



The Impact of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Combating the Boko Haram Terrorist Organization in Nigeria

Nijerya'da Boko Haram Terör Örgütüyle Mücadelede Sivil Müşterek Görev Gücünün (CJTF) Etkisi

Huriye YILDIRIM ÇINAR*

Abstract

In counter-terrorism efforts, civilian elements can be extremely effective in raising public awareness and securing support, preventing terrorist acts in advance, and neutralizing terrorist elements quickly and effectively. In countries like Nigeria, which face political, military, and economic problems during the state-building process following a long period of colonial rule, and where security forces are insufficient, civilian joint task forces play a crucial role. Utilizing qualitative research techniques, this study investigates the impact of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) against Boko Haram in Nigeria. The study's findings indicate that the CJTF has achieved significant successes against terrorist elements, particularly in areas where state control is weak and security forces are inadequate. However, the findings also reveal that while the CJTF has made significant contributions to counter-terrorism efforts, its activities have also raised some debates regarding legal oversight, accountability, and human rights practices.

Keywords: Nigeria, Boko Haram, Counter-terrorism, Civilian Elements in Counter-terrorism, Civilian Joint Task Force

Özet

Terörizmle mücadelede sivil unsurlar, kamuoyunu bilinçlendirmede ve destek sağlamada, terör eylemlerini önceden engellemede ve terörist unsurları hızlı ve etkili bir şekilde etkisiz hale getirmede son derece etkili olabilir. Uzun sömürge yönetimi sonrasında devlet inşası sürecinde siyasi, askeri ve ekonomik problemleri olan ve güvenlik güçlerinin yetersiz kaldığı Nijerya gibi ülkelerde sivil müşterek görev güçleri önemli işlevlere sahip olmaktadır. Nitel araştırma tekniklerinden yararlanan bu çalışma Nijerya'da Boko Haram'a karşı Sivil Müşterek Görev Gücü'nün (CJTF) etkilerini araştırmaktadır. Çalışmanın bulguları, CJTF'in bilhassa devlet kontrolünün zayıf olduğu ve güvenlik birimlerinin yetersiz kaldığı bölgelerde terörist unsurlara karşı önemli başarılar elde ettiğini göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte bulgular, CJTF'in terörle mücadele süreçlerinde önemli katkılar sunduğunu, ancak faaliyetlerinin hukuki denetim, hesap verebilirlik ve insan hakları uygulamaları bağlamında bazı tartışmaları da beraberinde getirdiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Nijerya, Boko Haram, Terörle Mücadele, Terörle Mücadelede Sivil Unsurlar, Sivil Ortak Görev Gücü

* Asst. Prof. Dr., Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Erciş Faculty of Business Administration, huriyeyildirimcinar@yyu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-3052-617X

Introduction

Existing research indicates that local communities and civilian actors often contribute to counter-terrorism efforts by providing valuable information, identifying potential threats at an early stage, and assisting state security institutions in areas where government presence is limited (Bateson, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2017; Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2018a). Community participation, support, and awareness have been identified as critical factors in neutralising terrorists and preventing future terrorist activities. Civilian elements have the capacity to contribute to the global effort to combat terrorism in a number of ways. Firstly, it is vital to emphasise the discord between terrorist activities and societal values to prevent terrorists from gaining traction within the community. Secondly, the presence of civilian elements within a given context has been demonstrated to facilitate a more expeditious neutralisation of terrorist activities and entities by means of the identification of suspicious activities or individuals, and the subsequent dissemination of relevant information to security forces. Furthermore, civilian elements can play a pivotal role in thwarting the radicalization of potential terrorists by aiding in the recognition of signs of radicalization within the community and providing necessary support to these individuals. Ultimately it can be argued that community participation, support, and awareness are critical factors in neutralising terrorists and preventing future terrorist activities.

The Boko Haram (Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād) terrorist organization, which emerged in Maiduguri, Nigeria, in 2002, quickly expanded its influence to neighboring countries. From its founding in 2002 until its violent insurgency in 2009, Boko Haram largely followed a strategy of non-violent behavior, social criticism, and self-isolation; during this period, there were only a few assassination attempts and limited clashes with security forces (Loimeier, 2012: 150-151). Following the assassination of its founding leader in 2009, and under the leadership of his successor, Abubakar Shekau, the violence rapidly escalated. In response, the Nigerian government implemented various counter-terrorism strategies, including amnesty negotiations, the imposition of a state of emergency in the northeast, increased security spending, and military deployment. Among these security measures, the Joint Civilian Task Force (CJTF) emerged, initially as a societal effort and later as a joint effort with security forces to combat Boko Haram. CJTF has contributed to liberating towns and villages from Boko Haram, ensuring the safety of women and children in the northeast, and helping to identify Boko Haram members protected by some terrorist collaborators within the population (Center for Civilians in Conflict [CIVIC], 2018b).

While the CJTF has made the aforementioned contributions in the fight against Boko Haram, it has also created certain security threats stemming from the organization's structure and lack of oversight. Due to the CJTF's unlawful and excessive use of force in its fight against the terrorist group, many individuals who have lost family and loved ones have developed negative attitudes towards the Nigerian state. Influenced by the propaganda of the Boko Haram's preachers, these individuals may, over time, become involved in terrorist acts driven by manipulated feelings such as seeking revenge for their loved ones or liberating their people from state oppression. Furthermore, numerous former militants who managed to escape the terrorist group have been forced to rejoin it due to the harassment and detention they face from both law enforcement and the CJTF (Global Public Policy Institute, 2025).

Although the literature on vigilantism has grown substantially over the past two decades, existing research has generally developed along three main directions. The first focuses on the conceptual and normative dimensions of vigilantism, examining issues such as legitimacy, state authority, and moral responsibility (Johnston, 1996; Sundar, 2010; Locke, 2022). A second body of literature explores community-based armed groups and hybrid security governance, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states. A third strand concentrates on the CJTF in northeastern Nigeria, primarily assessing its operational contribution to the fight against Boko Haram or highlighting concerns related to human rights and accountability. While these studies have generated valuable insights, they have rarely brought these perspectives together. In particular, limited attention has been paid to how the CJTF's operational role in counter-terrorism intersects with broader debates on state capacity, hybrid security governance, and the implications of civilian participation in security provision. By addressing these interconnected dimensions, this study examines the CJTF not simply as a local vigilante formation, but as a hybrid security actor whose involvement in counter-terrorism both strengthens state security efforts and generates new challenges for governance, accountability, and the state's long-term monopoly over the legitimate use of force.

This study employs a qualitative case study to examine the role of the CJTF in Nigeria's efforts to combat Boko Haram. Drawing on academic literature, policy documents, reports from international and non-governmental organizations, and credible media sources, the study uses document analysis and thematic analysis to evaluate the CJTF's contribution to local security. Particular attention is paid to its impact on counter-terrorism effectiveness, accountability, human rights, and state-society relations. By doing so, the study seeks to highlight both the opportunities and the challenges that emerge when civilian actors become involved in security provision. The first part examines the establishment, aims, escalation of violence, and the emergence of new groups within the Boko Haram terrorist organization, which has caused widespread destruction in Nigeria and surrounding areas since 2009. The second part addresses the national and international dimensions of the Nigerian government's strategies for combating Boko Haram. The final part first examines the concept of "vigilantism," a subject with limited research in the literature, in detail.

Following this, the establishment, organizational structure, control mechanisms, relationship with the state, and positive and negative impacts of CJTF formations on counter-terrorism are discussed. Examining the issue of vigilantism in the case of Boko Haram is crucial for discussing its role and impact in counter-terrorism. The emergence of Boko Haram, its rapid rise to power, and the security vacuum it created within the Nigerian state led to the emergence of the CJTF, a concrete example of vigilante groups, particularly in the rural areas of northeastern Nigeria where the Abuja government's influence was limited. Therefore, examining the CJTF's role in combating Boko Haram offers a vital analytical perspective for understanding the transformation of security structures in counter-terrorism in Nigeria and the potential impact of the CJTF on this effort. At the same time, however, the CJTF's contribution to counter-terrorism should not obscure the risks associated with vigilantism; without effective legal frameworks, institutional oversight, and accountability mechanisms, the CJTF may generate adverse consequences—including human rights violations, abuses of power, and challenges to long-term state authority—alongside its security benefits.

