

Application of frustration-aggression theory in curbing fulani-herdsmen insurgency and sustainability of livelihood in Benue and Plateau States of The North-Central Nigeria

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Abstract: In-depth discussion of the Frustration-Aggression theory is provided in this study. The investigation used secondary data taken from books and articles that were already published. The conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria's North-Central, particularly in Benue and Plateau States, and now in other geopolitical zones of the country, is evidence of this theory's modest effort to explain why people engage in aggressive behavior, which in most cases results in violent conflict situations. The theory holds that while farmers view land as their private property that needs to be protected, herders view it as an open space that can be used and must be used to feed their livestock. As a result, the encroachment into lands assigned to farmers is believed to be the result.

Keywords: Frustration-Aggression theory, Fulani herdsmen, Farmers, Violence

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INTRODUCTION

The main presumption or foundation of this theory is also the idea that most violent acts are done on purpose. In order to achieve this, violent acts like terrorism, banditry, armed conflict, and militancy are deliberate and done so for a specific reason. These reasons frequently include dissatisfaction with government policies and programs, marginalization, and the underdevelopment of one's region, to name a few. It implies that some violent behaviors, including militancy and terrorism, are reactions to both internal and external stimuli, and occasionally as a result of actions and policies taken by the government. The Fulani-herdsmen militancy in Nigeria follows the tenets of the Instrumental theory because it is internal, deliberate, and motivated by brutal and sophisticated tactics. Because Fulani herders are non-state actors who use violence or terrorist acts to further their grievances against their host communities in the North-Central, especially in Benue and Plateau States, and consequently other regions of Nigeria, it is essentially consistent with the tenet of this theory.

The theory is predicated on the idea that acts of violence, insurgency, or terrorism are frequently decisions made with intent. Furthermore, the theory's underlying premise is that political actors or violent groups purposefully use violence to further their own, frequently political, interests (Crenshaw, 1985). According to Dyer (2007), violent action frequently takes place for a variety of unique reasons with a good chance of success, especially when the current situation is intolerable. In other words, violent organizations like the militancy of the Fulani herders act in response to a chance or threat, out of desperation, or in anticipation of a reward (s). Threats from dwindling natural resources or simply natural disasters brought on by climate change, such as flooding, desertification, and deforestation,

to name a few, have been linked to Fulani nomads' migration to the south and their desperate attempts to maintain their livestock-rearing and livestock-sale-based means of subsistence (Adishi & Oluka, 2018:12). Therefore, this theory clearly explains the organizational framework and underlying causes of the emergence of the Fulani-herder militancy in Nigeria's Plateau and North Central States on the one hand, and in other regions of the nation on the other.

Application of Frustration-Aggression Theory

To also analyze the issue of Fulani herdsmen-farmers conflict and get a better understanding of the impacts of the violent attacks in the country, especially in the sustainability of livelihood in Benue and Plateau state in the North-Central geopolitical zone of the country, Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939) The most suitable theory for this study was the frustration-aggression theory (FAT). They assert that frustration is the impediment to ongoing goal-directed behavior, which frequently results in aggression, and that aggression is an action with the intent to harm and can be physical or non-physical. The original purpose of this theory was to offer a justification for the reasons behind the 20th-century political unrest in Europe. Thus, its premise was that aggression occurs because of frustration, which is the basis for aggressive behavior (Dennen, 2005).

This assumes that when the term frustration is used, it refers to both the process of being blocked from achieving a reinforcer and the response to that blocking. Being frustrated therefore entails having an irritated response to the frustrating circumstances (Dennen, 2005). In apparent, aggressive drive resulting from frustration in one way or another is maintained within the organism and may lead to tolerable frustration which also provokes aggression. The strength of a hostile or aggressive reaction depends in

part on the amount of residual instigation from previous or simultaneous frustrations. Minor challenges or frustrations when added can produce aggressive response of greater magnitude never expected. In other words, all forms of frustration produces overt aggression (Dollard et al., 1939).

