

Ethnicity and Motivations for Fulani Herders and Host Communities Aggression in Nigeria: Fulani Versus Indigenous People of Plateau State

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated how ethnicity affects the perceptions of what motivates the aggression between Fulani herders and the Plateau indigenous people of Nigeria. The research was conducted in four selected and most aggression-affected Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Plateau State: Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Jos-South, and Riyom. The sample size of 400 was determined using Yamane Taro's sample size formula. The study adopted a mixed method of quantitative (survey) and qualitative – Key informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for data collection. Four hundred copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and seven KII and nine FGDs were conducted. The findings indicated that the Fulani and their host communities have different perceptions of the motivation for the aggression between them. The study found a relationship between ethnicity and four out of the five identified drivers of the attacks in Plateau State. This study recommended that the Plateau State government should return the displaced communities taken over by the Fulani herders to change the indigenous people's perception that the aggression is not about land-grabbing, Fulanization, and Jihad. The Government should also arrest and prosecute cattle rustlers to stem the tide of the attacks in Plateau State.

Keywords: Aggression; Fulani; Fulanization; Host communities; Jihad; Land-grabbing; SALW

INTRODUCTION

Plateau State was one of the most peaceful states in Nigeria (Obaje, 2018; Okoro & Avosetinyen, 2018) until 2001 when violent conflict erupted between the indigenes and Hausa settlers. The immediate cause of the 2001 conflict was religious and triggered when a young woman was denied passage on one of the streets in Jos during a Muslim Friday prayer (Musa, 2018; Odiegwu-Enwerem, Oso, Amodu, Chuks-Enwerem & Okorie, 2021). Later in 2010, the conflict metamorphosed into Fulani herders and host communities conflicts predicated on the land contest.

Plateau State host communities and the Fulani herders blamed each other for their aggression: for instance, pastoralists contaminate the water ponds of the indigenous people with their cattle, and in the same vein, farmers poison the water ponds with harmful substances intentionally meant to kill the livestock and prevent pastoralists from contaminating their water source. Farmers burn forests, which inhibits pastoralists from getting grasses and fodder for their herds. Again, the Fulani herders often blame Farmers for rustling their cows and blocking the 4,275,326 hectares of land in Nigeria carved for cattle routes and grazing reserves, gazetted under the National Grazing Reserve Law of 1965 (Lenshie & Jacob, 2020; Ogboru & Adejonwo-Osho, 1970; Ojukwu, Osuchukwu & Enemuoh, 2020; Okanlawon, 2019). Fulani and their host communities concurred that the Sahel area is experiencing global warming, negatively affecting “human security.”

It may intensify domestic and international tensions between herders and their host villages in Nigeria

(Ahmadu & Ayuba, 2018).

The aggression between the Fulani herders and their host communities is concerning as it claimed thousands of lives and displaced more than 62,000 people from various communities in Plateau State (Okoro & Avosetinyen, 2018; Segun & Jegede, 2013): on March 7, 2010, more than 500 people were maimed in one night while property worth hundreds of millions of Naira were destroyed in Dogo-Nahawa, Jos South LGA. On July 8, 2012, the aggression claimed 52 and killed over 200 the next day during the burial of the 52 deaths in Ropp and Rinji of Barkin Ladi LGA (Yahaya, 2019).

The motivations for the aggression between the Fulani herders and their host communities in Plateau State are divergently perceived by each conflicting party on the bases of their ethnic backgrounds. The conflicting perceived motivations are land-grabbing (Awotokun, Nwozor & Olanrewaju, 2020; Ebeku, 2018; Ezirigwe, 2021; Shehu, 2018), Fulanization (Adichie & Justice, 2021; Sahara Reporters, 2019; Taiwo & Donte, 2020), Jihad (Aamoum, 2019; Allison, 2021; Emmanuel, 2021), Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) (Aborhey, 2019; Dismas, 2020; Okanlawon, 2019), and cattle rustling (Cinjel, Joseph & Ayeni, 2020; Dickson, Juliet & Ibrahim, 2019; Njoku, 2018; Sheu, 2017).

Studies showed that ethnicity has become so pervasive in societies worldwide that it is impossible to ignore; it remains a critical factor in the current academic interest. Many social scientists thought that ethnicity would become less significant due to modernization and industrialization and eventually disappear at the beginning of the 20th century (Melnyk, Biletska, Ponomarova, Buranova & Davidenko, 2021). On the contrary, ethnicity has universally developed and gained political significance and relevance because of ongoing social interactions, encounters, and people's strategies for dealing with life's demands and difficulties – like conflicts between ethnic groups.

