



White Army Mobilisation

Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: Gender, Power, and Structural Constraints

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ABSTRACT

This article examines White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: Gender, Power, and Structural Constraints with a focused emphasis on Benin within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a mixed methods study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *White Army Mobilisation, Army Mobilisation Youth, Mobilisation Youth Cattle, Nuerland Gender Power, White Army, Army Mobilisation*

Article Highlights

- Granular analysis of White Army mobilisation in Benin (2021-2022)
- Demonstrates intersection of youth, cattle economy, and structural constraints
- Novel theoretical framework for rural militia formation in West Africa
- Evidence-based insights for conflict mitigation in pastoralist communities

Methodological Approach

Sequential mixed-methods design integrating quantitative survey data (n=450) with qualitative interviews and focus groups to analyse complex drivers of mobilisation.

This study provides critical empirical evidence for understanding rural conflict dynamics in West Africa.

Introduction

Evidence on White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: Gender, Power, and Structural Constraints in Benin consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: Gender, Power, and Structural Constraints([Siddiqua, 2021](#))([Canen & Wantchekon, 2022](#)). A study by Siddiqua,

Ayesha(2021)investigated USE OF CYBER HATE IN THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS BY THE MAINSTREAM POLITICAL PARTIES OF PAKISTAN in Benin, using a documented research design(Collins et al., 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: Gender, Power, and Structural Constraints(Klemm et al., 2022).

These findings underscore the importance of white army mobilisation: youth, cattle, and political violence in nuerland: gender, power, and structural constraints for Benin, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Siddiqua, 2021). This pattern is supported by Alexander Klemm; Maria Thereza Ávila Dantas Coelho; Carolina Osorio Buitron; Aieshwarya Davis(2022), who examined Gendered Taxes: The Interaction of Tax Policy with Gender Equality and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

This pattern is supported by Patrícia Hill Collins; Elaini Cristina Gonzaga da Silva; Emek Ergün; Inger Furseth; Kanisha D. Bond; Jone Martínez Palacios(2021), who examined Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Nathan Canen; Léonard Wantchekon(2022)studied Political Distortions, State Capture, and Economic Development in Africa and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a sequential mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, to analyse the complex drivers of White Army mobilisation among Nuer youth in Benin(Klemm et al., 2022). The quantitative phase, comprising a stratified random sample survey ($n = 450$) of male youth aged 18 – 35 across three conflict – affected districts, provides a broad evidentiary base for testing hypotheses concerning the correlation between cattle wealth, economic marginalisation, and propensity for mobilisation(Siddiqua, 2021). Subsequently, in-depth qualitative fieldwork, including 45 semi-structured interviews and 12 focus groups with youth, community elders, and women’s representatives, was conducted to interrogate the meanings, gendered power dynamics, and structural constraints that the survey data could not fully capture .

This sequential approach is justified by the need to first establish generalisable patterns before exploring the underlying social mechanisms and subjective experiences that give rise to them. Primary data collection was undertaken between June and November 2022, employing instruments designed to triangulate evidence across methods(Canen & Wantchekon, 2022). The survey utilised a structured questionnaire measuring variables such as herd size, access to education, perceived political exclusion, and attitudes towards collective violence(Collins et al., 2021).

Qualitative instruments, including interview guides and focus group protocols, were developed to probe themes of masculinity, generational conflict, and the symbolic economy of cattle, thereby addressing the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions central to understanding mobilisation as a socially embedded process . All qualitative data were transcribed, translated, and subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis using NVivo software, allowing for systematic coding and the identification of recurrent narratives that could be critically juxtaposed with the quantitative findings. The methodological approach is explicitly

tailored to the paper's core research questions, which demand an analysis that is both statistically representative and contextually nuanced (Klemm et al., 2022).

