PRO-GOVERNMENT MILITIA GROUPS AND THE THREATS TO NATIONAL SECURITY: A STUDY OF THE CIVILIAN JOINT TASK FORCE IN NORTHEASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

State sovereignty and security governance are seriously threatened by the growth of pro-government militias (PGMs) in conflict areas. Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts have relied heavily on the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a grassroots militia established in 2013 to fight Boko Haram. However, doubts have been raised about the CJTF's long-term stability due to its unclear legal status, lack of accountability, and documented violations of human rights. Few studies critically analyze PGMs' systemic risks, especially in fragile states with weak security institutions, despite the literature's emphasis on the tactical advantages of PGMs. By examining the CJTF's dual function in Nigeria's counterterrorism strategy as a security asset and a possible liability, this study fills this knowledge gap. It examines the operational contributions, the elements that allow the CJTF to continue its role in national security, and the threats it presents to post-conflict stability, state authority, and the rule of law. Based on empirical data, the study shows that although the CJTF improves short-term security by fostering community trust and localized intelligence, its unofficial structure, lack of oversight, and criminal potential jeopardize long-term peacebuilding. The study also examines how the CJTF's influence is maintained by inadequate state capacity, public mistrust of official security forces, and a lack of demobilization mechanisms, all of which run the risk of turning it into an uncontrolled armed group. By looking at these dynamics, the study adds to larger discussions about militia-state relations and provides policy-relevant information about how to regulate and hold accountable informal security actors in areas affected by conflict.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Counterinsurgency, Pro-government militias, and Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).

Introduction

One important but little-studied aspect of modern security governance is the growth of pro-government militias (PGMs) in conflict areas. The long-term incorporation of these groups into state security frameworks presents difficult issues regarding legitimacy, accountability, and state sovereignty, even though they frequently arise as ad hoc responses to insurgencies (Carey, Mitchell, & Lowe, 2013). The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria is a prime example of this phenomenon, having been instrumental in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency since 2013. The conflicts between immediate security benefits and long-term institutional stability are highlighted by the CJTF's legal ambiguity, lack of official oversight, and documented human rights violations, notwithstanding its operational contributions (Higazi, 2016). By examining the CJTF's dual function as a security asset and a possible liability within Nigeria's counterterrorism strategy, this study aims to close this gap.

The CJTF's ability to both strengthen and weaken national security is a major paradox in its involvement. On the one hand, its embeddedness in the community and localized knowledge have been useful in counterinsurgency operations and intelligence gathering (Onuoha & Ugwueze, 2020). However, the lack of standardized training and its informal structure increase the likelihood of extrajudicial violence and the weakening of state power (Staniland, 2015). PGMs' tactical usefulness is often highlighted in existing research, but their systemic effects are often overlooked, especially in fragile nations with inadequate security sector governance (Jentzsch, Kalyvas, & Schubiger, 2015). This study provides insights into the larger issues of militia-state relations by critically analyzing how the CJTF's operations affect Nigeria's monopoly on violence and the rule of law.

Additionally, the continued existence of the CJTF is a reflection of deeper structural and sociopolitical factors, such as the vulnerability of the state, public mistrust of official security institutions, and the lack of effective demobilization routes (Bøås, 2021). Such groups run the risk of becoming uncontrolled armed factions in the absence of clear regulatory frameworks, which would prolong unstable cycles (Albrecht & Stepputat, 2015). While evaluating the CJTF's potential to worsen insecurity in Northeast Nigeria following the conflict, this study looks into these enabling factors. The study adds to policy discussions on the regulation of informal

security actors in fragile states by examining the group's operational risks, governance issues, and legal ambiguities.

Methodology

 The role of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria's counterinsurgency operations and its consequences for national security are thoroughly examined in this study using a qualitative methodology. Key stakeholders, such as CJTF members, security guards, civilians impacted by militia operations, military officials, local community leaders, and human rights advocates, were interviewed in a semi-structured manner. These Interviewees were purposively selected. In order to gather a variety of viewpoints on the CJTF's activities, accountability systems, and long-term security threats, these interviews were carried out in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa in northeastern Nigeria. Recurring patterns in the data were found using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), specifically with regard to militia-state relations, governance issues, and human rights abuses.

The study examines accountability gaps, incentive misalignment, and delegation failures in Nigeria's use of the CJTF using Principal-Agent Theory (PAT) as an analytical framework to increase theoretical rigor. Government reports, publications from non-governmental organizations (such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International), and academic works on pro-government militias and DDR procedures are the sources of secondary data. Informed consent, interviewee confidentiality are examples of ethical considerations. This methodology informs policy discussions on militia regulation in fragile states and offers solid insights into the security impacts of the CJTF by fusing theoretical analysis with empirical fieldwork.

Conceptual Review

Pro-Government Militia Groups

Pro-government militias (PGMs) are armed non-state actors that support official security forces in different ways (Carey, Colaresi & Mitchell, 2015). As auxiliary forces that governments use to accomplish security goals while preserving plausible deniability for human rights abuses, these organizations hold a special place in civil-military relations (Ahram, 2011). PGMs are both

