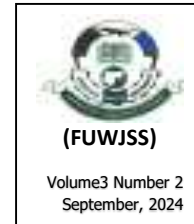


**BENUE STATE OF NIGERIA OPEN GRAZING
PROHIBITION AND RANCHES ESTABLISHMENT
LAW (2017) AND RESURGENCE OF CROP-
FARMERS AND HERDERS' CONFLICTS**



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Abstract

Since 2017, conflicts between crop farmers and animal herders have resurged in Benue state. While scholars attribute the conflict in Benue to a plethora of issues, including climate change, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and inconsistencies of state policies, none have considered an opposition to the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017). This study examines how opposition to the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) reignite conflict between crop-farmers and herders. The study was anchored on the frustration-aggression theory, which argued that when goal-oriented persons are interrupted from achieving their goals, they resort to aggression. The study was a time series study which collected data from primary and secondary sources. Major findings of the study established that herdsmen, the main aggressors, are frustrated by the interruption of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) against their cattle rearing business. The study concludes that opposition to the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) is responsible for the resurgence of conflicts between crop farmers and animal herders in Benue State in recent years. The study recommends that the Benue state government should intensify sensitisation on the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) and give animal herders loans under favourable conditions to establish ranches.

Keywords: Grazing law, crop farmers, animal herders, conflict and resurgence

Introduction

Agriculture is one of the major economic activities in Nigeria, contributing 22.35% of GDP on average, with over 70% of Nigerians engaged in it at the subsistence level (Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2023). Agricultural activities in Nigeria involve both crop farming, animal husbandry, forestry and fishing. The thriving of agriculture is important to the sustenance of the lives of many Nigerians and a major contribution to GDP (Etumnu, 2013). Located on the fertile Benue valley, Benue state like its counterpart, Nasarawa is one of the major contributors to agriculture in Nigeria leading to it being dubbed the 'Food Basket of the Nation' (Fatona, 2022).

Although fishing and other agricultural activities occur in Benue state, crop cultivation and animal husbandry are the primary agricultural activity. Crop cultivation is largely done by the Tiv, Idoma, Iggede, Etulo, and Jukun, who are said to be indigenous to the state, whereas animal husbandry, particularly cattle herding, is dominated by the Fulani, who are nomadic and are thought to be settlers in the state. The majority of the population in the state is engaged in agricultural activities, which has resulted in disputes between crop farmers and animal herders, who compete for lands and water supplies to sustain their respective forms of agricultural activity (Alu, 2017).

The relationship between crop farmers and animal herders in Benue state has not always been antagonistic; in the past, it has been symbiotic. According to Ofem & Inyang (2014), a symbiotic relationship existed previously between animal herders and crop growers in each new settlement where they stopped to rest. Crop farmers in host towns obtained free organic manure from cow dung and protein from beef and dairy products, while animal farmers relied on farm produce for food. Thousands of pastoralists migrate through the Middle Belt every year following established and regulated migration routes, making it one of the busiest and largest international transhumance routes in West Africa and the Sahel. State of Benue is surrounded by farmed croplands, semi-nomadic pastoralism, and international transhumance routes. The majority of herders in Nigeria engage in a nomadic or semi-nomadic form of pastoralism known as "open grazing." This implies that a herder must traverse extensive stretches of land in order to provide for their livestock. Although the Middle Belt is a significant centre for food production and pastoralist activity, many farmers and herders live on a subsistence level. As tensions worsen, both groups must aggressively defend their own

sources of income because any damage to their crops or livestock directly jeopardises their ability to survive (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin, 2017).

Although violent clashes between crop farmers and animal herders have happened across Nigeria, the intensity has escalated since 2010. According to Kingdom News (2017), between 2010 and 2017, the operations of animal farmers constituted an existential threat to different local Nigerian populations. Over 5,000 people have been killed and over 100,000 have been internally displaced as a result of Fulani livestock herder attacks in the North-Central region. Many rural settlements have been separated, and their residents have been thrown into disarray, shattering community cohesion and jeopardising the existence of the local population. It has also been stated that Fulani animal herders occupy the lands from which they violently and murderously evict local crop farmers, and that security forces and the government then take steps to secure Fulani possession of the occupied lands (Ojomoyela, 2016; Kingdom News, 2017). Benue State bears the brunt of these assaults. The violent Fulani animal herders were named the world's fourth deadliest brigand aggregate in 2015 by the Global Conflict Index. Despite this and the numerous people who have been killed, the government has remained silent. In Benue state, for example, the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria stated that the attacks on their neighbouring ranchers are a form of retaliation for capturing one hundred bovines by persons from the rural communities that have been attacked. Furthermore, more than 1,042 people were killed in Benue State in 2016 as a result of the ongoing carnage. In 2015, Fulani herders invaded seven communities in Agatu Local Government, and seven farmers were killed in the state's Ikpele and Okpopolo regions, uprooting nearly 6000 people. Herdsmen have invaded 15 of the 23 local government areas of Benue state, killing thousands of civilians, destroying homes and farms, and raping the wives and daughters of men in these villages (Opejobi, 2016).

