promote credible stories of recovery and cultural achievement; and avoid relying on public relations as a substitute for security and governance reforms. |

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| | | p and tourism can be overshadowed by insecurity narratives. Nevertheless, reputational damage is not irreversible; credible security and governance improvements can support recovery. | | |

**Table 4.2: Empirical Evidence Matrix Supporting the Four Objectives**

| Author(s), title, journal/publisher and year | Methodology | Major Results / Findings | Implications / Recommendations | Relevance to Present Study |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nnamani, K. E., Ononogbu, D. C., Okafor, N. I., Ohabuenyi, J., & Anichebe, O. J. (2024). "Open grazing prohibition law, political economy of centralized law enforcement mechanism, and nomadic pastoralist-sedentary farmer relations in Nigeria." Cogent Social Sciences, 10(1), 2414869. Publisher: Taylor & Francis. | Qualitative/political-economy analysis of the relationship among anti-open-grazing law, centralized enforcement, class and economic structures. The study examines why anti-grazing laws have not resolved pastoralist–farmer conflict. | Anti-grazing legislation has failed to curb recurring conflict. The study argues that weak or uneven enforcement alone does not fully explain failure; political-economic structures and centralized law-enforcement arrangements are also important. | Policy should go beyond legislation to address enforcement structures, political-economic interests and the institutional conditions that reproduce conflict. This supports locally workable and politically credible conflict-management mechanisms. | Supports Objective 1 by explaining institutional and political drivers and the historical policy context of grazing management. |
| Olaniyi, R. O. (2015). "Bororo Fulani | Qualitative historical study based on in-depth oral interviews | Conflicts included economic (crop | Traditional rulers and pastoral leaders can | Supports Objective 1 and |

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| **Author(s), title, journal/publisher and year** | **Methodology** | **Major Results / Findings** | **Implications / Recommendations** | **Relevance to Present Study** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| pastoralists and Yoruba farmers' conflicts in the Upper Ogun River, Oyo State Nigeria, 1986–2004." Journal of Asian and African Studies, 50(2), 239–252. Publisher: SAGE. | in Saki and Iseyin, Oyo State. | destruction and cattle killing), social (murder, rape, armed violence and molestation) and communal destruction of villages, pastoral settlements and markets. Competition over land, grazing, water and markets and wider indigene–settler power relations were central. | contribute to peace committees and local conflict-resolution arrangements. Resource governance and power relations should be addressed rather than treating incidents as isolated clashes. | Objective 2 by establishing the historical, socioeconomic and communal dimensions of conflict. |
| George, J., Adelaja, A., Vaughan, O., & Awokuse, T. (2022). "Explaining transhumance-related violence: Fulani ethnic militia in rural Nigeria." Journal of Rural Studies, 89, 275–286. Publisher: Elsevier. | Spatial/grid-level panel-data analysis examining push, pull and escalating factors associated with transhumance-related violence. | Climate-related pressures, drought, natural disasters, high temperatures, grazing constraints and insecurity—including the effects of Boko Haram attacks—help explain the movement and escalation of pastoral conflict. The findings reinforce the multidimensional nature of the crisis. | Conflict prevention should integrate climate adaptation, pastoral mobility management, security interventions and evidence-based livelihood strategies rather than relying on a single explanatory factor. | Supports Objective 1 by demonstrating interaction between environmental, livelihood and security drivers. |
| Nnam, M. U. | Qualitative approach; | The conflict | Improve food- | Directly |

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| **Author(s), title, journal/publisher and year** | **Methodology** | **Major Results / Findings** | **Implications / Recommendations** | **Relevance to Present Study** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (2025). "Violent herder–farmer conflicts and human security in Nigeria: A focus on food security." Development in Practice. Publisher: Taylor & Francis. | ex post facto design; non-probability theoretical sampling of media/documentary cases; qualitative content analysis of selected media sources and reports. | threatens human security, particularly food security. Violence disrupts agricultural production and livelihoods and generates wider insecurity. The study highlights the importance of developing a stronger evidence base where official security data are inaccessible. | security resilience, protect agricultural livelihoods and strengthen evidence-based policy. Researchers and institutions should improve the availability and accessibility of trustworthy conflict data. | supports Objective 2 by linking farmer–herder violence to human security and food security. |
| Chiluwa, I., & Chiluwa, I. M. (2022). "'Deadlier than Boko Haram': Representations of the Nigerian herder–farmer conflict in the local and foreign press." Media, War & Conflict, 15(1), 3–24. Publisher: SAGE. | Corpus-based discourse study comparing representations in the Nigerian press and Western/foreign media. The analysis examines ideological implications and consequences for peace and security. | Nigerian press representations were found to be highly sensational, divisive and potentially dangerous. Foreign press coverage appeared comparatively more objective but could frame the conflict in ways tailored to foreign audiences and could also minimise aspects of its seriousness. | Journalists and media institutions should adopt more conflict-sensitive and contextual reporting. Media narratives should avoid constructions that intensify division or portray entire communities as inherently dangerous. | Strongly supports Objective 3 by connecting media representation with interpretation of the conflict and its potential consequences for Nigeria's image. |
| Sholola, Y. A., Ibrahim, O. O., | Triangulated design combining content | Coverage was predominantly | Media organisations | Supports Objective 3 |