1. Boko Haram: Ideological Roots, Organizational Structure and Terrorist Strategies

Boko Haram is a terrorist organization with a jihadist Salafist ideology that emerged in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in Nigeria, in 2002 (Reinert and Garçon, 2014: 9). Although the emergence of Salafist movements in Nigeria dates back to the early years of independence, the history of Salafism in the region actually goes back much further. The Sokoto Caliphate and Osman dan Fodio's jihad movement in 1804 inspired the formation of opposition movements against colonial rule by the people of the region (Audu and Osuala, 2015: 29). In these formations and Salafist groups, the view prevailed that colonial rule and subsequent neocolonial practices, built on Western values and modernity, were the cause of the structural problems in Northern Nigeria, where a large part of the population is Muslim. Therefore, Salafi leaders in the region, such as Aminu Kano, Abubakar Gumi, and Ahmedu Bello, have argued that the problems can be resolved through a system based on Sharia law.

Not all Salafist groups in Nigeria that viewed Sharia-based governance as a solution were radical. The majority of mainstream Salafists maintained more moderate relations with the state and the Nigerian population outside of Salafist circles, often offering criticism rather than taking action. However, after independence, Salafist groups such as the Maitatsine Movement (Isichei, 1987), the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (Gray and Adeakin, 2019), and the Izala Movement gradually became more radical, adopting radical rhetoric and actions against the secular state, the non-Muslim Nigerian population, and even Muslims who did not share their views.

Among these groups, the Izala Movement emerged from among the founding leaders of the Boko Haram terrorist organization. Its full name is "Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah Wa Iqamatus Sunnah" (Group for the Abolition of Innovations and the Re-encouragement of Sunnah), and it was founded in 1978 in Jos, Nigeria, by Sheikh Ismail Idris, a student of Abubakar Gumi (Thurston, 2016: 95). Nigerian Salafists who were receiving education in Saudi Arabia at the time played a significant role in Izala's founding. The Izala Movement aimed to combat beliefs and practices it considered heretical (*bid'ah*). However, unlike many other Salafist groups, Izala adopted a moderate stance regarding the inclusion of women in the movement and the opening of schools providing modern religious education (Loimeier, 2012: 141).

In the following years, the Izala movement split into two factions, Kaduna and Jos, as the debate over whether Sufis should be considered Muslims intensified within the movement. The Jos faction, led by Ismaila Idris, adopted a harsher stance against Sufis (Amara, 2012: 76). The Kaduna faction, on the other hand, consisted of educated Salafis who had studied at the Islamic University of Medina and had strong ties to Saudi Arabia. Led by Musa Mai Gandhi, the Kaduna faction adopted a more moderate attitude towards Sufis (Loimeier, 2012: 145). The rivalry between the Jos and Kaduna factions within the Izala Movement intensified further after the death of Abubakar Gumi, a prominent Salafi figure in Nigeria, in 1992. As a result of this conflict, a group that broke away from Izala formed a new organization called "ahl al-sunna wa-l-jama'a" (People of the Sunnah and the Community) under the leadership of Ja'far Mahmoud Adam (Higazi and Brisset-Foucault, 2013: 146).

Mahmoud Adam, educated in Medina, is an influential Salafi figure in Nigerian political life. He played a significant role in the implementation of Sharia law in some

northern Nigerian states in 1999, particularly in Kano state, where he held political positions (Brigaglia, 2012). Furthermore, Mahmoud Adam trained numerous Salafis in northern Nigeria, one of whom is Muhammad Yusuf, known as the founder of Boko Haram. Muhammad Yusuf remained with his mentor, Mahmoud Adam, until 2001. In 2001, Muhammad Yusuf and his followers began advocating for military intervention against the Nigerian state. In contrast, Mahmoud Adam adopted a more moderate stance towards the state, advocating for the Islamization of state institutions over a long period. Adam and his followers also did not harbor negative views towards Western-style and secular educational institutions during this long process (Mohammed, 2014: 2-4).

Ultimately, Muhammad Yusuf, as a jihadist Salafist, began to increase his influence in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. According to Yusuf and his followers, the problems faced by Muslims living in Northern Nigeria are caused by the secular Nigerian state. This group is opposed to democracy, modern law, Western values, and modern education. According to Muhammad Yusuf and his followers, Nigerians raised with a Western-style education lose their own identities and become individuals who work for the interests and demands of the West. Indeed, the political elites of the secular Nigerian state established after independence were also educated in these Western educational institutions, prioritizing the interests of the West and their own personal interests, ignoring the demands of the people (Maiangwa and Agbibo, 2014: 51). Therefore, Boko Haram members refer to these individuals as “Yan Boko” (children of the book) and have launched a struggle against them that sometimes involves violence. Ultimately, Boko Haram promised Nigerian Muslims a prosperous life by completely dismantling the system imposed on Nigerians by colonial powers and replacing it with a state governed by Islam and Sharia law.

Aside from ideological factors, socioeconomic and political conditions in northern Nigeria have also been highly influential in the emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist organization. Despite Nigeria being one of the world’s leading hydrocarbon producers, the northern states have suffered from deep poverty, unemployment, inadequate public services, weak state institutions, and widespread political exclusion in the years following independence (Agbibo, 2013; Thurston, 2017). Researchers specializing in security and terrorism, such as Agbibo, Thurston, and Onuoha, argue that the rise of Boko Haram and its rapid rise to widespread support cannot be explained solely by ideology; rather, they maintain that economic problems, corruption, mismanagement, and the central government’s inability to provide security and public services were more influential factors. (Agbibo, 2013; Onuoha, 2014; Thurston, 2017). Furthermore, while the transition to civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999 led to expectations of economic development and political participation in the north, no significant progress has been made in that region in the years since. Consequently, the emergence and rise of the Boko Haram terrorist organization can be interpreted as a consequence of the political and socioeconomic inequalities in Northern Nigeria during the post-colonial period (Agbibo, 2013; Onuoha, 2014).

The Boko Haram organization, founded on the ideological basis described above, rarely resorted to violence between 2002 and 2009. However, in 2009, in Bauchi State, Nigeria, a group of Boko Haram members, while returning from a funeral on motorcycles, refused to comply with the rule of wearing helmets and ignored a stop order from Nigerian police at a police checkpoint. A clash ensued between the group members and the police, resulting in 17 Boko Haram militants being wounded. The refusal of Nigerian hospitals to admit the wounded militants increased tensions in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states. In a large-scale operation launched by the Nigerian government against Boko Haram members

in the region, 19 members of the organization were killed. In response, Muhammed Yusuf wrote an open letter to the Abuja government, inviting his followers to wage war against the state (Afzal, 2020: 4-5). Thus, a war between the Nigerian state and Boko Haram began in July 2009. During the escalating clashes between July 27-30, 2009, approximately 1000 people died, and Boko Haram leaders such as Muhammed Yusuf, his father-in-law Baba Fugu Muhammed, and Buji Foi were arrested by Nigerian police (Onuoha, 2012: 1-6). However, the killing of Muhammed Yusuf by police during this arrest caused widespread outrage among Boko Haram members and sympathizers in Northern Nigeria (Higazi and Brisset-Foucault, 2013: 152-153).

Following the assassination of Muhammad Yusuf and the subsequent rise of Abubakar Shekau to leadership, Boko Haram terrorism began to spread in northern Nigeria and surrounding areas. Shekau's extremely violent actions against non-Muslims, including women, children, and the elderly, caused divisions within the organization's command structure. During this period, high-ranking militants, such as Khalid al-Bernawi, who had contact with al-Qaeda, wrote letters to al-Qaeda leaders regarding Shekau's practices and his use of the organization's resources for his own benefit. These dissenting militants eventually broke away from Shekau's leadership and, with support from al-Qaeda, formed the Ansar al-Musulmina fi Bilad al-Sudan (ANSARU) organization (Zenn and Weiss, 2021). While ANSARU was influential in Nigeria and surrounding areas for a time, it began to weaken in 2013 and disbanded in 2016 following the capture of its leader, Khalid al-Bernawi. Although the organization was said to have disbanded, it re-emerged when ANSARU claimed responsibility for an attack on January 15, 2020 (Crisis Group, January 2020).

The second significant split within Boko Haram occurred in August 2016. As is known, the chaos created by the conflicts in Iraq and Syria following the Syrian civil war allowed radical organizations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda to gain power and expand their operations in the region. ISIS, in particular, attracted significant international attention in 2014 by seizing control of northern Iraq. During this period, the organization increased its influence and carried out terrorist acts in Iraqi and Syrian territories. However, with the intervention of the international coalition forces, the areas under ISIS control decreased, and the organization weakened. This weakening process led to the organization strategically expanding to other regions. Sub-Saharan Africa emerged as an alternative target. In particular, factors such as weak state structures, ethnic and religious conflicts, poverty, and social unrest in the region created fertile ground for terrorist organizations to operate there. Some high-ranking militants and followers of Shekau, a member of Boko Haram, who had disagreements with him, began interacting with ISIS, which was increasingly gaining influence in the region (Warner and Hulme, 2018). In August 2016, a group of militants led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi, son of Muhammad Yusuf, established the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a branch of ISIS (Yahaya, 2020). In its early days, ISWAP was mainly active in Yobe State, Nigeria, and the surrounding areas of Cameroon. However, in recent years, ISWAP has entered into intense competition with the Jama'atu Ahl al-Sunna Lid Da'wati wa al-Jihad (JAS) group, which remained under Shekau's leadership (Bello, 2021: 8). In one of the intense clashes between these two groups, JAS leader Abubakar Shekau, realizing he was cornered, committed suicide by detonating an explosive vest he was wearing. During the leadership of Doron Bakura, who succeeded Shekau as JAS leader, the conflicts with ISWAP continued to intensify (Daily Sabah, June 18, 2021).