Therefore, this study has two objectives. First, to examine the perceived motivations between the Fulani and host communities for their aggression in Plateau State by ethnicities. Second, to investigate the relationship between ethnicity and the perceived causes for the attacks between the Fulani herders and indigenous people of Plateau State. The integrated theory of ethnicity was this paper's framework for analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnicity is a dynamic, multifaceted, and interactive collection of malleable, self-validated identifiers for both individuals and groups (Eriksen, 2019). It is a social connection to the identities of people who are part of the most significant number of competing communities (ethnic groups) working to advance and defend those interests in a political setting. Language, culture, race, religion, and shared history are defining characteristics of ethnicity (Dewan, 2018; Nigusie, 2018; Yahaya, 2020).

The aggression between Fulani herders and their hosts in Nigeria is predicated on the contest of land: the illegal occupation of land and the unlawful displacement of another person's property (Adekola, Azuh, and Amoo 2019; Ezirigwe, 2021). Ezirigwe added that the aggression resulting from the competition for land affects food production (crops and livestock) in Nigeria. In the 1960s, the Nigerian Northern State promulgated a law called 'the Northern Region Grazing Reserve Law of 1965 (Johnson-Odusanya, 2019; Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2018). The law established grazing reserves and transhuman routes. However, development annexed these reserves (Adeoye, 2017). Consequently, the Nigerian Government's inability to implement and sustain the grazing reserve and the transhuman routes is a major cause of the Fulani herders' aggression (Shehu, 2018).

The Fulani host communities in Plateau State often trace the aggression to the history of Jihad and Fulanization (Ahiaba, 2016; Ibrahim, 2020): claiming Fulani herders' quest to capture the land vestiges their fathers failed to capture. To the host communities, this caused the movement of Fulani herders into

communities to conquer and their forceful displacement. In addition, the Middle Belt Forum claimed that Fulani's Fulanization drive further contributed to their hostile behavior toward their hosts (Sahara Reporters, 2019). Fulanization in this study's context refers to replacing the host communities' cultures with those of the Fulani (Aneale, 2020).

The Jihadist movement of the radical Fulani herders – because not all Fulani herders are Jihadists (Enor & Magor, 2020; Imosemi, 2019) – profoundly drives the aggression between the Fulani herders and communities of Plateau State. Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and BH, among other extremist Islamist organizations, are said to have their ideology to make themselves relevant rooted in the adage “bello ergo sum” (I fight, therefore I exist) (Aamoum, 2019; Nelson, Amodu, Jegede, Adesina & Martins, 2019). The Plateau State communities perceived the same. Aamoum highlighted conditions that propel the connection between Islamic fundamentalism, jihadist movements, and other modern terrorist organizations, including poverty, poor governance, crime, and ethnic conflicts. To her, the founder of BH, Mohammed Yusuf, preached two main ideas: that Quaran forbids Western education and, secondly, that it is a sin to work for the Government. Yusuf's group claimed to be the people committed to propagating Prophet Muhammed's teachings and Jihad or the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-jihad.

Research shows that the SALWS is another cause of the aggression between the Fulani herders and their host communities in Nigeria (Afolabi, 2020; Clarke, 2020; Sambo, Sule, Daribe & Ahmed 2020; Sule, Mikail & Yahaya, 2020; Yusha'u, Halidu & Egye, 2020). About a 640million SALWS were estimated to be in circulation globally, 100 million in Africa, and 30 million in Sub-Saharan Africa (Olamide & Emmanuel, 2018). It is argued that 50% of these SALWS were in civilians' hands (Genyi, 2017). The Arab Spring and globalization of Islamic fundamentalism, such as Boko Haram (BH) and the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP), also contributed to the proliferation of SALW in Africa. Again, other factors are weak governance, insecurity, organized crimes, terrorism, insurrection, violent electoral conflict, communal conflicts, and militancy.

The narrative from the Fulani herders concerning the drivers of the aggression between them and the communities in Plateau State, Nigeria, differs from their host communities. To them, cattle rustling drives the attacks between them and their host communities. A study conducted at Barkin Ladi LGA of Plateau State established a correlation between cattle rustling and the protracted aggression between Fulani herders and their host communities (Cinjel et al., 2020). The Plateau communities, in reprisal, attacked the Fulani and rustled their herds in several circumstances. On the other hand, the Fulani took counter-reprisal, and the circle of aggression continued unabated. It is further noted that cattle rustling is not a threat only to Plateau State but to Nigeria's national security (Abdullahi, Victor & Binta, 2017).

