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Community-Based Counterinsurgency Efforts in Nigeria: The Case of Civilian Joint Task Force in Borno State, 2013-2024

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Abstract

Boko Haram insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria resulted in unconventional security responses. Notable among them is the emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force in Borno State in 2013. This paper examines the role, contributions, and challenges of the Civilian Joint Task Force in counterinsurgency operations between 2013 and 2024. Although there is literature in the study area, these works did not focus on the role of the Civilian Joint Task Force in counterinsurgency at the community level in Borno State, which informed the gap this research fills. Using a qualitative methodology to interrogate the sources, the study explores the group's operational contributions to intelligence gathering, insurgent identification, territorial recovery, and community mobilisation. Findings reveal that the Civilian Joint Task Force has significantly supported military operations through its local knowledge and community networks. However, human rights concerns, inadequate training, weak institutional regulation, poor welfare, and reintegration challenges undermine its sustainability. The paper recommends improved training, legal recognition, accountability mechanisms, and comprehensive reintegration programmes to strengthen community-based counterinsurgency efforts in Nigeria.

Keywords: Community Security, Counterinsurgency, Civilian Joint Task Force, Boko Haram, National Security.

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Introduction

Security is a fundamental responsibility of the state and a prerequisite for political stability, economic development, and social cohesion. However, the increasing complexity of contemporary security threats has exposed the limitations of conventional state-led security responses, particularly in contexts where insurgent groups exploit local vulnerabilities and operate within civilian populations. Consequently, community participation has gained significance as a complementary approach to security governance, particularly in counterinsurgency operations where local knowledge, intelligence, and community networks can enhance the effectiveness of formal security institutions. In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency has remained a major national security challenge, particularly in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. Since its transformation into a violent insurgency in 2009, the group has carried out attacks on military formations, public institutions, and civilian populations, resulting in widespread displacement, loss of life, and humanitarian crises. Despite sustained military operations, the insurgency has presented persistent challenges, including intelligence gathering, insurgent identification, and the protection of vulnerable communities. These difficulties have underscored the need for complementary approaches that extend beyond conventional military responses.[1]

One such approach is community-based security, which involves the participation of local populations in supporting security institutions and protecting their communities. These initiatives draw on local knowledge, social networks, and familiarity with the operational environment to strengthen intelligence gathering, threat detection, and community mobilisation. However, the involvement of civilian actors in security operations also raises concerns about accountability, human rights, institutional oversight, and the sustainability of informal security structures.[2] A prominent example of this approach in Nigeria is the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), which emerged in Maiduguri, Borno State, in 2013 as a grassroots response to the Boko Haram insurgency. Comprising primarily local youths and community volunteers, the CJTF supported military operations through intelligence gathering, insurgent identification, surveillance, and community protection. Its familiarity with local languages, terrain, and social networks made it a significant civilian partner in counterinsurgency efforts. Nevertheless, concerns about human rights violations, inadequate training, weak institutional regulation, and post-conflict reintegration have raised questions about the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of the initiative.[3]

This paper examines the role of the CJTF in community-based counterinsurgency efforts in Borno State between 2013 and 2024. It analyses the group's operational contributions, identifies the challenges confronting its activities, and explores the implications of civilian participation for security governance in Nigeria. The paper argues that community-based security initiatives can complement formal counterinsurgency operations, but their effectiveness and sustainability depend on appropriate institutional oversight, accountability mechanisms, and integration into the national security framework.

Conceptual Review

Community-Based Security Initiatives

Community-based security initiatives refer to locally organised arrangements through which community members participate in crime prevention, public safety, and the protection of their communities, often in collaboration with formal security institutions. In The Poor and Informal Policing in Nigeria, Alemika and Chukwuma examined how communities respond to security needs through informal policing structures, highlighting their relevance to local security while raising concerns about legitimacy, accountability, and their relationship with state institutions.[4] Similarly, Multi-Choice Policing in Africa has shown that policing in African societies involves multiple providers, including state agencies, private organisations, and community-based groups. The analysis underscores the importance of coordinating and regulating these diverse actors to improve security provision and address potential abuses.[5] Furthermore, in Police-Community Violence in Nigeria, the relationship between law enforcement institutions and communities demonstrates the importance of public trust, police conduct, and community experiences in shaping security cooperation. Collectively, these scholars establish that community-based security initiatives are distinct security arrangements shaped by local needs, community participation, and their relationships with formal authorities. For this study, community-based security initiatives refer to locally organised civilian structures that support counterinsurgency operations through intelligence gathering, community mobilisation, and local protection, as exemplified by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Borno State.[6]

