



**CIVILIAN JOINT TASK FORCE AND COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATIONS IN
BORNO STATE (2015–2025)**

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Abstract

The escalation of Boko Haram insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria since 2009 prompted diverse state and community responses, among which the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) emerged as a decisive non-state security actor. This study presents a systematic literature review of the CJTF's role in counter-insurgency operations in Borno State between 2015 and 2025. Using structured searches across academic databases, grey literature, and policy documents, the review applies inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed works, reports, and studies addressing operational, governance, and socio-political dimensions of the CJTF. The thematic analysis reveals four dominant findings. First, the CJTF provided substantial operational contributions through intelligence gathering, local knowledge, and combat support, enhancing military effectiveness. Second, its activities raised significant human rights concerns, including allegations of extra-judicial killings, forced recruitment, and sexual violence, thereby undermining community protection. Third, challenges in governance, legal recognition, and professionalisation highlight the ambiguities of hybrid security arrangements in fragile states. Finally, the absence of comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) frameworks poses long-term risks of militia re-mobilisation and insecurity. The review concludes that while the CJTF has been instrumental in reducing Boko Haram's territorial control, it also complicates Nigeria's security governance and transitional justice efforts. Policy implications include the need for formalised engagement, legal accountability, gender-sensitive DDR programmes, and integration into broader security sector reform. Identified research gaps call for longitudinal, comparative, and community-level studies to assess the CJTF's evolving role. This review contributes to scholarship on hybrid security governance and provides policy-relevant insights into managing non-state armed groups in counter-insurgency contexts.

Keywords: *Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), Boko Haram, counter-insurgency, community militias, security governance, Borno State, Nigeria, DDR.*



Introduction

Counter-insurgency (COIN) operations are complex undertakings that require a combination of military, political, economic, and social strategies to defeat insurgent movements and restore state authority. Globally, the use of community-based security auxiliaries or vigilante groups has become increasingly visible in contexts where state forces are overstretched, terrain is difficult, and insurgent networks are deeply embedded within civilian populations. In Afghanistan, Iraq, and Colombia, local militias and self-defence groups were mobilised to provide intelligence, secure localities, and deny insurgents freedom of movement (Jones, 2012; Kilcullen, 2010). While these groups often delivered short-term tactical gains, their hybrid and irregular status created long-term governance challenges, including human-rights abuses, lack of accountability, and difficulties with disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR). These global experiences illustrate both the utility and risks of community-based auxiliaries in modern COIN environments.

In Africa, the use of vigilante and volunteer security groups has also been a recurring feature of counter-insurgency and community security. In countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, traditional hunters' associations (e.g., Dozo groups) and self-defence militias (Koglweogo) were mobilised to combat jihadist incursions, often filling critical gaps in overstretched state security forces (International Crisis Group, 2017). Similarly, in Somalia, clan-based militias provided both resistance against al-Shabaab and community policing functions, though with mixed consequences for state-building and civilian protection (Hansen, 2019). These experiences reveal that in fragile African states, non-state armed groups frequently emerge as force multipliers in COIN operations but require careful regulation to avoid undermining state legitimacy and human rights.

In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency, which escalated in 2009 and expanded across the Lake Chad Basin, created one of the gravest security and humanitarian crises on the continent. By 2015, Boko Haram controlled significant territory in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa States, displacing millions and undermining regional stability (Zenn, 2019). The Nigerian military, despite launching major operations such as Operation Lafiya Dole, faced capacity gaps in intelligence gathering, local terrain navigation, and civilian engagement. These gaps created a vacuum that facilitated the emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Maiduguri in 2013. The CJTF, composed largely of unemployed youth, hunters, and local volunteers, rapidly expanded into a formidable



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grassroots auxiliary force. By 2015, the CJTF had become institutionalised as a critical partner in Nigeria's COIN strategy, particularly in Borno State, providing intelligence, manning checkpoints, and escorting humanitarian convoys (CIVIC, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2017).

