

Fulanization

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ABSTRACT

Fulanization is the historical and cultural impact of the Fulani people, particularly in West Africa. The Fulani Empire was led by figures like Usman dan Fodio, who played a significant role in the spread of Islam and the establishing of a vast empire across the region, which led to the shaping of the region's cultural and religious identity. The Fulani language, Fulfude, greatly impacts the region's linguistic landscape. Fulanization is a term used in political, cultural, and media discourse – especially in parts of West Africa – to describe the perceived spread of Fulani cultural, political, or economic dominance. The term is controversial and often associated with ethnic and religious tensions, particularly in Nigeria. The paper looks at the concept, context, and the impacts of Fulanization.

KEYWORDS: *Fulanization, Fulfude, Fulani herders, Islam, ethnic profiling, banditry, social identity, race, Fulani empire, conflict resolution mechanism*

INTRODUCTION

The profiling of tribes and races about criminal activities is currently gaining widespread acceptance across the globe, with its significant challenge characterizing social relations in Nigeria today. The Fulani tribe is been fingered as massively involved and engaged in criminal activities, generating severe fear and suspicion between them and the rest of the tribes in Nigeria, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Fulanization is the perceived process by which the Fulani ethnic group (or individuals believed to be affiliated with it) expands its influence over non-Fulani communities, which can be via political appointments, economic dominance, demographic migration, or religious propaganda, particularly in regions like Nigeria. In Nigeria, the term gained traction in public discuss amid rising insecurity involving Fulani herders and the farming communities. It has been alleged by some commentators and political figures that the Nigerian government, especially during the Muhammadu Buhari's administration as the president (a Fulani), was said to be advancing the Fulani agenda, a claim that was seriously debated and often criticized as inflammatory or ethnocentric. Many analysts and

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scholars argue that the term is divisive and promotes ethnic profiling. The Fulani are a diverse and widespread ethnic group across West and Central Africa, and many Fulani people are marginalized themselves [1-4]. Several studies by researchers have concluded that Fulani have been involved in various criminal activities across the Sahel, most notably in Sub-Saharan Africa, with northern Nigeria serving as the epicenter [5, 6]. Further studies have also showed that many victims of crimes in northern Nigeria, such as armed robbery, banditry, kidnapping, hostage-taking, and insurgency, have testified to encounters with Fulani as the majority members of various criminal gangs that assaulted them [6, 7, 8].

HISTORY

The Fulani, Fula, or Fulbe people are an ethnic group in Sahara, Sahel and West Africa, widely dispersed across the region [5, 6], as shown in Figures 3 and 4. They inhabit many countries, they live mainly in West Africa and Northern parts of Central Africa, South Sudan, Darfur, and regions near the Red Sea coast in Sudan. As a result of clashing definitions regarding Fula ethnicity, their approximate population

is unknown. However, various estimate put it between 25 and 40 million people worldwide [9-12].

The origins of the Fulani people are unclear and various theories have been postulated. They are nomadic herding people, who have moved through and among many cultures, making it difficult to trace their relationships and history with other peoples. Speculations about their origins started in the era of European conquest and colonization because of their oftentimes fair skin, wavy long hair and facial features [9]. Fulani oral histories suggest that their origins lie in North Africa. Their ethnogenesis arose as a result of interactions between an ancient West African populations such as Berbers or Egyptians [9, 13, 14]. The earliest mention of the Fula in history may go back to the Bible. Maurice Delafosse speculated that they may correspond to the descendants of Put, the son of Ham. Josephus wrote of what is now Libya [9].

MIGRATION

The Fulani were cattle-keeping farmers who shared their lands with other nearby groups, like the Soninke, who contributed to the rise of ancient Ghana, with eastward and westward expansion being led by nomadic groups of cattle breeders or the Fulbe ladde, as shown in Figure 5. Agricultural expansions led to a division among the Fulani, where individuals were classified as belonging either to group of expansionist nomadic agriculturalists or the group of Fulani who found it more comfortable to abandon traditional nomadic ways and settle in towns or the Fulbe Wuro. The evidence of Fulani migration as a whole, from the Western to Eastern Sudan is fragmentary. Delafosse, one of the earliest enquirers into Fulani history and customs, relayed mainly on oral tradition, estimated that Fulani migrants left Fuuta-Tooro heading east between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. By the 15th century, there was a steady flow of Fulbe immigrants into Hausaland and, later on, Bornu. Also by the 16th century, their presence was seen in Baghirmi, and while by the end of the 16th century, Fulani settlements were dotted all along the Benue River valley and its tributaries [9].

