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**Trends of cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria: A new dimension of organized crime in perspective in Bauchi and Plateau States**

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the trends of cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria as a new dimension of organize crime in perspective in Bauchi and Plateau states. The research adopted strain theory developed by Robert Merton. The study also used cross-sectional research design based on qualitative methods. Purposive sampling technique was used to extract information from the key respondents. Both primary and secondary data were collected. For the primary data, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were used as methods of data collection for the study while secondary data were also utilized to complement data gathered from the field. The findings of this study revealed that the cattle rustlers do carry out kidnapping in addition to cattle rustling. The trends of cattle rustling also involved kidnapping where millions of naira were demanded by the rustlers in the form of ransom. Another finding confirmed that some youths have taken rustling as means of survival because it yielded high income. The study concluded that, cattle rustling constituted a serious threat to livestock rearing and contribute to the impoverishment of rural population. Finally, the study recommends that security agencies should conduct a thorough investigation to unravel the network of cattle rustlers and identify those responsible for the supply of arms, rustling perpetrators, transporting rustled cattle to markets among others.*

**Key words:** Rustling, organized Crime, Trans-border, Kidnapping, banditry.

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**1. Introduction**

At the forefront of the numerous problems affecting northern Nigeria is the phenomenon of cattle rustling which involves largescale stealing of cattle. This phenomenon has in recent years taken the dimension of organized crime with high degree of sophistication made possible by proliferation of weapons and involve a wide range of perpetrators (Gumba, 2020; Gumba et al 2019). Organized criminal networks are typically involved in many different types of crime across national and international boundaries. The United States National Intelligence Council has estimated that by the year 2025, the

“relative power” of criminal networks will continue to rise, and some countries could even be overtaken and run by these networks (Finklea, 2010). The expansion of organized crime across national border has become a key security concern for the international community. In the past 80 years, 80 percent of United Nations Security Council’s discussion and resolution around organized crime has pertained to Africa (Reed, 2014). Organized crime in Africa can be described as anything from elephant poaching to the ivory and diamonds trade, to trafficking in persons and drugs (Reed, 2014). In Nigeria organized crime

involves drug trafficking, armed robbery, kidnapping, advanced fee fraud (419), oil bunkering and many others. Nevertheless, cattle theft in Nigeria evolved as a recent phenomenon which has taken the pattern of organized crime with immense criminal sophistication and efficiency. Hence, contemporary cattle rustlers operate with modern weaponry and their operations are marked by trans- locational and transnational syndication (Alemika, 2013; Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014).

Several studies have reported widespread cattle rustling across the world. In Latin America, authorities in Uruguay have recorded 1,200 incidents from March to August 2020 (Ford, 2021). In Paraguay, 350 heads of cattle were rustled from a ranch in 2014 and earlier in 2013, 200 heads of cattle were stolen from a ranch, each worth close to 700 dollars (Seth, 2014). In Europe, Scotland has witnessed cattle rustling in 2013 in which 300 cattle were reported to have been rustled, leading to the declaration of cattle rustling as a national calamity (Daily Trust Editorial, 2014). In India, the remote Garvin basin is well known for cattle rustling. More so, in Africa especially the horn of Africa region, the areas of Southern Ethiopia, Southern Sudan, Karamoja region of Uganda, Somalia and the whole of Northern Kenya is a beehive of cattle rustling activities (Julius, 2014).

In the West African sub-region, cattle rustling is a problem which occurs within the countries of (in the case of Senegal in Kaolack, Factick and Linguere) and around the border town between the Gambia and Senegal (Gueye, 2013). In Nigeria, the northern part of the country is besieged by cattle rustlers whose activities is giving the Fulani herdsmen, community leaders and the government a sleepless night, as thousands of cattle worth millions of naira were brazenly stolen and many

lives lost (Madugba et al, 2015). The rustlers were believed to be residing in the Kamuku/ Kuyanbana forest, a thick forest in the Birnin Gwari area of Kaduna state; Rugu forest, a large swath of woodland in Katsina state along the state's border with Zamfara, Sokoto, Niger, and Kaduna states; Falgore forest, which lies within Doguwa, Tudun Wada and Sumaila local government areas and Lame-Bura forest in Toro and Ningi local government areas of Bauchi state (Webmaster, 2016; Dailytrust, 2020; Mudashir, 2021).