At the case study level of Borno State, the CJTF assumed both operational and symbolic importance. Operationally, CJTF members used their intimate knowledge of local communities, languages, and terrain to identify insurgents, intercept attacks, and support the Nigerian Army in retaking and holding territory. Symbolically, the CJTF embodied community resistance against Boko Haram, mobilising local resilience and signalling that citizens were not passive victims of insurgency. However, the CJTF's rapid rise also raised serious protection concerns. Reports by Human Rights Watch (2019) and UNICEF (2019) documented child recruitment, arbitrary detention, and occasional abuses committed by CJTF members. Although a UN Action Plan signed in 2017 led to the release of nearly 900 children by 2019, long-term risks of accountability gaps, fractured command structures, and difficulties in demobilisation persist (UN CAAC, 2017; Stimson Center, 2024).

Between 2015 and 2025, the CJTF has thus represented both an indispensable ally in the fight against Boko Haram/ISWAP and a policy challenge for Nigeria's counter-insurgency framework. On one hand, the group significantly contributed to stabilising Maiduguri and other urban centres; on the other, its unregulated status raises questions about rule-of-law governance, child protection, and post-conflict reintegration. This duality reflects broader tensions in COIN theory and practice: the need to harness local legitimacy and intelligence while ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law, protection of civilians, and long-term state consolidation. The present study situates the CJTF within this wider landscape, examining its evolution, contributions, challenges, and implications for counter-insurgency in Nigeria. By synthesising global, continental, national, and case-level perspectives, it underscores that the CJTF is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader trend of hybrid security governance in fragile conflict environments.

Statement of the Problem

The escalation of violent extremism and insurgency across the globe has posed significant challenges to state security, often overwhelming conventional armed forces and necessitating the engagement of non-state actors in counter-insurgency efforts. Globally, experiences from Iraq,



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Afghanistan, and Syria illustrate the increasing reliance on local militias and community-based vigilante groups to supplement state responses against terrorist organisations (Kilcullen, 2015; Staniland, 2017). In Africa, the rise of armed non-state actors such as the Janjaweed in Sudan, community vigilante groups in Mali, and anti-Balaka militias in the Central African Republic underscores the critical but contested role of civilian groups in irregular warfare (Debos, 2016; Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015).

In Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009, evolved into one of the deadliest terrorist movements in the world, with devastating humanitarian, social, and economic consequences, particularly in the North-East (Onuoha, 2014; Zenn, 2020). By 2015, despite intensified military operations, Boko Haram maintained territorial control in parts of Borno State, necessitating the emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a community-based militia that mobilised local knowledge and networks to support security forces (Agbiboa, 2015; Kassim, 2018). The CJTF's involvement has been credited with contributing significantly to reclaiming territories, gathering intelligence, and boosting community confidence in counter-insurgency operations (Alao & Ojomo, 2019). However, their participation also raises fundamental concerns. While the CJTF has enhanced local resilience against Boko Haram, issues of accountability, human rights violations, recruitment of child soldiers, and the risk of post-conflict proliferation of armed groups present long-term governance and security dilemmas (Amnesty International, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2017). Furthermore, the integration of CJTF members into formal security institutions remains inconsistent and fraught with challenges, creating uncertainties about their role in sustainable peace and post-conflict stabilisation in Borno State.

Therefore, the problem under investigation is the paradox of the CJTF as both a vital force multiplier in Nigeria's counter-insurgency operations and a potential source of future insecurity. This dilemma underscores the need for a systematic examination of the CJTF's role between 2015 and 2025, highlighting their contributions, limitations, and implications for long-term security governance in Borno State and Nigeria at large.



Methodology

A systematic and transparent search strategy was employed to identify, screen, and select relevant literature on the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and counter-insurgency operations in Borno State between 2015 and 2025. Following guidelines from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), multiple databases and scholarly repositories were utilised to ensure comprehensive coverage of both peer-reviewed and grey literature (Moher et al., 2009). The electronic databases searched included Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ProQuest, Google Scholar, African Journals Online (AJOL), and HeinOnline. In addition, policy documents, reports, and working papers were retrieved from institutional sources such as the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), ECOWAS, International Crisis Group (ICG), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Nigerian government agencies. This inclusion of grey literature was considered necessary given the policy-oriented and security-sensitive nature of the topic.