adjustable instruments of state power and possible causes of unchecked violence because, in contrast to formal military units, they usually lack standardized training, official oversight, and legal accountability frameworks (Jentzsch, Kalyvas & Schubiger, 2015). Their emergence is frequently linked to state weakness, where governments are unable or unwilling to use traditional methods to address security threats (Staniland, 2015). PGMs have increased in recent years across Africa, along with their participation in conflict events, including those resulting in fatalities (Raleigh & Kishi, 2018) as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Proliferation of PGMs in Africa
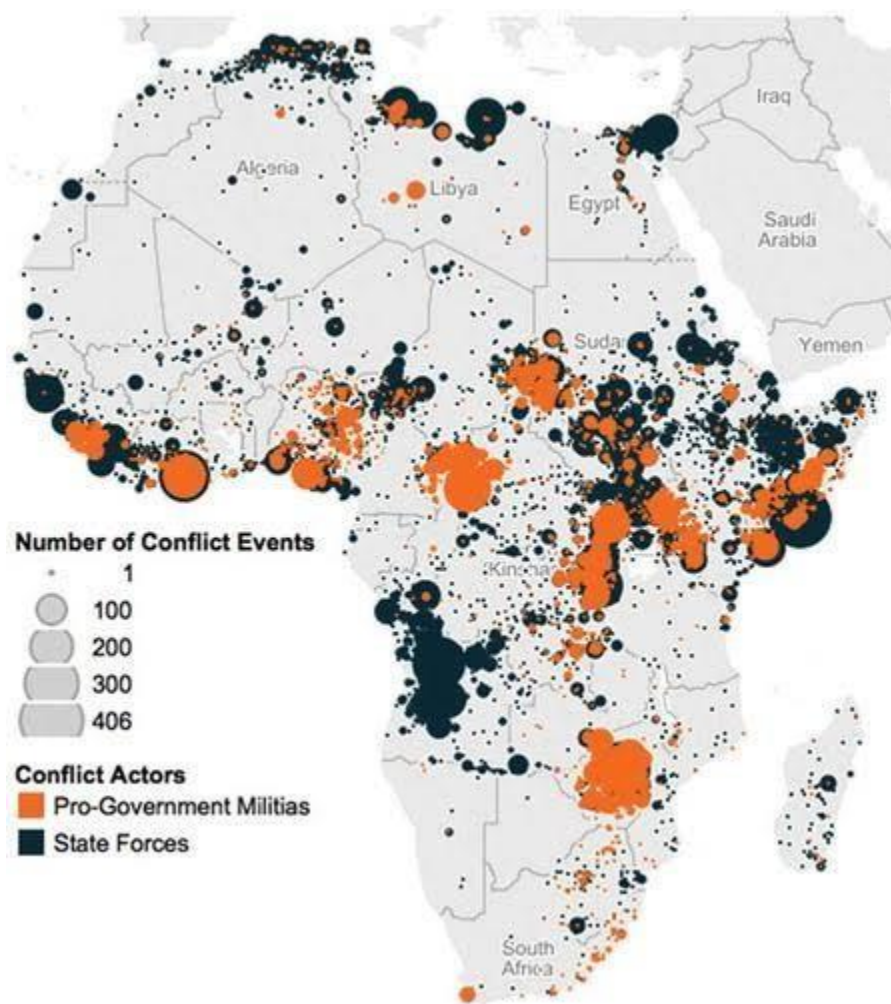
Source: Raleigh & Kishi (2018)

States and PGMs have a range of relationships, from loose affiliation to direct control. While some militias function with tacit approval through unofficial networks (covert support), others

receive weapons, money, and strategic guidance from state actors (overt support) (Mitchell, Carey & Butler, 2014). Strategic goals are served by this ambiguity: states profit from militia operations while avoiding responsibility, especially when overt military action is restricted by international scrutiny (Ahram, 2015). This dynamic is best illustrated in Nigeria, where the government has integrated local militias into counterinsurgency efforts against Boko Haram while keeping an arm's length eye on them through organizations like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) (Higazi, 2016). These agreements frequently represent what Reno (2018) refers to as "mediated statehood," in which governments contract out security duties in order to preserve authority in outlying areas.

Three main elements are highlighted in theoretical explanations for PGM emergence: institutional fragmentation, political expediency, and strategic utility. From a strategic standpoint, militias provide states with local knowledge and undeniable force projection that conventional forces cannot match (Lyall, 2010). In terms of politics, they enable governments to reward devoted supporters, stifle dissent, or evade military reforms that could jeopardize the interests of the elite (Albrecht & Ohl, 2016). Institutionally, PGMs frequently appear in areas with weak, corrupt, or fragmented security sectors, allowing for the emergence of parallel armed structures (Carey & Mitchell, 2017). However, because PGMs have the potential to develop into independent power centers that oppose state authority, these short-term benefits usually jeopardize long-term security sector governance (Staniland, 2021). Shia militias in Iraq after 2003 and the Janjaweed in Sudan serve as examples of how initially beneficial proxies can turn into long-lasting threats to state stability (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Disarmament

Disarmament, which is essentially concerned with the gathering, management, and destruction of weapons and ammunition from both combatants and civilian populations, is a crucial first stage in DDR procedures (United Nations, 2006). Disarmament is a fundamental component of the post-conflict transition, with both symbolic and pragmatic uses. By changing the material circumstances that support violence, it symbolically signifies a concrete commitment to peace (Berdal, 1996). In practice, it lessens the armed groups' immediate ability to recommence fighting while creating the security conditions required for later demobilization and reintegration

initiatives (Muggah, 2005). The process involves more than just gathering weapons; it also involves changing the identities of combatants and the physical security environments.

Lessons learned from decades of peace operations are reflected in the conceptual evolution of disarmament. Disarmament was initially viewed as largely a technical endeavor centered on quantitative weapons recovery, especially during Cold War-era interventions (Batchelor et al., 2002). But according to recent research, disarmament is a complicated sociopolitical process that calls for careful interaction with armed actors. Knight and Özerdem (2004) draw attention to the important difference between negotiated voluntary disarmament and externally imposed coercive disarmament, with empirical data showing that participatory approaches produce more long-lasting results. According to Bourne (2007), Vines (2013), and Podder (2013), this paradigm shift recognizes that weapons are not only instruments of violence but also integral components of war economies, identity structures, and political bargaining processes.