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| **Author(s), title, journal/publisher and year** | **Methodology** | **Major Results / Findings** | **Implications / Recommendations** | **Relevance to Present Study** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| & Olufadi, O. H. (2025). "Media Framing and Peace Advocacy in Mainstream Coverage of the Herder-Farmer Conflicts in Nigeria." Journal of Management & Social Sciences, 14(1). Publisher: Fountain University/Journal of Management & Social Sciences. | analysis of 150 online reports from Punch, Daily Trust and Vanguard with a survey of 251 Nigerian Union of Journalists members in Kwara State. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics. | framed through panic- and fear-inducing narratives, while solution-oriented and awareness/peace frames were limited. Journalists recognised the influence of framing but faced institutional and structural constraints in applying peace-oriented reporting. | should partner with peacebuilding institutions, strengthen conflict-sensitive journalism and increase solution-oriented coverage that promotes dialogue, understanding and reconciliation. | and provides direct evidence for the proposed Framing Theory component. |
| Ogunkunle, D., Odebiyi, S., Walter, S., Beazer, A., Bravo, I., & Palicki, S. (2026). "Analysing media framing of the farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria: Combining topic modelling and Qualitative Content Analysis." Media, War & Conflict, 19(3), 734–755. Publisher: SAGE. | Mixed computational/qualitative approach. The researchers analysed 2,076 newspaper articles from four national newspapers published 2017–2021 using topic modelling and qualitative content analysis. A purposive corpus and a qualitative sample were used to examine causes, consequences and solutions. | Media framing was diverse rather than uniform. Politics/conflict resolution and security/conflict management were prominent themes. Southern newspapers more often used ethnic framings of causes, while the Northern newspaper emphasised climate change. The study concludes that the media can either fuel or help abate tensions. | Media should diversify voices and strengthen constructive, conflict-sensitive representations. Future research should test how these frames affect audience perceptions and attitudes. | Directly supports Objective 3 and identifies the exact gap this study addresses: moving from media framing to implications for Nigeria's national image. |

### 4.3. Findings

The evidence indicates that farmers–herders conflict in Nigeria is historically rooted in competition over land, pasture and water but has been intensified by demographic change, changing land-use patterns, environmental stress, insecurity, institutional weaknesses and political-economic factors. The crisis has consequences extending beyond physical violence. It affects human security, food security, livelihoods, displacement, social cohesion and community relations.

Media representation is an important mechanism through which the crisis becomes visible to wider audiences. Ethnic, security, climate, political and humanitarian frames can produce different interpretations of the same conflict. Persistent negative representations, combined with the reality of violence and perceived institutional weakness, can contribute to unfavourable perceptions of Nigeria. Nevertheless, national image is not determined by media narratives alone; actual improvements in governance, security and social cohesion are fundamental.

The strongest analytical contribution of the present study is therefore the integration of conflict dynamics, human-security consequences, media framing and national-image implications within a single critical framework.

### 4.4 Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicate that the farmers–herders crisis in Nigeria is a multidimensional phenomenon arising from the interaction of environmental, socioeconomic, political, institutional and security factors. The analysis reveals that the crisis cannot be adequately explained as a simple struggle between agricultural farmers and pastoralists over land. Rather, changing land-use patterns, population pressure, competition for water and grazing resources, climate variability, pastoral mobility, weak institutional mechanisms and insecurity have combined to intensify the tensions. George et al. (2022), for example, demonstrate that climate-related pressures, grazing constraints and insecurity interact in explaining transhumance-related violence. Similarly, Nnamani et al. (2024) show that legislative and institutional responses to open grazing have not, by themselves, resolved the underlying political-economic and governance problems associated with farmer–herder relations. These findings support the argument that sustainable conflict management requires attention to the structural conditions that reproduce the crisis.