To capture relevant studies, Boolean operators, truncations, and keyword combinations were used. Search terms included: “Civilian Joint Task Force” OR “CJTF”; “Counter-insurgency” OR “Counterterrorism” OR “COIN operations”; “Boko Haram” OR “ISWAP” OR “terrorism in Nigeria”; “Community militias” OR “vigilante groups” OR “local security actors”; “Borno State” OR “North-East Nigeria”; Time frame: 2015–2025. To ensure inclusivity, publications in the English language were considered, while non-English works were excluded due to translation limitations. Only studies with explicit reference to the CJTF in the context of Nigeria’s counter-insurgency operations were retained. Duplicates across databases were removed, and reference lists of selected studies were manually screened to identify additional relevant sources. The search process was iterative, with initial scoping carried out between March and May 2025, followed by supplementary searches in July 2025 to capture the most recent publications within the review period. This rigorous approach ensured that both academic scholarship and practitioner insights were incorporated into the evidence base.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain methodological rigour, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to guide the selection of literature for this review. The inclusion criteria ensured that only studies



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relevant to the objectives of the review were considered. First, publications were included if they explicitly examined the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) within the broader framework of counter-insurgency or counterterrorism operations in Nigeria, particularly in Borno State. Second, only studies published between 2015 and 2025 were selected to reflect the most current and contextually relevant evidence within the chosen review period. Third, both peer-reviewed journal articles and grey literature such as policy briefs, government reports, NGO publications, and international organisation documents were included to capture the diverse scholarly and practical perspectives on the subject.

Conversely, exclusion criteria were applied to filter out materials that did not align with the scope of the study. Publications that addressed Boko Haram insurgency or counter-insurgency efforts without any reference to the role of the CJTF were excluded, as they did not directly contribute to the central research question. Similarly, literature focusing exclusively on other vigilante groups in Africa or elsewhere, without comparative insights linked to the Nigerian context, was not included. Duplicates across databases and repositories were removed to avoid redundancy. Studies published before 2015 were excluded, as they fell outside the temporal scope of the review. Additionally, non-English language works were omitted due to translation constraints, which could affect interpretation and reliability of findings. The application of these criteria was essential in refining the pool of studies, ensuring that the final selection comprised only the most relevant and credible sources for analysing the role of the CJTF in counter-insurgency operations in Borno State between 2015 and 2025. This process also enhanced the internal validity of the review by maintaining consistency in the type, scope, and quality of included literature.

Data Extraction and Management

After the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, data were systematically extracted from the selected studies using a structured protocol to ensure consistency and reliability. A data extraction template was developed in Microsoft Excel to capture essential bibliographic, methodological, and thematic information. The key variables extracted included: author(s), year of publication, title, study setting, methodological approach, type of publication (peer-reviewed or grey literature), thematic focus (e.g., intelligence gathering, community mobilisation, human rights



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issues, integration into security forces), and key findings or conclusions. This process facilitated a comprehensive mapping of the existing evidence base.

To ensure accuracy and reduce bias, data extraction was conducted in two stages. First, the abstracts and executive summaries of selected studies were reviewed to confirm their relevance. Second, full-text reviews were carried out to capture detailed information and contextual insights. Any ambiguities or inconsistencies in the data were resolved through cross-checking across multiple sources, including reference lists, to ensure robustness. In managing the extracted data, duplicate studies were removed, and recurring findings were consolidated to prevent overrepresentation of particular viewpoints. Reference management software (Zotero) was used to store, organise, and annotate relevant publications, thereby streamlining the citation process. The data were then organised into thematic categories reflecting the major dimensions of the CJTF's role in counter-insurgency operations, such as security contributions, socio-political implications, human rights concerns, and post-conflict challenges. This systematic approach to data extraction and management ensured transparency, reproducibility, and reliability in synthesising findings from diverse sources. It also provided the analytical foundation for the subsequent thematic synthesis, enabling the identification of convergences, divergences, and knowledge gaps within the literature.

Results - Study Characteristics and Thematic Findings

Overview of Included Sources

The systematic search process yielded a diverse body of literature on the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and counter-insurgency operations in Borno State. Out of an initial pool of over 300 records retrieved from databases and grey literature repositories, 72 studies were screened at the abstract level. Following the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, 41 publications were retained for full-text review, and ultimately 28 studies were included in the final synthesis. These comprised 16 peer-reviewed journal articles, 7 policy reports, 3 working papers, and 2 government/NGO documents, reflecting both academic and practitioner perspectives. The included studies spanned the review period of 2015 to 2025, with a concentration of publications between 2016 and 2020, coinciding with intensified Nigerian military campaigns against Boko Haram and the increasing visibility of the CJTF. A smaller but growing number of works published between 2021 and 2025



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focused on post-conflict dynamics, such as reintegration of CJTF members, deradicalisation efforts, and implications for transitional justice in North-East Nigeria.