Crop farmer and animal herder attacks and counter-attacks continued into 2017 and were more lethal. The violence was blamed on the state's practise of open grazing (Channels TV, 2017). The state government moved to introduce a law to prevent open grazing in the state. However, while the crop farmers generally accepted the idea of a law abolishing open grazing, the animal herders did not accept it. They saw it as an attempt to kick them out of Benue state even though Nigerian laws guarantee citizens the right to reside in any part of Nigeria and carry out their business (Alhasan, 2021). Neighbouring Taraba state also moved to make a similar law, and it was also met with resistance. On the 12th of

January 2017, members of the Taraba State chapter of the Miyeti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria protested the state's Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Bill 2017 at the House of Assembly. The measure, according to the group, is intended to subdue the Fulani tribe as well as weaken and restrict the Fulani tribe's operations in the state. In the collective interest of the people of the state, the group urged lawmakers to halt the bill. It further stated that if the House passed the bill, there would be a breakdown in law and order (Mkom, 2017). They committed to fighting such laws across the country (Alhasan, 2021).

The Benue and Taraba State governments still made laws prohibiting open grazing in their respective state. Other states, including Ekiti, Ondo, Enugu etc., also joined and made laws that will prohibit open grazing in their states. The law in Benue State stopped open grazing and made a provision for the establishment of ranches in the state. The governor of the state at that time, signed the bill into law on the 27th of May, 2017 after it was passed by the state assembly, to come into force on the 30th of October, 2017. The governor declared that the law was going to mark the end of the clashes between crop farmers and animal herders (Channels TV, 2017). However, a resurgence of attacks was experienced in the states after the law came into force. For instance, an attack on Tombo village in the Logo local government on January 6, 2018, one on Mkgovur village in the Buruku local government on March 6, 2018, and multiple attacks on communities in the Agatu local government on March 20, 2019, all of which resulted in the deaths of nineteen people (Chukwuemeka, Aloysius, & Eneh, 2018). These and more attacks happened in the state after the enactment of the law. These attacks were carried out by suspected herdsmen who are incidentally against the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017). Broadly, this research analysed the impact of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) on the violent conflict between crop farmers and animal herders in the state. Specifically, it ascertained whether opposition to that law accounted for the resurgence of conflicts between crop farmers and animal herders in Benue State between 2017 and 2021.

Literature Review

Literature was reviewed to uncover what scholars attribute the persistent conflicts between crop farmers and cattle herders in Nigeria and especially in Benue state. Scholars like Shettima & Tar (2008) have

attributed the persistence of the conflict between crop farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. This is compounded by the fact that the country has weakly manned borders which allow these arms and weapons to proliferate in the country, especially from neighbouring countries such as Sudan, Mali, Niger, and Chad.

Another factor that scholars attribute the persistence of the conflict to is climate change. Tall in Ibrahim-Olesin, et al., (2021) observed that it has long been customary for herders to migrate from the semi-arid region of Nigeria, the arid North, and other West African countries to the humid and sub-humid regions during the dry season because there is a lack of water and cattle feed. Farmers and herders have always had a mutually beneficial partnership that has evolved throughout time. Equally, Benjaminsen et al. in Ibrahim-Olesin, et al., (2021) also added that there is competition for limited resources because of the unpredictable nature of the shifting climatic phases, which include increasingly drier weather and irregular rainfall. Mertz, Rasmussen, and Rasmussen in Ibrahim-Olesin, et al., (2021) also noted that rivalry for agricultural land and water, as well as livestock damage to crops as a result, are the primary causes of farmer-herder disputes in humid and sub-humid regions. Tiwo (2023) advanced that research indicates that the main source of conflict in the skirmishes between farmers and Fulani pastoralists is over land usage and water rights. The demand for land has grown due to the need for larger grazing pastures and greater agricultural production. This fight is notable for the valour of the fighters and the variety of theories put up to explain why it occurred. It is crucial to recognise that climate change has upset the equilibrium in the distribution of these resources, even though several studies have reduced this dilemma to grazing, farming, and water disputes. Farmers accuse the Fulani herdsmen of letting their animals run amok and damaging crops, while the herders respond to complaints from the government by saying that farmers are attacking them to take their animals.