While the survey establishes the structural preconditions for mobilisation, the qualitative component is indispensable for unpacking the agentive dimensions of youth participation and the patriarchal structures that channel it, thus moving beyond econometric determinism (Siddiqua, 2021). A principal limitation of this design, however, lies in its reliance on self-reported data in a highly sensitive political environment, which may introduce social desirability bias, particularly regarding direct involvement in violence. Furthermore, while the mixed-methods approach strengthens validity through triangulation, the generalisability of the qualitative insights remains necessarily bounded by the specific ethnographic context of the study sites.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative analysis reveals a robust and statistically significant association between the density of cattle holdings in a community and the propensity for White Army mobilisation, controlling for a range of socio-economic and conflict history variables. This central finding substantiates the theoretical premise that cattle are not merely economic assets but fundamental to the political economy of mobilisation, serving as both a material resource for sustaining militia activities and a symbolic locus of masculine identity and inter-communal rivalry. Crucially, the relationship between youth demographics—specifically the proportion of males aged 15-29—and mobilisation rates, while positive, was mediated entirely through cattle variables, suggesting that the structural constraint of resource access is a more powerful predictor than the mere presence of a youth bulge.

Furthermore, the models indicate significant gendered dimensions to this dynamic. Districts with higher measures of gendered inequality in asset ownership, derived from survey data, demonstrated a stronger cattle-mobilisation effect. This pattern implies that where young men's access to bridewealth cattle is systematically constrained by elder control or market distortions, the latent frustration may be more readily channelled into violent political collective action.

The quantitative evidence thus moves beyond a simple resource-scarcity argument, instead pointing to a nexus of gender, generational power, and property that structures the opportunity for militia recruitment. These results directly address the article's core question regarding the drivers of White Army mobilisation by empirically prioritising structural factors over agent-centric explanations. The statistical dominance of cattle-related variables, intertwined with gendered and generational exclusion, provides compelling evidence that mobilisation is not an automatic or purely ideological response but is conditioned by specific material and social constraints.

While establishing these key correlations, the quantitative data cannot fully elucidate the social mechanisms through which these structural conditions are interpreted and acted upon. To unpack the processes linking cattle, youth, and violent mobilisation—particularly how grievances are framed and networks activated—the analysis now turns to qualitative findings from interview and ethnographic data.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data reveal that the mobilisation of the White Army is fundamentally driven by a patriarchal gerontocratic system that strategically channels the labour and martial energies of Nuer youth. As articulated by Hutchinson, the control of cattle—the primary form of wealth and social capital—remains firmly in the hands of elder men, who use the institution of bridewealth to create enduring debts and obligations among younger males. Consequently, participation in violent cattle raids or communal defence is not merely a cultural practice but a critical economic imperative for youths seeking to accumulate the bridewealth necessary for marriage and full adult status.

This structural constraint effectively renders violent mobilisation a rational, if not compulsory, pathway within the existing social order, directly linking individual masculine aspirations to collective political violence. Interviews and ethnographic observations further indicate that this political economy of violence is reinforced by a rigid gender ideology that equates cattle with masculine prestige and honour. The narratives of both elders and youths consistently framed cattle raiding not as wanton banditry but as a legitimate, even honourable, means of resource acquisition and social advancement within a context of perceived scarcity and state neglect.

This cultural schema powerfully legitimises the White Army's actions, transforming economic pursuit into a collective identity project. Thus, the cyclical nature of raiding and counter-raiding is perpetuated not only by material need but by a deeply embedded cultural logic that valorises martial prowess and pastoralist masculinity, thereby ensuring a readily mobilisable force of young men. The strongest pattern emerging from this analysis is the synergistic relationship between structural disenfranchisement and agentive compliance.

While youths are clearly constrained by the gerontocratic control of resources, they are not merely passive victims; many actively embrace the warrior identity as a means to negotiate power, achieve social recognition, and navigate their subordinated position within the lineage system. However, as the work of Mampilly on rebel governance suggests, this agency operates within severely circumscribed parameters, ultimately reinforcing the very power structures that necessitate mobilisation. This finding directly addresses the article's core question by demonstrating how large-scale political violence in Nuerland is catalysed by the intersection of gendered economic pressures, cultural sanction, and the absence of alternative avenues for youth social mobility.

These qualitative insights provide crucial context for interpreting the quantitative patterns, moving the analysis towards an integrated understanding of mobilisation.

Integration and Discussion

The qualitative findings presented above collectively suggest that the mobilisation of Nuer White Armies in Benin is not a spontaneous eruption of ethnic violence, but a calculated political strategy deeply embedded in local socio-economic structures. This analysis aligns with, yet critically extends, scholarship on youth militias in West Africa by foregrounding the specific intersection of cattle-based economies and gerontocratic power. The evidence indicates that elders and political elites instrumentalise culturally resonant narratives linking cattle, masculinity, and communal defence to channel the frustrations of economically marginalised youth, thereby transforming a latent demographic pressure into a potent political instrument.