The trend and patterns of cattle rustling vary in different parts of Nigeria. In the North-central geopolitical zone, especially in Plateau, Nassarawa and Benue states, the problem is framed around wider identity issues, including ethnic differences ethnicity (minority/majority divide), religious differences, and the indigene/settler splits, which are linked to struggles over land and water resources. Rustling is capable of impacting these identity issues as they are played out at regional and national levels. Furthermore, tension and conflict are sharpened by clear-cut occupational and ethno-cultural differentiations between farmers and grazers (Egwu, 2015:30). The increase in incidence of cattle rustling has had adverse implications for peace and security in the north. It has promoted distrust among communities and provoked misplaced aggression, as aggrieved cattle owners reportedly mobilized to unleash havoc on suspected cattle thieves (Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme, 2014).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Aside Boko Haram insurgency, one of the most disturbing and challenging problems affecting Northern Nigeria today is the phenomenon of cattle rustling. From what used to be a means livelihood, the crime of cattle rustling has undergone a fundamental transformation into an

international commercial venture organized and bankrolled by cattle warlords (Gumba, 2020; Osamba, 2000). Available evidence also suggests that cattle rustling not only metamorphosed into an immensely sophisticated and efficient organized crime, it is now also motivated by both 'subsistence' and 'commercial' imperatives (Gueye, 2013). According to Ahmadu Suleiman, Head of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria's Kaduna State branch, over 6,500 cattle were rustled from commercial livestock farms and herdsmen in Northern Nigeria between October 2013 and March 2014 (Bashir, 2014).

The current governor of Katsina State, Aminu Bello Masari, claimed the seizure of over 29,000 livestock from rustlers just a few months after launching a combined military operation to combat the threat (Tauna, 2016). The rustlers usually murder and maim their victims, as well as rape their wives, before robbing them of their cows (Akowe & Kayode, 2014). In the process, they also kidnap girls and women (Adeniyi 2015; Yusuf, 2015).

Accordingly, numerous cattle rustling have been reported in the media, with largescale commercial live-stock breeders and nomadic pastoralists being the most victims. This powerful effect threatened the very survival of the pastoralist communities.

There have also been troubling reports of nomads suffering from hypertension, insanity, and untimely deaths as a result of livestock rustling. Rustling has impact on the economy of Fulani. Accordingly, cattle rustling has persisted despite efforts by the government and other stake holders to halt it. Therefore, the issues in the problem need to be properly captured for clear understanding.

Several studies have been conducted on Cattle rustling and organized crime across the globe such as (Airborne Drones, 2021; Julius, 2014; Kwaja, 2014; Ocan,1992). However, none of the above aforementioned scholars covered the area of this study. Therefore, this paper sought to fill the gap on the trends of cattle rustling as a new dimension of organized crime in Bauchi and Plateau states.

The study is centered on the trends of cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria as a new dimension of organized crime. The focus of the study is limited to cattle rustling only within Plateau and Bauchi State. Also, due to limited time, the study would cover the trends of cattle rustlers from 2013 to 2021.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Concept of Cattle Rustling**

The phenomenon of cattle rustling has received great attention by scholars and social analysts. This has led to the emergence of varieties of scholarly perspectives on the subject matter. According to (Cheserek et. al., 2012) "cattle rustling is the act of forceful raiding of livestock from one community by another using guns and leaving destruction of property and loss of lives" In the same vein, Osamba (2000:12-13) defined cattle rustling as a "system of predatory exploitation of economic resources in the form of armed attacks by one group on another with the purpose of stealing livestock". Moreover, Adan and Pkalya (2005:16) describe cattle rustling as a "criminal activity of raiding other communities for cattle and other livestock". In the current literature, the primary concept of contemporary cattle rustling is that it is a sort of livelihood crime motivated by both subsistence and commercial imperatives (Gueye,