The Boko Haram terrorist organization, which expanded its influence in waves from Maiduguri in 2002, has reached a capacity to operate in a vast region encompassing Niger,

Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Benin, with two factions splitting from its ranks and foreign terrorists from various countries. Having caused the deaths of tens of thousands of people and displaced more than two million since 2009, the organization was ranked as the world's deadliest terrorist organization in the 2015 Global Terrorism Index report (Afzal, 2020). Following developments in the Middle East and changes in global politics, the organization's attacks on both secular state mechanisms and other radical groups in the region have placed regional security under more complex threats. Indeed, after 2016, the collaboration between ISIS and Al-Qaeda and various other terrorist groups in Sub-Saharan Africa led to the emergence of new terrorist formations and the creation of different arenas of conflict. These formations began to carry out attacks against both regional states and populations, as well as against other competing terrorist organizations.

Moreover, the fragmentation of Boko Haram into rival factions linked to different transnational jihadist networks significantly complicated Nigeria's security environment. ISWAP's alignment with ISIS and ANSARU's connections to Al-Qaeda created a situation in which multiple militant actors pursued distinct strategies while operating within the same conflict space. Rather than diminishing the overall threat, these groups broadened recruitment channels, strengthened external linkages, diversified their tactics, and intensified competition for influence among local communities. As a result, Nigerian security forces were no longer confronting a single insurgent movement but a network of interconnected militant organizations with both local roots and global affiliations. This increasingly fragmented landscape highlighted the shortcomings of purely military approaches and contributed to a prolonged security crisis that has remained difficult for the Nigerian state to manage effectively.

In this environment where threat perceptions have become complex, African states, already struggling with numerous structural problems, have been put at a disadvantage in the fight against terrorism. The Nigerian case illustrates how Boko Haram's transformation from a locally based insurgent movement into a fragmented network with connections to both ISIS and Al-Qaeda has contributed to the persistence of conflict and altered the dynamics of security governance in the country. As the threat became more complex and difficult for state institutions to address on their own, non-state actors such as the CJTF emerged as important participants in counter-terrorism efforts.

2. Nigerian Government Strategies for Combating Boko Haram

Following the arrest and subsequent killing of Muhammad Yusuf by police in 2009, Boko Haram launched violent attacks in northern Nigeria. As the security situation worsened, then-President Umaru Musa Yar'adua appointed Major General Saleh Maina to lead the fight against terrorism. Under Maina's command, Nigerian security forces launched an intense and extremely violent campaign against Boko Haram terrorism (Smith, 2009). During this period, the fact that Boko Haram terrorists often mingled with the civilian population led to numerous civilian casualties as a result of interventions by Nigerian law enforcement. These civilian casualties fueled criticism of the central government and increased terrorist attacks.

During the period when Boko Haram carried out its most violent attacks in 2009, President Yar'adua left the country for treatment at a clinic in Saudi Arabia due to a heart condition. The power vacuum created by the president's absence made Nigeria's security situation even more complex (Ani and Dada, 2017). After news of Yar'adua's death, Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian leader, was appointed as his successor. Following the

transition period, Jonathan ran in and won the presidential election (Stearns, 2011). The election of a Christian leader caused unease among both the Muslim public and Boko Haram members, and the political crisis in the country intensified. In response to this deepening crisis, Goodluck Jonathan launched a multi-faceted fight against Boko Haram and other radical groups on June 12, 2011, by establishing the “Joint Task Force-Operation Restore Order” (Osakwe and Audu, 2017: 4). During Jonathan’s administration, in addition to military strategies, legislative work was also undertaken to combat terrorism. Following Boko Haram’s increased financial strength through attacks on farmers and banks, a state of emergency was declared in Borno, Adamawa, Niger, and Plateau states on December 31, 2011. However, these states of emergency measures did not yield the expected successful results; on the contrary, they created new crises in national security due to the unlawful and excessively violent practices of law enforcement and the inability to access the organization’s assets (Comolli, 2015: 191-192).

In the face of the escalating violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, the government in Abuja initiated a negotiation process with the insurgents in April 2013. This development was made possible by the concerted efforts of prominent opinion leaders in the north of the country, including the “Northern Elders Forum” and the “Northern Governors Forum”. However, the process was halted when President Jonathan declared that he would not negotiate with the insurgents, thus bringing the negotiation process to a close. This was followed by the declaration of a second state of emergency on 14 May 2013 (Ayebusi and Rukema, 2019: 115).

This declaration of a state of emergency caused great anxiety among the public due to the events during the first state of emergency. Indeed, shortly after, during the second state of emergency, Nigerian law enforcement and intelligence agencies, acting on faulty intelligence while distinguishing between terrorist members and civilians, arrested numerous innocent individuals, and many were subjected to unlawful and excessive violence. At this point, the local population, fearing both the terrorist organization and the unlawful actions of state law enforcement, turned to developing their own strategies to combat Boko Haram terrorism. In this process, a group of young Nigerians came together in Maiduguri, where Boko Haram first emerged, to form the CJTF.). As will be examined in detail in the next section, the actions of this formation did not yield the desired results against Boko Haram and led to the emergence of new political and military problems.

Goodluck Jonathan, who was in power between 2010 and 2015, was largely unsuccessful in bringing peace and stability to the country, leading to widespread public backlash. Consequently, he was not re-elected in the March 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria. The elections were won by Muhammadu Buhari, who had seized power in a military coup in 1983 and led a junta regime for two years. Buhari had also run for president before the 2015 elections, but failed to win. In the 2015 elections, Nigerian voters, reacting strongly to the deep crises created by Jonathan’s rule, supported Buhari, the candidate of the opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC) (BBC, April 1, 2015). During Buhari’s term, which lasted from 2015 to 2023, the Nigerian government conducted military operations against Boko Haram and attempted to reclaim areas controlled by the terrorist group. While these operations have achieved some success, Boko Haram remains an active threat. Numerous civilian casualties and human rights violations have occurred during military operations. There are several international reports of arbitrary detentions, torture, and house arrests by government forces under the pretext of combating terrorism. This has

led to criticism that the Buhari government should adopt a more humane approach to counter-terrorism.

During his presidency, Muhammadu Buhari also placed great emphasis on international cooperation in the fight against Boko Haram. Nigeria's cooperation with the international community, particularly with neighboring countries, in combating Boko Haram terrorism included joint efforts in areas such as information sharing, military support, training of law enforcement, border protection, and preventing the financing of terrorism. For example, the best-known international cooperation undertaken during the Buhari era to combat Boko Haram is the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), composed of the armies of Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Benin, and Cameroon. The foundation of this formation was laid in 1994 by Nigeria's then-President Sani Abacha to combat criminal organizations in the northern regions of the country. However, due to increasing terrorist incidents, counter-terrorism was also included in the MNJTF's mandate in April 2012 (Yakubu, Aideloje, and Babawale, 2022: 52-53). Nigeria has also individually cooperated with Western states, particularly the US, France, and the UK, in the fight against terrorism. Actions such as Boko Haram's attack on the UN building, the kidnapping of British, Chinese, French, German, Italian, and Canadian citizens, the abduction of the Chibok girls in 2014, and Boko Haram's increased cooperation with international terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda have led international actors from outside the region to become involved in the fight against the organization (Ekhomu, 2019: 247-248). Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, finding himself inadequate in combating the increasingly influential Boko Haram, has called on France, along with the UK and the US, to assist in the fight. However, given that Boko Haram terrorism continues, it can be said that these initiatives have not been entirely successful (Oshewolo et al., 2023: 29-35).