Cattle population growth has also been blamed for the persistence of the conflict. Nigeria's cattle population is around 25 million in 2021, and the number of cattle is expected to increase to 60 million by 2050 (Fabiya & Otunuga, 2016). A large amount of food and water is required to satisfy massive numbers of animals when they are travelling over farmers' lands. Farmers accused the Fulani herdsmen of failing to control their cattle and allowing them to damage farmers' crops. However, the Fulani herdsmen accused farmers of stealing their cattle and sheep (Fabiya & Otunuga,

2016). This makes the two groups fight continuously. According to Genyi (2017), research shows that the conflict is mostly caused by the population boom, the deteriorating economy, climate change, antiquated farming practices, and the trend towards Islamisation. This perception is shared by many other scholars. The review shows that scholars have attributed the persistence of conflicts between crop farmers and animal herders in Nigeria to a lot of factors. Shatimma & Tar (2008) for instance, attributed it to the proliferation of SMALW, and Ibrahim-Olesin, et al., (2021) attributed it to climate change. Fabiyi & Otunuga, (2016) attributed it to the increase in cattle numbers while Genyi (2017) views the conflict as a result of a perceived Islamisation by the herdsman. None of the scholars attributed it to the reaction to Benue State's Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law (2017) creating a gap that this research filled.

Theoretical Framework

There is hardly any good scientific research without a theoretical foundation. The essence of theorisation is to explain phenomena and reach valid generalisations. Against this backdrop, the study adopts the frustration-aggression theory. The theory has its origins in Psychology and can be traced to the works of John Dollard et al. in 1939. The central argument of the theory is that aggression is always a consequence of frustration (Mbah, 2014). Dollard et al. argued that frustration leads to aggression when the source of frustration cannot be effectively challenged. Frustration in the context of this theory is not understood as an emotional response but rather "an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response" (Breuer & Elson, 2017:1). People will therefore resort to aggressive behaviours when frustrated. The theoretical explanation of the relationship between frustration and aggression has become more refined beyond the original theory leading to the emergence of competing theoretical considerations (Breuer & Elson, 2017). According to Brown and Faber in Breuer & Elson (2017), two requirements qualify an event as frustrating: the first is that achieving the goal must be very important to the subject. The second is that the subject perceives the achievement of the goal as a likely outcome. Therefore, when these conditions are met, the consequence is aggression. Dollard et al. in Breuer & Elson (2017) equally held that the strongest acts of aggression are directed at the perceived source of the frustration. Aggression towards a source of frustration is seen as a retaliatory move.

Aggression can also be directed at targets outside the source of frustration; this is commonly described as displaced aggression.

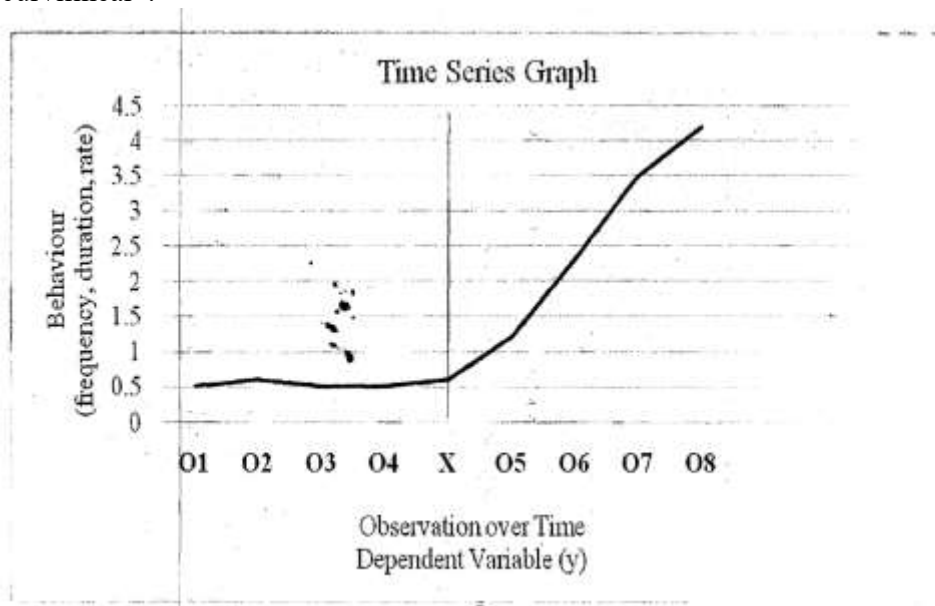
One of the major thrusts of the theory discusses scapegoating as a way of displacing aggression. It was argued that aggression is sometimes directed at targets outside the source of frustration, most of whom may be considered convenient victims. It can be directed at such scapegoats for some reason. First, aggression can be displaced when the frustrated entity cannot express aggression towards his/her perceived source of frustration; he/she may find the easiest target to express the aggression against for cathartic relief. Secondly, it is socially unacceptable to express aggression towards a person without justification, so aggressors may use the actions of a different party to justify their aggression towards a scapegoat (Jost, 2021). As soon as an aggressor can, he/she directs his/her frustration to the source of his/her frustration which is usually the strongest.