ISLAM AND THE FULA JIHADS

The Fula who lived at the edge of the Sahara, were among the first Sub-Saharan groups to adopt Islam. As stated by David Levison, adopting Islam made the Fulani feel a “cultural and religious superiority to surrounding peoples, and that adoption became a major ethnic boundary marker” between them and other African ethnic groups in the Sahel and West Africa [9]. Armed with horses and weapons from the north and inspired by Fula, Berber and Arab clerics, Fulani political units played a central role in

promoting Islam in West Africa through peaceful and violent means. These jihads targeted other ethnic groups but as well as other Fulani who had not yet adopted Islam or who follows it too loosely [9, 15]. These wars helped the Fula dominate much of the Sahel region of West Africa during the medieval and pre-colonial era, which established them as not only as a religious group but also as a political and economic force [16, 17]. From the 18th century onwards, the frequency of jihads increased and the Fulani became politically dominate in many areas [9], as shown in Figures 6 and 7.

SOKOTO CALIPHATE AND ITS VARIOUS EMIRATES

The Sokoto Caliphate was by far the largest and most successful legacy of Fulani power in Western Africa, and the most organized of the Fulani jihad states. Throughout the 19th century, Sokoto was one of the largest and most powerful empires in West Africa until 1903, when it was defeated by the European colonial forces. The Sokoto Caliphate was made up of several emirates, the largest of which was Adamawa, although the Kano Emirate was the most populated. Others included, but not limited to Gombe emirate, Gwandu emirate, Bauchi emirate, Katsina emirate, Zazzau emirate, Hadejia emirate, and Muri emirate [9, 18].

ANTI-FULANI SENTIMENT

The anti-Fulani sentiment is the hostility that exists towards Fulani people in Nigeria, Mali and other West African nations as well as the discrimination that they are subjected to. The Fulani are a semi-nomadic ethnic group that is dispersed across several West African countries, and they represent 6% of Nigeria's population [19].

ISLAMIC TERRORISM

There has been accusation that the Fulani people are supporting Islamic terrorist groups such as Boko Haram even though they themselves are often victims of terrorist attacks [19, 20]. The following accusations have emboldened various ethnonationalist groups in Nigeria, such as the Igbo nationalist group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), which attempts to spread anti-Fulani rhetoric [21]. The alleged support for Islamist Terrorism was the main motive for the Ogossagou massacre in Mali by Dogo militias [19].

HERDER-FARMER CONFLICTS

The herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria are a series of disputes between Fulani cattle herders and non-Fulani farmers over land, most often resulting in violence. This situation has led to anti-Fulani sentiment in Nigeria from politicians and the press or news outlets [20]. Some states in Nigeria have therefore, as a

response to this conflicts proposed or enacted laws to discourage Fulani herders from bringing their cattle for grazing, but have been seen as being discriminating [22]. The Fulani advocacy group Tabital Pulaaku International (TPI) has accused Adamawa senator Binos Dauda Yaroe of hate speech after he blamed Fulani pastoralists for armed kidnappings in Nigeria [23].

The Fulani militia also known as Fulani herders, come from a nomadic, predominantly Muslim tribe. It was in 2014 that the militia was named the 4th deadliest terrorist group in the world by the Global Terrorism Index (while Boko Haram, ISIS, and Taliban, ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd in that order). Southern Kaduna State in central Nigeria, is one of the worst affected areas where more than 800 men, women and children have already been killed and while over 10,000 have fled their homes, as shown in Figures 8 and 9. The Fulani militia are targeting non-Muslim communities, particularly the Christians, i. e. isolated communities and individuals with the most vulnerable being men and women working on their farms [24].

There are accusations that the Fulani have collaborated with so-called jihadist groups in Nigeria and neighboring countries to fuel tensions at the political levels of the country, leading to ethnoreligious self-protection groups amongst Christian communities in the Middle Belt in particular [25]. With regards to the Boko Haram crisis, the government has been criticized for failing to address the growing dangers of farmer-herder violence. This is not far-fetched as President Muhammadu Buhari – a Fulani himself – has been accused of being overtly soft on the herding communities, refusing to robustly prosecute the perpetrators of violence [26]. Strong anti-grazing laws passed by some state governments in 2017-18 was seen as a punitive act against herders, prompting them to move into neighboring states where new conflicts broke out [26]. The absence of strong state institutions in the northern states of Nigeria have led to widespread banditry and cattle rustling with high levels of impunity [27, 28]. Nigeria's Middle Belt and the northernmost states have become some of the most dangerous states in the Sahel [29]. It is estimated that about 300,000 people have been displaced between 2016 and 2018 alone, with deaths of thousands in most fragile communities in the country [26].