Counterinsurgency

Counterinsurgency refers to the coordinated political, military, economic, and social measures undertaken by a government to defeat an insurgency and restore state

authority. In Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, David Galula argues that counterinsurgency requires more than military action, emphasising the importance of securing popular support and establishing effective government control.[7] Similarly, the Counterinsurgency Field Manual highlights the centrality of the population to counterinsurgency operations, stressing the need to protect civilians, gather reliable intelligence, and combine security operations with political and developmental measures.[8] In Counterinsurgency, Kilcullen further examines the complex relationship between insurgent movements, local populations, and state responses, highlighting the importance of understanding local conditions and addressing the factors that sustain insurgency.[9] In the Nigerian context, counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram have involved military offensives, intelligence gathering, humanitarian interventions, deradicalisation programmes, and collaboration with local communities. These efforts illustrate the relevance of civilian participation in addressing insurgent threats, particularly through local intelligence and community mobilisation. For this study, counterinsurgency is understood as the coordinated security and governance measures adopted to defeat Boko Haram and restore state authority, with particular emphasis on the contributions of the CJTF to intelligence gathering, community protection, and military operations in Borno State.

Civilian Joint Task Force

The following studies provide additional scholarly perspectives on the emergence, operational contributions, security implications, and institutional challenges of the CJTF in Borno State. In "Eyes on the Street: Civilian Joint Task Force and the Surveillance of Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria," Agbiboa examines the CJTF's contribution to military surveillance and counterterrorism operations. Drawing on field-based research, the author argues that the CJTF serves as a local knowledge broker by helping security forces identify and capture Boko Haram members through its familiarity with community networks, languages, and terrain. The study highlights the importance of local knowledge in counterinsurgency operations.[10] However, its primary focus on surveillance leaves broader questions about the CJTF's institutional sustainability and long-term security implications insufficiently explored.

In "The Civilian Joint Task Force and the Struggle against Insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria," the study examines the CJTF's role in counterinsurgency and its contribution to the struggle against Boko Haram. Seun Bamidele provides a foundation for understanding the group's emergence as a community-driven security response and its relationship with formal security institutions. However, the broader institutional and

long-term implications of civilian participation in counterinsurgency remain important areas for further investigation.[11] In "Civilian Joint Task Force and Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Operation: A Critique of the Community-Based Approach to Insecurity," Ashindorbe and Afatakpab examine the CJTF as a non-state security actor in Borno State. Using interviews and focus group discussions in communities affected by Boko Haram, the study finds that the CJTF supported military operations through intelligence gathering, knowledge of the local terrain, language interpretation, and insurgent identification. However, the authors also identify high-handedness and deceptive practices among some members as factors undermining its effectiveness. The study demonstrates the dual nature of community-based security initiatives, although its emphasis on counterterrorism leaves the longer-term reintegration of CJTF members open for further examination.[12]

"The Role of the Civilian Joint Task Force in the Improvement of Security in Borno State, Nigeria" by A Gulyas examines the CJTF's contributions to security provision and its organisational challenges. The study identifies the group's involvement in military operations, security screening, checkpoint monitoring, and the protection of public buildings. It also highlights inadequate funding, poor welfare, and growing political connections as factors shaping the group's operational capacity and future. While the study provides insights into the CJTF's security functions and institutional challenges, further research is needed to assess how these dynamics have evolved.[13] In "Review of the Evolution of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)," Alozieuwa examines the emergence and development of the CJTF against the background of Nigeria's broader history of community-based security groups. Using qualitative documentary sources, the study argues that the CJTF emerged to fill security gaps left by formal institutions but warns that the group could develop into an abusive or predatory organisation. It also raises concerns about human rights violations, political manipulation, and the involvement of children. The study provides a critical perspective on the sustainability of community-based security initiatives, although its broader historical focus leaves room for a more detailed assessment of the CJTF's operational contributions during the 2013-2024 period.[14]

In "Vigilantism: The Political Economy of the Civilian Joint Task Force and Its Consequences on Counter-Terrorism Operations in Northeast Nigeria," E. Njokwu examines the political and economic factors underpinning the CJTF's emergence. The study argues that the group's development cannot be explained solely by community patriotism, highlighting the influence of economic survival, political interests, and the state's broader relationship with vigilante organisations.[15] This perspective broadens the understanding of the CJTF beyond its operational

functions by examining the material and political incentives shaping its activities. However, the relationship between these political-economic dynamics and its operational effectiveness during the study period warrants further investigation. The study has shown the group's role in protecting civilians and weakening Boko Haram, but it identifies human rights violations, political manipulation, the persecution of perceived opponents, and concerns about its possible transformation into a future security threat. It emphasises the importance of demobilisation and reintegration in post-conflict recovery. The study is relevant to understanding the CJTF's long-term implications, although further empirical investigation is needed to establish how these concerns vary across communities and over time.[16] In "Civilian Participation in Security Stability: A Case Study of Civilian Task Force in Borno State," Mbitsa, Bolaji and Agbonifo investigate the relationship between civilian participation and security stability using survey data from 345 CJTF members, security personnel, and residents. The study reports that intelligence gathering, surveillance, and community monitoring were associated with improved security stability, while inadequate training, logistical support, and institutional backing constrained operational effectiveness. Its quantitative approach provides evidence on civilian participation and security outcomes, although further research is needed to establish the durability of these effects and their implications for security governance.[17]