2013).cattle rustlers are primarily motivated by a criminal purpose to steal grazing cattle for slaughter or sale in this respect (Gueye, 2013:66, Okoli and Okpaleke, 2014:111). Cattle rustling is distinct from other forms of banditry like armed robbery, which may carry no social significance beyond the perpetrators' economic gain (Ibrahim and Dabugat, 2015:262).

## 2.2 History and Evolution of Cattle Rustling

Cattle rustling is an age-old practice which dates back to over many decades. Rangers and Osborne (2006) stated that over 7,000 years ago livestock attacks were reported to have taken place. The Greek historian Herodotus reported livestock raiding by Scythian horsemen 2,500 years ago (Egwu, 2015:21)

Furthermore, in the American Old West, Mexican rustlers were a major concern during the American civil war (1861-1865). Likewise, Texans stole cattle from Mexico, swimming them across the Rio Grande; these cattle were called 'wet stock' (Egwu, 2015:22). Also, conflict over allege rustling was a major issue in the *Johnson County War*, 1892 in the U.S. state of Wyoming (Weiser, 2021). Cattle rustling became a major issue at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century in Argentina, where cattle stolen during *malones* were taken through *Rastrillada de los chilenos* across the Andes, which were swapped for alcoholic drinks and firearms in Chile ("Cattle raiding," 2022)

In Africa, cattle rustling among the Pokot of Kenya dates back to 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Massai roamed about with their livestock in Baringo (Julius, 2014). According to Triche (2014) "livestock raiding has been a source of conflict amongst and between pastoral societies for hundreds of years." Pastoral communities

raided each other as well as sedentarised communities for livestock, mainly to replenish their herds depleted by severe droughts, disease, raiding or other calamities (Adan and Pkalya, 2005:16). Today, numerous literatures pointed to transformation of cattle rustling from petty theft and cultural practices into an organized crime (Maluleke, 2020; Gumba, 2020, Olaniyan et al. 2016)

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

The role of social theory as a guide in research cannot be disputed. The 'Strain Theory' analyzing the trends and patterns of cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria.

### The Strain Theory

The strain theory was developed by Robert Merton and connected to Durkheim's theory of anomie (Crossman, 2016). The cornerstone of the strain theory is that crime breeds in the gap, imbalance or dysfunction between culturally induced aspirations for economic success and structurally distributed possibilities of achievement (O'connor, 2013).

According to Merton, every society has culturally defined goals and socially approved means of achieving such goals. However, there is some inequality in opportunity and these inequalities in access may result in deviance and criminality. As those disadvantaged seek similar goals, there might be a predisposition to cut corners and use means which are not socially approved (Alubo, 2014:11).

Sutherland (1973) suggests that factors such as deprivation, limited access to legitimate alternatives and exposure to innovative success models creates susceptibility to criminal behaviour (Lyman and Potter, 2007). This is highlighted by Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) argument based on 'differential

opportunity theory' which states that many lower-class male adolescents experience a sense of desperation surrounding the belief that their position in the economic structure is relatively fixed and immutable. As a result of failing to meet cultural expectations of achieving upward mobility, conditions become ideal for socialization functions such as recruitment, screening and training for organized crime.

Furthermore, Taylor, Walton and Young (1973:97) argue that when opportunities to succeed are distributed unequally, consequential results include the adoption of illegitimate means of obtaining success. Merton (1938:678) supports this argument: "the use of conventionally prescribed but frequently effective means of attaining at least the simulacrum of cultural defined success" applies when people select success routes outside normatively prescribed channels. Accordingly, considerable precedent for using illegitimate goals to achieve success exists in locations noted for the presence of organized crime (Lyman and Potter, 2007:69).

