Assessment of Guns, Militarization and Insecurity in Cattle Rustling-Prone Regions of North Rift, Kenya

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Cattle rustling/raids has been a challenge to security agencies and rural Kenya, particularly North Rift, which has become synonymous to the issue. The objective of this study is to examine availability of guns both legally and illegally and insecurity in cattle prone regions of North Rift. Based on Albert Bandura's social learning theory, the study argues that when the youth increasingly become militarized through acquisition of gun knowledge, it will entice them to acquire more knowledge leading to violent behaviour. North Rift was purposively selected owing to the fact that the government has given attention due to the scale of insecurity caused by cattle rustling. The findings reveal residents aren't comfortable with guns in the region although National Police Reservist (NPR) has contributed to the decline in frequency of cattle raids. In conclusion, availability of guns in the regions has increased level of youth being socialized into gun culture leading to militarization of the communities.

1. Introduction

For decades, the insecurity in North Rift neighboring communities - Marakwet, Pokot and Tugens caused cattle rustling or cattle raids has changed its shape, few communities, such as Tugen, who coexisted peacefully with Marakwets, have started attacking each other. The government of Kenya has demonstrated its efforts to combat the situation through various approaches and one notable is the decision to arm communities through National Police Reservists (NPR). However, there have been claims of favoritism in the allocation of NPR. This article argues that such claims may lead part of community members to acquire illegal guns. The available research evidence suggests prohibited persons exploit loopholes in existing gun laws to acquire firearms (Miller, Hepburn, & Azrael, 2017). The Kenyan government claims that NPR is a cost-effective way to increase security, particularly in distant areas where banditry and cattle rustling are the main security problems. However, difficulties with record keeping have made it challenging to determine the precise number of NPR in the nation.

While they have coexisted for decades, with systematic cattle raids using traditional methods, the present trends require in-depth analysis. All the communities reside along Kerio Valley belt and share almost similar issues like unreliable rains, lack of access roads and overreliance on traditional methods of animal rearing (Iiyama et al, 2008; Boitt, Albright, & Kipkulei, 2020). Geographically, Marakwet lives in Elgeyo Marakwet County while Pokot ethnic group in West Pokot County and Tugen in Baringo County. Another notable thing is that all these counties subscribe to membership of North Rift Economic Bloc (NOREB) which focuses mainly on economies of scale in agriculture, sports tourism, trade, natural resources wildlife and its rich cultural heritage.

The objective of this study was the assessment of guns possession are connected with, militarization and insecurity in cattle rustling-prone regions of North Rift, Kenya

2. Literature Review

Although government of Kenya intervention is evident through NPR, military operation and increasing police presence, the continued brutal and reckless attacks attest to the complex nature of cattle rustling. What is interesting is the continued announcements on construction of dams along the region but have never been implemented. According to Elfversson (2016), inadequate resources such as water points or grazing have contributed to increase in conflicts among the communities.

There is widespread evidence that cattle rustling posts significant threat to the health and wellbeing of communities and mainly the youth who engages in protection, decreased nutrition due to loss of herds, and decreased access to arable land and watering holes. In addition to acquisition of livestock, women and children were opportunistically abducted, with abducted women being taken as wives, and children being incorporated into the families of the captors (Glowacki, & Wrangham, 2015). The persistence in cattle raids and the devastating consequences continue to be shocking, both in scale and the inability of the state to prevent or punish it. For example, the attacks and counter-attacks leads to people moving to temporary shelters because the next attack is unpredictable and no one would want to risk their lives.

This article demonstrates that the patterns of insecurity in the North Rift region have been complicated by claims of favoritism in NPR allocation, politicization of security matters and even attempts to localize security matters. First, the article highlights scholarly interpretations of several concepts including cattle rustling, cattle raids, and banditry. This is followed by accounts on how legal and illegal gun supply leads to militarization of civilians and how this could lead to growing insecurity situation. Again, the researcher focused on two ethnic communities Marakwet and Pokot whose conflicts date back to 1960s (Mwaniki, 2007). Lastly, the article attempts to provide preliminary analysis of how cattle rustling is connected with gun population and political aspirations.

Theoretical Review

This study applies Queer Ladder Theory (QLT) developed by American Sociologist, Daniell Bell in 1919 (Okoli, & Okpaleke, 2014). He coined the idea 'queer ladder' to try to explain functional organized crime as a desperate tactic for socioeconomic empowerment and social climbing. This theory has been used by several scholars in the study of cattle rustling (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014); illegal mining (Schmidt. 2020). Therefore, the theory is used in this study to explain motivation behind rising cases of cattle raids in North Rift-Kenya. The selection of the theory is premised on the explanation that participation of individuals in cattle raids as a means of earning livelihoods and gaining social status affects people's revenue generation.