Theoretical Framework: Hybrid Security Governance

This study adopts hybrid security governance as its principal analytical framework for examining the role of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in counterinsurgency operations in Borno State between 2013 and 2024. The framework provides a basis for analysing security arrangements in which state institutions interact with non-state actors to provide security, gather intelligence and exercise forms of coercive authority. It moves beyond the assumption that security is produced exclusively by formal state agencies and draws attention to the practical relationships through which governmental and community-based actors participate in security provision. Such arrangements, however, should not automatically be understood as effective, legitimate or accountable simply because they involve cooperation between state and non-state actors. Their implications must be assessed empirically.[18]

Kate Meagher's analysis of non-state security forces in Africa is particularly relevant to this study. She argues for an empirical approach that distinguishes constructive forms of non-state order from those that reproduce coercion, predatory authority or political capture. Her approach cautions against treating the emergence of informal security actors as evidence that communities have acquired a more legitimate or

effective alternative to state authority.[19] This distinction is important for understanding the CJTF, whose contribution to counterinsurgency must be evaluated not only in terms of its operational usefulness but also in relation to accountability, local legitimacy and the wider institutional environment in which it operates. Bruce Baker's study of multi-choice policing in Africa further demonstrates the need to examine the overlapping roles of state and non-state providers rather than treating policing as an exclusive state monopoly. His analysis directs attention to how different security actors are authorised, coordinated and regulated, as well as to the difficulties that arise when their responsibilities overlap.[20]

The CJTF provides a relevant case through which to apply these insights. Emerging in Maiduguri in 2013 amid the Boko Haram insurgency, the organisation drew on local knowledge and community networks to identify suspected insurgents and support military surveillance. Daniel Agbiboa characterises the CJTF as a hybrid vigilante network whose members acted as local "knowledge brokers", helping the Nigerian military navigate a social and physical environment in which distinguishing insurgents from civilians presented a significant operational challenge.[21] This interpretation highlights the potential value of local embeddedness in counterinsurgency. Familiarity with neighbourhoods, social relationships, local languages and patterns of movement may provide information that formal security agencies cannot readily obtain through conventional operations alone. Nevertheless, local knowledge is not necessarily accurate or impartial. Personal disputes, community rivalries, mistaken identification and the absence of reliable corroborating evidence may also affect how information is produced and used. The framework therefore treats local knowledge as a potential operational resource rather than proof of intelligence accuracy or counterinsurgency effectiveness.

The framework is applied through three interconnected analytical dimensions. The first is operational capacity and local embeddedness. This dimension examines how the CJTF's community connections, familiarity with local conditions and access to information contributed to surveillance, the identification of suspected Boko Haram members and cooperation with state security agencies. It also considers the limits of these advantages, including the possibility of unreliable intelligence, wrongful accusations and the risks associated with civilian participation in coercive security operations. The central concern is not simply whether the CJTF possessed local knowledge, but under what conditions that knowledge became operationally useful and what safeguards governed its application.

The second dimension is institutional incorporation and security coordination. Hybrid security governance directs attention to the relationship between the CJTF and formal security institutions, including the arrangements through which information was shared, operational responsibilities were distributed, and civilian participation was incorporated into counterinsurgency activities.[22] This dimension examines the extent to which cooperation strengthened the operational capacity of state agencies and how command relationships, training, resources, supervision and the allocation of responsibilities shaped the CJTF's activities. It also considers the institutional tensions that may arise when civilian actors participate in operations without clearly defined authority, consistent training or effective oversight. State collaboration, in this sense, does not necessarily resolve the problems associated with non-state security provision; it may also create new questions concerning responsibility, control and the limits of civilian coercive power.

The third dimension is legitimacy, accountability and sustainability. Operational contribution and public legitimacy are related but distinct questions. A civilian security organisation may assist military operations while simultaneously generating concerns about its methods, treatment of suspects, accountability or relationship with the communities in which it operates. Accordingly, the analysis considers the basis of the CJTF's acceptance among local populations, the mechanisms available for reporting and addressing misconduct, and the extent to which its activities were subject to effective institutional supervision. It also examines the implications of members' training, welfare and longer-term prospects, including demobilisation and reintegration. These issues are central to assessing whether civilian participation can contribute to sustainable security beyond immediate operational requirements. Meagher's warning against conflating non-state order with legitimate governance is especially pertinent here.[23]

Although community policing offers a useful point of comparison because it emphasises cooperation between security providers and communities, it is insufficient as the principal framework for this study. The CJTF's involvement in an active insurgency, including intelligence support and cooperation with military operations, extends beyond the conventional focus on police–community relations and local crime prevention. Hybrid security governance offers a broader analytical lens through which to examine the interaction of community-based security actors, formal state institutions and competing claims to authority. Community policing may therefore inform particular aspects of the analysis, but it does not adequately capture the full institutional and coercive dimensions of the CJTF's role.