In terms of disciplinary orientation, the literature drew from security studies, political science, sociology, development studies, and human rights law. While international journals such as *African Affairs*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, and *Small Wars & Insurgencies* contributed theoretical and comparative insights, local outlets such as *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies* and *Journal of Peace and Development Studies* provided context-specific empirical evidence. Grey literature, particularly reports from the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), offered critical assessments of operational realities, human rights concerns, and policy implications.

Geographically, all the included sources were Nigeria-focused, but several provided comparative perspectives by situating the CJTF within the broader phenomenon of community militias in Africa, including parallels with vigilante groups in Mali, Chad, and the Central African Republic. Methodologically, the studies varied widely: 12 employed qualitative case studies based on interviews and fieldwork in Borno State, 6 utilised mixed-methods approaches, 5 relied on documentary analysis, and 5 were primarily desk-based literature syntheses. Overall, the evidence base reflects a balanced mix of empirical field research, policy analysis, and theoretical reflection. This diversity provided a comprehensive understanding of the CJTF's role in counter-insurgency operations, capturing both its operational contributions and its broader socio-political implications.

Theme 1: Operational Contributions and Tactical Value

One of the most consistent findings across the reviewed literature is the crucial operational role played by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria's counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Scholars and policy analysts underscore that the CJTF emerged as a force multiplier for the Nigerian military and security forces by bridging gaps in manpower, local knowledge, and terrain familiarity (Alao & Ojomo, 2019; Kassim, 2018). Their grassroots origins and recruitment from affected communities enabled them to provide intelligence that was often inaccessible to formal security



actors, particularly in identifying insurgent hideouts, collaborators, and supply routes (Agbibo, 2015).

The CJTF's tactical contributions were most evident in urban and rural operations in Maiduguri, Konduga, Bama, and Gwoza, where they played frontline roles in manning checkpoints, conducting patrols, and guiding military units through difficult terrain (Zenn, 2020). Their presence not only facilitated more effective clearance operations but also enhanced the legitimacy of counter-insurgency campaigns by demonstrating local ownership of the fight against insurgents (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). This "community-embedded legitimacy" distinguished the CJTF from external or state-only interventions, helping to reassure displaced populations and improve cooperation between civilians and security forces.

Another key operational value of the CJTF lies in their intelligence-gathering function, which leveraged local languages, cultural knowledge, and social networks. Multiple reports emphasise that their ability to distinguish insurgents from non-combatants significantly reduced civilian-military mistrust and improved operational precision (International Crisis Group, 2017; Adegbulu, 2020). This role was particularly important in countering Boko Haram's tactic of blending into civilian populations and using asymmetric warfare strategies. However, while their operational contributions were significant, scholars also highlight the dependency risk posed by over-reliance on the CJTF. Their semi-formal structure, lack of standardised training, and uneven coordination with the Nigerian military sometimes led to operational inefficiencies or unregulated use of force (Amnesty International, 2018). Nonetheless, the consensus across the literature is that between 2015 and 2020, the CJTF's tactical value was instrumental in rolling back Boko Haram's territorial control and sustaining the resilience of communities under threat. In sum, the CJTF's operational contributions reflect both their strategic importance as local security actors and the broader dynamics of community participation in counter-insurgency. Their effectiveness lies not only in physical combat support but also in building trust, mobilising community intelligence, and reinforcing state presence in contested areas.

Theme 2: Protection Risks and Human-Rights Concerns

While the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) has played an important role in bolstering Nigeria's counter-insurgency operations, the literature consistently highlights concerns regarding protection



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risks and human rights violations associated with their activities. Amnesty International (2018) and Human Rights Watch (2019) document instances of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, and sexual violence allegedly committed by CJTF members against civilians accused of collaborating with Boko Haram. Such abuses not only undermine the credibility of counter-insurgency operations but also risk alienating the same communities whose support is vital for defeating insurgency.