SEPARATIST AGITATION AND CONFLICTS OVER OIL IN THE SOUTH

Nigeria's southern delta region is faced with the long-standing issue or disputes over natural resources, while the north is confronted with insecurity. For

some years now, local Nigerian groups have been protesting against the extraction practices of oil companies and the national government, complaining that they are marginalized economically while suffering the brunt of the environmental hazards of extraction [30], especially in the region of the Indigenous People of Biafra – where political and economic exclusion has fueled a decades-long insurgency and the push for secession [28].

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

As relatively wealthy and blessed with natural resources as Nigeria is, the country still remains deeply and grossly underdeveloped and is suffering from extremely high unemployment rates and poverty levels [31]. Overreliance on oil exports meant that the 2014 slump in oil prices triggered a rapid drop in economic growth and a spike in unemployment (up to 23% in 2018). As at today, Nigeria has the highest number of extremely poor people of any country in the world, with a poverty rate over 50 per cent [30, 32] – thus, demographic growth cum increasing inequalities between the rich and the poor, socioeconomic grievances have become a significant driver of tensions and potential violence in Nigeria.

The endemic food insecurity is as a result of the obvious outcome of poor economic growth and weak governance systems in Nigeria. The agricultural sector is underdeveloped, resulting in low productivity and a high dependency on food imports [30, 33]. More than two thirds of the Nigerian workforce is into farming, lacking sufficient investments in mechanized agriculture, dependent on rain-fed farming, making crops to be highly susceptible to changing rainfall patterns, shifting water tables and desertification [33]. Instead of investing in staple crops so as to reduce dependencies on foreign imports, the government's focus on investments in "cash crops," only generate funds for farmers but does not provide food security for the broader population, which has led to significant increase in food prices and compounded by the 2019 decision by the government to close the land borders to prevent food smuggling from Nigeria's neighbours [34, 35].

However, poverty and unemployment are not evenly distributed across Nigeria. The oil-rich South enjoys far greater investment and development, leaving the North a largely neglected hinterland. Coincidentally, the poorest regions are those that are suffering most severely from violence, whether from Boko Haram or farmer-herder conflicts. Despite the oil, many southern communities are deeply impoverished, since they are not enjoying the benefits of their natural resources – causing economic marginalization which

has led to the reasons for groups taking up arms against the state, and is a clear driver of many of the conflicts in Nigeria today [33, 34, 36].

POPULATION DISPLACEMENTS

Population movement is due to conflicts, rendering millions of people homeless. Cameroonians numbering 52,000 recently fled from violence to seek for shelter in Nigeria, and while 111,000 Nigerians left violent-affected areas and sought for safety/refuge in Cameroon, which was as a result of Boko Haram attacks in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, leading to the displacement of thousands of people yearly. Experts say that, newly arriving populations create strains on limited resources and most often cause renewed intercommunal tensions. The displaced populations are uniquely vulnerable to food insecurity and violent attacks [37-40].

THE IMPACT ON GIRLS/WOMEN

Those mostly vulnerable to conflicts in Nigeria are girls and women, as they are the target of sexual and gender-based violence, which includes but not limited to Boko Haram and its affiliates. Girls/women in displacement camps are said to be very much vulnerable to sexual abuse and gender-based violence. Many of the women folk due to farmer-herder conflicts, lose their husbands (male breadwinners), and finding it extremely difficult to support themselves and their families. Coupled with low education rates/lack of economic opportunities, these women in conflict-affected or prone areas of Nigeria tend to suffer the most [41-44].

CORRUPTION AND WEAK GOVERNANCE

Corruption and the extremely weak/poor governance capacities of the Nigerian government help to fuel the risks of violent conflicts. Nigeria is among one of the most corrupt countries in the world, with the highest illicit outflows anywhere in Africa and significant diversion of oil revenues away from state coffers. Nigeria has struggled to build state governance capacities. Furthermore, the bulk of the national budgetary spending is on security, resulting in heavy-handed responses to violent conflicts without accompanying social and economic programming e.g. widespread power cuts, many communities have no basic services, lack of infrastructure, hence undermining communities' faith in the federal government. Also are the issues of long-standing grievances between the northern communities, and the Christian/Muslim antagonism, of which people are now calling on the general population to take up arms to defend their land and communities, since the central government is not capable of protecting its citizens [45, 46].