Overall, Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategies have failed to achieve the desired results. In fact, military operations, particularly those conducted during Buhari's presidency, were successful in reclaiming areas controlled by Boko Haram, disrupting the terrorist organization's logistical network, and capturing its leaders. In addition, regional and international counter-terrorism initiatives like the MNJTF have weakened Boko Haram's operational potential in Nigeria and the surrounding region by increasing intelligence sharing, cross-border operations, and military coordination among coalition forces (Campbell, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2019). However, the inability to prevent excessively violent terrorist attacks, the emergence of powerful factions with ties to global terrorist organizations such as ISWAP and ANSARU, and the deepening instability in the northeast of the country all indicate that military mechanisms have been ineffective. Widespread human rights violations, unlawful and excessive actions by security forces, and allegations of civilian casualties have damaged relations between the state and its citizens throughout the process. Furthermore, the failure of counter-terrorism strategies to focus on addressing the socioeconomic problems that fuel radicalization, beyond military measures, has limited the effectiveness of counter-terrorism initiatives in the country. Consequently, while international cooperation and military operations remain indispensable elements of counter-terrorism in Nigeria, the ultimate solution can only be achieved through a more comprehensive roadmap encompassing reforms within security forces, nationwide socioeconomic development, and strengthening the bond between the state and its citizens.

3. Vigilantism in the Fight Against Boko Haram and the Joint Civilian Task Force in Nigeria

Before examining the CJTF example that emerged in the fight against Boko Haram in Nigeria, it is appropriate to address the theoretical framework of the concept of “vigilantism.” This is because the CJTF is an example of entirely civilian-based self-defense and struggle that has taken shape in an environment where the state’s security monopoly has weakened, citizens’ trust in state institutions has been severely undermined, and the terrorist threat has surpassed ordinary legal mechanisms. Understanding the nature of such formations, their legitimacy, and the complex relationship they establish with the state requires first focusing on the definitional boundaries of the vigilantism concept, its historical transformation, and its manifestations in different societies. Accordingly, the basic definitions of the concept, its components, and the tense relationship between state and popular justice will be discussed in detail below, in light of the relevant literature.

3.1. Conceptual Examination of Vigilantism

The concept of vigilantism, which is related to many political issues such as the role of the state, the functioning of the law, social class dynamics, and international relations, has a limited number of studies in the political science literature. The limited research on this subject prevents concrete definitions of vigilantism. Therefore, a more in-depth examination and understanding of the phenomenon of vigilantism, which is linked to fundamental political issues such as the role of the state, the functioning of the law, social class dynamics, and international relations, is needed. More detailed and clear examinations of the concept can contribute to the development of comprehensive policy recommendations and effective solution strategies.

The word “vigilante” is derived from the Latin root “vigilans,” meaning “alert, observant, and watchful.” The concept of “vigilantism,” derived from “vigilante,” is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as “the practice of ordinary citizens taking informal actions to prevent crime in a place or to apprehend and punish those believed to be criminals” (Cambridge Dictionary). According to Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1974: 541-543), vigilantism consists of coercive actions or threats that violate the formal boundaries of an established socio-political order, but which the violators aim to protect against some form of destruction. On the other hand, Abraham defines vigilantism as an organized attempt by a group of ordinary citizens to enforce norms and maintain law and order on behalf of their communities, often resorting to violence in the perceived absence of effective formal state action through the police and courts (Kantor and Persson, 2010: 11).

Regina Bateson, after conducting detailed studies on vigilantism, arrived at a simpler definition and subsequently investigated the components of the concept. According to Bateson, vigilantism is “the extra-legal prevention, investigation, or punishment of crimes.” According to this definition, vigilantism has three components. First, vigilantism involves extra-legal actions. However, this extra-legal aspect does not mean illegal. The actions that are the subject of vigilantism go beyond the law recognized in a legal order. Therefore, a legal order exists where vigilante formations occur. For example, citizens calling the police after seeing an individual committing a crime is not a vigilante action. However, citizens observing an individual who is committing or whom they suspect is about to commit a crime, preventing the act before it happens, or apprehending and punishing them after the act has been committed, is a vigilante action. The second component of the concept is that vigilantism consists of preventative, investigative, or punitive actions. These actions can sometimes be carried out individually, and sometimes several at once. The third component of vigilantism is that it is carried out in response to a crime. The crime in question can be one defined by law, or it can be a violation of existing societal norms (Bateson, 2021).

In his 1996 article titled “What is Vigilantism?”, Les Johnson stated that vigilantism has the following six characteristics:

- Those participating in these actions must plan their actions in advance.
- Participants do so voluntarily.
- Vigilantism constitutes a social movement as a form of “autonomous citizenship”.
- Vigilantism involves the use or threat of use of force.
- It arises when an established order is threatened by a breach, potential breach, or presumed breach of institutionalized norms.
- Vigilantism aims to control crime or other social violations by offering security guarantees to both participants and others. (Les Johnston, 1996: 220)

As can be understood from the definitions, a universally accepted definition of the concept of vigilantism has yet to be established. Furthermore, different perceptions have influenced every attempt at definition, preventing a holistic view of the concept. For example, the definitions above have generally focused on security issues. However, when examining different examples of vigilantism around the world from the past to the present, it is seen that these groups try to change the existing order by raising awareness and creating a political agenda on various issues, such as youth employment, socio-economic policies of governments, and the campaigns of political candidates during election periods. As Fuller, Arango, and Keene (2019) report, homelessness in the state of California in the USA was a problem that the state government could not solve for many years. Moreover, the increasing number of unlawful attacks against the homeless exacerbated the situation. Subsequently, a group of people brought the issue of homelessness in the state to public attention through the media, leading to some steps being taken in this regard (Bateson, 2019: 2-3). Similarly, it is known that in some societies, vigilante groups conduct propaganda work for the candidates they support during political election periods.

There is a misconception that vigilantism only arises where the state has little or no capacity to ensure the safety of its citizens. However, vigilantism sometimes occurs where there is a lack of trust in the state and its law enforcement agencies. For example, as observed in Nigeria and some other African countries, citizens do not trust the state to ensure their own safety in places where the central government and security forces are perceived as corrupt and engaging in illegal practices. They even fear direct physical violence from the state and law enforcement units. Therefore, some of these citizens engage in struggles, individually or in groups, against what they perceive as threats directed at them (Kantor and Persson, 2010: 12).

At this juncture, it is pertinent to draw attention to a discernible incongruity between the notion of vigilantism and Western, state-centric conceptions of security. In Western democratic governments, “security” is recognised as a public good, and the state is obligated to provide it to its citizens (Krahmann, 2008: 399-400). However, in certain regions of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, the provision of security is undertaken by both state and non-state actors. In these societies, law enforcement services are not exclusively the monopoly of the state. Non-state actors, that is to say, individuals and groups not constituted as legal persons, may engage in surveillance, investigation, and even punishment of individuals or situations they perceive as threats to the prevailing social order.

Another complex aspect related to vigilantism is the relationship between the state and vigilante groups. Vigilante groups, which create alternatives to the state's monopoly on the use of force and operate in the grey area between legality and illegality, can be considered to exist "against the state." In some cases, this is indeed the case. In some African societies where state law enforcement uses excessive and unlawful violence and threatens ordinary citizens, some groups try to ensure their own and their communities' security. However, in some cases, vigilante groups trying to protect the existing order and the local population may be tolerated by the state and even supported financially and technically. Indeed, in Nigeria, which will be examined in detail in the next subsection, the CJTF was supported by the central government and law enforcement due to its successful activities against Boko Haram terrorism in the region.

3.2. Civilian Joint Task Force in Nigeria

On May 14, 2013, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states against the Boko Haram terrorist organization, which had been escalating its violence since 2010. However, this declaration of a state of emergency further complicated security in these states. Following the declaration of the state of emergency, numerous civilians lost their lives due to both the unlawful and excessively violent actions of security forces and Boko Haram terrorism. In addition, the public became greatly concerned about the increasing arbitrary arrests by the Nigerian army and police in these three states. Families whose members were members of the Boko Haram terrorist organization or forced to join it were forced to leave their homes due to their fear of law enforcement. Taking advantage of this chaotic environment, Boko Haram terrorists increased their activities in the region, while the Nigerian army and police proved quite inadequate in combating the increasing terrorist incidents (Comolli, 2015: 192).

In the atmosphere that emerged in northern Nigeria in 2013, most Nigerians had lost faith in the state and law enforcement agencies regarding security. Indeed, in May 2013, Baba Lawal Jafar's act of capturing an armed Boko Haram terrorist in his area in Maiduguri with only a stick and handing him over to the nearest military unit had a significant impact on the local population. Inspired by Jafar's courage, many young people came together to fight against terrorist groups in the region (Haruna, 2023).

Following the declaration of a state of emergency in May 2013 and the escalating security crisis, particularly across Borno, Yobe, and Maiduguri, local vigilante groups led by Baba Lawal Jafar began patrolling neighborhoods in early June, armed primarily with sticks and machetes. While these patrols constituted the CJTF's initial response to the growing threat posed by Boko Haram, the group quickly assumed a more active role in local security affairs. One of the earliest and most significant incidents involving the CJTF took place in Borno State on 1 June 2013. Hundreds of CJTF members set fire to the residence of Mala Othman, the chairman of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) in Borno, accusing him of providing financial support to Boko Haram. Othman was subsequently apprehended by CJTF members and handed over to the authorities (Idris, 2013). Intended as a strong warning to individuals suspected of collaborating with the insurgency, this incident revealed that the CJTF was not merely a community-based group assisting security forces by identifying and reporting militants. Rather, from its inception, the organization demonstrated a willingness to take direct action and impose its own measures in the pursuit of public security.