Disarmament is examined from several interconnected angles by theoretical frameworks. The physical dimension includes tangible methods for removing weapons, such as coercive seizure operations, buy-back plans, or collection programs (Muggah, 2009). Acknowledging that addressing subjective perceptions of security and status is necessary for meaningful disarmament, the psychological dimension concurrently tackles the transition of combatant identities from military to civilian roles (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011). Effective disarmament at the structural level requires tackling the underlying causes of arms availability and dismantling institutionalized systems of weapons proliferation (Bourne, 2007). When taken as a whole, these factors highlight how effective disarmament goes beyond technical execution to involve more extensive social change.

Demobilization

Demobilization is the official process of disbanding armed groups, releasing combatants, and reintegrating them into civilian life. It is a fundamental part of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs (United Nations, 2006). By making sure that former combatants are methodically separated from military institutions and ready for socioeconomic reentry, it acts as a vital link between the end of hostilities and long-term reintegration (Muggah, 2009). Demobilization is essentially an organizational and psychosocial process that dismantles

military hierarchies, removes combatants from conflict zones, and provides temporary support, in contrast to disarmament, which concentrates on the collection of weapons, or reintegration, which emphasizes sustainable livelihoods (Knight & Özerdem, 2004).

Demobilization is now viewed as a multifaceted intervention integrated into peacebuilding frameworks rather than just a logistical endeavor. Early DDR models viewed demobilization as a technical step that included cantonment, registration, and temporary aid, especially in post-Cold War contexts (Spear, 2002). However, empirical research from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Colombia, and Sierra Leone showed that high recidivism rates resulted from ignoring the psychological and socioeconomic aspects of demobilization (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007). In order to keep former combatants from turning to violence, modern strategies place a strong emphasis on "human security-centered demobilization" (Ozerdem, 2012), which entails trauma counseling, job training, and community reconciliation (De Vries & Wiegink, 2011).

The sequencing and inclusivity of demobilization are the subject of a critical theoretical debate. In order to facilitate reintegration, proponents of "linear DDR" (United Nations, 2018) support a systematic, phased approach in which disarmament comes before demobilization. However, detractors contend that this model is ineffective in situations where combatants may oppose official disarmament, such as with fragmented non-state armed groups like Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces or Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) (Themnér, 2015). Alternative frameworks that emphasize localized, flexible demobilization that adjusts to informal militia structures while maintaining accountability include "community-based DDR" (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018).

Difficulties in the Demobilization Process

Disarmament**,** Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs frequently fail due to the complex issues surrounding the demobilization of former combatants. Incomplete disarmament, in which combatants keep their weapons in spite of official demobilization efforts, is one of the most enduring problems. This results in "paper armies," or ostensibly demobilized combatants who are still armed and able to remobilize during political crises, as Berdal (1996) points out. Because former combatants often concealed their weapons, either out of mistrust for peace

processes or as a precaution against future insecurity, post-demobilization violence often broke out in places like Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007). In areas with porous borders and flourishing black markets for small arms, where weapons serve as both a security assurance and a financial asset, this phenomenon is made worse (Muggah, 2009). Demobilization turns into a pointless endeavor that is unable to eliminate the dormant threat posed by rearmed groups in the absence of strong verification procedures.

The political instrumentalization of demobilization by governments and armed group leaders is a second significant obstacle. Podder (2013) details how Sudan's DDR initiatives prioritized the demobilization of southern militias over Darfuri rebel factions, thereby escalating ethnic divisions and sustaining conflict cycles. Similarly, the government's selective application of eligibility criteria in Colombia, favoring paramilitary groups over left-wing guerrillas, hampered early DDR efforts (Daly, 2016). Such exclusionary tactics encourage disenfranchised groups to reorganize and undermine faith in the peace process. As demonstrated in Afghanistan, where warlords used DDR to consolidate power by demobilizing rival forces while keeping their own militias, elite capture can skew results even when demobilization is ostensibly inclusive (Giustozzi, 2008). These incidents show how politicized demobilization can be used as a weapon of war instead of a means of achieving peace.

Another widespread issue is gender exclusion, where female combatants and their allied members—such as wives, cooks, and porters—are routinely left out of demobilization procedures. In Sierra Leone and Uganda, DDR programs frequently categorized women as "dependents" rather than combatants, preventing them from receiving reintegration benefits, according to Mazurana et al. (2005). The reason for this oversight is that strict definitions of combatancy give priority to frontline combatants while neglecting the various roles that women play in armed groups, such as recruiting, spies, and logistic coordinators (MacKenzie, 2012). The ramifications are severe: marginalized women experience social disgrace and financial hardship, and some turn to survival sex or re-affiliate with armed groups (Coulter, 2009). Participation in decision-making forums and vocational training is frequently restricted by patriarchal norms and cultural barriers, even in cases where women are officially included, such as in Nepal's DDR program (Luna, 2018). In addition to transgressing equity principles, this gender blindness wastes chances to capitalize on women's special capacity for peacebuilding.

Demobilization is made more difficult by logistical and operational challenges. Mass DDR program desertions have been caused by a lack of cantonment sites, stipend payment delays, and poor healthcare in resource-poor countries like South Sudan (Oosterveld & Galand, 2020). Psychological obstacles are also important: Betancourt et al. (2013) discovered that while less than 10% of former combatants in Sierra Leone received mental health assistance during demobilization, 60% of them had PTSD symptoms. Ex-combatants find it difficult to adjust to civilian life without trauma-informed care, which raises their risk of substance abuse, domestic violence, and recidivism (Vermeij, 2016). These difficulties are exacerbated in urban areas, where covert armed groups (such as El Salvadorian gangs) conflate criminal and political violence, rendering conventional demobilization strategies useless (Savenije, 2017).

Lastly, the rejection of former combatants is frequently fueled by the absence of community involvement in demobilization planning. According to De Vries and Wiegink (2011), Mozambican communities stigmatized returning fighters as "unrepentant killers," denying them access to land and marriage opportunities, because they were not included in the design of DDR. Demobilized Hutu militiamen were marginalized in Rwanda due to similar circumstances, and some of them subsequently joined cross-border insurgent groups (Thomson, 2011). In order to restore social trust, effective demobilization necessitates not only top-down orders but also grassroots reconciliation initiatives, like Liberia's "Palava Hut" forums (Iwilade, 2019). Without these connections, demobilization becomes a technical endeavor separate from the social reconciliation required for enduring peace.