CONCLUSION

Fulanization is a complex and multifaceted concept, encompassing historical, cultural, and contemporary dimensions. "Fulanization" is said to be a controversial and politically charged term or concept often used in parts of West Africa, especially Nigeria, to describe alleged attempts by Fulani individuals or groups to assert dominance over other ethnic or religious groups. Discussions around it are often tied to issues such as herder-farmer conflicts, insecurity, political power, and ethnic tension.

Fulanization concept reflects deep-rooted ethnic and political tensions in Nigeria and West Africa. Some see it as a genuine fear of marginalization or cultural domination, and others see it as a politicized narrative used to sow division and distract from broader structural challenges such as poverty, weak governance, and insecurity. There is little concrete evidence of a coordinated agenda to "Fulanize" the region; rather, the perception often arises from complex socio-political dynamics, including herder-farmer conflict, regional imbalances in power, and historical grievances.

To address these issues requires not ethnic scapegoating, but inclusive policies, stronger institutions, conflict resolution mechanisms, and equitable governance that will promote national unity and development as a more productive path than fueling narratives that will deepen division.

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Figure 1. Fulani people

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtPRrN1KfHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deryxM1hSgIcsRgSExOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUSHgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqLDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewi99auv6Y6NAXVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=QTnSRMV1HZVoM&vsid=mosaic

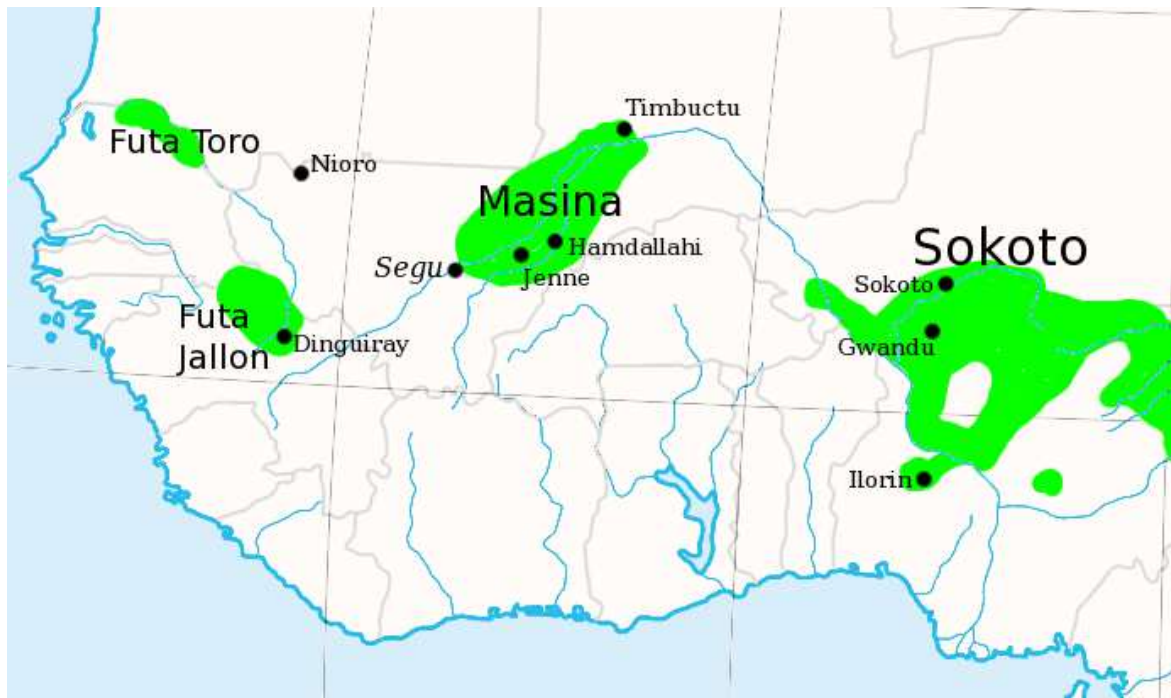


Figure 2. Fula jihads

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtpRRn1KfHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmnHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deyxM1hSgIcsRgSEexOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUShgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqIDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi99auv6Y6NAXVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=A7T6VBH5hShsMM&vsid=mosaic