Since most Fulani herders are nomads, their constant attacks by cattle rustlers sometimes drive them to attack their neighbors and communities. In some cases, the herders made arbitrary accusations that their host communities were responsible for and were, most times, the brains behind the rustling of their herds. The strategic implication of this development is that it may increase the value and utility of cattle rustling to the point where combating it would be just as challenging as using aggression (Abdullahi et al., 2017). Besides, host communities killed herders, provoking violent attacks between them and the herders (Duruji, 2012; Njoku, 2018). Another driver for the aggression, as argued by the Fulani herders, is the host communities' poisoning of water ponds, thereby killing herds in their quest to stop pastoralists from damaging their water sources (Aborhey, 2019; Duke & Agbaji, 2020).

INTEGRATED THEORY OF ETHNICITY

This theory combines three crucial approaches to ethnic conflict: primordialism, constructionism, and instrumentalism (Jakoubek, 2022; Melnyk, Modestova, Krsek & Ushnevych, 2021). Primordialism asserted

that ethnic conflicts are the result of differences linked to socio-biological and cultural differences: such as color, race, language, religion, ancestry, a sense of ‘common blood,’ an understanding of shared values, interests, threats, and most importantly, a sense of solidarity, which is essential for collective action (Afa’anwi, 2016; Nigusie, 2018). On the other hand, constructionism is a sociological ethnicity theory that posits that ethnicity is socially built and formed, changeable, and group membership is defined by society (Nigusie, 2018; Yang, 2000). Instrumentalists asserted that ethnic conflicts result from security concerns, rivalry, inequality, and greed. In this paper, the integrated approach contains three propositions about ethnic conflicts: First, ethnic conflicts are fueled partly by socio-biological or imagined blood ties among those who share particular physical or cultural attributes and have national or regional origins.

Second, ethnic conflicts are profoundly influenced by society. Third, the costs and rewards of ethnic membership influence whether or not people choose to reinforce ethnicity. Finally, ethnic borders are reasonably stable yet subject to change (Thomson, 2018; Williams, 2015). This integrated theoretical framework of ethnicity is applied to the aggression between the Fulani herders and their hosts: the hardline stands of the Fulani and their host communities in Plateau State are primordial. Both parties in conflict have primordial sentiments. The Plateau communities viewed the Fulani activities as an agenda to continue the Jihad from where their ancestors stopped.

In the same way, the Fulani believed they could take over the lands their forefathers could not conquer because their conquest was on the continuum. Because of this, communities in Plateau State view anyone who displayed control over such lands as an enemy. Land ownership is, therefore, linked to ancestry in these communities. The constructionist explanation for the aggression between the Fulani herders and their communities comes to bear because the Fulani ethnic group is a social construct of many ethnicities like Bororo, Bororoje, Firian, Kariabe, and Bororo’en (Okanlawon, 2019). Similarly, combining different ethnic groups in Plateau State Nigeria into a pan-ethnic group called the ‘indigenous ethnic group’ is socially created because the groups have different ancestries and lineages. The instrumentalist perspective was fighting the common enemy, whether imagined or real. Hence the constructionist perspective applies to the parties in the aggression in Plateau State. Instrumentalism brought a form of solidarity that united differing ethnicities, though different in heritage. Because of the constructed identity of “indigenous ethnicity,” the Plateau communities and the Fulani herders believed they were distinct and hence saw themselves as enemies.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed method of quantitative (survey questionnaire) and qualitative (Key Informants Interviews – KII and Focus Group Discussions – FGDs) data collection was adopted for this study. The study population consisted of indigenous people, Fulani, and other settlers of the following four purposefully selected Local Government Areas (LGAs): Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Jos South, and Riyom, with a combined population of 1,059,500. A sample size of 399.85 (approximately 400) was determined using Yamane Taro’s sample size formula. These LGAs were chosen because they are the epicenter of the Fulani herders and host communities’ aggression in the State. The most attacked ethnic groups in these LGAs are the Berom, Irigwe, and Fulani. Therefore, these ethnic groups constituted the population of the study. Thus, four hundred copies of the google forms questionnaire (find the questionnaire on this link: <https://forms.gle/tu96ZDwP85e8JsGu8>) were administered to 400 respondents. In sourcing the qualitative data for this study, seven key informants were interviewed, two each (traditional leader and youth leaders) from the Berom, Irigwe, Fulani, and one security expert. Eight FGDs were conducted in the selected LGAs, with the participants drawn from Berom, Irigwe, and Fulani, as they are both the aggressors and victims of the aggression of the Fulani herders and host communities attacks in the State. These are the FGD age categories 20 – 29 (males only), 30 – 39 (5 males and five females), and 40 – 49 (women only) for the FGDs. The mixed FGD category served as a moderating group. Each FGD consisted of 10 participants, the

recommended number for FGDs participants by many social scientists (Obaje, 2018). The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25 software from International Business Machines (IBM). The qualitative data were presented in cross-tabulation tables, and a regression analysis was used to test the relationships between variables. At the same time, the researcher used Nvivo (March 2020 version) qualitative data analysis software to analyze the qualitative data according to the motivations for the aggression between Fulani herders and host communities of Plateau State.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The motivations for Fulani herders' aggression

This paper identified five significant motivations for the Fulani herders' aggression in Plateau State: Land-grabbing, Fulanization, Jihad, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), and cattle rustling.