Reintegration

Reintegration, which includes the sustainable return of former combatants to civilian life through economic, social, and political dimensions, is the most intricate and protracted stage of DDR processes (United Nations, 2006). Reintegration is an open-ended social process that can go on for years after official DDR programs end, in contrast to the more temporally limited phases of disarmament and demobilization (Muggah, 2009). Fundamentally, effective reintegration necessitates converting ex-combatants into contributing members of the community and promoting social acceptance, two tasks that call for all-encompassing strategies that span individual needs with group reconciliation (Ozerdem, 2012).

Since the first DDR implementations, the theoretical underpinnings of reintegration have undergone substantial change. Early conceptualizations of reintegration mainly used economic perspectives, emphasizing livelihood assistance and vocational training as means of achieving civilian transition (Jennings, 2008). But according to recent research, sustainable reintegration needs to focus on three interrelated pillars: social belonging through family and community ties; political inclusion through citizenship rights and participation; and economic security through employment or income-generation (Podder, 2013). Although 63% of DDR programs offer vocational training, only 28% address psychosocial needs, resulting in gaps in comprehensive reintegration support. This multifaceted framework recognizes that former combatants face compound vulnerabilities (IDDRS, 2020).

According to critical viewpoints, reintegration is a two-way social contract that necessitates both community acceptance of returning members and ex-combatant adaptation (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018). As demonstrated in Sierra Leone, where stigma against former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fighters continued years after formal DDR completion, the social reconciliation dimension proves to be especially difficult (Peters, 2011). Similarly, the Gacaca traditional justice system in Rwanda showed that social cohesion cannot be achieved solely through economic support; rather, reintegration success depends on concurrent community healing processes (Brounéus, 2008). These incidents highlight the fact that reintegration represents both societal and personal change.

Other complications are introduced by the political economy of reintegration. In war economies, former combatants frequently hold particular positions that are difficult for DDR initiatives to fill with acceptable substitutes (Berdal, 1996). About 22% of demobilized paramilitaries in Colombia joined successor armed groups due to the strong pull factors created by the country's ongoing illicit economies and organized crime networks (Daly, 2016). This demonstrates the shortcomings of independent reintegration programs that aren't linked to larger development projects. Successful strategies combine reintegration with local economic revitalization to develop long-term alternatives to violence, as exemplified by Liberia's Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund (UNDP, 2015).

Civil-Military Relations

As a key component of political sociology, civil-military relations study the dynamic interaction between the armed forces and civilian authority in state structures (Huntington, 1957). In order to ensure the effectiveness of national security, this field of study examines the institutional arrangements, norms, and power dynamics that control military subordination to democratically elected leadership (Feaver, 2003). According to the traditional theoretical framework, which Samuel Huntington outlined in The Soldier and the State, professional militaries should remain politically neutral while offering knowledgeable counsel on defense-related issues; this is known as "objective control" (Huntington, 1957). Scholars who have documented the continued influence of militaries in political processes across postcolonial states, such as Nigeria's history of military coups and ongoing governance issues in the security sector, have contested this ideal-type formulation (Luckham, 1971; Decalo, 1998).

The range of military involvement in politics, from overt coups to covert influence behind the scenes, is acknowledged by modern civil-military relations theory (Perlmutter, 1977). Nigeria's 1999 transition from military to civilian rule serves as an example of the difficulties in consolidating democracy, as former military leaders maintain significant political sway through both official and informal means (Adekanye, 1999). When examining African contexts, where frequent military interventions in politics have historically threatened constitutional order, the idea of "praetorianism" is still especially pertinent (First, 1970). Through patronage networks and security sector allocations, nominally civilian regimes frequently maintain symbiotic relationships with military establishments, according to recent scholarship (Brzoska, 2016).

Civil-military relations theory has gained new dimensions in the post-9/11 security environment, especially in relation to the militarization of counterterrorism and internal security operations (Desch, 2007). The conflicts between military authority and civilian supervision are illustrated by Nigeria's experience with the Boko Haram insurgency, where emergency measures have occasionally undermined democratic accountability (Eze, 2021). Traditional civil-military boundaries are further complicated by the emergence of hybrid security arrangements, such as Nigeria's use of civilian joint task forces, which result in parallel security structures with unclear accountability mechanisms (Mustapha, 2022). According to Albrecht and Stepputat (2015), this

phenomenon is consistent with global trends of "security sector pluralism," in which armed non-state actors take on official security roles.

A growing number of theoretical discussions center on the institutionalization of democratic control mechanisms through the development of civilian expertise, defense budget transparency, and legislative oversight (Croissant et al., 2013). The inability of Nigeria's National Assembly to effectively supervise defense spending and security operations highlights the discrepancies between formal frameworks and real-world implementation (Omitoogun, 2020). Comparative studies show that careful renegotiation of civil-military agreements that define roles, establish accountability, and address military corporate interests is necessary for successful democratic transitions (Pion-Berlin, 1992). In resource-dependent economies where oil revenues have historically supported parallel military budgets, the Nigerian case highlights the unique difficulties of reforming security sectors (Basedau & Lay, 2009).

Civilian Joint Task Force

As a community response to the insurgency of Boko Haram, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is a complex hybrid security arrangement that arose in northeastern Nigeria (Higazi, 2016). This local vigilante group was established in Maiduguri in 2013 and blurs the lines between state and non-state security (Mustapha, 2022). As an example of what Albrecht and Stepputat (2015) refer to as "security pluralism" in fragile states, the CJTF's transformation from an unplanned self-defense effort to a semi-formalized counterinsurgency auxiliary challenges traditional security sector frameworks. The group's operational strategies blend community networks and local terrain knowledge with differing levels of military cooperation to produce distinct security dynamics that are difficult to classify (Pérouse de Montclos, 2016).