Again, the study utilizes Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which suggests that criminal behaviour is learned same way as other behaviours (Bandura, 2019). According to this theory criminal behaviour is mainly learned through observation and modeling. Indeed, the more individuals are exposed to criminals, will result in a greater degree of criminal learning. This learning includes specific techniques, motivations, and attitudes. According to the social learning hypothesis, all behaviors, including criminal activities, are taught through a process of socialization. Therefore, it stands to reason that using a gun to commit a crime is also a learned behavior. This theory is used as it can help explain people's understanding of gun culture and their involvement in criminal activities. This is premised on the idea that children born in these communities have for a long time been exposed to violence, something positively associated with both commission and acceptance of dating violence (Liao, et al, 2020).

3. Methodology

Research design and study sample

The study employed a cross sectional research design with a population of 600 residents across the three counties. Also, the study used systematic sampling method where every 6th residents of the target areas were interviewed by research assistants. Data for this study was collected from a sample of 60 (10%) of the population. The region is currently under intense surveillance and hence most residents fear divulging more information publicly. In this case, online questionnaires allowed those with smart phones to fill the questionnaire at their convenience.

Although the sample size is relatively small from a statistical perspective, the response rate of 93% is above acceptable limit and the sample is representative enough of the population. To the knowledge of the researcher, few studies have focused on this area.

Regarding respondent's gender, most were male (54%) and female (46%) and since insecurity affects everyone, this implies that the study received views from diverse groups in the community. We observed also that majority of the study participants included mainly youth between ages of 18 to 39 years old and this correspondent with previous studies suggesting that youth are active groups in cattle raids/rustling. The study also interviewed residents of the three counties who are above 62 years old, including community elders and prophets whose participation revolves around blessings through rituals. Moreover, their participation in this study suggests the study benefited from their wealth of knowledge regarding influx of both legal and illegal guns in the

region. While 9% of the study didn't have formal education, most of them had high school (34%) and tertiary education (29%) suggesting almost all could understand language used to develop the questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to obtain data from the recruited residents. The questionnaire contained two sections A and B and study participants were required to indicate their demographic information and knowledge of the topic under study. The validity of the questions was established using content validity index and to determine the relevance of questions in measuring variables. Moreover, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Nunally, 1978). According to Nunally (1978) Cronbach's alpha coefficient of about 0.6 is acceptable. Overall Cronbach's alpha for this study was 0.79 and hence can conclude that the study items elicited internal consistency.
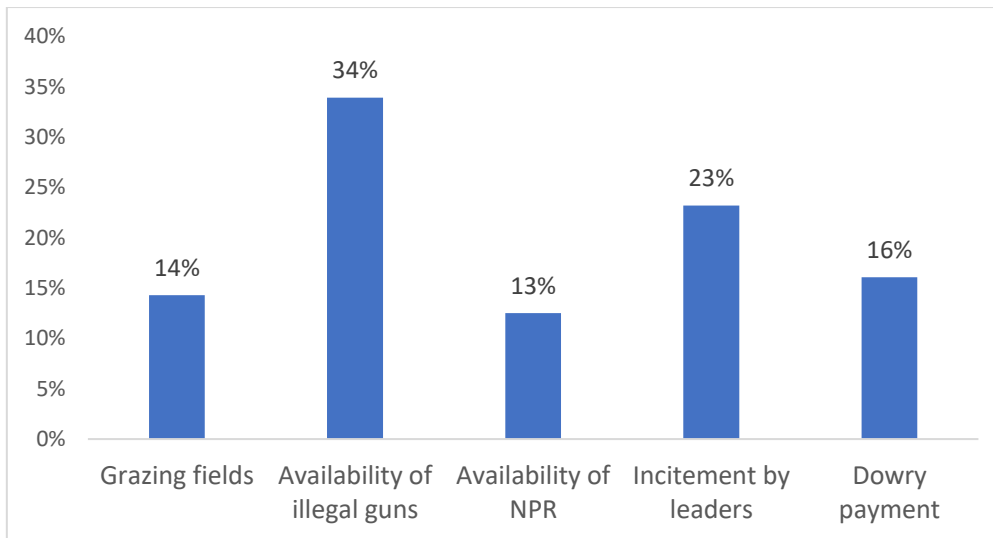
Table 1: Demographic information of respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	31	54%
	Female	26	46%
		57	100%
Age	18-28 yrs	12	21%
	29-39 yrs	17	30%
	40-50 yrs	9	16%
	51-61 yrs	10	18%
	62+ yrs	8	14%
		56	100%
Level of education	None	5	9%
	Primary school	16	29%
	High school	19	34%
	Tertiary college	10	18%
	University	6	11%
		56	100%