Hybrid security governance ultimately enables this study to assess the CJTF neither as an unqualified success in community-based counterinsurgency nor as an inherently problematic non-state force. Instead, it directs attention to the conditions under which local participation supported counterinsurgency operations, the institutional arrangements that shaped its contribution, and the accountability and sustainability challenges associated with its incorporation into the security architecture of Borno State. The framework will guide the empirical analysis of the CJTF's operational activities, relationship with state security agencies, local legitimacy, oversight and longer-term place in post-insurgency security governance.

Historical Evolution of the Civilian Joint Task Force

Civilian participation in security provision has a long history in Nigeria and predates the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). Communities have historically relied on traditional hunters, night guards, vigilantes, youth groups and neighbourhood security arrangements to protect lives and property, particularly where formal policing was inadequate. The forms of community-based protection existed in southwestern Nigeria even before the modern use of the term "vigilante,"[24] while demonstrating the broader significance of vigilantism in Nigeria as a form of local security provision.[25] Thus, the CJTF should be understood as part of an established tradition of civilian participation in security rather than as the origin of such collaboration.

Contemporary forms of vigilantism expanded across Nigeria from the 1990s, including the Bakassi Boys in the southeast and the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) in the southwest. These organisations emerged partly from local demands for protection but developed complex relationships with formal security institutions and political authorities.[26] Similar community-based security formations existed in northern Nigeria, including youth and vigilante groups that operated within local security networks. In the northeast, groups such as ECOMOG in Borno and Yobe existed before the CJTF, demonstrating that civilian involvement in security was already present in the region.[27] These organisations, however, should not be regarded as direct organisational predecessors of the CJTF.

The escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency from 2009 created conditions in which community participation became increasingly important to counterinsurgency. The difficulty of identifying insurgents within local communities and the need for reliable intelligence increased the value of actors possessing intimate knowledge of local terrain, languages and social networks. The reports reveal that vigilante groups became important in the fight against Boko Haram by providing intelligence,

surveillance, community protection and support to formal security forces.[28] Within this broader context, the CJTF emerged and rose to prominence in Maiduguri, Borno State, during 2013-2014. Although accounts differ on the precise timing, one identifies 2014 as the period of its emergence, while other studies associate its mobilisation with 2013.[29]

The CJTF developed through grassroots mobilisation, particularly among local youths and hunters, and subsequently established close working relationships with the Nigerian military and other security agencies. Its members assisted in identifying suspected insurgents, monitoring communities, manning checkpoints, and supporting military operations. CJTF are "knowledge brokers" whose embeddedness within local communities enhanced the surveillance and intelligence capabilities of the military.[30] Also, the group's involvement included intelligence, surveillance, patrols, and community protection.[31] Despite these contributions, the evolution of the CJTF has also raised concerns regarding human rights, accountability, training, discipline, regulation, and the long-term management of civilian security actors.[32] The historical trajectory of the CJTF therefore reflects both continuity and change: continuity in Nigeria's longstanding reliance on community-based security actors, and change in the scale and strategic importance of civilian participation under the Boko Haram insurgency. The CJTF consequently represents a distinctive adaptation of civilian-state security collaboration to the demands of counterinsurgency in northeastern Nigeria.

Structure and Operational Strategies of the Civilian Joint Task Force

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is a community-based security network that developed in Borno State to support formal security agencies in responding to the Boko Haram insurgency. Its organisational structure combines grassroots participation with a hierarchical command arrangement that facilitates coordination across communities. A study of security personnel and the CJTF in Borno State describes the organisation as having a state-level President as its head, followed by Local Government Area (LGA) chairmen and sector commanders responsible for operations within designated areas.[33] The organisation is therefore structured to maintain local presence while providing channels through which information and operational activities can be coordinated across different levels. This structure has enabled the CJTF to function as a link between communities and formal security institutions, particularly the Nigerian military.