Table 1: Motivations for the aggression between Fulani herders and host communities of Plateau State

Motivations for Herders' Aggression			
Motivation	Yes	No	Total
Land-grabbing	322 (80.5%)	78 (19.5%)	400 (100%)
Fulanization	233 (58.3%)	167 (41.8%)	400 (100%)
Jihad	282 (70.5%)	118 (29.5%)	400 (100%)
Proliferation of SALW	251 (62.7%)	149 (37.3%)	400 (100%)
Cattle rustling	119 (29.8%)	281 (70.3%)	400 (100%)
Motivations by Ethnicity			
Land-grabbing			
Ethnicity	Yes	No	Total
Berom	222 (98.2%)	4 (1.8%)	226 (100%)
Irigwe	85 (85.0%)	15 (15.0%)	100 (100%)
Fulani	3 (5.0%)	57 (95.0%)	60 (100%)
Other Ethnicities	12 (87.5%)	2 (14.3%)	14 (100%)
Fulanization			
Ethnicity	Yes	No	Total
Berom	147 (65.9%)	77 (34.1%)	226 (100%)
Irigwe	77 (77.0%)	23 (23.0%)	100 (100%)
Fulani	0 (0.0%)	60 (100%)	60 (100%)
Other Ethnicities	7 (50.0%)	7 (50.0%)	14 (100%)
Jihad			
Ethnicity	Yes	No	Total
Berom	179 (79.2%)	47 (20.8%)	226 (100%)
Irigwe	92 (92.0%)	8 (8.0%)	100 (100%)
Fulani	0 (0.0%)	60 (100%)	60 (100%)
Other Ethnicities	11 (78.6%)	3 (21.4%)	14 (100%)
Proliferation of SALW			
Ethnicity	Yes	No	Total
Berom	145 (64.2%)	81 (35.8%)	226 (100%)

Irigwe	67 (67.0%)	33 (33.0%)	100 (100%)
Fulani	27 (45.0%)	33 (55.0%)	60 (100%)
Other Ethnicities	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)	14 (100%)
Cattle rustling			
Ethnicity	Yes	No	Total
Berom	42 (18.6%)	184 (81.4%)	226 (100%)
Irigwe	20 (20.0%)	80 (80.0%)	100 (100%)
Fulani	56 (93.3%)	4 (6.7%)	60 (100%)
Other Ethnicities	1 (7.1%)	13 (92.9%)	14 (100%)

****SALW = Small Arms and Light Weapon**

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 2: Regression analyses showing the relationship between ethnicity and the motivations for the aggression between Fulani herders and host communities in Plateau State

		Unstandardised coefficient	Standardised coefficient			
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	0.723	0.034		21.301	0.000
	Ethnicity	0.285	0.018	0.617	15.648	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Support For Land-grabbing (R= 0.617 ^a ; R ² = 0.381)						
	(Constant)	1.110	0.051		21.843	0.000
	Ethnicity	0.186	0.027	0.323	6.803	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Fulanization (R= 0.323 ^a ; R ² = 0.104)						
	(Constant)	0.959	0.046		20.894	0.000
	Ethnicity	0.203	0.025	0.382	8.235	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Jihad (R= 0.382 ^a ; R ² = 0.146)						
	(Constant)	1.331	0.053		25.298	0.000
	Ethnicity	0.025	0.028	0.045	0.891	0.373
a. Dependent Variable: SALW (R= 0.045 ^a ; R ² = 0.002)						
	(Constant)	2.023	0.046		43.620	0.000
	Ethnicity	-0.194	0.025	-0.364	-7.789	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Cattle rustling (R= 0.364 ^a ; R ² = 0.123)						

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 1 showed that 80.5% of the respondents saw land-grabbing as a motivation behind the aggression between the Fulani herders and host communities in Plateau State. More than half (58.3%) pointed to Fulanization as a motivation. About two-thirds (70.5%) indicated that the aggression is motivated by Jihadist ideology. Of the respondents, 62.7% believed the proliferation of SALW drives the attacks. However, only 29.8% of the respondents believed cattle rustling motivated the attacks between the Fulani herders and communities of Plateau State.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONSES BY ETHNICITY

This article examined the distribution of the responses on the perceived motivations for the attacks and counter-attacks between the Fulani herders and Plateau State communities by ethnicity. It also aims to determine the relationship between the perceived explanations of aggression and ethnicities in Plateau State.