In the wake of these events many sources report that in Maiduguri alone, in less than a month, more than 500 individuals began organizing to fight Boko Haram. These groups in Maiduguri quickly inspired similar formations in surrounding areas. In fact, state governments in the north of the country, affected by terrorism, even encouraged their citizens to form similar groups (Dywern and Oweni, 2026).

These vigilante groups, formed in this way and called the CJTF, were also known by different local names in different states. In some places, they were called “Kato da Gora” (Men with Sticks) because individuals mostly used sticks in counter-terrorism operations, while in others they were called “Youth Vanguard.” Furthermore, these vigilante groups fighting Boko Haram in the Yobe and Adamawa regions were also known by names such as “Sarkin Baka” (King of the Arrow) and “Peace Group.” Initially, these groups patrolled the streets with simple tools like sticks and machetes, trying to protect neighborhoods, mosques, schools, and markets. Later, they also carried out intelligence gathering and surveillance activities related to Boko Haram terrorists and sympathizers (Monday, 2019: 54-56). Over time, a simple organizational structure was also established among the groups that made up the CJTF. At the first level of CJTF’s organizational structure are “unit heads” who oversee the daily operations of the group in their respective regions. These unit heads report regularly to the second-level “regional commanders,” who then relay the reports and intelligence to the “state presidents,” the highest level in the CJTF structure. Unit meetings are held every two weeks, but emergency meetings can be called in case of a crisis. Representatives from different regional formations meet with the state presidents monthly. Corruption and misconduct are prevalent within this organizational structure (Umara and Ikayese, 2018: 1549).

The success of CJTF formations in combating terrorism over time has been appreciated by the Abuja Government and state administrations. Indeed, some villages and towns were liberated from Boko Haram control as a result of CJTF operations (Gana, 2020: 347). The operations to recapture Maiha and Mubi from Boko Haram marked a turning point in the evolution of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and significantly enhanced its public profile. On 12 November 2014, CJTF spokesperson Jubrin Gunda publicly asserted that the liberation of Maiha had been achieved primarily through the efforts of CJTF members rather than Nigerian military forces. According to CJTF accounts, at least 75 Boko Haram militants were killed during the operation, while many others were forced to retreat from the area (Ajakaye, 2014).

Buoyed by this success, the CJTF expanded its activities beyond local community defense. Shortly after the Maiha operation, approximately 60 CJTF members from Maiduguri mobilized and advanced into Adamawa State to support efforts to reclaim Mubi, which had fallen under Boko Haram control. Their participation in these offensives demonstrated a growing level of confidence, coordination, and operational capability (The Will News, 2014).

These developments reflected a broader transformation within the CJTF. Initially emerging as a loosely organized network of local youths engaged primarily in neighborhood surveillance and intelligence gathering, the group increasingly evolved into a semi-organized militia force capable of conducting offensive operations alongside, and at times in the absence of, formal security institutions. The campaigns in Maiha and Mubi highlighted the CJTF’s transition from a reactive community defense initiative into a more proactive security actor, willing and able to challenge Boko Haram directly when state security forces were perceived as overstretched or ineffective.

Therefore, the Nigerian government has supported the CJTF in its fight against Boko Haram by providing military, financial, and logistical support. This support has taken various forms, including training programs, provision of weapons and equipment, intelligence sharing, operational coordination, and irregular payments to CJTF members (Umara and Ikayese, 2018: 1550). However, the fact that these payments did not cover all CJTF members and that there was no standardization in the payments received later became a source of tension in relations between the CJTF, state administrations, and the Abuja Government.

In their early days, CJTF members operated in their respective regions without any oversight or regulation. However, over time, some CJTF units and members engaged in actions and attitudes that went beyond their intended purpose and provoked a reaction from the civilian population. For example, some members arbitrarily detained people without following legal procedures. They also used violence against civilians in some northern regions of Nigeria, forcibly displacing them or looting their homes. Such unlawful and unethical actions damaged the CJTF's reputation and led to a loss of public trust. To regain this trust, the CJTF implemented measures such as training its members, subjecting them to rules, monitoring them, and applying necessary disciplinary actions. For example, in July 2019, the Nigerian government, in partnership with the UN Development Programme, provided CJTF members with training covering topics such as human rights, capacity building, and leadership (UNDP, 2019). Some of the rules imposed on CJTF members during this process can be summarized as follows:

- Members should not be seen shouting in neighborhoods and streets.
- Members must not travel to another region to apprehend suspected Boko Haram members.
- Children under 15 cannot join CJTF. (As a result of pressure from UNICEF, approximately 900 children were removed from CJTF formations in May 2019.)
- CJTF members cannot undertake engagements without military support (Umara and Ikayese, 2018: 1549).

It is possible to argue that the CJTF, operating in different regions of Nigeria since its establishment in 2013, has had both positive and negative impacts on the fight against Boko Haram. Firstly, the CJTF has played a crucial role in counter-terrorism by providing state institutions and law enforcement agencies with information-centric human and ground intelligence. Because CJTF units have a deep understanding of local socio-cultural connections, interpersonal interactions, local languages, and the geography of the region, they provide timely and reliable intelligence to law enforcement agencies involved in counter-terrorism operations, enabling them to identify Boko Haram terrorists and plan operations accordingly. The fact that CJTF members know the local population intimately also prevents terrorists from exploiting the unfamiliarity of military personnel. For example, a Boko Haram terrorist dressed and acting like a civilian could easily camouflage themselves and pass through a checkpoint. However, at a checkpoint in a rural area where CJTF members are present, it is easily apparent that the terrorist is not a local, and the necessary action can be taken. Furthermore, the reliability of CJTF's human and ground intelligence often allows terrorists to be easily isolated in their areas and quickly handed over to security forces. Thus, Boko Haram terrorists are captured in most rural areas without resorting to intense violence. On the other hand, it is known that Boko Haram terrorists in rural areas obtain food and material gain from the local population, who mostly make a

living from agriculture and livestock farming. In areas where CJTF formations are active, the terrorists' exploitation of the local population has been largely prevented (Ghana, 2020: 353-354).

The CJTF is important not only for the intelligence and action-oriented support it provides to Nigerian law enforcement, but also for the sense of security it instills in the local population in the regions where it operates, in the face of the terrorist threat. As mentioned earlier, in some areas, the local population is apprehensive not only about Boko Haram terrorism but also about the unlawful and excessively violent actions of the state's law enforcement forces. At this point, many individuals have more confidence in the CJTF members who come from within their own communities to fight terrorism. This allows for a relative calm within the community. For example, such an atmosphere was created in Maiduguri between 2014 and 2018, where the CJTF was active. As a result of the security provided in schools with the support of the CJTF, many schools in Maiduguri reopened and education resumed (Raphael and James, 2016: 477). Similarly, as a result of the security provided in health facilities in the region, the local population was able to access more healthcare services (Umara and Ikayese, 2018: 1550). Indeed, previously, many citizens were unable to access healthcare facilities even for emergencies like vaccinations and childbirth due to fears of terrorism. This has led to significant problems in public health, such as an increase in infectious diseases and widespread maternal and infant mortality during childbirth.

Numerous works in the literature suggest that vigilante groups were initially established to ensure their own safety and the safety of the local population, contributing to national security, but that this situation changed over time. Many vigilante groups eventually exceeded their authority, engaging in actions that violated the law for their own benefit and creating new security threats. Similarly, international organizations have reported that CJTF members in Nigeria committed crimes such as kidnapping, smuggling, looting, arson, and rape (Premium Times, February 8, 2018). Furthermore, some members acted as authorities, carrying out trials and executions in cases of minor offenses like theft and brawls. This ultimately damaged the CJTF's image among the Nigerian public and further complicated security issues in their areas.

Another negative impact of the CJTF on the fight against Boko Haram is the obstruction of the reintegration process of former terrorists who have left the organization. CJTF members view these former terrorists and their relatives as potential terrorists, causing them to live under great pressure and limiting their livelihoods. As a result, former terrorists whose reintegration processes are disrupted by the CJTF are forced either to rejoin the organization or to leave their locations (Onuoha, 2014: 7). Similarly, the CJTF also exhibits tendencies such as profiling and oppression against individuals whose connection to the terrorist organization is not definitively established. These restricted and ostracized individuals may eventually be forced to join criminal and terrorist organizations to survive.