In application to this study, the goal or aim of every farmer during planting season is to have a bountiful harvest, then sell the farm produce and make profits. On the other hand, the herdsmen would always want to have well-fed and healthy cattle and be able to make profits as well. The animal herders are always frustrated because they need free grass and water to reduce the cost of their entire animal farming business, but the presence of the Open Grazing Prohibition And Ranches Law has been preventing them from achieving this aim of getting free feeds to feed their stocks, so there is a natural tendency that whenever one's effort is been frustrated, he/she turns to be aggressive and this is the case of the animal herders since their efforts to get what they want is always been frustrated and this subsequently lead to aggression. The aggression is mostly targeted at the state government, especially Governor Ortom which is the source of the frustration but it is sometimes displaced on innocent crop farmers. This explains the reason why there have been renewed clashes between animal herders and crop farmers in Benue state.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the Time series Research Design. In doing so; it employs a lengthy series of observations and measurements of the dependent variable (Y) before the occurrence of a presumed causal event or intervention called the independent variable (X), and this is followed by another series of measurements of the same variable (Y) after it has encountered variable (X). Time series collects data on the same variable at regular intervals, which may be between weeks, months, years, etc.

Leege & Francis (1975) noted that “the change between the last measurement before the intervention of (X) and the first variable after it is the principal focus for measuring the effect of the experiment”. Johnson & Joslyn (1995, cited in Ugwueze, 2017, p. 50) observe that “the pre-measurements allow a researcher to establish trends in the dependent variable (Y) that are presumably unaffected by the independent variable (X) so that appropriate conclusions can be drawn about post-treatment measures, and these trends may be linear (either increasing or decreasing) or curvilinear”.



Where:

‘X’ axis = independent variable/observation overtime/intervention/ causal event

‘Y’ axis = dependent variable/ behaviour or occurrence (frequency, rate, duration)

O₁-O₄ = Baseline phase before the intervention demonstrates the normal state of the behaviour of the Y variable.

O1-O8 = series of observations of the dependent variable (Y) over time

In this research:

‘X’ axis = opposition to the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017.

‘Y’ axis = resurgence of clashes between crop farmers and animal herders in Benue state.

O₁-O₄ = Nature of the clashes between crop farmers and animal herders in Benue state before the enactment of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017.

The study population involves the entire Benue population, estimated to be 5,741,815 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The research was narrowed to only three local governments, including Logo, Guma and Agatu. They were selected to represent the three senatorial districts of the state. They were specifically selected to represent these senatorial districts because they were the worst hit in those senatorial districts in terms of the clashes between crop farmers and herders in the state.

Non-probability sampling was adopted for This research. Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique that does not rely on chance selection but instead on the availability of units or investigator judgment. The study specifically adopted the pre-designed availability type of non-probability sampling units selected based on availability and meeting specific criteria (Okafor & Ukaegbu, 2018). The major research instrument used for this research work was an interview. The researcher went into the field to collect primary data or information from interviewees to understand their opinions on the law and extrapolate how it may have resulted in the return of disputes between crop farmers and herders. In Agatu LGA, twenty crop farmers and twenty animal herders were interviewed, while the same numbers were interviewed in Logo and Guma LGAs. The three LGAs have ten electoral wards each. Four interviewees were selected in each ward in the LGs. Two represented crop farmers from each ward and two represented animal herders although some of the herders were traced to Nasarawa state where they had mostly relocated. This gave a total of sixty interviewees. They were asked about their reactions to the law, how it affected their agricultural activities, and whether or not it should be retained.