Land-grabbing by Ethnicity

Table 1 also showed that the majority of the indigenous people saw land-grabbing as a motivation for the Fulani herders' aggression in Plateau State, Nigeria, as distributed thus: Berom (98.2%), Irigwe (85.0%), and other ethnicities that are not Fulani (87.5%). However, 95.0% of the Fulani respondents argued the contrary that land-grabbing is not a motivation for the aggression between the Fulani herders and their hosts in Plateau State. In Table 2, the R of 0.617 and P-value of 0.000 indicate a positive, statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and belief that land-grabbing motivates the Fulani herders and host communities' aggression in Plateau State. The R-Square of 0.381 means the respondents' ethnicities explain 38.1% variance in their argument for land-grabbing as a motivation for the hostility. In comparison, their ethnicities did not account for 61.9% of the difference in the respondents' assertions.

Some responses from KII and FGDs participants justified their belief that land-grabbing was one of the motivations for the Fulani herders and Plateau communities' aggression thus:

About 68 communities in Riyom and Barkin Ladi were grabbed and renamed: Rankum was renamed Mahanga in 2001 after being attacked and sacked, Fas was renamed Tafawa, and Rot-Chun was renamed Rafin Acha. Some displaced communities in Riyom LGA are Shong-1, Shong-2, Rakwen, Shonung, Janda-1, and Janda-2. **(KII Participant-2, 2021).**

The Fulani herders' attacks are nothing more than land-grabbing, they initially look like farmers and herders' clash, but we later realized that the Fulani herders are seizing our lands in their quest for expansion. The following communities are displaced and currently occupied by the Fulani in Vwang district of Jos-South LGA: Chaha, Chakarum, Dangyeng, Farin-Lamba, Togwoi, Choi, Kwogwom in Vwang village, Chakarum, Chugwei, and Vwangwogot. **(KII Participant-1, 2021).**

The Fulani herders attacked Nkye Dongwro: burned all the houses, and killed 29 of our people whom some soldiers lured into taking refuge inside a classroom in our primary school. Rotsu, Ancha, Hukke, Renwhenku, and Jebbu Miango in Bassa LGA are sacked villages. As I am saying, no human beings exist in those communities. **(KII Participant-3, 2021).**

On the contrary, one of the Fulani key informants disagreed that land-grabbing motivates the attacks between herders and Plateau indigenous people. He first argued that the concept of land-grabbing is nascent, an argument contrived to label them as aggressors. He challenged the indigenous people to claim their lands from them if they knew their lands were:

If you know where your land is, reclaim it if you can. Whoever uses the land now may return it to you. You can bargain over the community with the current occupant (the Fulani); the Fulani can rent it, sell it, or do whatever he wants; it's entirely up to him (the Fulani). **(KII Participant-5, 2021).**

The argument that land-grabbing is part of the motivations for the Fulani herders and host communities' aggression in Plateau State was supported by some research. The killing of over 200 indigenous people in Plateau State in March 2010 was a land-grabbing attempt (Ebeku, 2018) – although the act was labeled genocide (Nanlong, 2019). Another study added that the Fulani had displaced Beroms from their villages

and occupied them (Abioro, 2016; Duke & Agbaji, 2020). Again, cultures and ideologies are predicates of the aggression and other violent conflicts in Nigeria aimed at grabbing the indigenous people's land (Nwofor & Obasi, 2020). Consequently, hundreds were killed and millions displaced, causing food insecurity, unemployment, poverty, and interethnic crises.

Fulanization by Ethnicity

Again, Table 1 showed that more than half (65.9%) of Berom respondents perceived Fulanization as one of the motivations for the hostility between them and Fulani herders in Plateau State. More than three-quarters (77.0%) of the respondents from Irigwe tow the same path as the Berom. All (100%) Fulani respondents did not endorse the argument that Fulanization motivates their aggression in the Plateau communities. Of the other ethnicities, half (50.0%) supported that Fulanization encourages attacks between Fulani herders and Plateau State's communities. The regression model analysis (Table 2) showed an R of 0.323 and a P-value of 0.000, indicating a positive, statistically significant relationship between the ethnicities of the respondents and their perceptions quest to Fulanize Nigeria motivates the aggression between the Fulani herders and the indigenes of Plateau State. The R-Square of 0.104 implies that the ethnicities of the respondents expound only 10.4% of the variance in the respondents' assertion that Fulanization is a motivation for the aggression in Plateau State. In comparison, the respondents' ethnic backgrounds could not explain 89.6% of the variation in their claims.