Figure 2: Map of Nigeria showing Borno as one of Boko Haram Hotspots States
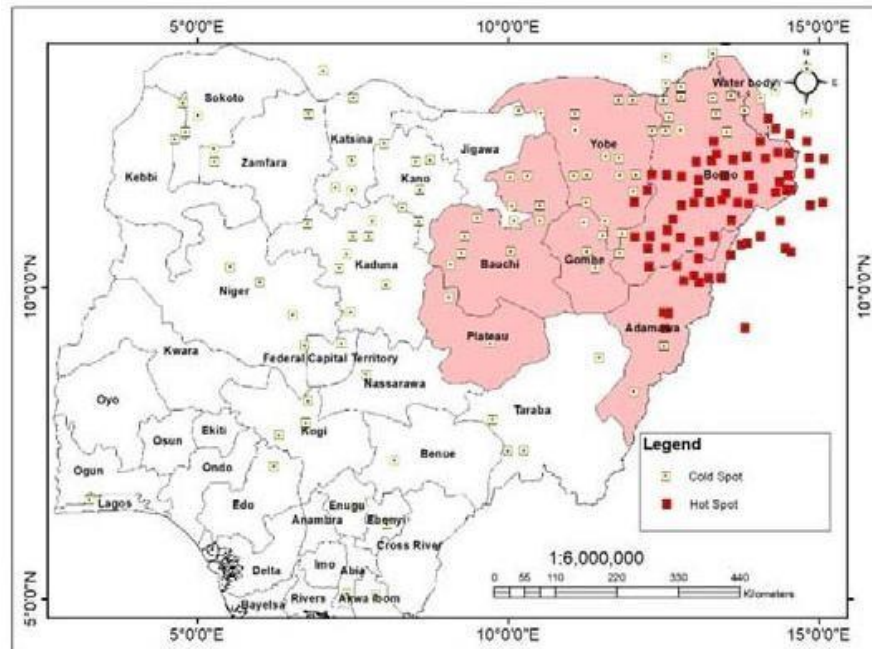
Source: Omogunloye et al. (2023)

A number of academic discussions concerning non-state security actors in conflict areas are influenced by theoretical viewpoints on the CJTF. The group is an example of "resistance militia," which Stanton (2015) defines as locally based armed groups that fight insurgent groups while preserving intricate ties with state forces. The CJTF retains operational autonomy despite receiving differing degrees of material support from Nigeria's security agencies, in contrast to traditional civil defense forces that function under distinct state command structures (International Crisis Group, 2020). This hybridity is indicative of larger trends in African conflicts where non-state actors have been called upon to handle security functions due to state weakness (Bøås, 2015). The CJTF's role is further complicated by its Islamist ideological stance and ethnic Kanuri composition, which raises concerns about sectarian bias while facilitating counterinsurgency effectiveness (Zenn, 2018).

Fundamental conflicts between democratic governance norms and security pragmatism are revealed by scholarly examination of the CJTF. Through intelligence collection and local policing, the group has helped gain territory against Boko Haram (Onuoha, 2014), but its lack of official training and accountability procedures has led to documented human rights violations,

such as arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial killings (Amnesty International, 2020). The "dilemmas of victory" in irregular warfare, where tactical gains frequently come at the strategic expense of the rule of law and civilian protection, are in line with this paradox, according to Kaldor (2013). The Nigerian government's conflicted attitude toward the CJTF—using and denigrating the group at the same time—reflects what Ahram (2015) refers to as the "plausible deniability" tactic frequently employed in state-militia interactions.

Civilian Joint Task Force and Security Threats in Northeastern Nigeria

In northeastern Nigeria, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has become a source of security threats, despite its initial role in fighting Boko Haram. This has raised concerns about the CJTF's long-term effects on governance and stability. Although it played a significant role in dismantling Boko Haram's urban networks, the organization's lack of legal and official supervision, accountability systems, and professional training has resulted in numerous violations of human rights, such as extortion, arbitrary arrests, and extrajudicial killings (Amnesty International, 2020). Public confidence in security institutions has been damaged by these infractions, and in certain situations, they have increased animosity that insurgent organizations use as a recruiting tool (International Crisis Group, 2020). The CJTF's unbridled authority has undermined larger counterinsurgency efforts by causing localized security quandaries where communities see them as both predators and protectors (Mustapha, 2022).

The CJTF's evolution into an armed group with political and economic objectives beyond its original mandate poses a serious security risk. Since many of its members depend on conflict-related incomes like security contracts, checkpoint tolls, and illegal taxation, the group has grown interested in extending instability over time (Omenma et al., 2021). Scholarly criticisms of pro-government militias, which frequently develop into self-sustaining armed groups that oppose demobilization, are consistent with this (Carey & Mitchell, 2017). According to reports, certain CJTF factions in Borno State participate in illegal activities such as trafficking in weapons and banditry, which further destabilizes the area (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The possibility that these actors will turn into outright criminals is similar to trends seen in other conflict areas where vigilante groups turn into organized crime syndicates (Bakonyi & Stuvøy, 2005).

By escalating tensions between communities, the CJTF's ethnic and sectarian biases also present a long-term security risk. Despite being founded with the intention of opposing Boko Haram, the group's primarily Kanuri membership has given rise to allegations of prejudice against Christian communities and Shuwa Arabs, among other minority groups (Bamidele, 2023). Particularly in ethnically mixed areas where complaints about marginalization endure, such exclusionary practices run the risk of rekindling dormant conflicts (Higazi, 2016). Additionally, by getting involved in local conflicts and occasionally supporting one side over another, the CJTF has widened societal divides and made efforts at reconciliation during post-conflict recovery more difficult (Pérouse de Montclos, 2016). These situations serve as an example of how unofficial security actors may unintentionally prolong the instability they were intended to address.