The fact that CJTF included a large number of children in its ranks, especially in its early years, raised another issue. This was even listed in the appendices of the UN's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict in 2016. Following the signing of an Action Plan between the UN and Nigeria in 2017 concerning the presence of children in military formations, approximately 2,000 children were released. These children subsequently received support from UNICEF and were able to continue their education. However, it is still known that children in the northeast of the country are negatively affected by both terrorist and vigilante groups (UNICEF, 2021).

It has been reported that CJTF (Communist Youth Federation) groups occasionally interfere in Nigerian elections, attempting to usurp the people's democratic right to vote and be elected. For example, in the 2019 elections in Borno State, media reports indicated that some politicians from the ruling party used CJTF members as a tool to undermine the influence of their opponents. Similar attempts were observed before the 2023 elections, resulting in the opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) issuing a statement condemning the harassment and threats made by CJTF members against its own members (Buba, 2023).

Conclusion

This study examines the emergence, evolution, and role of the CJTF in Nigeria's fight against Boko Haram, focusing on both its contributions to counter-terrorism efforts and the challenges it created. The analysis shows that the CJTF became one of the most important actors in the fight against the Boko Haram terrorist organization, particularly at a time when the Nigerian state and security institutions struggled to provide effective protection in the northeast region and its legitimacy among the public was eroded. Leveraging its close ties with local communities, knowledge of the terrain, and ability to identify insurgent elements, the CJTF significantly contributed to limiting Boko Haram's movements, reclaiming areas under its control, and restoring a degree of security in many affected regions. For example, public service institutions such as schools and healthcare facilities, which were forced to close for years due to Boko Haram terrorism, were able to continue operating under CJTF protection.

Drawing on the example of the CJTF's impact in combating Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, it is possible to argue that in many post-colonial states where state authority is unevenly distributed and security institutions face significant operational limitations, local communities often become active participants in their own protection. Under these conditions, civilian militia organizations emerge as functional responses to immediate security threats and can play a crucial role in supporting state-led counter-terrorism efforts. The CJTF's experience clearly demonstrates that local actors can bring capabilities to the field that traditional security institutions often lack. These capabilities are not merely complementary; they are fundamentally different in nature. These include deep, place-specific local knowledge derived solely from living within a community; access to and trust within informal social networks that state forces cannot easily penetrate; a kind of social legitimacy based on shared identity and mutual experience rather than legal authority; and perhaps most importantly, the ability to maintain a sustained and accepted presence in areas that state authorities find difficult to reach, let alone control. In other words, the CJTF has succeeded precisely where the state's reach ends.

Beyond the Nigerian case, the rise of the CJTF reflects a broader transformation in contemporary counter-terrorism practices. Rather than relying exclusively on military and law-enforcement institutions, governments facing persistent insurgencies are increasingly engaging local security actors to enhance their ability to respond to evolving terrorist threats. The experience of the CJTF demonstrates that civilian involvement can serve as an important force multiplier, particularly in environments where state capacity is limited, security challenges are highly localized, and formal security institutions struggle to maintain a permanent presence. Unlike conventional security forces, community-based actors often possess detailed knowledge of local terrain, social networks, and population dynamics, enabling them to identify threats more quickly and respond more effectively. In the case of northeastern Nigeria, these advantages significantly contributed to efforts aimed

at limiting Boko Haram's operational freedom, reclaiming territory, and improving security conditions for local communities. As a result, counterterrorism strategies in such contexts have gradually evolved to incorporate closer cooperation between formal security institutions and community-based actors, moving beyond approaches that rely solely on the coercive capabilities of the state.

At the same time, the Nigerian experience highlights the inherent challenges and risks associated with this model. While vigilante organizations can contribute to immediate security gains and help fill critical gaps in state capacity, their effectiveness often comes at the cost of complex governance and accountability concerns. In the absence of effective oversight mechanisms, clearly defined mandates, and institutional control, such groups may operate beyond legal boundaries and engage in practices that undermine the very security objectives they are intended to support. Reports of abuses committed by some CJTF members, including extrajudicial killings, extortion, arbitrary detention, and other human rights violations, weakened public trust and, in some instances, generated new grievances among local populations.

Furthermore, the CJTF's actions within Nigerian security structures have also produced some other undesirable consequences. Because CJTF members generally rely on intelligence gathered within the community and widespread personal information among the local population, they have become a new source of concern due to the possibility of false reports, misidentifications, and false accusations driven by individual revenge. Unverified information and intelligence data have sometimes led to reports to security forces alleging links to Boko Haram or direct or indirect support from the organization, often stemming from personal disputes, ethnic and tribal rivalries. This has resulted in wrongful arrests, stigmatization, and social exclusion. Moreover, the collaboration of certain individuals or groups, particularly those involved in political activities, with the CJTF has the potential to intensify inter-communal polarization and create new security risks. Ultimately, while the CJTF strengthens local defense mechanisms against the terrorist organization, it can also fuel conflict among civilians, thus creating new security threats. This situation also shows that when intelligence data is not verified and accountability mechanisms for CJTF members and law enforcement agencies are not developed, the CJTF's fight against terrorism can create major political and social crises.

These developments demonstrate that the long-term success of community-based security initiatives depends not only on their operational contributions but also on their ability to maintain legitimacy and public confidence. Consequently, integrating such actors into clearly defined legal and institutional frameworks remains essential for ensuring that short-term security gains translate into sustainable peace and stability.

Therefore, the future role and effectiveness of the CJTF and similar organizations will depend not only on their operational capabilities but also on the extent to which they are integrated into broader security governance frameworks. Although these groups have demonstrated their ability to address urgent security challenges in areas where state institutions face significant constraints, their contributions are unlikely to be sustainable without clear legal foundations, institutional support, and effective oversight. Strengthening accountability mechanisms, clarifying mandates and responsibilities, improving coordination with state security agencies, and providing comprehensive training programs are essential steps toward ensuring that such organizations remain both effective and legitimate actors in local security provision.

Ultimately, the experience of the CJTF suggests that vigilante organizations should be viewed neither as substitutes for state institutions nor merely as temporary responses to security crises. Rather, they have become increasingly important actors in counter-terrorism efforts, particularly in contexts where state presence and security capacity remain limited. The sustainability of Nigeria's achievements against Boko Haram will therefore depend not only on continued military pressure against terrorist groups but also on the state's ability to effectively regulate, supervise, and institutionalize community-based security actors. Achieving this balance will be crucial for preserving the operational advantages that make such groups effective while minimizing the risks they may pose to long-term security, public trust, and social stability.

Bibliography

- Afzal, M. (2020). "From Western Education is Forbidden to the World's Deadliest Terrorist Group", Foreign Policy at Brookings, 2-28, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FP_20200507_nigeria_boko_haram_afzal.pdf, (Access Date: 10.07.2026).
- Agbiboa, D. E. (2013). "Why Boko Haram exists: The relative deprivation perspective", African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review, 3(1), 144-157. <https://doi.org/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.3.1.144>
- Ajakaye, R. (2014). "Nigeria Vigilantes Kill 75 Militants, Retake Town", Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/nigeria-vigilantes-kill-75-militants-retake-town/101736>, (Access Date: 27.05.2026).
- Amara, R. B. (2012). "Shaykh Ismaila Idris (1937-2000) Was the Founder of the Izala Movement in Nigeria", Annual Review of Islam in Africa, 11, 74-78, https://humanities.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/content_migration/humanities_uct_ac_za/1009/files/Ramzi%2520Ben%2520Amara.pdf, (Access Date: 10.07.2026).
- Ani, K. J. and Dada, J. P. (2017). "Nigerian Civil Society, the Media, and Silence that Emanated from Late President Yar'adua's Medical Trip to Saudi Arabia", Journal of African Union Studies, 6(2-3), 79-96, <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-bcbd971a5> (Access Date: 12.07.2026).
- Audu, M. S. and Osuala, U. S. (2015). "The British Conquest and Resistance of Sokoto Caliphate, 1897-1903: Crisis, Conflicts and Resistance", Historical Research Letter, 22, 29-43, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/HRL/article/view/23886> (Access Date: 11.07.2026).
- Ayebusi, T. R. and Rukema, J. R. (2019). "The Politics of Emergency Rule in North-Eastern Nigeria (2013-2014)", African Journal of Democracy & Governance, 6(2), 107-124, <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/c9acfc18-c5bc-40d3-980a-af54e7060f2d/content> (Access Date: 17.05.2026).
- Bateson, R. (2021). "The Politics of Vigilantism", Comparative Political Studies, 54(6), 923-955. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020957692>
- BBC News (2015). "Nigeria Election: Muhammadu Buhari Wins Presidency", <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32139858>, (Access Date: 14.04.2026).
- Bello, M. (2021). "The Terror Campaign of Boko Haram: Its Transformation and Challenges to Nigeria's Security", Golden Ratio of Social Science and Education, 1(2), 85-94. <https://doi.org/10.52970/grsse.v1i2.70>