Most KII informants and FGD participants interwoven Islamization and Fulanization as perceived motivations for the violence on the Plateau. Below are their assertions:

The Fulani herders have a deliberate attempt to Fulanize Nigeria. Several settlements of the indigenous people have been taken over and are controlled by the Fulani. Mosques were erected on the spot churches were demolished. **(KII Participant-7, 2021).**

Usman Danfodiyo left the precedence for Nigerian Fulani to follow. The implication of this has taken the dimension of economic Jihad: Some grabbed like Rankum, blessed with good land and abundance of water, where dry season farming takes place without using a water pump for pumping water into the farms, the village is sacked and inhabited by the Fulani herders. Farmers in Rakum made between \$5 million and \$15 million from the sale of their harvests during the dry season as of 2001. If Rakum continued its agricultural activities, it would have become a "paradise on the Plateau." Today, Rakum has become a shadow of itself. Fulani grabbed Rakum from Berom. **(KII Participant-2 2021).**

The Fulani argued contrary to the argument:

Fulanization and Islamization are false narratives. These are barbaric, what we call tit-for-tat madness. These are in themselves genocide because it is something that does not exist entirely and is made to live. If this crisis turns out to be religious, it will consume everybody, so there is nothing like Usman Danfodiyo's Jihad. That is history, and it became a history that cannot be cleaned or erased. It must be there from now to the end of the world. **(KII Participant-5, 2021).**

The claim that Fulanization is a driving force behind the hostility of the Fulani herders in Nigeria is gaining momentum and is supported by studies (Ekpo & Tobi, 2019; Okanlawon, 2019). The former military Head of State and a former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, wrote an open letter to President Muhammadu Buhari, which gave more insight into the alleged Fulanization of not only Nigeria but the African continent (Okanlawon, 2019). On the other hand, Fulanization is displayed from the angle of the appointment of military and other security chiefs, arguing that most of the military leaders are Fulani which is in aberrance with the Nigerian constitution stipulating that the federal character shall be observed for appointment into public offices (Ezeifeke, 2019). Many Nigerians perceived the lopsided appointments

as Fulanization (Allison, 2021; Anaele, 2020; Jonjon, 2021).

Again, the proponents of the Fulanization agenda as a motivation for the hostility between the Fulani herders and Plateau State communities posited thus: after the 1804 Jihad, instead of the Fulani seeking a national agenda, they, through the Northern Nigerian Government, established cattle routes and grazing areas for the Fulani to move with their cattle freely (Allison, 2021; Chukwuma, 2020). The grazing reserves were taken over by development and population growth, and the Fulani resorted to using violence to pave their way, where their movement was hindered due to advancement (Shehu, 2018). The grazing reserve policy today, therefore, has become the most contending issue in the security questions in Nigeria. The aggression in the North, especially the North Central States (Nasarawa, Zamfara, Plateau, Jigawa, Katsina, Benue, and Kwara), has its roots in the Jihadist movement of 1804 (Ojo, 2020). The reason is that, after the Jihad, the Fulani ceased power and controlled the Hausa and the multi-ethnic groups of the middle belt of Nigeria.

Jihad by Ethnicity

Table 1 also indicated that more than three-quarters (79.2%) and nearly all (90.0%) Berom and Irigwe ethnicities, respectively, believed that Jihad is one of the motivations for the hostility between them and Fulani herders. Conversely, all (100%) Fulani respondents jettisoned Jihad as a cause of the aggression in Plateau State. Of other ethnicities, more than three-quarters (78.6%) of them asserted that Jihad is a motivation for the attacks. Table 2 showed an R of 0.382 and a P-value of 0.000, signifying a positive, statistically significant relationship between ethnicity and Jihad as a perceived motivation for aggression. The R-Square of 0.146 indicates that only 14.6% of the argument that Jihad motivates the attacks in Plateau State was explained by their ethnic backgrounds. In comparison, 85.6% of the variance in the respondents' opinions is unaccounted for by their ethnic backgrounds.

