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Nigeria violence: Raids on Christian villages near Jos

Armed gangs attacked Christian villages in northern Nigeria on Saturday, sparking a day of violence in which 37 people died, the military says.

Dozens of men launched attacks on the villages near the city of Jos in the early hours of Saturday. A military task force deployed and got the situation under control after hours of heavy fighting, officials said.

Muslim herdsmen were blamed for the raids, but their community leaders denied any wrongdoing. The area around Jos has seen much ethnic violence as well as clashes between Christians and Muslims in recent years.

Mustapha Salisu, of the special task force, said "hundreds" of assailants had launched "sophisticated attacks".

"Some had [police] uniforms and some even had bulletproof vests," he said.

The dead included 14 civilians, 21 attackers and two policemen, Mr Salisu said.

He declined to lay blame for the attacks, but another military spokesman had earlier told Reuters news agency that Muslim Fulani herdsmen were the likely culprits.

Fulani community leaders denied their people had done anything wrong.

The Miyetti Allah cattle group dismissed the accounts as propaganda and said the military had attacked the herdsmen.

Jos is in Plateau state, which lies on the fault line between Nigeria's mainly Muslim north and Christian and animist south.