The effect of the CJTF on Nigeria's official security architecture is another serious worry. Parallel chains of command have been established by the group's semi-institutionalized status, undermining state authority and fragmenting security governance (Staniland, 2015). With some members opposing reintegration into civilian life, the CJTF has established itself within the security sector rather than acting as a temporary auxiliary force (Nwankpa, 2022). This undercuts attempts to restore the state's monopoly on violence and professionalize law enforcement, two crucial tenets of long-term peacebuilding (Brzoska, 2003). Despite the group's documented abuses, the Nigerian government's unwillingness to disband it highlights a larger problem in counterinsurgency: it can be challenging to dismantle informal armed actors once they have integrated themselves into security operations (Ahram, 2015). Lastly, the CJTF's presence in northeastern Nigeria makes the processes of reconciliation and transitional justice more difficult. There are concerns regarding accountability and reparations because many Boko Haram victims see the group's atrocities as an extension of their own suffering (Zenn, 2018). Without formal mechanisms to address these grievances, resentment may fester, creating conditions for future cycles of violence (Themnér, 2015). Thousands of armed youths are left without effective alternatives to violence due to the lack of a structured disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program for CJTF members (Omenma et al., 2021).

Empirical Review

Ahmed and Sunamai's 2023 study, "The Fight Against Boko Haram Insurgency: Interrogating the Role of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Jere LGA, Borno State, Nigeria," looked at how

the CJTF dealt with the Boko Haram insurgency in Jere Local Government Area, Borno State. 320 respondents were surveyed using a mixed-methods approach that included systematic and cluster sampling techniques. In addition, descriptive, narrative, and regression techniques were used to evaluate the data. The results demonstrate how important the CJTF has been for covert operations, patrol, surveillance, escort missions, and intelligence collection. Regression results that revealed significant contributions in areas such as community-focused security (CFS), intelligence involvement (II), and active intervention (AI) demonstrated the CJTF's effectiveness in local counterinsurgency. However, the group's operations are threatened by shortcomings such as inadequate funding, logistical problems, a lack of training, and a tarnished reputation. Finally, the authors encourage the government to provide immediate assistance in the form of communication systems, training, and logistics to reinforce CJTF operations and ensure their continued ability to combat insurgency.

In "Strategy of Civilian Joint Task Force Militia in Combating Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria," Gana (2020) examines the different tactics that have contributed to the Civilian Joint Task Force's (CJTF) victory against the Boko Haram insurgency in North Eastern Nigeria. In order to uncover the complexities of the CJTF's local operations, the study employs a qualitative methodology that includes in-depth interviews with 13 informants and non-participant observation. The results show that the group started out as an unofficial self-defense mechanism in response to the security issues in the area. The CJTF's information-based strategy, which prioritizes local intelligence collection, thorough socio-cultural integration, and terrain familiarity, has enabled accurate and successful counterinsurgency operations, increasing its competence. Additionally, the CJTF's success has been credited to its community-based strategy rather than traditional military methods. In conclusion, the author suggests that rather than depending solely on kinetic solutions, the Nigerian government reconsider its counterinsurgency strategies to incorporate socioeconomic reforms, inclusive governance, and community inclusion.

In their 2023 paper "Civilian Joint Task Force as a Supplementary Force in the Boko Haram Conflict in the Lake Chad Region," Suleiman and Bello examine the CJTF as an additional force in the fight against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, utilizing Borno State as a case study. Internally displaced people (IDP) camps have been successfully protected, direct attacks have

been carried out, and intelligence gathering has been facilitated by the CJTF. But there have been some difficulties with this collaboration. Even though the CJTF has helped apprehend militants who have infiltrated communities, some of the group's members have been charged with violating human rights, including harassing and abusing locals. The results indicate that if appropriate demobilization is not carried out, the persistent militarization of young people may lead to problems in the area. To guarantee a smooth reunion with local communities, the authors propose a comprehensive strategy that incorporates coordinated counseling, skill-building initiatives, and security agency recruitment.

Akaba et al. (2024) analyze the dedication of non-state security actors, especially the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), to fighting terrorism in Borno State, Nigeria. al. in their paper "A Study of Civilian Joint Task Force in Borno State: Voluntary Security Outfit and the Fight against Terrorism in Nigeria." The study focused on ten experts from a variety of professions and used Key Informant Interviews (KII) as part of its qualitative methodology. The Partnership Theory of Crime Prevention and Resistance Theory was also used by the study as a foundation for its conclusions. The findings demonstrate how the CJTF, in cooperation with state security agencies, has grown to be an essential component of Borno State's counterterrorism efforts by assisting in the identification, apprehension, and disruption of Boko Haram activities. In order to increase effectiveness and intelligence gathering, the study emphasizes the significance of community-based security initiatives, local sensitization campaigns, and local volunteer security mechanisms. In conclusion, the authors support the growth of volunteer security organizations as a means of preserving law and order in unstable areas of Nigeria. In his work "Human Security Initiatives for National Security Crisis: Vigilant Civilian Groups and Counterinsurgency from Below in North-Eastern Nigeria,"

Oyewole (2023) argues that the prevalent state-led narrative regarding Boko Haram militancy is largely inaccurate because it ignores the significant role that local, civilian-backed counterinsurgency campaigns have played in North-eastern Nigeria. The study claims that the establishment of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in 2013 is evidence of "counterinsurgency from below," whereby residents organized resistance and vigilance against Boko Haram after becoming worried about their safety. Based on the human security theory, the study demonstrates that community-based strategies not only filled significant gaps left by state forces

but also reinterpreted national security to include non-state actors as significant players. Oyewole concludes by highlighting the importance of incorporating these community-driven projects into larger counterinsurgency operations and claiming that a nuanced approach that gives equal weight to state capability and local resilience is necessary to establish long-lasting peace and security in areas plagued by violence.