- Brigaglia, A. (2012). "A Contribution to the History of the Wahhabi Da'wa in West Africa: The Career and the Murder of Shaykh Ja'far Mahmoud Adam (Daura, ca. 1961/1962–Kano 2007)", *Islamic Africa*, 3(1), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.5192/21540993030101>
- Buba, I. (2023). "How Nigeria Avoided Organised Violence During the 2023 Elections", *African Arguments*, <https://africanarguments.org/2023/04/how-nigeria-avoided-organized-violence-during-the-2023-elections/>, (Access Date 15.04.2026).
- Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). "Vigilantism", <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/vigilantism>, (Access Date: 13.05.2024).
- Campbell, J. (2018). "Boko Haram: The World's Deadliest Terror Organization", Council on Foreign Relations Press, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/boko-haram-worlds-deadliest-terror-organization>, (Access Date: 11.07.2026).
- Center for Civilians in Conflict. (2018a). "Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria", https://civiliansinconflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2018.06.CJTF-Report.Africa-Program.Web_.pdf, (Access Date: 25.05.2026).
- Center for Civilians in Conflict. (2018b). "Protecting and Harming Civilians: Perceptions of the Civilian Joint Task Force in Northeast Nigeria", <https://civiliansinconflict.org/blog/cjtf/>, (Access Date: 16.04.2026).
- Comolli, V. (2015). *Boko Haram: Nigeria's Islamist Insurgency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Daily Sabah (2021). "Boko Haram's New Chief Confirms 'Unkillable' Shekau's Death", <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/africa/boko-harams-new-chief-confirms-unkillable-shekaus-death>, (Access Date: 15.05.2026).
- Ekhomu, O. (2019). *Boko Haram: Security Considerations and the Rise of An Insurgency*, Boka Raton: CRC Press.
- Gana, M. L. (2020). "Strategy of Civilian Joint Task Force Militia in Combating Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria", *International Journal of Legal Studies (IJOLS)*, 7(1), 345-360. <https://ijols.com/article/143126/en>
- Global Public Policy Institute. (2025). "Ask the Experts: Lessons for Regional Stability in the Lake Chad Basin", <https://gppi.net/2025/08/21/ask-the-experts-lessons-for-regional-stability-in-the-lake-chad-basin>, (Access Date: 21.04.2026).
- Gray, S. and Adeakin, I. (2019). "Nigeria's Shi'a Islamic Movement and Evolving Islamist Threat Landscape: Old, New and Future Generators of Radicalization", *African Security*, 12(2), 174-199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2019.1639281>
- Haruna, A. (2023). "Borno Civilian Task Force Announces Sack of Founding Leader Amid Corruption Allegations", *HumAngle*, <https://humanglemedia.com/orno-civilian-task-force-announces-sack-of-founding-leader-amid-corruption-allegations/> (Access Date: 21.04.2026).
- Higazi, A. and Brisset-Foucault, F. (2013). "Les Origines et la Transformation de L'insurrection de Boko Haram Dans le Nord du Nigeria", *Politique Africaine*, 130(2), 137-164. <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.130.0137>.

- Idris, H. (2013). "Arrest: Borno ANPP Officials Disown State Chairman", Daily Trust, <https://dailytrust.com/arrest-borno-anpp-officials-disown-state-chairman/> (Access Date: 24.05.2026).
- International Crisis Group. (2017). "Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram", (Africa Report No. 244), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/244-watchmen-of-lake-chad-vigilante-groups-fighting-boko-haram.pdf> (Access Date: 11.04.2026).
- International Crisis Group. (2019). "Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria", (Africa Report No. 273), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/africa/nigeria/273-facing-challenge-islamic-state-west-africa-province>, (Access Date: 12.04.2026).
- Isichei, E. (1987). "The Maitatsine Risings in Nigeria 1980-85: A Revolt of the Disinherited", Journal of Religion in Africa, 17(3), 194-208. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006687X00136>
- Johnston, L. (1996). "What is Vigilantism?", The British Journal of Criminology, 36(2), 220-236. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjc.a014083>
- Kantor, A. and Persson, M. (2010). "Understanding Vigilantism: Informal Security Providers and Security Sector Reform in Liberia", Stockholm: Folke Bernadotte Akademin, <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/understanding-vigilantism-informal-security-providers-and-security-sector-reform-in-liberia/>, (Access Date: 15.06.2026).
- Krahmann, E. (2008). "Security: Collective Good or Commodity?", European Journal of International Relations, 14(3), 379-404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066108092304>
- Locke, R. (2022). "Heroes or Villains? A Lockean Approach to Justifying Vigilantism", Dianoia: The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Boston College, 18-31. <https://doi.org/10.6017/dupjbc.v9i1.15485>
- Loimeier, R. (2012). "Boko Haram: The Development of A Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria", Africa Spectrum, 47(2-3), 137-155. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971204702-308>
- Maiangwa, B. and Agbiboa, D. (2014). "Why Boko Haram Kidnaps Women and Young girls in North-eastern Nigeria", Conflict Trends, 2014(3), 51-56.
- Mohammed, K. (2014). "The Message and Methods of Boko Haram", (Ed. De de Montclos, M. A. P.) , Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria (pp.9-32), Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- Monday, A. (2019). "Role Of Vigilante Groups in the War Against Terrorism In North", Global Journal of Politics and Law Research, 7(2), 49-58. <https://ejournals.org/wp-content/uploads/Role-of-Vigilante-Groups-in-War-against-Terrorism-in-North-Eastern-Nigeria.pdf>, (Access Date: 21.05.2026).
- Onuoha, F. C. (2012). "Boko Haram: Nigeria's Extremist Islamic Sect", Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/sites/default/files/articles/reports/documents/2012229113341793734BOKO%20HARAM%20NIGERIAS%20EXTREMIST%20ISLAMIC%20SECT.pdf>, (Access Date: 11.07.2026).

- Onuoha, F. C. (2014). "Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?", United States Institute of Peace, 348(5), 3-12. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/180882/SR348Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf, (Access Date: 15.04.2026).
- Osakwe, C. C. and Audu, B. J. (2017). "Nigeria's Military Operations in the Lake Chad Basin", Journal of Defense Management, 7(1), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-0374.1000162>
- Oshewolo, S., Azeez, A. A., and Jimba, K. (2023). "Foreign Military Assistance in An Interdependent World: President Goodluck Jonathan's Prosecution of Nigeria's Anti-Terror War", Tamkang Journal of International Affairs, 26(2), 1-46. [https://doi.org/10.6185/TJIA.V.202301_26\(2\).0001](https://doi.org/10.6185/TJIA.V.202301_26(2).0001)
- Premium Times. (2018). "Benue Community Accuses Militia of Killings, Abductions", <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/north-central/257960-benue-community-accuses-militia-killings-abductions.html>, (Access Date: 15.04.2026).
- Raphael, E. C. and James, A. E. (2016). "Nigeria Security Challenges and the Role of Non-Conventional Security Outfit in the War Against Terrorism: A Study of the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) on the War against Boko Haram in North East of Nigeria", Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 4(5), 473-481. <https://www.saspublishers.com/article/13060/>, (Access Date: 12.07.2026).
- Reinert, M. and Garçon, L. (2014). "Boko Haram: A Chronology", (Ed. De de Montclos, M. A. P.), Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria (pp. 237-245), Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- Rosenbaum, H. J. and Sederberg, P. C. (1974). "Vigilantism: An Analysis of Establishment Violence", Comparative Politics, 6(4), 541-570. <https://doi.org/10.2307/421337>
- Smith, D. (2009). "Nigerian Forces Storm Militant Islamist Mosque", The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/30/nigerian-forces-storm-mosque>, (Access Date: 11.05.2026).
- Stearns, S. (2011). "Jonathan Declared Winner of Nigeria's Presidential Election", Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/jonathan-declared-winner-in-nigeria-riots-break-out-in-north-120098509/138211.html>, (Access Date: 11.05.2026).
- Sundar, N. (2010). "Vigilantism, Culpability and Moral Dilemmas", Critique of Anthropology, 30(1), 113-121. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X09360140>
- The Will News. (2014). "Nigeria: Local Hunters, Vigilante Helps Military Retake Mubi from Boko Haram", <https://thewillnews.com/nigeria-local-hunters-vigilante-helps-military-retake-mubi-from-boko-haram/>, (Access Date: 23.05.2026).
- Thurston, A. (2016). Salafism in Nigeria: Islam, Preaching, and Politics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thurston, A. (2017). Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement. Princeton University Press.
- Umara, I. and Ikayese, J. T. (2018). "Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and Boko-Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Understanding the Activities of (CJTF) in Minimizing Boko-Haram Threat in the Northeastern Geo Political Zone", Scholars Journal of Arts,