The process by which organized crime provides a means for social adaption begins with the basic definition of success. Merton has argued that an emphasis on specific goals often develops in our society. This emphasis become virtually exclusive and ignores appropriate means for achieving these goals. In this instance, and as it relates to this study, cattle rustling is a response to achieving societal expected goal of material success through illegitimate means. Due to inequality in access to the legitimate means of achieving this goal, those at disadvantage position resort to act of cattle rustling through an organized criminal syndicate.

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopted cross-sectional research design. This design involves

investigating the state of affairs in a population at a certain point in time, allowing conclusions about phenomena across a wide population to be drawn (Bethlehem, cited in Zheng, 2015; Shuttleworth, 2010).

The target population consisted of Fulani herders, local Fulani chiefs, leadership and officials of cattle breeders' association, cattle dealers and security agents. Accordingly, all the respondents of the study were selected based on their knowledge and expertise on issues relating to cattle and cattle rustling in Nigeria. The sampling techniques adopted for the study was purposive or judgmental non-probability sampling. According to this method, sample members are selected on the basis of their knowledge, relationships and expertise regarding a research subject (Freedman et. al., 2007). Purposive sampling technique was chosen because it ensures that only people with the necessary knowledge and expertise were selected as sample members. The study adopted the qualitative approach to data collection. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were the methods used by the researcher to gather data for the study. A key element of both KIIs and FGD is the interaction between participants and the interviewer or facilitator (Taylor and Blake, 2015). The focus group discussions technique is primarily a qualitative data collection method involving the administration of open-ended questions to a carefully selected target group or focus groups, which optimally consists of 5 – 7 persons and at most 10 – 12 persons (Alemika, 2002, p. 28). Focus group discussion is designed to elicit group attitude and responses. The discussion usually lasts between one or two hours and provides the opportunity for all the respondents to participate and to give their opinions. Additionally, secondary data were also utilized to complement data gathered from the field. The secondary

data were obtained from findings reported in recent published documents and media reportage on the phenomenon of cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria. Secondary data were used because using available information not only saves time and money, but it can add depth to the study. The study utilized the interview guide as the instrument of data collection. This was used as guide for the key informant interviews, as well as for the focus group discussions. A uniform set of open-ended questions were prepared, so as to guide the interviews and the focus group discussions

towards answering the research questions and achieving the objectives of the study. The study adopted thematic method of data analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data. It minimally organizes and describes data set in rich detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis suits questions related to people's views, experiences and perceptions.

#### 4 Results and Discussions

**Table 1: Description of the Informants**

Code Number	Informants	Occupation	Position/Rank
0001	Nomads	Pastoralists	Herders
0002	Miyetti Allah	Socio-cultural Association	Chairman/officials
0003	Nigerian Police Force	Policing	PPRO, DPO
0004	Operation Safe Haven	Peace Keeping	Officials
0005	Cattle/dealers/butchers	Cattle/ meat business	Chairman/Secretary
0006	Vigilante Group	Community policing	Chairman/Members
0007	Danga security	Private security firm	Chairman/ Secretary
0008	Community leaders	Local chiefs	Ardo (Fulani chiefs)

*Source: (Researcher, 2022).*

#### 4.1 The Trends of Cattle Rustling in Northern Nigeria

The issue of cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria has become more visible and severe in recent years. Data collected by the researcher revealed different trends in cattle rustling across different parts of northern Nigeria. The rustlers are believed to be mostly young people between the ages of 21 to 40 years, and they move about in group of between three to four and a maximum of ten people. As revealed by the participants, the rustlers used simple tools such as machets, knives, stick, fabricated guns as well as sophisticated weapons like pistols, double barrel, including AK 47.

