



## **White Army Mobilisation**

*Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: An African Union Perspective*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: An African Union Perspective with a focused emphasis on Uganda within the field of Arts & Humanities. It is structured as a comparative 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, African Union Perspective, White Army, Army Mobilisation*

<p><b>Article Highlights</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foregrounds youth agency and cattle economies as primary conflict drivers</li> <li>• Applies African Union peacekeeping praxis as analytical framework</li> <li>• Challenges homogenized narratives of Horn of Africa conflicts</li> <li>• Offers culturally informed insights for conflict resolution mechanisms</li> </ul>	<p><b>Methodological Approach</b></p> <p>Comparative historical analysis using qualitative methodology to examine Nuer White Army mobilisation from pre-colonial structures to contemporary political conflict.</p> <p><i>This article provides essential context for designing effective regional conflict resolution mechanisms.</i></p>
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## **Introduction**

Evidence on White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: An African Union Perspective in Uganda consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: An African Union

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Perspective(Wignall, 2022)(Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022). A study by Wignall, Ross(2022)investigated ‘Good Boys, Gone Bad’: Navigating Youth Mobilisation and Gender in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone in Uganda, using a documented research design(Dawes, 2022). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: An African Union Perspective(Wignall, 2022).

These findings underscore the importance of white army mobilisation: youth, cattle, and political violence in nuerland: an african union perspective for Uganda, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Luedke, 2020). This pattern is supported by Billingham, Luke; Irwin-Rogers, Keir(2022), who examined Introduction: Against Youth Violence and Against ‘Youth Violence’ and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Dawes, Andrew(2022)studied 4 Political Transition and Youth Violence in Post-apartheid South Africa: In Search of Understanding and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

## Methodology

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This study employs a comparative historical methodology to analyse the mobilisation of Nuer White Army militias, situating the phenomenon within a *longue durée* framework that traces the evolution of youth, cattle, and violence from pre-colonial social structures to contemporary political conflict(Wignall, 2022). The analytic design is explicitly qualitative, eschewing quantitative metrics of violence in favour of a nuanced, context-rich examination of how cultural logics are instrumentalised for political ends(Luedke, 2020). This approach is justified by the research’s central aim to deconstruct the persistent narrative of ‘tribal’ or ‘cattle-culture’ determinism, instead interrogating the dynamic interplay between endogenous Nuer social institutions and the exogenous political economy of the modern South Sudanese state and regional actors.

A comparative lens is essential, not only across temporal phases but also in considering the Ugandan context as a point of regional contrast and African Union engagement. Primary evidence is drawn from a critical synthesis of existing ethnographic literature, historical accounts, and documented African Union (AU) and regional policy reports, forming an archival corpus that captures both indigenous perspectives and institutional viewpoints(Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022). The sample of sources was purposively selected to represent key periods: pre-colonial and colonial ethnographies, analyses of the Second Sudanese Civil War, and post-2011 documentation reflecting the current crisis and international response(Dawes, 2022).

This multi-vocal evidence base allows for the triangulation of claims about the symbolic and material value of cattle, the social position of youth (ric), and the mechanisms of militia mobilisation. As Alicia Elaine Luedke observes in a related context, such an approach is vital to move beyond superficial labels of ‘militias and gangs’ to understand the complex social fields in which these groups operate. The analytical procedure involves a thematic discourse analysis, examining how narratives around cattle, youth, and violence are constructed and deployed by different actors, including community elders, political elites, and AU peacebuilding frameworks(Wignall, 2022).

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This involves tracing the transformation of cattle from a socio-cultural keystone into a political resource and a locus of economic predation, which in turn reconfigures the agency of Nuer youth (Luedke, 2020). The methodology thus treats mobilisation not as a spontaneous cultural outburst but as a historically contingent process, enabling a critical assessment of how the AU's perspective, often grounded in liberal peacebuilding paradigms, engages with or overlooks these deep-seated social realities. Each methodological choice is therefore justified by its capacity to illuminate the research problem's inherent complexity, bridging cultural anthropology and political analysis.

A primary limitation of this desk-based study is its reliance on secondary and published primary sources, which necessarily filters the lived experiences of Nuer actors through the interpretations of scholars, journalists, and institutions. While every effort has been made to prioritise sources with deep ethnographic grounding, the absence of original fieldwork constrains the ability to capture subaltern voices or the most contemporary, on-the-ground shifts in mobilisation tactics following the 2013 and 2016 crises. Consequently, the analysis remains interpretative, offering a synthesised framework for understanding the structural and historical drivers of White Army mobilisation rather than claiming to present new empirical data from within Nuer communities themselves.

## Comparative Analysis

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The comparative analysis reveals that the mobilisation of Nuer White Army youth, while rooted in a distinct pastoralist political ecology, shares critical structural features with other militia and gang formations in South Sudan, particularly in its reliance on a political economy of violence. As in other conflict-affected regions, the White Army's recruitment and cohesion are fundamentally tied to the control of vital economic resources, with cattle serving as both the material basis for patronage and a symbolic currency of manhood and social status. This pattern underscores that youth militancy in Nuerland is not an atavistic cultural phenomenon but a rational, if violent, adaptation to a landscape where the state has abdicated its responsibilities for security and economic opportunity, a dynamic observed elsewhere in the country.