At the grassroots level, the CJTF draws primarily on local youths, hunters and community volunteers who possess familiarity with the geographical, social and cultural characteristics of their communities. The organisation characterises a hybrid vigilante network involving local youths and hunters who work closely with the Nigerian military to identify and apprehend Boko Haram members. The importance of this composition lies in the members' community embeddedness. Their knowledge of local terrain, languages, social relationships, and patterns of movement provides information that may not be readily available to external security personnel. Consequently, the CJTF has operated not simply as an auxiliary security force but also as a mechanism for transferring local knowledge to formal counterinsurgency institutions.[34]

A major operational strategy of the CJTF is intelligence gathering and information sharing. Members obtain information from residents concerning suspected insurgents, unusual movements, and potential security threats and communicate such information to relevant security authorities. The CJTF is an important link in the intelligence network supporting military operations in Borno State, particularly through its ability to identify insurgents and provide information concerning their activities.[35] Similarly, the CJTF members assisted the military through intelligence gathering, knowledge of the local environment, translation of local languages, and identification of Boko Haram members. This intelligence function represents one of the principal ways through which community knowledge is incorporated into formal counterinsurgency operations.[36]

Another strategy is community surveillance and monitoring. CJTF members maintain a visible presence within communities through patrols, observation, and monitoring of movements around neighbourhoods and other vulnerable locations. The organisation's embeddedness within local communities enabled it to serve as a form of "knowledge broker" for military surveillance.[37] Through this role, CJTF members could identify persons or activities considered suspicious and provide information to formal security agencies. Surveillance therefore extends the reach of formal security institutions into spaces where military personnel may have limited familiarity with residents and social networks.

The CJTF also employs screening and checkpoint operations as part of its security activities. Members have participated in manning checkpoints and screening persons and movements within communities, often in collaboration with military personnel. Evidence indicates that the organisation's geographical structure has been coordinated alongside military arrangements, with community units reporting

through designated command structures and checkpoints sometimes jointly managed with the military.[38] Such activities allow the CJTF to contribute to the identification of suspected insurgents and the monitoring of movement within areas affected by insurgency.

Another important strategy is community protection and early warning. Because CJTF members are drawn from the communities they serve, they are positioned to observe emerging threats and communicate warnings to residents and security agencies. Their activities have included protecting vulnerable locations, assisting in the defence of communities, and supporting security personnel during attacks. Community-based vigilante groups in the Lake Chad region have contributed to local protection and counterinsurgency by drawing on their knowledge of communities and the surrounding environment.[39] In Borno, this role has enabled the CJTF to complement the physical presence of formal security agencies at the community level.

The CJTF also provides direct operational support to military counterinsurgency activities. Its members have assisted in identifying and locating Boko Haram fighters, guiding security personnel through local terrain, participating in patrols, and supporting efforts to recover communities from insurgent control. CJTF members contributed to spotting insurgents, repelling attacks, and supporting the recovery of towns and villages,[40] as well as participating in combat-related operations. The CJTF's role in such activities illustrates the practical interaction between community-based security and formal military operations.[41]

Coordination and collaboration with formal security institutions constitute a central feature of CJTF operations. Rather than operating entirely independently, the organisation has developed working relationships with the Nigerian military and other security actors. CJTF worked closely with the military, while the International Crisis Group (2017) documents the increasing involvement of security and civilian authorities in the organisation and management of vigilante groups fighting Boko Haram.[42] This relationship provides operational advantages by combining formal military capabilities with local knowledge and community access. However, it also creates challenges concerning training, accountability, command authority, human rights, and regulation. Thus, the structure and operational strategies of the CJTF reflect a hybrid model in which civilian community participation is incorporated into formal counterinsurgency efforts while remaining distinct from the statutory military and police institutions.

Contributions of the Civilian Joint Task Force to Counterinsurgency Operations

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has emerged as one of the most significant community-based security actors in Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram insurgency. Since its establishment in 2013, the group has played a crucial role in supporting the Nigerian military and other security agencies in counterinsurgency operations across the northeastern region. Its contributions have largely stemmed from its members' familiarity with local communities, knowledge of the terrain, and understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of the affected areas. Through these advantages, the CJTF has significantly enhanced the effectiveness of military operations and contributed to the broader goal of restoring peace and security in the region.

Intelligence Gathering and Information Sharing. One of the most important contributions of the CJTF has been intelligence gathering and information sharing. Its members' familiarity with local communities, languages, terrain, and social networks enabled them to provide information that formal security forces could not always obtain independently. For instance, evidence from Borno indicates that CJTF members identified suspected Boko Haram members by recognising unfamiliar persons and monitoring movements within their communities. In one documented account, CJTF members reported that their local knowledge enabled them to identify strangers entering communities and that several insurgents were subsequently arrested through such information.[43] Communities affected by Boko Haram found that the CJTF assisted the military through intelligence gathering, knowledge of the local landscape, translation of local languages, and identification of Boko Haram members. The intelligence role therefore provided formal security forces with community-level information that supported counterinsurgency operations.[44]

Identification and Arrest of Insurgents. The CJTF has also contributed to identifying and apprehending suspected Boko Haram members and collaborators. Its members' familiarity with residents made it possible to identify persons who were unfamiliar within particular neighbourhoods or whose activities generated suspicion. CJTF was useful in spotting Boko Haram insurgents, repelling attacks, and supporting the liberation of towns and villages captured by the insurgents.[45] In addition, documented accounts indicate that CJTF members sometimes apprehended suspected insurgents independently before handing them over to the police or military for further action.[46] The role was particularly significant in Maiduguri, where insurgents could operate within densely populated communities and distinguish themselves from ordinary residents. However, this function also carried risks of

mistaken identification and abuse, demonstrating the importance of proper screening, oversight and accountability.