In Plateau state it was revealed that cattle rustlers operate in gangs made up of people from different ethnic groups. Special Task Force (STF) stated during the FGD:

*The trend in Plateau state is quite distinct from other Northern states. So many ethnic groups are into rustling. The Fulani, Berom, Taroh are all into cattle rustling. They raided cattle, load them into trucks and transport them to Southern part of Nigeria where the demands for meat is very high (Operation Safe Haven, 0004; Vigilante, 0006).*

Furthermore, a participant, an STF officer stated that:

*Cattle rustling have become a lucrative business in Plateau state. Some youths have taken to rustling as a means of survival because the major business with high income in the state is cattle breeding. So, these youths have devised ways of stealing cows (Operation Safe Haven, 0004).*

More so, as revealed by participant from Bauchi state, cattle rustling was said to be perpetrated by Fulani ‘Katsinawa’ and ‘Zamfarawa’ who have set of camps at Lame-Bura forests in parts of Toro and Ningi local government area of Bauchi state. The trends in the state also involved kidnapping where millions of naira are demanded by the rustlers in the form of ransom. As revealed by two of the key informants, a Fulani community leader in Lame District and Miyetti Allah leader in Bauchi metropolis:

*Al though cattle rustling still occur, the trend now is mostly that of kidnapping. It is those rustlers who have now become kidnapers. They now kidnapped our people and demand for ransom where we have to sell the cattle ourselves*

*to pay for the ransom (community leader, 0008; Miyetti Allah, 0002).*

Another participant, an official of the vigilante group in Tama ward confirmed that the rustlers do carry out kidnapping in addition to cattle rustling. He said “because of the proactive measures taken, it now becomes difficult for the rustlers to cart away with large herds of cattle without being caught. Even last year we recovered about 200 cattle from the rustlers (Vigilante group, 0006).”

Generally, as explained by most of the participants, cattle rustling is not a new phenomenon, there has always been cattle rustling among the Fulani but the practice was not widespread and organized as we have it today. As stated by the participants, cattle rustling in the past were carried out using mystical powers mostly to acquire more herd of cattle, it was not motivated by commercial motives and did not involve maiming and killing. However, the new trend is now motivated by capital acquisition motives and involved the use of modern and sophisticated weapons to steal large herd of cattle. The new trends also involved maiming, killing, raping and kidnapping for ransom. Rustling as we have it today also involved collaboration with some insiders, security agencies, vigilante, community leaders, butchers and cattle dealers.

**Table 2: Dimensions of Cattle Rustling in Northern Nigeria**

	<b>Orientation</b>	<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Origination</b>	<b>Destination</b>	<b>Culprits</b>
Petty/local ized rustling	Not syndicated, not armed	Criminal quest for household protein or diary (meat and milk)	Neighbourhood paddocks or grazing fields	Local or household	Local farmers and nomads

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Inland rustling	Loosely syndicated and fairly armed	Quest for capital accumulation	for	Grazing fields of herding communities	Local cattle markets and abattoirs	Nomads and local cronies
Trans-border rustling	Robustly syndicated, organized and armed	Quest for capital accumulation, funding of political causes e.g armed rebellion and terrorism	for	Grazing fields, commercial farms, cattle markets, herding communes	Across national boundary to Niger, Chad, Cameroon.	Nomads and cartel of agents and foreign accomplice

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*Source: Okoli and Okpaleke (2014)*

The Table 2 above displays the dimensions of cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria. The table identifies three dimensions of cattle rustling which include petty/localized, inland and trans-border rustling. The table shows that petty/localized rustling are not syndicated or armed, it's motivated by criminal quest for household protein or diary, are carried out in neighborhood paddock or grazing fields, the destination is local household and the culprits are local farmers and nomads.

The table also reveals that inland rustling are loosely syndicated and fairly armed, it's motivated by quest for capital accumulation and it takes place in grazing fields of herding communities, the destination is local cattle markets and abattoirs and the culprits are nomads and local cronies.