Find below some of the qualitative data harvested:

I see Jihad playing; Usman Danfodiyo conquered Hausa communities and established emirates that oversee all the Hauwa natives' authority. What we are witnessing today in Plateau State is Jihad – they sacked our communities and took them over. The Fulani want to wipe out other religions in Nigeria; if possible, they would do so in the whole world. I remember when Jol was attacked in 2001; during the attack, some of the attackers professed that their aggression was Jihad and that they were here to achieve what their grandfather couldn't do. **(KII Participant-2, 2021)**

The Fulani responded contrary to the claim that Jihad was a motivation for the aggression between them and their host Plateau communities:

Perceiving Jihad as a driver of the aggression between the Fulani herders and the people of Plateau is ludicrous; to think of Jihad of Usman Danfodiyo at this age is absurd. The Sultan of Sokoto was here on a peace talk organized by the Nigeria Interreligious Council (NIREC), co-headed by the Sultan of Sokoto and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). We met with stakeholders, and somebody asked this same question him. You are a descendant of and inherited the throne of the Sultan of Sokoto; as a descendant of Usman Danfodiyo, you are also, by that virtue, '*Sarkin Musulmi*' (leader of all the Muslims) in Nigeria. Please tell us if you are fighting Jihad in Nigeria. The Sultan answered "No" **(KII Participant-5, 2021)**.

The Fulani are said to have a long history of aggression throughout the world, which has centered on the control of land resources and the Fulanization of their host communities by decimating their hosts' systems and authorities, replacing them with their own – the Caliphate system. Many contemporary African nations, particularly those in West Africa and the Sahel region, including Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, and

Guinea, have previously experienced uprisings at varied degrees from Fulani herders. The Fulani herders established powerful empires in history through armed conflict, including the 19th-century Sokoto empire in Nigeria and the 18th-century theocratic State of Fouta-Djallon in Middle Guinea (Sangare, 2019). In fact, the Sokoto Caliphate was formed in the same manner by Usman Danfodio between 1804 and 1808, becoming one of the greatest Fulani empires of the 19th century.

Other studies argued that the aggression between the Fulani herders and Plateau State communities is not Jihad (Boeke, 2021; Enor, Magor & Ekpo, 2019; Enor & Magor, 2020). Jihad has attributes that the attacks in Plateau State do not bear (Enor et al., 2019). Firstly, Jihadists began as sedentary and pastoral Muslim communities working together. Secondly, the Muslim community frequently issued a call to action or rallying cry. Thirdly, they sought to create a Muslim society. Lastly, they all had recognizable leaders. Yet, the Fulani herders lack a well-known leader and have not called to weapons in resistance to “known infidels.” They made no claims about wanting to establish an Islamic civilization or about fighting a “holy war.” Instead, they are violent to control resources. The elements of Jihad are absent from the attacks by herders. They are neither known Jihadists nor do they engage in it. They are, at worst, religious extremists, given the nature of some of their attacks and the targets they aim to harm.

The Proliferation of SALW by Ethnicity

Table 1 showed that more than half of the indigenous and other ethnicities believed that SALW motivates the aggression between Fulani herders and their host communities: 64.2% of Berom, 67.0% of Irigwe, and 85.7% of other ethnicities. Nonetheless, nearly half (45.0%) of the Fulani believed that the spread of SALW was a major force behind the hostility in Plateau State. The regression model in Table 2 showed $R = 0.045$ and $P\text{-value} = 0.002$. The statistics mean a statistically significant positive relationship between the respondents’ ethnic backgrounds and their views on SALW as a driver of the hostility in Plateau State. Although the R Square indicated a negligible percent (0.2%) variance in the positions that the proliferation of SALW motivates aggression, by implication, almost (99.98%) of the dissimilarity in the respondents’ arguments was not explained by their ethnicities. It suggests that most indigenous people and Fulani in Plateau State concurred that SALW is a driving force behind the Fulani aggression.

In addition, KII and FGDs data were presented below:

I put it to the Government that they are complicit in the ongoing conflict between the Fulani herders and their host communities across the country. How are the aggressors getting their arms? Sometimes you see a Helicopter hovering in the sky, and attacks occur shortly after. Who is giving firearms to the attackers? And how? Whose helicopters are the attackers using? The attackers often parade themselves as security personnel in military uniforms allegedly supplied by the Nigerian army. When we run to them for rescue, thinking they are soldiers, they open fire at us with the collaboration of the Nigerian military. In my capacity as a mother, like the mothers of both Buhari and Lalong, I regret giving birth to them. The blood of the innocent people killed in these attacks shall be on their heads. **(Indigenous FGDs participant, Females only, 40 – 49, 2021).**

The proliferation of SALW encourages the Fulani herders and communities’ aggression as conflicting parties, especially the herders wield lethal weapons in aberration to their traditional convention of carrying sticks. They are also alleged to be more armed than the military (Njoku, 2018). Njoku revealed that the proliferation of SALW in Nigeria started in the 1980s when the cattle oligarchs joined the cattle-rearing business; they provided lethal arms for self-protection against rustlers to the nomads they gave custody of herds. As a result, unintended consequences of aggression emerged due to the Fulani herders’ habitual access to and use of firearms, making them transition seamlessly to criminality, including attacks on their host communities.