Figure 3. Fula people

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtpRRn1KfHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmnHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deyxM1hSgIcsRgSEexOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUShgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqIDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi99auv6Y6NAXVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=QimdHNcfGJ8RtM&vssid=mosaic

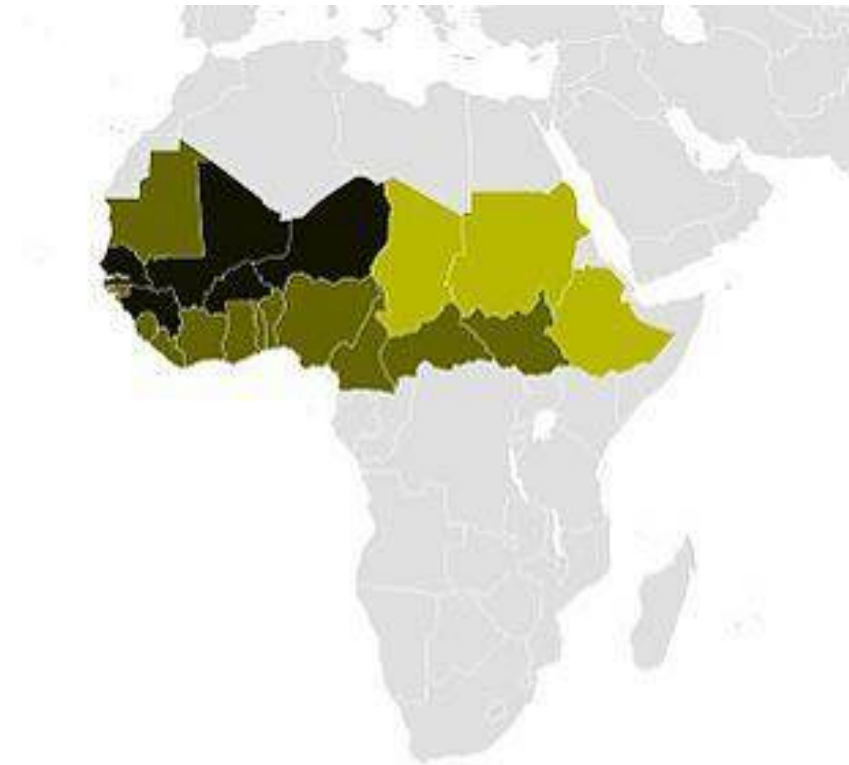


Figure 4. Fula people

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtpRRn1KFHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deyxM1hSgIcsRgSEexOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUShgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqLDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi99auv6Y6NAxVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=sc36m95GK6q_uM&vssid=mosaic



Figure 5. Fulani herdsmen

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtpRRn1KFHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deyxM1hSgIcsRgSEexOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUShgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqLDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi99auv6Y6NAxVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=ylluJxICKu-dkM&vssid=mosaic



Figure 6. Nomadic conflict

Source:https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtPRrN1KFHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmnHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deyxM1hSgIcsRgSEexOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUShgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqLDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi99auv6Y6NAXVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=zORATx7VKA0DcM&vsid=mosaic



Figure 7. Fulani extremism in Nigeria

Source:https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtPRrN1KFHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmnHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deyxM1hSgIcsRgSEexOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUShgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqLDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi99auv6Y6NAXVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=h__11EjsKVgS3M&vssid=mosaic



Figure 8. Jihad of Usman dan Fodio

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtPRrN1KFHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deyxM1hSgIcsRgSEexOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUShgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqIDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi99auv6Y6NAXVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=RpS_Efo-RTRHjM&vssid=mosaic



Figure 9. Southern Kaduna genocide

Source: https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=ce60991e9ce914f5&sxsrf=AHTn8zpHlh4gIZa3JrWouVBVH5dv3A9z0A:1746533786258&q=images+on+fulanization+by+wikipedia&udm=2&fbs=ABzOT_CWdhQLP1FcmU5B0fn3xuWpAdk4wpBWOGsoR7DG5zJBnsX62dbVmWR6QCQ5QEtPRrN1KFHti9EP_dqC742rxzHrDFksFYTIxd98bIPdakfB8lox85YygmHQT4VDGkLGDE_UGdauwCRz2ea1US0xmR9pK9deyxM1hSgIcsRgSEexOBSYxTsI5yy_8NkaklPLjDWUShgA8ldYPqeb9Gu__PqIDQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi99auv6Y6NAXVRV0EAHbSMPTkQtKgLegQIFxAB&biw=1036&bih=539#vhid=VZ02VLMhZsm3IM&vssid=mosaic