Also, books, journals, articles, government publications, and news media were used as secondary methods of data collection to corroborate some data found from primary sources to assist the researcher in answering the research question. The research will use verbatim quotations from interviewees for its analysis. The words of interviewees will be further triangulated with relevant secondary sources for verification. Pseudonyms will be used to conceal and protect the identities of the interviewees.

The Major Aims and Objectives of the Law are as Follows:

The Benue state open grazing prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law 2017 was enacted on 22 May 2017 and its enforcement began on 1 November 2017; its provisions include.

- a) To prevent the destruction of farm crops
- b) To bring to an imminent end clash between crop farmers and animal herders
- c) Protect the environment while optimizing the use of land
- d) To optimize the use of land resources in the face of overstretched land and increasing population
- e) To prevent, control, and manage the spread of diseases
- f) To create a conducive environment for large-scale crop production etc.

Worthy of note in the law, outside of the designated ranches, open nomadic livestock herding or grazing is prohibited under Section 19 (1) of the Law. A violation of this clause will be considered an offence and will result in a five-year prison sentence, a one million Naira fine, or both. Ranchers are also strictly liable for any injury, loss of life, or accident that may occur, and they are prohibited from carrying both licenced and unlicensed firearms, but they can hire registered security guards; defaulters will be prosecuted under the Robbery and Firearm Provision Act. According to Section 19(4) of the law, livestock in Benue State can only be carried by truck and waggon, and cattle wandering the streets will be confiscated and can only be retrieved by the owner after paying a fee that will be deposited into the state's revenue account.

Reaction to the law

Nigeria's crop farmers and herdsmen conflict has existed since the establishment of the Fourth Republic in 1999. However, the violence became more intense, with more frequent attacks and skirmishes and intermittent increases in the number of casualties and displaced people.

In response to the regular fights between farmers and herders, the governor approved the anti-open grazing measure to assist in reducing the ongoing clashes, which frequently result in death and property destruction throughout the state. The reaction of farmers to this law in Benue state is discussed below. Most crop farmers were pleased with the anti-open grazing law and offered various opinions about it. Some were optimistic that the law would serve as a stepping stone in reducing violent clashes between them and herders. Some of them, however, were unsure of their emotions because they had co-existed with the herders for a long time and adjusting to the new change was difficult; some even went so far as to suggest that not all herders are troublesome, although they had lived with them for a long time. Mr. T.S. from Anyii community of Logo LGA, for example, believes that the enactment of the anti-open grazing law has served as a panacea for peace in Logo Local Government Area and indeed the entire state of Benue, and that the law will be recorded as the governor's greatest achievement in-that its effects on the lives of the common man (farmers) cannot be overemphasised. Similarly, O.S., a crop farmer in the Odugbeho community of Agatu local government area who was interviewed stressed that his reaction to the law and indeed most of the farmers in Agatu LGA has been nothing other than joyous celebration, he went further to say that, since the law was enacted till now, the people of Agatu LGA area and indeed the people of Benue State are full of gratitude and appreciation to the governor for birthing such an incredible law in Benue state.

Mr. J.A., a crop farmer in Gbajimba, Guma LGA, also expressed his appreciation to the governor and the state legislature. He emphasised that the law has been a game changer for Benue farmers since it has been able to keep the situation in the state under control for some time. He observed that the law has been a true blessing because herders used to hide under the guise of rearing their cattle to cause immeasurable devastation in the LGA, but today there is no sporadic grazing because anyone found will be made to pay for disobeying the law. Mr J.K. stated that the law has provided jobs for the people of Benue State. This is because the state government has empowered a vigilante force known as the Livestock Guard to circumvent the regulations of open grazing and arrest anyone (herder) spotted grazing in the open.

During the interaction with the herdsmen, when this question was asked, they responded bitterly that the law was enacted primarily to drive them out of the state, and during an interaction with Mr L.A., who is now a resident of Agbashi in Doma Local Government Area of Nasarawa state

but was previously a resident of Obagaji in Agatu LGA of Benue state, he expressed very bitterly that he is not happy with the law because, in his opinion, it infringes on their right as Nigerians. He continued by saying that in northern Nigeria, everyone was free to conduct business without the state government passing laws restricting them, so why must the Benue state government operate in such a manner? He went on to say that the law was unlawful and unacceptable and that the state's animal farmers would not accept such laws. Many of them agreed with Mr. L.A. in this regard. The law was used as a 'stick' to drive people out of Benue state and away from lush pasture and abundant water, according to Mr Y.U., a former herder in Gondozuwa of Logo LGA and current resident of Tunga in Awe LGA of Nasarawa state. Mr U. M. referred to the bill as Ortom's folly and emphasised that it was only a temporary display of power intoxication. More herdsmen were interviewed but they declined to answer this particular question their observed body language suggested they were not happy with the law.