Utilising the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Borno State as a major case study, Ozden and Kwabe (2023) in their article "Analysing the Impacts of Non-State Actors in Providing Security in Borno State, Nigeria: A Case of the Civilian Joint Task Force" investigate the bilateral consequences of non-state actors in providing security. The study examines the emergence of these groups in the context of the larger African narrative, which describes the adoption of locally led security measures due to the incapacity or vulnerability of the government. According to a critical analysis, the CJTF was established by locals in the impacted areas because they believed the Nigerian governments were not providing enough security. A number of issues, such as power abuse and the lack of formal accountability frameworks, have occasionally impeded the CJTF's positive contributions, which include bolstering government security programs through intelligence collection, operational support, and civilian defense.

In their paper "The Rise of Ethnic Militia, Banditry and Implications on National Security in Nigeria," Kallah et al. (2024) assess the rise in ethnic militias and banditry in Nigeria and its detrimental effects on national security using the relative deprivation and frustration-aggression theories. The paper argues that systemic dissatisfaction with Nigeria's post-colonial state structure and deep-seated institutional breakdown led to the emergence of ethnic militias like the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Drawing on documentary sources, the study identifies underdevelopment, rural deterioration, marginalization, and government indifference as the main causes of the ongoing crises. These factors all contribute to the escalation of militant agitation and unofficial resistance movements. The authors contend that because of the leaders' incapacity to confront significant issues, the country is mired in a cycle of repression and counter-resistance. Therefore, the study concludes by calling for immediate structural changes of Nigeria's federalism through thorough and historically rooted engagement in order to reduce interethnic tensions and create a more stable and equitable national framework.

In his work "Nigeria: Volunteer Vigilantism and Counter Insurgency in the North East," Chukwuma (2017) examines the dynamics of volunteer vigilantism as a local counterinsurgency mechanism in response to the atrocities carried out by Boko Haram in North-Eastern Nigeria. He gathers information through field interviews, discussions, and secondary sources in order to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of utilizing volunteer vigilante groups in addition to the military. According to the study, these groups' operations have had hitherto unseen repercussions, such as human rights abuses, retaliatory attacks by Boko Haram militants, and concerns that these vigilante elements might eventually turn violent. In order to lessen the risks to national security, the study suggests rigorous oversight, accountability systems, and appropriate disarmament following conflicts.

In an article titled "Civilian Joint Task Force and Countering Violent Extremism in the Northeast, Nigeria," Ganiyu et al. (2025) examine the changing role of the CJTF as a crucial player in eradicating violent radicalism in Northeast Nigeria. The study uses qualitative analysis to investigate how rural community members actively participate in security operations through the CJTF in ways that demonstrate their profound knowledge of the local environment, social dynamics, and threats to the community. It is founded on the ideas of community involvement and partnership policing. The study emphasizes that counter-insurgency efforts are far more effective when local actors are engaged as partners rather than passive recipients of state security measures. It also highlights how, despite being crucial in supporting official security services, the CJTF's informal and often uncontrolled structure limits its capabilities. The authors recommend that the government provide official legal recognition and institutional support to community-based security groups like the CJTF in order to enhance their legitimacy, accountability, and coordination in the fight against violent militancy.

In his 2016 paper "Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) – A Community Security Option: A Comprehensive and Proactive Approach to Counter-Terrorism," Bamidele examines the formation and developing function of the CJTF as a community-based response to the Boko Haram insurgency. The study situates the CJTF within the broader context of community security decisions and highlights proactive, citizen-led counterterrorism engagement. The author acknowledges Nigeria's conventional state-led counterterrorism tactics, including military deployment, amnesty offers, and emergency legislation, but it also emphasises how the CJTF

became a potent local force that was able to retake communities, track down militants, and rescue victims. Despite concerns that CJTF could become ethnic militias, Bamidele argues that their success in stopping Boko Haram's activities demonstrates the latent security potential in local communities. In its argument that effective counterterrorism and lasting peace in Nigeria will necessitate African-inspired solutions that enable local actors as valid partners in the national security architecture; the paper promotes the institutionalisation of community security models that are based on indigenous, people-centred approaches.

Theoretical Framework: Principal-Agent Theory

Principal-Agent Theory (PAT) offers a strong theoretical foundation for examining the intricate relationship between the Nigerian government and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in northeastern Nigeria. PAT, which originated in organizational and economic theory, studies relationships in which one party (the principal) gives another (the agent) the authority to carry out particular tasks (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). In Nigeria, a traditional principal-agent dynamic rife with difficulties that jeopardize national security has been established as the government (principal) has successfully assigned counterinsurgency operations to the CJTF (agent).

Theoretical Underpinnings and Principal Proponents

A number of significant academics laid the conceptual underpinnings of PAT. Three fundamental agency issues were identified in Jensen and Meckling's (1976) groundbreaking study: disparities in risk aversion, goal incongruence, and information asymmetry. The economic theory of agency was developed by Ross (1973), who focused on the impact of information gaps on contractual relationships. These theoretical frameworks effectively capture the relationship between the Nigerian government and the CJTF, wherein the local militia may not always act in the state's best interest despite having superior knowledge of community dynamics and insurgent activities (Aghedo, 2015). Some CJTF members violate human rights in spite of their official counterinsurgency mandate, which can be explained by Eisenhardt's (1989) expansion of PAT to include behavioral components.

Principal-Agent Theory and the National Security Risks of Civilian Joint Task Force Operations in Northeastern Nigeria

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was established in 2013 as a community-based security effort to counter the Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. Although the group was initially successful in supplying local security and intelligence, its activities have sparked growing worries about their potential to affect national security. A strong framework for comprehending these security risks via the prism of accountability deficiencies, incentive misalignment, and delegation issues is offered by the application of Principal-Agent Theory (PAT) (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). A classic agency problem with information asymmetries and conflicting interests is created in this relationship, where the Nigerian state acts as the principal and has assigned security responsibilities to the CJTF as its agent.