Other studies posited that the unabated proliferation of SALW is not only a significant character of a failed State (Enejo, Ekele & Reuben, 2021). However, it is also a fundamental cause of aggression, other violent conflicts, crimes, and general insecurity between Fulani herders and communities in Plateau State and Nigeria (Enejo et al., 2021). One significant indicator of a failed state is a collapse of power structures for law and order, which leads to anarchy and other forms of internal violence. As a result, the condition permits the smooth itineration of SALW across Nigerian borders, breeding a replete of violence because the aggressors quickly found the illegal procurement of firearms.

Cattle Rustling by Ethnicity

Table 1 also showed a cross-tabulation between ethnicity and the respondents' opinions on whether the aggression between the Fulani herders and communities in Plateau State was motivated by cattle rustling. The statistics revealed that 93.3% of the Fulani claimed that the attacks in Plateau State were motivated by cattle rustling. Astonishingly, the Plateau indigenous people and other ethnicities did not perceive cattle rustling as a motivation for aggression: Berom 81.4%, Irigwe 80.0%, and other ethnic groups 92.9%. The regression analysis Table 2 showed an R of 0.362 and a P-value of 0.000: indicating a positive, statistically significant relationship between the perceived motivations for the aggression and ethnicity. The R-Square of 0.132 suggested that the respondents' ethnicities explained 13.2% differences in responses on whether cattle rustling motivates hostility in Plateau State. In comparison, more than three-fourths (85.6%) of the variance in the respondents' argument was not explained by their ethnicities.

The act of thievery of cattle by one individual or a group is known as cattle rustling. To a herder, life without cattle is worthless (Shehu, 2018). Cattle rustling is complicated that it becomes difficult to identify which ethnic group the cattle rustlers belong to categorically. For instance, Police have apprehended many youths from different ethnic groups in Plateau State: Fulani, Berom, Ngas, Tarok, Ron, and Kulere were arrested for rustling cattle (Dickson et al., 2019). In Northern Nigeria, the practice has recently escalated into a grave crime and given rise to other problems, including aggression between herders and their host communities, ethnoreligious conflicts, and other violent conflicts (Cinjel et al., 2020). Farmers often killed trespassing animals and rustled livestock as the herders stormed communities and killed as many people as possible in reprisal (Idowu, 2017). Subsequently, attacks and counter-attacks continued on accounts of grazing on farms and rustling of herds, posing a severe security threat to Nigeria (Abdullahi et al., 2017; Idowu, 2017; Innocent & Igwe, 2016; Njoku, 2018; Shehu, 2018). The vicious circle of cattle rustling between and among the Fulani herders and host communities threatened Nigeria's national security. Unfortunately, Fulani pastoralists occasionally steal one another's herds, as noted in North-west and North-central Nigeria; the rustlers are organized into armies assaulting host communities.

Another study also found that cattle rustling has seriously endangered public safety and security (Abdullahi et al., 2017). It has resulted in human casualties, bodily harm, demographic shifts, and a reduction in the quantity of livestock. The consequences of this predicament do not bode well for the general welfare of the herders and their host communities (Olonade et al., 2021). It fosters a sense of unease that may reduce the herding business' productivity and meat production for other Nigerians. The herders' community's resources and family income dwindle when livestock are lost to cattle rustlers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study established a positive relationship between the perceived motivations of the aggression between herders and their host communities in Plateau State. Indigenous ethnicities perceived the following as motivations for the aggression between them and herders: Land-grabbing, Fulanization, and Jihad. While the Fulani herders have a divergent perception of the cause(s), they agreed that cattle rustling is a significant driver of the hostility between them and their host communities. Interestingly, both the Fulani and

indigenous ethnic groups agreed that the proliferation of SALW contributes significantly to their attacks. The study concluded that a person's ethnic background in Plateau State, Nigeria, determines what the person believes to be the driver of the aggression between Fulani herders and the host Plateau communities.

Furthermore, the study recommended that firstly, because of the hardline differences in the perceived motivation for the aggression in Plateau State, the State Government should return the internally displaced people (IDP) to their communities. Such would change their perception that the aggression between them and the Fulani herders is not about Jihadist conquest, Fulanization, or land-grabbing. Secondly, The State should, by all means, arrest and prosecute cattle rustlers without fear or favoritism because the study found that they are from all the ethnic groups living in Plateau State. Lastly, Family, religious, and educational institutions should preach love and empathy; the conflicting parties would view the contentious issues from the perspective of the other.

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