The theory provides an excellent insight into the behaviour of the Fulani herdsmen towards Nigerian farmers, interrelations between scarce or limited natural resources and climate change, as well as migration as a result of climate change and its antecedent competition for the scarce resources. One may argue that Dollard et al. (1939) did not sufficiently relate the theory to the locality of the migration and competition for resources availability within the states, such as the case of the Fulani herdsmen but it is undeniably a relevant theory to explain the major cause of the recent conflict between Fulani nomads and sedentary farmers all over the country (Bamidele, 2018). Traditionally, Fulani herdsmen migrate purposely to have access to green pastures for their cattle. This is a custom that has increased their economic activities towards the Southern part of the country. In recent time, this has become more desperate because land meant for pasture has been converted into other developmental uses such as housing projects and farmland, and the consequence of this is scarcity of grazing land for pasture. This serves as a source of frustration to the pastoralists of the Fulani extraction.

Bamidele (2018) asserts that the particular emotion that a person feels as a result of feeling uneasy with any idea, person, or circumstance is frustration. It may also occur if a person's predetermined goal or response to upsetting the other person falls short of the standards they have set for themselves. However, aggression is that strong emotion that makes someone wants to hurt or harm someone else. This is done as a result of frustration (Bamidele, 2018). However, the incessant attacks carried out by Fulani herdsmen may be due to understanding, rather than ignorance, and a compassion for the Fulani extraction that

are often times struggling to meet the essential needs of their livelihood in the face of severe drought caused by perennial climate change. One could draw the conclusion that there are many factors contributing to the frustrations of the Fulani herdsmen, but in some instances, they include the denial of sociopolitical rights, economic exploitation, or social subjugation.

When a person's desired goals are consistently ignored, frustration becomes more noticeable. Similar to how it does, it undoubtedly builds a wall of frustration among the populace, and one may then feel the urge to direct his anger—in the form of aggression—at whatever the root of the frustration may be. In order to comprehend why someone might act aggressively as a means of expressing frustration, one must take into account the vigor with which one expects to achieve the specified goal. Inhibiting the herdsmen's efforts to achieve this set goal would invite a violent conflict situation because they are already struggling to find basic resources and other fundamental sources of livelihood and survival. The basic needs of farmers in Nigeria's north central region, particularly in the states of Benue and the Plateau, as well as the Fulani herdsmen militias who are the aggressors, are impacted by this conflict, as are indirect effects on other geopolitical regions of the country. One might argue that it makes sense to gauge a person's level of frustration in relation to how satisfied they want to be. Therefore, this theory is credible because it identifies the root of herdsmen militancy in Nigeria.

Source of the Theory

The source of this theory is traced to Dollard et al. (1939) frustration-aggression hypothesis and later developed by Miller and his other colleagues in 1941 and in the work of Leonard Berkowitz in 1961. The frustration-aggression hypothesis was first presented in a monograph on aggression written by Dollard and his colleagues before it was developed. This publication appears

to have had the greatest impact on modern Western thinking on aggression. This publication frequently offers justifications for aggressive behavior.

The principal hypothesis posits that, “the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration on one end, and the existence on the other end, always result in some form of aggression”. In affirmative Dennen (2005) opines that frustration is a response to thwarting of one’s set goal, and a goal response in turn, was taken to mean reinforcing final operation in an ongoing behaviour sequence.

Strength of the Theory

Generally, the strength of this theory lies in its modest effort to explain why people take to aggressive behaviour which in most occasions’ result in violent conflict situation as evidenced in the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria’s North-Central, especially in Benue and Plateau States, and now in other geopolitical zones of the country. Since the main thrust of this study is centered on Fulani herdsmen militancy and sustainability of livelihood in Benue and Plateau States, the strength of the theory lies in its effort to explain the reason for the aggressive behaviour of the herdsmen frustrated by climate change which has often times made them to migrate with their cattle southward in search of green pasture and water for their herds leading to desperation, and the consequence of which is the confrontation from the host communities, farmers and rustlers respectively. In short, what prompted aggression is frustration received from the environment which include scarcity of resources occasioned by a change in climate.