A particularly troubling dimension identified in the literature is the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Reports indicate that boys as young as 13 were mobilised into CJTF ranks, often with limited oversight from state authorities (UNICEF, 2017). This contravenes international legal instruments, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, to which Nigeria is a signatory. The presence of children in CJTF operations not only exposes them to immediate harm but also raises long-term challenges for disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes (Siaplay, 2020).

Another recurrent theme in the literature is the absence of accountability mechanisms. Unlike the Nigerian military, the CJTF does not operate under a formal chain of command or statutory framework, leading to weak oversight and enforcement of discipline (Agbibo, 2015; Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Efforts by the Nigerian government to integrate some CJTF members into formal security agencies or to provide them with stipends have been uneven, leaving many unregulated groups to operate independently. This lack of institutionalised accountability exacerbates risks of impunity and increases the likelihood of human rights abuses persisting. Scholars also caution that abuses by CJTF members can inadvertently fuel cycles of radicalisation and community mistrust. Victims of CJTF excesses, particularly within marginalised groups, may develop resentment toward both the militia and the state, thereby creating fertile ground for Boko Haram or ISWAP recruitment (International Crisis Group, 2017; Adegbulu, 2020). In this sense, the paradox of the CJTF emerges clearly: while intended to protect communities, they may simultaneously perpetuate insecurity if not properly regulated and monitored. Overall, the literature underscores the need for a balanced approach that recognises the CJTF's operational value but prioritises the establishment of effective oversight, accountability, and human rights safeguards. Without such mechanisms, the



contributions of the CJTF risk being overshadowed by long-term protection challenges and legitimacy deficits in Nigeria's counter-insurgency strategy.

Theme 3: Governance, Legal Status, and Professionalisation

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) occupies a contested space between state authority and community self-help, raising important questions about governance, legal status, and professionalisation. A recurring theme across the reviewed literature is the absence of a coherent statutory framework to regulate the CJTF's operations. While the Nigerian government has at various times acknowledged and supported the group, through stipends, uniforms, and limited integration of members into security agencies, there has been no comprehensive legislation establishing their mandate, command structure, or rules of engagement (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Alao & Ojomo, 2019). This ambiguity has contributed to uneven practices across Borno State, where some units operate with tacit approval of local authorities, while others act autonomously.

The lack of formal legal recognition has direct implications for accountability and professional conduct. Scholars argue that without codified oversight, the CJTF risks drifting into the pattern of other unregulated militias in Africa, which often evolve into spoilers in post-conflict contexts (Debos, 2016; Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015). In the Nigerian case, the challenge has been how to balance the immediate operational utility of the CJTF with the long-term imperative of integrating or transforming them into professionalised security structures. Several studies highlight government attempts to absorb selected CJTF members into the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Police, or paramilitary agencies, but these initiatives have been limited in scope and fraught with bureaucratic and financial constraints (Kassim, 2018; Adegbulu, 2020).

The question of professionalisation is also linked to capacity-building and training. Whereas formal security forces undergo structured training on weapons handling, human rights, and rules of engagement, most CJTF recruits are volunteers with little or no prior security experience (International Crisis Group, 2017). As a result, they often lack the discipline and technical knowledge required for sustained counter-insurgency operations. Some donor-supported programmes have sought to provide human rights and community policing training to CJTF



members, but these efforts remain sporadic and insufficient in addressing systemic gaps (UNDP, 2021).

From a governance perspective, the CJTF highlights the tension between state sovereignty and community-driven security. On one hand, their emergence represents an innovative form of citizen participation in security provision; on the other, it risks entrenching a dual system of authority in which non-state actors wield significant coercive power alongside the state (Agbibo, 2015). This duality raises concerns about Nigeria's long-term security governance, especially in the context of demobilisation and peacebuilding once the immediate insurgency threat subsides. In summary, the literature underscores that the legal ambiguity and partial professionalisation of the CJTF remain unresolved challenges. Without clear governance mechanisms and sustained institutional reforms, the CJTF risks transitioning from a short-term security asset into a long-term governance liability.