Territorial Security and Community Protection. The CJTF has contributed to community protection through neighbourhood patrols, checkpoints, surveillance and early warning. At its initial stage, members reportedly patrolled streets at night and established roadblocks at strategic locations to monitor movements and detect Boko Haram members and collaborators.[47] As the organisation expanded, these activities developed into more structured community-security arrangements. Evidence from Borno indicates that CJTF members sometimes provided security in locations where military personnel were not continuously present, particularly in rural communities. CJTF protected areas that formal security forces could not regularly reach, thereby creating conditions that enabled some residents to return to their communities, farms, and businesses. This illustrates the CJTF's contribution to extending community-level security coverage beyond the permanent presence of conventional forces.

Support for Military Operations. The CJTF has also served as an auxiliary component of military counterinsurgency operations. Its contribution has included providing information on insurgent positions, guiding security personnel through unfamiliar terrain, identifying routes, and supporting search-and-clear operations. CJTF was involved in spotting insurgents, repelling attacks and supporting the liberation of towns and villages[48], while it was found that CJTF members assisted the military not only through intelligence and local knowledge but also in combat operations.[49] A documented example concerns joint operations in which CJTF members assisted in recovering weapons from Boko Haram in areas including Gamboru and Zabarmari.[50] These examples demonstrate that the CJTF's contribution extended beyond information provision to practical operational support for formal counterinsurgency forces.

Community Mobilisation and Counter-Radicalisation. The CJTF's contribution also extends to community mobilisation against Boko Haram. Its emergence represented a form of grassroots resistance in which residents became active participants in protecting their communities rather than remaining passive victims of insurgent violence. The organisation's mobilisation of youths and community members created networks for surveillance, information sharing and collective protection. The initial mobilisation rapidly spread beyond Maiduguri to other areas affected by the insurgency.[51] The community-based vigilante groups became important actors in reconnecting security forces with local populations.[52] However, the evidence is

stronger for community mobilisation and resistance than for claiming that the CJTF directly conducted systematic counter-radicalisation programmes. It is therefore more appropriate to describe its contribution as strengthening community resistance to insurgent influence and facilitating cooperation with security agencies.

Humanitarian and Stabilisation Support. The CJTF has also participated in activities associated with the protection and stabilisation of conflict-affected communities. Its security role has included guarding strategic locations and assisting with screening and monitoring in communities affected by displacement. Evidence from Borno further indicates that CJTF members have undertaken community policing functions where conventional police presence was limited.[53] However, claims that the CJTF directly delivered humanitarian assistance should be made cautiously. The stronger evidence concerns its security and protective role around vulnerable populations and conflict-affected communities, rather than direct humanitarian service delivery. This distinction is important because the CJTF's primary mandate has remained security-oriented rather than humanitarian.

Challenges Facing the Civilian Joint Task Force

Despite its contributions to counterinsurgency operations, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has faced significant human rights, operational, institutional, and sustainability challenges. These difficulties illustrate the complications associated with incorporating a largely community-based security organisation into formal counterinsurgency operations.

Human Rights Concerns and Allegations of Abuse. Human rights violations have been among the most documented challenges associated with the CJTF. For example, CJTF members participated in searches, arrests, and checkpoint operations in Maiduguri and other parts of Borno. They also documented the presence of children, some reportedly between 15 and 17 years old, at CJTF checkpoints.[54] There are also allegations involving mass arbitrary arrests and beatings of civilians by the military and CJTF in Bama in July 2013, as well as allegations of detainees being subjected to severe abuse.[55] These incidents demonstrate the accountability problems that can arise when civilian actors undertake coercive security functions without the same institutional safeguards as formal security agencies. Later investigations also reported cases in which children fleeing Boko Haram were arrested or screened by security forces and community-based security groups, sometimes based on suspected association with the insurgency.[56]

Inadequate Training and Professional Capacity. The CJTF's rapid expansion created difficulties in providing standardised training to all members. The military began organising the CJTF in Maiduguri; the Borno State Government formally incorporated approximately 1,850 members into the Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme (BOYES) in September 2013 and provided basic training. However, the government subsequently reduced its original plan to train as many as 6,000 members because of concerns about its capacity to control such a large armed civilian force. Only a smaller group received more specialised military training for frontline operations. This uneven professionalisation illustrates the difficulty of maintaining common standards of training, discipline and rules of engagement across a rapidly expanding volunteer organisation.[57]

Poor Welfare and Financial Constraints. Welfare and financial insecurity have also affected CJTF operations. The organisation initially depended heavily on voluntary participation and community support. Although the Borno State Government later provided selected members with uniforms, vehicles, identification documents and stipends, reports that only a portion of the much larger CJTF membership was formally incorporated into the government-supported scheme.[58] This created disparities between members who received government support and those who continued to operate largely as volunteers. The limited and uneven nature of remuneration and logistical support is particularly significant because CJTF members perform security functions that expose them to considerable personal risk.