The second major finding is that farmers–herders violence has significant implications for human security, food security, livelihoods and social cohesion. Violent attacks destroy farms, crops, livestock and settlements, while displacement prevents affected populations from engaging in productive economic activities. Nnam (2025) found that farmer–herder violence threatens human security, particularly food security, through destruction of farmland and crops, displacement, water pollution and disruption of agricultural livelihoods. The implication is that the conflict extends beyond immediate loss of lives to undermine the capacity of communities to produce and access food and sustain their livelihoods. The persistence of violence may also deepen mistrust and social fragmentation between affected communities, thereby creating conditions for retaliatory attacks and further cycles of violence.

The third finding concerns the role of media framing in shaping perceptions of the crisis and, consequently, Nigeria's national image. The findings suggest that media coverage does not simply reproduce events but selects particular explanations, actors and consequences through which audiences interpret the conflict. Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2022) found that representations of the conflict in the Nigerian press could be highly sensational and divisive, while foreign media constructed the conflict for international audiences in distinctive ways. More recent evidence from Ogunkunle et al. (2026) demonstrates that media framing is not uniform: Southern newspapers tended to emphasise ethnic explanations, whereas the Northern newspaper examined in their study gave greater attention to climate change. Politics, security and conflict resolution were also prominent frames.

This finding is particularly important to the present study because it demonstrates the relevance of Framing Theory. When farmer–herder violence is predominantly presented through ethnic, religious or highly sensational frames, international audiences may develop simplified perceptions of Nigeria as a country characterised by communal hostility and insecurity. Conversely, frames emphasising climate change, governance, peacebuilding and conflict resolution may encourage a more contextual understanding of the crisis. Therefore, media framing can influence the interpretation of Nigeria's national image, although it should not be regarded as the sole cause of negative perceptions. The actual occurrence and persistence of violence remain the fundamental basis upon which many negative narratives are constructed.

Finally, the findings indicate that the farmers–herders crisis has implications for Nigeria's international reputation, investment attractiveness, tourism, diplomatic relations and soft-power projection. Persistent reports of killings, displacement, food insecurity and institutional inability to prevent violence can reinforce perceptions of insecurity and weak governance. Such perceptions may make international investors and tourists more cautious and may constrain Nigeria's ability to project positive aspects of its national identity. The findings therefore support the application of Image Repair Theory, which emphasises the importance of appropriate responses to reputational threats. However, the study argues that image repair cannot depend exclusively on public-relations campaigns. Nigeria's reputational recovery must be anchored in demonstrable improvements in security, governance, justice, humanitarian protection and peaceful coexistence.

Overall, the findings establish an interconnected relationship between the causes of the farmers–herders crisis, its security and humanitarian consequences, media framing, and Nigeria's national image. The crisis therefore constitutes not only a domestic security and development challenge but also a national reputation and international communication challenge. Effective management requires a combination of substantive conflict prevention and resolution, human-security interventions, conflict-sensitive media practices and credible strategic communication. This integrated approach is more consistent with the realities of Nigeria's national-image challenge than an approach that treats image management as merely a matter of promotional communication.

### 4.5 Conclusion

The study concludes that the farmers–herders crisis constitutes more than a localised competition over agricultural and pastoral resources. It is a multidimensional national crisis

whose effects extend from insecurity and humanitarian suffering to the communication and perception of Nigeria internationally. The findings support the application of Framing Theory because the media can influence which causes, actors and consequences become most salient in public discourse. They also support the relevance of Image Repair Theory because governmental responses to recurrent violence can either mitigate or deepen reputational damage. Consequently, Nigeria's national-image recovery requires a dual strategy: substantive improvements in security, governance, justice, humanitarian protection and peaceful coexistence, combined with credible, timely and conflict-sensitive international communication.

### 4.6 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended among other things that:

1. The Government should strengthen integrated conflict-prevention and early-warning systems that combine security intelligence with community-level information.
2. The legislators and policymakers should develop negotiated and locally legitimate approaches to grazing, agricultural land use, water access and pastoral mobility.
3. There should be a clear and deliberate policy to climate change issues as a conflict multiplier and expand climate-adaptation measures for both farming and pastoral communities.
4. The Government should improve protection, assistance and livelihood restoration for internally displaced and conflict-affected populations in various parts of the country.
5. The relevant Security Agencies in the country should strengthen their internal accountability and justice mechanisms, so that perpetrators of violence are investigated and prosecuted irrespective of identity or affiliation.
6. There should be stronger partnerships between media organisations, peacebuilding institutions, researchers and civil-society organisations to shore-up peace-building initiatives and solution-oriented reporting in the country.

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