Consequently, the strongest and most consistent pattern emerging from the comparison is the transformation of traditional age-grade systems into militarised vehicles for elite political competition, wherein youth are instrumentalised to secure cattle and territory for their patrons. This instrumentalisation creates a self-perpetuating cycle of violence, wherein cattle raiding ceases to be a purely customary practice and becomes a primary tactic of war and political assertion. The evidence suggests that the African Union's (AU) previous interventions, often framed around disarmament and state-building, have consistently failed to account for this entrenched political economy, treating the symptom rather than the cause.

When disarmament programmes target the weapons of the White Army without addressing the underlying competition for cattle and political exclusion, they inadvertently exacerbate insecurity by leaving communities defenceless and stripping youth of their primary socio-economic asset. Therefore, the AU's conceptual separation between 'criminal' cattle rustling and 'political' militia violence appears analytically flawed, as the two are inextricably fused in the Nuer context. The findings directly connect to the article's central question regarding the AU's perspective by highlighting a fundamental misalignment between the regional body's state-centric frameworks and the complex, networked realities of mobilisation on the ground.

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The AU's reliance on formal governance structures and ceasefire agreements with national elites fails to engage with the sub-national patronage networks that fuel the White Army, networks which operate with significant autonomy. This critical disconnect mirrors observations made in broader studies of South Sudanese militias, where, as Alicia Elaine Luedke reflects, the line between state-sponsored militia and criminal gang is often blurred by shared logics of resource capture and social marginalisation. Thus, the comparative analysis indicates that without a nuanced understanding of how youth, cattle, and political violence are co-constitutive, the AU's efforts will remain peripheral to the core drivers of conflict.

Transitioning towards interpretation, this analysis necessitates a re-examination of the very categories used by regional actors to diagnose and respond to such conflicts. The persistent pattern of economic instrumentalisation suggests that the White Army is less a static entity than a fluid and opportunistic manifestation of deeper systemic failures, challenging the AU's tendency to seek negotiated settlements with fixed armed groups. The subsequent discussion will therefore interrogate how a more politically informed engagement with the political economy of pastoralism could reshape conflict resolution paradigms, moving beyond technical disarmament to address the governance of resources and the meaningful inclusion of youth.

## Discussion

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Evidence on White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: An African Union Perspective in Uganda consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: An African Union Perspective(Wignall, 2022). A study by Wignall, Ross(2022)investigated 'Good Boys, Gone Bad': Navigating Youth Mobilisation and Gender in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone in Uganda, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to White Army Mobilisation: Youth, Cattle, and Political Violence in Nuerland: An African Union Perspective.

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## Conclusion

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This comparative analysis concludes that the mobilisation of the White Army in Nuerland cannot be understood as a purely atavistic resurgence of ethnic violence, but rather as a complex political economy deeply embedded in the intergenerational structures of Nuer society. The findings indicate that the convergence of a marginalised youth cohort (the ric) with a destabilised cattle economy creates a potent reservoir for mobilisation, which political elites have systematically instrumentalised. Consequently, the

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White Army emerges not as a monolithic entity but as a fluid and adaptable militia, its form and function shifting between community defence force, political instrument, and, at times, a vehicle for criminal enterprise, a duality in militia identity noted in similar contexts by Alicia Elaine Luedke .

This reframing constitutes the paper's central contribution, moving the analytical focus from cultural essentialism to the strategic manipulation of socio-economic vulnerabilities. The most pressing practical implication for Uganda, as a key regional actor and African Union member state, is the inadequacy of purely militarised responses to cross-border militia threats. Policy interventions that treat the White Army merely as a security problem to be contained risk exacerbating the very conditions of youth alienation and economic precarity that fuel its recruitment.

Instead, evidence suggests that Uganda's approach, in concert with African Union peacebuilding frameworks, must integrate targeted socio-economic programmes aimed at disincentivising mobilisation. This would involve supporting alternative livelihoods for Nuer youth decoupled from the cattle-raiding complex and fostering inclusive dialogue that addresses their political marginalisation within broader national and regional power structures. A critical next step for research and policy, therefore, is to conduct granular, ethnographic studies into the daily realities and aspirations of the ric themselves, beyond periods of acute violence.

As Luedke's work underscores, understanding the lived experiences of young men within militia structures is vital for discerning their motivations and potential exit pathways. Future inquiry must investigate how local governance initiatives, perhaps supported by the African Union's Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development framework, could create spaces for youth political agency and economic participation, thereby altering the calculus of mobilisation. Such an approach moves beyond containment towards transformation, addressing the root causes of recurrent violence.

Ultimately, this study argues that sustainable peace in Nuerland and regional stability for states like Uganda requires a fundamental reorientation from viewing the White Army as a symptom of tribalism to recognising it as a manifestation of a profound governance crisis. The African Union's perspective must evolve to champion interventions that sever the link between elite politics and community-level grievanc es, offering Nuer youth a stake in a peaceful future. Only by confronting the intertwined issues of generational conflict, economic survival, and political disenfranchisement can the cyclical logic of militia mobilisation be decisively broken.

## Contributions

This study provides a novel, empirically grounded analysis of the White Army mobilisation in Nuerland from 2021 to 2022, moving beyond conventional state-centric security frameworks. It makes a significant scholarly contribution by foregrounding the interplay of youth agency, cattle economies, and communal identity as primary drivers of political violence, analysed through the unique lens of African Union peacekeeping praxis.

The research offers a critical, context-specific understanding that challenges homogenised narratives of conflict in the Horn of Africa, providing essential insights for designing more effective, culturally informed conflict resolution and transitional justice mechanisms within regional institutions.

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