Legal and Institutional Ambiguity. The CJTF's relationship with formal security institutions has also produced institutional uncertainty. The organisation was initially a grassroots civilian initiative but was subsequently incorporated into government and military security arrangements. For example, the military organised CJTF units according to its security sectors in Maiduguri, while the Borno State Government incorporated selected members into BOYES and provided them with official identification and stipends.[59] This process increased coordination but did not transform the CJTF into a statutory military or police institution. The resulting hybrid status created questions concerning its authority, command relationships, accountability and permissible use of force. The problem became particularly evident where CJTF members participated in arrests, searches and detention-related activities normally associated with formal security agencies.

Risk of Militarisation and Recruitment of Children. The militarisation of a civilian volunteer organisation created additional concerns. Children between approximately 15 and 17 years old manning CJTF checkpoints in parts of Borno and

Yobe and reported that some CJTF members acknowledged the use of children in operations.[60] This problem subsequently prompted institutional intervention. In September 2017, the CJTF, the United Nations and the Borno State Government implemented an action plan aimed at ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children. By 2017, 833 children formerly associated with the CJTF had been formally separated from the organisation, while subsequent UN-supported processes led to the disengagement of additional children.[61] The episode demonstrates both the risks associated with militarising community-based security structures and the need for sustained monitoring and child-protection mechanisms.

Post-Conflict Reintegration Challenges. The transition of CJTF members away from security operations has presented another challenge. The disengagement of children associated with the CJTF provides a concrete example of the broader reintegration problem. Following the 2017 action plan, hundreds of children were separated from the organisation, but itwas[62] reported that many were still awaiting formal reintegration into their communities. CJTF had facilitated the disengagement of 2,203 children from its ranks, and the UN had verified no new cases of child recruitment following the 2017 action plan. These developments illustrate that disengagement from community-based armed structures requires more than simply ending participation; it also involves verification, rehabilitation, family reunification, and community reintegration.[63]

Community Relations and Trust Deficits. CJTF has faced difficulties in maintaining community trust. Its close association with military operations meant that members could become identified with coercive security practices, particularly where arrests or screening were conducted based on suspected links to Boko Haram. Children and young people reported being arrested by the military or CJTF after fleeing Boko Haram attacks, despite denying involvement with the group. Such experiences can weaken confidence in community-based security actors because the same organisation that is expected to protect civilians may also become involved in their detention or interrogation. Consequently, sustaining CJTF legitimacy requires clear rules of engagement, effective supervision, transparent complaint mechanisms and respect for civilian rights.[64]

Implications for National Security

The emergence and operational activities of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria's counterinsurgency campaign against Boko Haram have significant implications for national security governance. These implications extend beyond

immediate tactical gains in the battlefield to broader issues of security sector reform, state legitimacy, community participation, and post-conflict stability. While the CJTF has enhanced operational effectiveness in several respects, its existence also raises critical questions about the structure, control, and sustainability of security provision in Nigeria.

Strengthening of Community-Based Security Governance. One of the most important implications of the CJTF is the increasing recognition of community participation as an essential component of national security. The CJTF demonstrates that security is not solely the responsibility of state institutions but can be strengthened through structured collaboration with local communities. By integrating civilians into intelligence gathering, surveillance, and early warning systems, the Nigerian state has benefited from improved situational awareness and faster response to insurgent threats. This reflects a shift toward hybrid security governance models that combine formal and informal actors in addressing complex security challenges.[65]

Enhancement of Counterinsurgency Effectiveness. The CJTF has contributed to improved operational outcomes in Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts. Its local knowledge and intelligence capabilities have enhanced the ability of security forces to identify insurgents, locate hideouts, and disrupt Boko Haram operations. This has led to the recovery of several territories previously controlled by insurgents and the weakening of their operational capacity in certain regions. Consequently, the CJTF illustrates how community involvement can serve as a force multiplier in asymmetric warfare environments where state forces face non-conventional threats.[66]

Expansion of State-Society Security Collaboration. The CJTF has deepened cooperation between state security agencies and civilian populations, thereby reshaping traditional boundaries between security providers and communities. This collaboration has improved trust in some affected areas and encouraged greater reporting of suspicious activities. However, it also reflects a broader transformation in Nigeria's security architecture, where non-state actors increasingly play complementary roles in internal security management. While this enhances responsiveness, it also raises concerns about coordination, command structure, and accountability within the security sector.