The Impact of the Law on Crop Farming

The research also tried to inquire how the law impacted agricultural activities in the state. Both crop farmers and animal herders were asked how the law impacted their agricultural activities. The law, according to Mr. O.S., a farmer in the Odugbeho community in the Agatu local government area, said that the law has had a good effect on crop output. This is because the amount of open grazing throughout the state and the LGA has been limited to the absolute minimum. This gives them the leverage to farm their crops freely unlike what was obtainable before the law where they feared getting attacked on their farms or having their crops eaten by cattle before harvest. Furthermore, Mr A.P., a crop farmer from Abali in the Logo LGA of Benue State, thought the law significantly impacted farm output. So, he stated:

You know, this anti-open grazing law has helped with farm output because, before it was passed in Benue State, the Fulani would attack with their cattle, with the majority of them disguising themselves as cattle rears to commit the heinous act and render the community defenceless. But now that the is fully operational and the livestock guard has been formed as a vigilante group, the state has done a great job of apprehending the herders who ranch freely, allowing us to farm and harvest peacefully.

More crop farmers said similar things that suggest they had more opportunities for crop farming since the enforcement of the law;

however, Mr. I.A., a farmer who was interviewed at Daudu in Guma, LGA, believed that the law had little to no impact on the state's agricultural output because some Fulanis could be seen bringing their cattle through the LGA despite the state's ban on open grazing. Mr I. A claimed that the livestock guard could not adequately protect the populace from the state's heinous destruction. As a result, he recommended that the state government legalise the carrying of firearms in Guma and throughout Benue State. In his opinion, this is the best way to quell the herders' activities in the state and find a solution that will benefit most farmers. He further argues that there is no need for the government to be killing her sons in the guise of fighting insecurity, whereas the herders massacre the people like flies.

The animal herders, on the other hand, disagreed that the law affected their farming operations. Most of them claimed that they were totally prohibited from grazing in the state of Benue. Before the law, keeping their animals alive was a simple task, but now that the law is in place, it has become very difficult for them because whenever the livestock guard officers see their cattle, they will arrest the cattle and take them to their office, which costs them a tonne of money. according to one animal farmer, Mr. L.A. expressed his bitter feelings that keeping his animals alive in the presence of the law had become a problem because he had lost several of his cattle to the livestock guard. He explained that there was a day when officers of the livestock guard opened fire on his cattle, resulting in the immediate death of ten cattle and the injury of others, making it very difficult to keep his animals alive with the presence of the law. He had to shift his cattle to Nasarawa state, which is adjacent to Benue state because things had gotten so bad. However, he bitterly lamented that Nasarawa state lacked the resources necessary to feed animals in large quantities, which had made life for them extremely tough.

Although the law made provisions for establishing ranches, most herdsmen disagreed about its applicability in Nigeria. Mr M.U., for example, expressed bitterly that ranching was only available in developed countries and areas where the governments of such countries set up ranches for animal herders, but he also pointed out that ranching cannot work in Nigeria because it was not their culture, and their normal practise is to take their animals around and feed them, so he expressed his displeasure when the issue of ranching was brought up to him. One cattle herder, Mr N.N expressed a viewpoint that was quite different from Mr M.U., noting that ranching is not inherently bad but that the funding

needed to establish these ranches is the problem. He bitterly resented that the Benue state government should have established ranches for them before passing the law to ensure fairness and transparency, but the government did not. How is that conceivable and where will they acquire that kind of money? All of the other animal herders who were questioned about this expressed views that showed they were not in favour of the idea of ranching, except for Mr N.N, who was in favour of ranching but believed that the government should establish it for them, that it was the government's responsibility to establish ranches rather than them doing it themselves.