- Humanities and Social Sciences, 6(8), 1546-1552. <https://www.saspublishers.com/article/17882/>, (Access Date: 18.06.2026).
- UNDP. (2019). "UNDP Trains Vigilantes and Civilian Joint Task Force Members in Human Rights and Leadership", <https://www.undp.org/nigeria/news/undp-trains-vigilantes-and-civilian-joint-task-force-members-human-rights-and-leadership>, (Access Date: 13.05.2026)
- UNICEF. (2021). "UNICEF Reacts to UN Delisting of CJTF From List of Organizations Using and Recruiting Children in Armed Conflict", <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/unicef-reacts-un-delisting-cjtf-list-organizations-using-and-recruiting-children>, (Access Date: 10.04.2026).
- Warner, J. and Hulme, C. (2018). "The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells across the Continent", CTC Sentinel, 11(7), 21-28. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/islamic-state-africa-estimating-fighter-numbers-cells-across-continent/>, (Access Date: 11.06.2026).
- Yahaya, J. U. (2020). "Boko Haram Leadership Conflict Crisis Between Abubakar Shekau, Al-Barnawi And Mamman Nur", International Journal of Environmental Studies and Safety Research, 5(3), 1-38. <https://casirmediapublishing.com/2021/02/23/boko-haram-leadership-conflict-crisis-between-abubakar-shekau-al-barnawi-and-mamman-nur/>, (Access Date: 21.06.2026).
- Yakubu, M., Aideloje, F. and Babawale, S. (2022). "The Criminality of Counter-Insurgency in North-East Nigeria, 2012-2019: A Study of the Multinational Joint Task Force", Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies, 2(1), 48-67. <https://doi.org/10.59569/jceeas.2022.2.1.52>
- Zenn, J. and Weiss, C. (2021). "Ansaru Resurgent: The Rebirth of Al-Qaeda's Nigerian Franchise", Perspectives on Terrorism, 15(5), 46-58. https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-04/Article%204_11.pdf, (Access Date: 19.06.2026).

Katkı Oranları ve Çıkar Çatışması / Contribution Rates and Conflicts of Interest

Etik Beyan	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.	Ethical Statement	It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.
Üretken Yapay Zeka Kullanımı	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde üretken yapay zeka araçları sadece dil düzenleme amacıyla sınırlı şekilde kullanılmıştır.	Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence	Generative artificial intelligence tools were used only in a limited capacity for language editing during the preparation of this study.
Yazar Katkıları	Bu çalışma tek yazarlı olarak hazırlanmıştır.	Author Contributions	This study was prepared with a single author.
Çıkar Çatışması	Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.	Conflicts of Interest	The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Finansman	Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.	Grant Support	The author acknowledge that they received no external funding in support of this research.
Telif Hakkı & Lisans	Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmaları CC BY-NC 4.0 lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.	Copyright & License	Authors publishing with the journal retain the copyright to their work licensed under the CC BY-NC 4.0

Genişletilmiş Özet

Nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden yararlanarak hazırlanan bu çalışma Nijerya ve çevresinde etkili olan Boko Haram terör örgütüyle mücadelede sivil bir oluşum olan “Sivil Müşterek Görev Gücü’nün “ (Civilian Joint Task Force-CJTF) etkisini çok boyutlu bir kapsamda incelemektedir. Bu çalışma özellikle devlet kapasitenin sınırlı kaldığı, kolluk güçlerinin yetersiz olduğu ve toplumsal kırılganlık ve gerginliklerin yoğunlaştığı yerlerde sivil oluşumların terörle mücadelede nasıl bir etkiye sahip olduğunu araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

2002’de Nijerya’nın kuzeydoğusunda yer alan Maiduguri’de ortaya çıkıp zamanla çevre ülkeleri de kapsayacak bir bölgesel güvenlik tehdidine dönüşen Boko Haram terör örgütü, 2009 yılından itibaren artan şiddet eylemleriyle uluslararası gündeme gelmiştir. Boko Haram’ın ideolojisi sömürge sonrası dönemde oluşan devlet inşasına yönelik tepkiler, Batı ve modernite karşıtı söylemleri ve şeriat temelinde yükselen radikal İslamcı bir siyasi ve toplumsal düzen arayışı üzerine inşa edilmiştir. Kurucu olan Muhammed Yusuf’un polis tutuklamasının ardından ölmesiyle örgüt Ebubekir Şekau liderliğinde daha da radikalleşerek, şiddeti daha kontrolsüz bir şekilde araçsallaştırması sonucunda hem Nijerya’da hem de çevre ülkelerde tehdidin derinleşmesine neden olmuştur. Diğer yandan zamanla Boko Haram’ın farklı hiziplere ayrılışı El Kaide ve DAESH gibi küresel terör ağlarıyla etkileşimini arttırması Batı Afrika’da terör tehdidinin daha karmaşık bir hal almasıyla sonuçlanmıştır.

Nijerya Devleti zaman zaman yabancı aktörlerin de desteğini alarak Boko Haram terör örgütüne karşı askeri operasyonlar, olağanüstü hal uygulamaları, müzakere ve toplumsal uzlaşma girişimleri gibi çok çeşitli terörle mücadele stratejileri geliştirmiştir. Ancak bu stratejiler geçen süre boyunca beklenen başarıya ulaşamamış, özellikle devlet kapasitesinin sınırlı kaldığı yerlerde güvenlik güçlerinin yetkilerini aşan aşırı güç kullanımı ve insan hakları ihlalleri Abuja yönetimini halk nezdindeki meşruiyetinin sorgulanmasına ve terör örgütünün propaganda fırsatı yakalamasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Keza bu ortamda kırsal bölgelerdeki Nijerya halkı hem terör örgütünü hem de yetkisini aşan eylemler setgileyen yozlaşmış güvenlik birimlerini tehdit olarak algılamaya başlamıştır. Bu nedenle devlet kapasitesinin yetersiz olduğu yerlerde erel halk kendi güvenliğini sağlayabilmek amacıyla alternatif çözüm yolları arayışına girmiştir. Bu arayış neticesinde ortaya çıkan CJTF, başlangıçta Nijerya’nın kırsal bölgelerinde yerel halkın kendi güvenliğini sağlama amacıyla oluşturduğu bir girişim olarak gündeme gelmiştir. Özellikle Boko Haram unsurlarının yoğun şiddet içeren eylemlerini gerçekleştirdiği bölgelerde CJTF unsurları teröristlerinin tespit edilmesi, terör örgütüne yönelik istihbaratın paylaşılması ve bazı bölgelerin örgütten kurtarılmasında önemli roller üstlenmiştir. Çünkü CJTF üyelerinin yerel halkı ve bulundukları coğrafyayı çok iyi tanıması terörle mücadele operasyonlarına büyük avantajlar sunmuştur. Diğer yandan kırsaldaki yaşlı, kadın ve çocuklar gibi güçsüz bireylerin korunmasında da CJTF önemli misyonlar üstlenmiştir.

Ancak bu önemli katkılara karşın CJTF Nijerya’da güvenlik alanında yeni sorunlar da yaratmıştır. Keza hukuki bir zemine sahip olmayan ve devletin denetim mekanizmasının olmadığı Nijerya’nın kırsal bölgelerinde CJTF üyeleri zaman zaman keyfi uygulamalar, aşırı güç kullanımı, tecavüz, yağma ve yolsuzluk gibi davranışlara yönelebilmektedir. Sivillere yönelik artan bu ihlaller yerel halk nezdinde devlete ve güvenlik birimlerine karşı güveni zedelemiş ve bazı bireylerin radikalleşme yoluna meyletmesine neden olmuştur.

Netice olarak Nijerya’da Boko Haram terör örgütü ile mücadelede CJTF’nin başlarda önemli operasyonel başarılar sağladığını ancak devam eden süreçte sürdürülebilir ve meşru bir çözüm yolu sunmadığını söylemek mümkündür. Çünkü sivil unsurların terörle mücadelede aktif ve etkili bir şekilde görevlendirilmesi ancak güçlü bir yasal dayanak ve etkin denetim mekanizmalarının var olduğu bir düzende mümkün olabilir. Eğer bu unsurlar noksan ise sivil müşterek güçler terörle mücadelede başarıyı getirmekten ziyade kırılgan yapıların olduğu sistemde daha karmaşık güvenlik sorunları yaratabilmektedir. Bu nedenle terörle mücadelede sivil unsurların rolü değerlendirilirken devlet kapasitenin güçlendirilmesi, hukukun üstünlüğünün sağlanması ve toplumsal güvenin inşa edilmesi hayati öneme sahiptir.