The loss of the state's monopoly on violence, a central Weberian idea of contemporary statehood, poses a serious threat (Weber, 1919). Despite being authorized at first, the CJTF's armed operations have produced parallel security structures that are increasingly functioning outside of official state authority (International Crisis Group, 2020). When agents form independent power bases and local allegiances that surpass their assigned mandate, Principal-Agent Theory predicts such an outcome (Shleifer & Vishny, 1997). This is especially risky in the Northeast region of Nigeria, where the growth of armed non-state actors may prolong violent cycles even after the Boko Haram insurgency has been subdued.

Another major national security threat that PAT helps explain is the documented human rights violations committed by the CJTF. CJTF members have been accused of extrajudicial executions, torture, and arbitrary detentions in a number of reports (Amnesty International, 2021). These behaviors demonstrate the moral hazard issues that arise in principal-agent relationships, in which agents take unwarranted risks knowing that the principal will ultimately pay the price (Arrow, 1985). Such abuses not only undermine counterinsurgency efforts by alienating local populations but also risk creating new grievances that violent extremists can exploit for recruitment (Aghedo, 2015). These issues are exacerbated by the Nigerian government's limited ability to oversee and manage CJTF operations, illustrating the agency costs mentioned in PAT literature (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

Additional security flaws are brought about by the state and CJTF's information asymmetries. Members of the CJTF are local actors with superior knowledge of insurgent activities and community dynamics. But according to PAT, agents might purposefully conceal or alter information in order to further their own objectives (Holmström, 1979). Some CJTF members are suspected of engaging in rent-seeking activities, such as extortion at checkpoints and cooperation with criminal organizations (Onuoha, 2019). These actions may lead to perverse incentives where maintaining conflict becomes profitable for some CJTF members in addition to undermining security operations.

The "agency slack" phenomenon outlined in PAT literature is exemplified by the progressive criminalization of certain CJTF factions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Some members have reportedly switched from counterinsurgency activities to outright criminal behavior, such as arms trafficking and protection rackets, in the absence of proper monitoring and accountability mechanisms (Baczko et al., 2017). This development is consistent with PAT's predictions regarding agent opportunism in situations where incentives are out of sync and oversight is inadequate. Conflicting directives from different principals (in this case, different security agencies) cause agent dysfunction, which is reflected in the multiple principal problem in agency theory. Inter-agency conflicts between the CJTF and formal security forces further complicate the situation (Dixit, 2002).

PAT proposes a number of institutional solutions to lessen these risks. By making expectations and accountability clear, formalizing the CJTF's status through explicit legal frameworks and oversight procedures may help to minimize agency issues (Fama & Jensen, 1983). CJTF conduct may be more in line with state security goals if performance-based incentive programs that reward adherence to human rights norms are implemented (Holmström, 1979). Most importantly, a phased program of demobilization and reintegration would channel the local knowledge of CJTF members into more structured security arrangements while also aiding in the reassertion of the state's security monopoly (Huntington, 1957).

The CJTF case demonstrates how PAT provides valuable insights into the security risks posed by state-sanctioned militias. The theory helps explain how information asymmetries, incentive misalignment, and weak oversight mechanisms can transform initially beneficial security arrangements into threats to national security. For Nigeria, addressing these agency problems is

crucial not only for defeating Boko Haram but also for preventing the emergence of new security challenges in the conflict's aftermath. Beyond Nigeria, the lessons provide warnings for other conflict areas where governments depend on non-state armed groups to maintain security.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that while the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has played an instrumental role in Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram, its integration into national security operations presents significant dilemmas. The CJTF's local legitimacy and tactical effectiveness have filled critical gaps left by state forces, yet its lack of formal oversight, legal ambiguity, and documented human rights abuses undermine long-term stability. The research highlights a fundamental tension: reliance on informal militias may yield short-term security gains but risks eroding the state's monopoly on violence and entrenching unaccountable power structures. Without robust regulatory frameworks, the CJTF's continued presence could perpetuate cycles of violence and weaken institutional trust, posing a threat to post-conflict recovery in Northeast Nigeria. The results highlight the necessity of a well-rounded strategy that addresses the risks of the CJTF while acknowledging its contributions. To stop the group from becoming an unruly armed faction, policymakers must give top priority to formalizing its status, putting in place accountability systems, and creating clear demobilization procedures. This study adds to broader discussions on pro-government militias in fragile states outside of Nigeria by highlighting the need to balance their usefulness against long-term governance and security sector reform. In the end, maintaining a lasting peace necessitates not only eliminating insurgents but also making sure that counterinsurgency tactics don't unintentionally create new sources of instability.

Recommendations

The Nigerian government should give top priority to formalizing the CJTF's legal status and integrating its members into organized security frameworks with distinct chains of command in order to reduce the risks connected with the group's participation in Nigeria's security operations. Standardized training programs on human rights and rule-of-law principles should be established, along with strong oversight procedures to guarantee that wrongdoers are held accountable. To stop former CJTF members from joining armed groups again, a phased demobilization and reintegration plan that provides them with economic opportunities and

vocational training should be created. In order to resolve complaints resulting from the CJTF's operations and restore confidence between the militia, civilians, and state security forces, community-based reconciliation programs should also be put into place. Nigeria's international partners ought to back these initiatives by offering technical assistance for the reform of the security sector, which should include enhancing the ability of legal and law enforcement organizations to deal with abuses involving militias. Community security discussions and early warning systems should be given top priority in donor programs in order to keep an eye on militia activity while fortifying official security measures. In order to provide insights for other fragile states dealing with comparable issues, research should also be supported to monitor the long-term effects of militia integration on post-conflict stability. By taking a comprehensive strategy that strikes a balance between immediate security requirements and long-term institutional resilience, Nigeria can maximize the CJTF's local benefits and reduce its potential for instability.

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