Retention of the Law

The question of whether or not to keep the 2017 Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law was put to the two groups of farmers. The law should be kept, and all the crop farmers agreed. However, Mr I.A. in Abali, Guma LGA argued that to successfully police the legislation, livestock guards should be given the legal right to bear arms. He also mentioned the need for more livestock guards to be hired to boost security and specifically implement the law. Herdsmen, on their part, were adamantly opposed to keeping the law in place. All of the herdsmen who were interviewed demanded that the law be repealed because it went against both their economic and cultural practices. However, Mr M.U. stated that while he was not entirely against ranching, they(herdsmen) do not have the capacity to establish them at the moment and that the law should be repealed until they were prepared or, alternatively, that the state and federal governments should assist them in establishing ranches in lieu of passing such a law.

Discussion of Findings

It is evident from the positions taken by the two groups of farmers above that crop farmers and herdsmen have different perspectives on the law. Herdsmen largely opposed it since it affected them differently, whereas crop farmers backed its implementation. Herdsmen were not pleased with the law, but crop growers were. Herdsmen reported a reduction in their agricultural activity, while crop producers claimed an improvement. Herdsmen wanted the law to be repealed, but crop farmers favoured keeping it in place. Herdsmen's objection to the law is supported by a number of publications its umbrella organisation, MACBAN, has issued in response to laws passed by several state governments to end open grazing (Alhasan, 2021). violent altercations continued after the

adoption of the law. According to Mr. Terver Verlumun, the residents of Ako town had either been massacred or fled for safety by the following Thursday after the terrible day (Tuesday). Notably, Fulani herdsmen started leaving the state in large numbers just 24 hours after the Benue state government declared war on open grazing. The new law allegedly caused an extraordinary migration of people, some of whose fathers were born in the state, according to Alhaji Gidado Idris Bebuji, the zonal chairman of Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore in charge of North Central states. He expressed worry that the legislation had placed limitations on their and their animals' freedom of movement, which he considered a breach of their fundamental human rights. Both a protest against the grazing law and the failure of the Open Grazing and Ranching Prohibition Act could be seen in the deaths. However, resorting to violence within 24 hours of the law's implementation not only indicates the extent of the Fulani cattle herders' displeasure but also portends disaster for the state of Benue's peace and tranquillity. Obviously, this peace has not yet been achieved, which raises the question of whether banning open grazing and ranching is the right course to follow in the fight for peace in Benue State and elsewhere (Blueprint, 2018).

On January 1st, 2018, suspected Fulani herdsmen launched fresh attacks on Benue communities, killing no less than 50 people. They had already attacked parts of the state's Guma and Logo Local Government Areas. Two villages in Guma and three in the Logo LGAs were assaulted by herdsmen. As well as Umenger, Tse-Akor, and Tomatar are in the vicinity of Tse-Abi in Guma LGA's Nongov District, Gaambe-Tiev, Ayilamo, and Turan are all located in Logo LGA. On New Year's Day, as residents were leaving the New Year's service, it was said that the encroaching herders attacked the villages of Gaambe-Tiev, Ayilamo, and Turan in Logo LGA (Folarin, Charles, & Muhammad, 2018). Terve Akase, Chief Press Secretary to Benue State Governor, stated in an interview with Reuters that these killings lasted a week and that the death toll had increased to 71 (Charles and Dada, 2018).

On March 7, 2018, a new altercation at Omutu community in Benue state's Okpokwu local government area resulted in the deaths of sixteen people, including a herdsman. The victims were mostly women and children, according to ASP Moses Yamu, spokesman for the Benue State Police Command. In a statement, Yamu claimed the assault was in revenge for some local adolescents who had gone insane, attacked Fulani herdsmen, and injured several animals. According to a police official, four individuals have been detained about the killings. He also stated that

special forces would be assisting in the 'massive' sweep of the neighbourhood that was currently underway. 34 persons were reportedly slain between March 3 and March 14 in attacks by alleged armed herders in the Benue State settlements of Umenger, Tse Orogbo, and Tse Igbe as well as Omosu-Edimoga village, Okpokwu LGA. (West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, 2018).