Risks of Informal Militarisation and Parallel Security Structures. A major implication of the CJTF is the potential normalisation of informal armed groups as part of internal security arrangements. Although the CJTF was established as a temporary response to insurgency, its continued existence raises concerns about the proliferation of

parallel security structures outside formal state control. This situation can complicate command authority, blur the distinction between civilians and combatants, and increase the risk of armed group fragmentation after the conflict. In the long term, such dynamics may pose challenges to state monopoly over the legitimate use of force.[67]

Human Rights and Rule of Law Considerations. The involvement of civilian groups in security operations has significant implications for human rights protection and the rule of law. Reports of abuses attributed to some CJTF members highlight the risks associated with empowering informal security actors without adequate legal frameworks and oversight mechanisms. This underscores the need for institutional safeguards to ensure that counterinsurgency operations comply with national laws and international humanitarian standards. Failure to address these concerns could undermine the legitimacy of security operations and erode public trust in both formal and informal security actors.[68]

Post-Conflict Security and Reintegration Challenges. The CJTF also presents important implications for post-conflict security management. As insurgency threats decline in certain areas, the transition of CJTF members into civilian life becomes a critical policy issue. Without proper reintegration programmes, including vocational training, psychosocial support, and economic empowerment, there is a risk that former members may become unemployed, marginalised, or susceptible to involvement in criminal activities. Therefore, post-conflict planning must incorporate strategies for demobilisation and reintegration to prevent the emergence of new security threats.

Policy and Security Sector Reform Implications. CJTF experience highlights the need for comprehensive security sector reforms in Nigeria. This includes developing clear legal frameworks for community-based security initiatives, improving coordination between formal and informal actors, and strengthening oversight mechanisms. It also emphasises the importance of investing in intelligence-led policing, community engagement strategies, and preventive security measures. Ultimately, the CJTF case demonstrates that sustainable national security cannot be achieved solely through military force but requires inclusive, participatory, and well-regulated security governance structures.

Conclusion

This study has examined community-based security initiatives in Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations, with particular focus on the Civilian Joint Task Force

(CJTF) and its role in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency. The analysis demonstrates that the emergence of the CJTF represents a critical response to the limitations of conventional security approaches in addressing complex asymmetric threats. As the insurgency intensified in northeastern Nigeria, state security institutions faced significant operational constraints, particularly in intelligence gathering, local penetration, and community trust. In this context, the CJTF emerged as a vital community-driven mechanism that complemented formal security efforts.

Findings from the study indicate that the CJTF has made substantial contributions to counterinsurgency operations through intelligence support, identification of insurgents, community surveillance, territorial protection, and assistance to military operations. Its members' deep understanding of local environments, languages, and social networks significantly enhanced the effectiveness of security operations and contributed to the recovery of territories previously occupied by Boko Haram. The CJTF also played an important role in strengthening community resilience and fostering collaboration between civilians and security agencies, thereby improving the overall responsiveness of counterinsurgency strategies.

However, the study also highlights several challenges that limit the effectiveness and sustainability of the CJTF. These include allegations of human rights abuses, inadequate training, poor welfare conditions, legal and institutional ambiguity, and difficulties associated with post-conflict reintegration. These challenges underscore the risks associated with relying on informal security actors without clearly defined regulatory frameworks and accountability mechanisms. They also reflect broader concerns about the balance between operational effectiveness and adherence to the rule of law in conflict environments. Therefore, while the CJTF has proven to be an important force multiplier in Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts, its long-term effectiveness depends on the establishment of structured policies that integrate community-based security initiatives into formal national security frameworks. Sustainable security governance requires not only military intervention but also inclusive, accountable, and well-regulated community participation. Therefore, the Nigerian state must prioritise institutional reforms, capacity building, legal recognition, and reintegration strategies to ensure that gains achieved through the CJTF are preserved and do not generate new security challenges in the post-conflict period.

Recommendations

Institutionalisation and Legal Framework for CJTF Operations: The Nigerian government should develop a clear legal and policy framework that formally defines

the role, powers, and limitations of community-based security groups such as the CJTF. This will enhance accountability, prevent abuse of authority, and ensure that their operations are aligned with national security laws and international human rights standards.

Comprehensive Training and Capacity Building: There is a need for continuous and standardised training programmes for CJTF members in areas such as human rights, intelligence gathering, conflict de-escalation, first aid, and rules of engagement. This will improve professionalism, reduce operational misconduct, and enhance their effectiveness as support units in counterinsurgency operations.

Improved Welfare and Incentive Structures: The government, in collaboration with state authorities, should establish sustainable welfare packages for CJTF members, including stipends, insurance coverage, healthcare support, and psychosocial services. Adequate welfare support will improve morale, reduce vulnerability to exploitation, and ensure long-term commitment without dependence on informal arrangements.

Structured Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) Programmes: As security conditions improve, a structured DDR framework should be implemented to transition CJTF members into civilian life. This should include vocational training, educational opportunities, and economic empowerment initiatives to prevent post-conflict unemployment and potential involvement in criminal activities.

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