The table also shows that trans-border rustling is well organized, armed, and syndicated with the perpetrators encouraged by a desire for financial gain, financing armed rebellion and terrorism; takes place in grazing fields, commercial farms, cattle markets and herding communes; the rustled cattle are destined across national boundary to Niger, Chad and Cameroon and the culprits are nomads and cartel of agents and foreign accomplice. This tells us how complicated

cattle rustling menace is in Northern Nigeria.

#### **4.2. Discussion of Findings**

Cattle rustling has undergone fundamental changes in terms of causes, effects and contents. Cattle rustlers among pastoralist communities began as a result of various groups attempts to increase herd's sizes in order to assure community survival (Gumba, 2020; Ocan, 1992). Raids, therefore were a form of response by a society to disasters emanating from cattle diseases, famines and other forms of calamities (Osamba, 2010:23). Cattle rustling has turned into an organized criminal practice nowadays. It is no longer a community affair, rather, an international syndicate involving an organized network of people distributed along a value chain (Olowa 2010, in Donnermeyer, 2016).

Commercialization of cattle rustling is largely due to the existence of a viable market that bridges the gulf between demand and supply (Kwaja, 2014). Cattle raids are driven by business people who want to cash on a growing urban population in need of meat. Trade in livestock is indeed a big business. According to the Kenya Meat Commission, Kenya exports 500 tons of beef every week to the Middle East such as (UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) and Africa (Sudan, DRC, Uganda, Tanzania and Egypt) (Dubourthoumieu,



2014). This leads to the emergence of commercialized cattle rustling, made possible by the proliferation of small arms where organized criminal gangs made up of five or a maximum of fifteen people stage a raid and efficiently drive a relatively large number of livestock (Kaimba, et al., 2011; Hendrickson, et. al., 1996; Julius, 2014).

The trends and patterns of cattle rustling had taken the direction of an organized crime with high level of sophistication and criminal efficiency that characterizes its contemporary manifestations (Okoli and Okpaleke, 2014; Gumba, 2020). Indeed, contemporary cattle rustlers operate with modern weaponry and their operations are marked by trans-locational and trans-national syndication (Gumba et al, 2019; Alemika, 2013). Accordingly, Kwaja (2014) stated that “Sophistication in terms of types and nature of weapons is a trend that defines cattle rustling. The use of AK 47 and other assault weapon is a common feature of such act that has led to huge deaths and population displacements”

Furthermore, the modern cattle rustling entail scouting for cattle and markets, plus planning, organizing, aiding and protecting criminals (Donnermeyer, 2016). This clearly underscores cattle rustling as a typical and prominent instance of ‘underworld franchise’ in contemporary societies (Okoli & Okpaleke, 2014).

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

Cattle rustling constitute a serious threat to livestock rearing and contribute to impoverishment of rural population. The dire impacts of cattle rustling on human life and property, livelihood, peaceful co-existence and harmonious intergroup relations have serious implications for peace and security across Northern Nigeria. Nigerians will no doubt have a

sign of relief when cattle rustling and other related crimes are brought to a halt.

### Recommendations

In order to curtail the menace of cattle rustling in Northern Nigeria, the following measures are recommended:

1. Government should ensure that the demand and supply chains as well as the operational routes, market networks, syndicate and infrastructures of cattle rustling are systematically identified and demolished in order to eliminate the illegal practice
2. The security agencies should carry out a thorough investigation to unravel the network of cattle rustlers and identification of those behind the supply of arms, the perpetrators of rustling, transporting the rustled cattle to the markets, the markets where rustled cattle are taken and those buying and disposing stolen cattle.
3. The government should impose stiffer and harsher penalty in the form of capital punishment or life imprisonments on perpetrators of cattle rustling, so as to serve as deterrence to others.
4. There is the need to use technology in the form of animal tracker which should link every cow to its owner. Each cow should carry a microchip which will determine the location of the cattle and enable tracking by the security agencies in the case of rustling.
5. Ranches and animal control posts should be created. These measures will help to curtail cattle rustling and frequent clashes between herders and farmers.

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