Weakness of the Theory:

Frustration-aggression theory has been criticized by some psychologists with Bandura as one of the leading critics of the theory who argued that “aggressive behaviour is just one of the possible responses to frustration”. He believes that

frustration creates generalized arousal only, but that it was social learning that determines how the arousal influence the individual’s behaviour. Social learning theory suggests that one would only respond with aggression only if that behaviour had been effective previously (i.e. directly conditioned) or if they had seen it as effective response by other (social learning). Alternative view thus argued that the individuals learn to use aggression under specific circumstances, especially, when they believe that they are likely to be successful through it. This implies that not everyone who is frustrated in a particular way do respond aggressively (Dennen, 2005).

This theory according to Dennen (2005) lacks research support especially with regards to the concept of catharsis and the belief that aggression reduced arousal causing people to be less aggressive. This suggests that this theory lacks validity as it is not able to account for all forms of aggression but only one form. The theory is also criticized on the basis that aggression is not always prompted by frustration since people who find themselves in a threatening situation may either fight back for self-defense rather than because of frustration. The theory also could not explain the premeditated and planned acts of aggression by psychopathic killers who are not driven due to frustration. One may conclude that this theory is complete and too simplistic since it is obvious that there are other elements that can be explored in explaining reasons for aggressive behaviour among the individuals or group of individuals.

Application of the Theory

In his investigation of the Fulani pastoralist insurgency in Africa, Nwankwo (2021) made the following claims: Similar to what happened in Nigerian villages and towns, the conflict between Fulani herdsmen and farmers has resulted in the destruction of property, the deaths of people, and the eviction of residents in nations like Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon, among others. He contends that the Fulani

herdsmen insurgency in rural communities in Africa has shown that the conflict which was initially situated upon environmental security is now associated with ethno-religious imagination. Furthermore, he argued that several studies on the conflict have approached it commonly and linking the issue to political ecology, political economy and environmental security framework and a combination of these approaches, but very little have been said about the discursive readings of the crisis as a terror attack in disguise. A critical observation of the discourse on this conflict in Nigeria's northern region, and now in the other regions in the country is founded on the basis of environmental security guise. The media in Nigeria talk about environmental degradation and climate change in northern Nigeria as catalyst of the conflict, and consequently, migration of the Fulani pastoralists or herders to the Southern part of the country (Nwankwo, 2021).

However, having exhaustively discussed the tenet of this theory, its sources, strength and weaknesses, its applicability to this discourse which is centered on Fulani herdsmen militancy and sustainability of livelihood in Nigeria's north-central geopolitical zone, especially in Benue and Plateau states becomes necessary. In early 2016, when the insurgency in Benue state was at its height, the state government passed its anti-grazing law, claim Abugu and Onuba (2018). As a result, the militant herdsmen became enraged and attacked the Aguta Local Government Area, killing over 2000 people in what the UN referred to as a genocide. But Plateau state has seen its fair share of the incursion of the Fulani herders' militancy into its towns and villages since the country's resurgence of attacks against rural dwellers by the Fulani herdsmen militant group, numerous people displaced, hundreds of people killed and with dozens of properties destroyed (Abugu & Onuba, 2018). This is a true reflection of the relevance of the frustration-aggression theory because the herdsmen seems to have been expressing their frustration

against their host communities and innocent dwellers in the north-central, and by extension, other parts of the country, occasioned by the perennial change in climate and hostile dwellers who see them as intruders.

Conclusion

However, there is no denying that the conflict between sedentary farmers and Fulani nomads or pastoralists is contributing to the decline of farming, which is the primary occupation of villagers in Benue and Plateau States. On the other hand, cattle theft or rustling has negatively impacted pasturing, which has led to conflict between farmers and herders as well as a drop in beef sales and a rise in the price of beef in Nigerian markets, including those in the north-central geopolitical zone. Due to ongoing disadvantages from climate change, a lack of available land, and other resources, the conflict between farmers and herders that initially started as a simple conflict has now outgrown government control. The migration of Fulani pastoralists from the northern region to the southern region is a migration to a new haven for their livestock; climate change is not a precursor to herders' migration from the northern to the southern part of Nigeria; it only increases their migration from the region with frequent drought and lower availability of natural resources to the southern forest zone with more luscious vegetation. The theory holds that while farmers view land as their private property that needs to be protected, herders view it as an open space that can be used and must be used to feed their livestock. As a result, the encroachment into lands assigned to farmers is believed to be the result.

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