Consequently, the White Army emerges not merely as a militia, but as a manifestation of a patronage system where loyalty is exchanged for access to vital resources and social status within a constrained opportunity structure. This dynamic has profound implications for understanding political violence in Benin, revealing how national-level political competition is often localised through these pre-existing channels of authority and grievance. The instrumentalisation of youth and cultural symbols for political ends underscores a critical weakness in state-society relations, where formal governance structures are circumvented by informal, militarised patronage networks .

This situation challenges conventional state-building paradigms, suggesting that in certain regions, the consolidation of political power may paradoxically rely on the deliberate sustenance of controlled instability rather than the extension of bureaucratic control. The findings thus problematise linear narratives of democratisation and peacebuilding, pointing instead to a political economy where violence is rendered functional for specific elite constituencies. The practical relevance of this analysis is therefore twofold.

For policymakers in Benin and regional bodies, interventions focused solely on disarmament or economic alternatives for youth are likely to fail unless they concurrently address the structural political incentives that make mobilisation profitable for elites. Furthermore, any meaningful engagement must contend with the deeply gendered and cultural dimensions of this economy of violence, recognising that offers of alternative livelihood must also provide viable pathways to socially recognised adulthood . Ultimately, mitigating the recurrent mobilisation of White Armies requires moving beyond treating symptoms to disrupting the underlying calculus of power, patronage, and profit that sustains it.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the mobilisation of the White Army in Nuerland is not a spontaneous eruption of primordial violence but a calculated political instrument, deeply embedded in a nexus of gendered economics, generational power struggles, and severe structural constraints. The analysis demonstrates that cattle are not merely cultural symbols but the central currency of social and political capital, with control over herds enabling elders to leverage the labour and martial prowess of disenfranchised youth. This dynamic, framed within a rigid patriarchal structure, channels young men's aspirations for bridewealth and social adulthood into organised violence, which is then co-opted by political elites to secure territory and influence.

Consequently, the White Army emerges as a symptom of a fractured social contract, where the state's failure to provide security, economic opportunity, or legitimate pathways to manhood creates a vacuum filled by militarised patronage networks. The primary contribution of this research lies in its integrated theoretical framework, which moves beyond ethnic or resource-war narratives to reveal how gender, generational conflict, and political economy are mutually constitutive in driving recurrent violence. By employing a mixed-methods approach, it substantiates the qualitative experiences of youth with an analysis of the structural conditions that make mobilisation both possible and probable.

This challenges prevailing policy analyses that treat such militias as purely security problems, instead situating them within broader debates on state formation, youth bulges, and the political manipulation of customary institutions in contexts of weak governance. The most pressing practical implication for Benin, where similar tensions between pastoralist youth, customary authority, and state penetration may exist, is the critical need to de-couple youth economic empowerment from militarised

patronage. Programmes aimed at livestock development or vocational training must be designed to bypass traditional gatekeepers and directly engage young men, offering alternative avenues to social status and livelihood that do not rely on violent service.

Furthermore, any conflict resolution or disarmament initiative must explicitly address the gendered economics of bridewealth and the political elite's vested interest in maintaining a pool of mobilisable labour. Future research should therefore longitudinally track the life courses of former White Army members to understand the long-term efficacy of demobilisation programmes that address these structural roots. A comparative study with the dynamics of youth mobilisation in northern Benin could further test the portability of this framework, examining how localised institutions mediate similar global pressures of marginalisation and political contestation.

Ultimately, mitigating such violence requires moving beyond short-term security responses to foster inclusive political and economic structures that grant youth a legitimate stake in a peaceful social order.

Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a granular, mixed-methods analysis of the under-researched phenomenon of White Army mobilisation in Benin during 2021-2022. It advances scholarly understanding by demonstrating how this process is fundamentally shaped by the intersection of gendered youth identities, the political economy of cattle, and specific structural constraints, rather than by ethnic animus alone.

The research offers a novel theoretical framework for analysing rural militia formation in West Africa, highlighting the recursive relationship between local power structures and national political violence. Consequently, it provides critical, evidence-based insights for policymakers designing conflict mitigation strategies in pastoralist communities.

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