4. Results and Discussion

This study set to assess the influence of guns in the militarization and insecurity amongst cattle rustlers of North Rift. It was emerging from the study that although it is not always easy to define cattle rustling, cattle raids or even militarization in relation to communities living in North Rift region, the nature and scale of civilians acquiring guns becomes necessary task. A recurrent history of cattle raids with perpetrators using automatic weapons makes us begin thinking beyond just cattle. What motivates one to raid, kill, injure, or drive away one's animals is a question that will feature in most instances in this article. As shown in Figure 1, availability of guns (legally or illegally) contributes mainly to cattle raids, something which has immersed destabilized Kerio Valley belt. What is still puzzling is the level of small arms proliferation, mainly illegal guns which account to 34% of the conflicts among the communities – Marakwet, Pokot and Tugen. Although it was least reported as a case of conflicts, NPR, despite its formality accounted for 13% of the problems facing the region. As noted by the study findings, acquiring a 'rearm' as a reservist is not always straightforward but can be influenced by other factors such as corrupt transactions and bribery. Past studies have widely reported criminal behaviour and 'rearm misuse' by some KPRs (Mkutu, 2005). Moreover, while it may not be the case for many, such actions can fall within militarization of civilians whose level of training and guideline principles aren't similar to security agencies. Consequently, as noted by Mkutu, and Wandera (2013) several cases of "criminal behaviour and 'rearm misuse by KPRs such as reports by a conservancy owner confirmed that in some of the confrontations between scouts and poachers it was discovered that the poachers were 'outside' KPRs"

Figure 1: Causes of conflict in North rift region

Effectiveness of the prevention strategies

One of the challenges facing the fight against cattle raids has been the politicization of the peace process. The study participants reported being conformable with their leaders and in fact, they confidently share information on conflicts. In a country where political allegiance is driven far more by ethnicity than ideology, "communities competed against each other for representation. In a study of the relationship between guns, land and votes in Northern Kenya, Greiner (2013) found that there is a disguised relationship between politics and cattle raids and hence this might explain why government strategies such as disarmament. As shown in Table 2 below, a significant number of study participants are hesitant on the effectiveness of disarmament. Although local leadership welcomes the government's approach to disarm individuals with illegals, politics seized the opportunity by trying to manipulate the minds of the residents in their favour.

Most study participants raised concerns on the arming of civilians as part of NPR despite the government believe it will supplement available security agencies. These concerns are driven by the misuse of weapons and most of those who wish to understand the issues related to weapons availability and misuse have understandably focused on the occurrence of weapon injuries among the civilian population. Also, the study established that most of NPRs do not have consistent contract and considering their level of contractual terms, it would be terminated at the mercy of the local administrators. In one of the

interviews, a youth who suggested some youths were recruited into NPR but only trained for few days, yet police officers undergo nine months training. Although it helps in deterring more raids, at times during short peace periods, the NPR individuals aren't engaged actively in security matters making them exposed to other illegal activities. They have always been working together collaboratively with those holding illegal guns and hence the same socialization behaviour into guns usage.

> *Few years ago, there were claims of NPR engaging in illegal activities resulting to some of them being dropped from the NPR. We are not sure what they did but what we know now is that they are experts in the villages. Youths in this area have acquired illegal guns through selling of animals from the raids* (Inf. 1)

This gun behaviour holds true to social learning theory that postulates that youth are exposed to violence because they are more likely to carry guns at one point in time (Spano, Pridemore, & Bolland, 2012). This indicates that at least for youths, exposure to guns has an impact on subsequent gun carrying or usage. Another interviewee argued that when civilians are socialized into using guns for several months or years, they acquire military behaviour with time. This is complicated by the geographical set up of the area as youth freely operate along the bushes allegedly guarding the community's livestock. Again, the growing need to replenish stock or own guns entices the youth conduct cattle raids but puzzles us is the market for the animals.

Table 2: Effectiveness of disarmament

	Not at comfortable at all	Somewhat comfortable	Comfortable	Very comfortable
Local leaders in conflict intervention	10%	18%	27%	45%
Effectiveness of recent disarmament in the region	50%	20%	12%	18%
Arming of civilians as part of NPR	46%	22%	22%	10%

Although the presents of NPR have reduced cases of cattle raids, some study participants' links government's unsuccessful fight against cattle rustling to NPR. Accordingly, whenever there is gun sound, there has been delays in response by police over claims of having police reservists under NPR and hence it complicates government's efforts to distinguish between illegal and legal guns. One would question the logic behind having a large number of security officers civilians are attacked frequently.

> *We are always wondering do we have NPR yet police officers and even military are roaming around. I feel the government should do something since this makes the security officers stay indoors even when there are cattle raids. I remember three years ago we had our cattle being driven and the police claimed NPR were trying to repulse attackers* (Info. 2).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study shows that while it is good idea to arm the civilians through NPR, it is not adequate as individuals serving as police reservists don't have proper training, lack guiding principles, and always work collaboratively with those holding illegal guns. Besides, there is a question of post-work period for the NPR meaning after the end of their contract, they will have acquired or become fully training soldiers. Hence, the study argues that this may complicate the fight against cattle rustlers and contain insecurity in the region which has threatened the economic stabilization of the region. In addition, arming civilians lead to militarization of communities and the end result may be complex as more and more youth acquire gun knowledge both legally and illegally affecting peace sustainability among Marakwet, Pokot and Tugen communities.

5.2 Recommendations

Considering cattle raids in the region have existed for decades, the study recommends that there is need for the government to avoid arming civilians through NPR and begin to research newer effective approach that does not involve arms exchange.

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