On July 5, 2018, Sun News Online reported that a suspected Fulani herdsmen invasion resulted in at least three deaths in Tiza Village, Tombo Council Ward, Logo Local Government Area, Benue State. The herdsmen arrived in huge numbers, brandishing sophisticated weapons, blocked field pathways and fired sporadically at anything in sight, according to Chief Joseph Anawah, a local community leader, who spoke to Sun News Online (Ejembi, 2018). On January 1, 2018, Fulani herders seized control of Benue State's Agatu Local Government. The invaders killed children, women, men, and the old in the raids on numerous villages and farm communities that took place in broad daylight. According to reports, the first killing spree claimed the lives of around 300 villagers, with significant casualties noted in places including Aila, Okokolo, Akwu, Adagbo, Odugbehon, and Odejo (Maya, 2018). The majority of the wrecked communities, according to Adejo, a motorbike transporter who also interacts with the Agatu Warriors, a new anti-Fulani local militia, he claimed, had been taken over by Fulanis who he claimed were flowing in from Nasarawa with their cattle. This claim was made by Maya (2018). They are bringing their cows along and are showing up in great numbers. They cannot be stopped by the military. We will witness Fulani grazing their cows in battle jackets with advanced weapons if we travel past here (Aila) to Abugbe, Ocholonya, or Adana, added Adejo. Most of them are merely the employees of wealthy men who own the livestock; they are not business owners. Adejo argued that even though it is a billion-naira industry, these powerful people have chosen to release millions of their cows and herdsmen into the farmlands of Benue's poor and helpless residents instead of building ranches and using irrigation to plant grasses to feed their animals.

Residents of Mbalom Village in Gwer East L.G.A awoke to the sound of gunshots on April 24, 2018, when armed suspected Fulani men stormed the village, murdering at least 16 people, including two priests. Some were on their way to the village Catholic Church for an early morning service, while others had arrived (Amnesty International, 2018). According to a church official, the shooters emerged from the jungle during the service and started shooting at people, primarily men. Among

those killed in the attack were two Rev Fathers, Rev Fr. Joseph Gor and Rev Fr. Felix Tyolaha, two primary school headmasters, Peter Dick and Ape Chia, a secondary school principal, Michael Tor, and fourteen other worshippers (Babajide, 2018).

These are just a few instances of fresh attacks that took place in Benue State after the law was put into effect, and they were almost always carried out by herdsmen who opposed the law. The mere fact that herders carried out the killings in Benue state to express their disagreement with the law does not prove that they were carried out by them. On his way to his farm in Tyomu along the Makurdi-Gboko highway in March 2021, Governor Samuel Ortom, who served as the state's chief security officer, was attacked. He bitterly claimed that Fulani herdsmen wanted to kill him on his land because he passed laws banning open grazing and establishing ranches. He also claimed that the attacks were an attempt by the herdsmen to pressure him into repealing the law. The former governor added that shortly after his attack, a group calling itself the Fulani Nationality Movement (FUNAM) released a press release claiming responsibility for the attempted murder (Okoh, 2022). Following the governor's remarks, Allah made a public declaration that the law violates their fundamental human rights and that they will continue to fight it until it is overturned. This declaration was made by Abdullahi Bodejor, national president of Miyetti Allah, Saleh Alhassan, and Garus Gololo.

There are connections between the governor's assertion and MACBAN's admission that they will stop at nothing to have the law overturned. Honourable Suemo Suswam, the Chairwoman of Tarka Local Government also confirmed that the attackers in Benue were Fulani herdsmen (AIT Online , 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research sought to ascertain whether opposition to the Benue State Open Grazing and Ranching Prohibition Law has led to renewed farmers-herders clashes in Benue State between 2017 and 2021, and to achieve that the research asked the following: Did Opposition to the Benue State Open Grazing and ranching prohibition Law the cause of farmers-herders clashes in Benue State 2017-2021? Starting with data gathered from interviewees showed crop farmers welcomed and were happy with the law; the law met strong resistance and opposition from the animal herders. For instance, when asked if the law should be maintained or repealed, the animal herders bitterly replied that the law

should be repealed if the state government wants peace in the state because they believe it was passed to favour crop farmers at the expense of the animal herders, which is unacceptable. They went on to say that they are against the law because it is making it difficult for them to feed their livestock and also the fact that it is costing them more money than they can afford to feed their livestock.

When the governor of Benue state was attacked, he responded that Fulani herdsmen were attacking him just to pressure him to repeal the laws. It is also important to note that it is the animal herders who are attacking due to the reasons they gave as statements. Miyetti Allah Kautal Hore published that they bitterly expressed that the law was Satanic and promised to keep resisting and disobeying it until it is repealed. The study concludes that the renewed clash between crop farmers and animal herders is caused by opposition to the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law of 2017 by the herdsmen. They generally disapprove of the law, as evidenced by interviewees' opinions and publications from their umbrella organisation Miyetti Allah Kautal Hores, which made it clear in those publications that they intended to continue opposing the law and attacking residents of Benue State, including the governor until the law was repealed. The Benue state government should intensify sensitisation on the law, and give animal herders loans under favourable conditions to establish ranches.

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