Theme 4: DDR, Transition Pathways and Long-Term Risks

A central concern in the literature on the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) relates to the post-conflict trajectory of its members and the long-term risks they pose to peace and security in Borno State and Nigeria more broadly. Scholars and policy reports emphasise that while the CJTF has been instrumental in counter-insurgency operations, the absence of a clear disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) framework risks transforming the group into a destabilising force in the future (International Crisis Group, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018). The demobilisation challenge is particularly acute given the CJTF's large membership base, estimated in the tens of thousands, many of whom are unemployed youth with limited livelihood alternatives (Alao & Ojomo, 2019).

The issue of transition pathways for CJTF members has been the subject of both governmental and non-governmental initiatives. Some members have been absorbed into formal security institutions such as the Nigeria Police Force, Civil Defence, and the military in auxiliary roles (Kassim, 2018). Others have been enrolled in donor-supported vocational training, agricultural schemes, or community policing initiatives. However, these efforts remain piecemeal and underfunded, failing to address the scale of reintegration needs (UNDP, 2021). The lack of a comprehensive national strategy risks leaving many members in limbo, with weapons, combat experience, and grievances that could be redirected toward criminality or political militancy.



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Another recurrent theme in the literature is the risk of politicisation of the CJTF. Scholars warn that local politicians may seek to co-opt the militia for electoral mobilisation, rent-seeking, or intimidation of rivals (Agbiboa, 2015; Adegbulu, 2020). Such dynamics have precedent in Nigeria's history of armed groups, where vigilante movements have often morphed into instruments of political violence when not adequately demobilised (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). This raises concerns about the CJTF's potential to contribute to long-term insecurity beyond the Boko Haram conflict.

The literature also highlights the psychosocial dimension of reintegration. Many CJTF members have been exposed to extreme violence and trauma, yet access to mental health or psychosocial support remains minimal (Siaplay, 2020). Without addressing these needs, DDR initiatives may fall short of building sustainable peace. Furthermore, communities themselves may resist reintegration efforts due to resentment over past abuses committed by CJTF members, complicating reconciliation and social cohesion (Amnesty International, 2018). In sum, while the CJTF has proven tactically valuable in the fight against Boko Haram, its future poses complex governance and security challenges. Without a robust DDR framework, clear transition pathways, and community-driven reconciliation processes, the group risks becoming another iteration of Nigeria's protracted cycle of armed non-state actors, thereby undermining the very stability it helped secure.

Methodological Observations and Quality Assessment

A critical appraisal of the studies included in this review reveals notable methodological trends, strengths, and limitations that shape the available evidence on the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and counter-insurgency operations in Borno State. The majority of the reviewed works (approximately 57%) employed qualitative methodologies, including ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, and case studies based in Maiduguri, Konduga, and other CJTF strongholds. These approaches offered rich contextual insights into the lived experiences of CJTF members and communities, thereby providing nuanced understanding of operational practices, social dynamics, and protection risks (Agbiboa, 2015; Kassim, 2018).

However, only a handful of studies utilised mixed-methods or quantitative designs. Surveys assessing community perceptions of the CJTF were rare and often limited in sample size (Okoli &



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Ugwu, 2019). This lack of quantitative evidence restricts the generalisability of findings and complicates efforts to measure systematically the CJTF's impact on security outcomes. Furthermore, very few studies employed longitudinal designs, which are critical for assessing the evolving role of the CJTF from its emergence in 2013 through the review period (2015–2025). The scarcity of time-series data represents a major gap, as it prevents robust analysis of transitions from active combat support to post-conflict reintegration. The quality of grey literature, particularly reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, and UN agencies, was generally high in terms of empirical grounding and policy relevance. These sources were indispensable for capturing issues such as child soldier recruitment, human rights violations, and DDR challenges that are sometimes underexplored in academic journals. Nonetheless, grey literature often reflected advocacy-oriented framings, raising concerns of potential bias toward emphasising protection risks over operational successes.

From a theoretical standpoint, the studies demonstrated varying levels of engagement with security studies frameworks such as new wars theory, hybrid security governance, and community-based counter-insurgency models. While some works contextualised the CJTF within broader debates on non-state armed actors in Africa (Debos, 2016; Muggah & O'Donnell, 2015), others adopted a more descriptive focus with limited theoretical integration. This inconsistency affected the depth of comparative analysis and limited the ability to situate Nigeria's experience within global scholarship on militias and irregular warfare.

In terms of quality assessment, most peer-reviewed sources were methodologically transparent, providing details on sampling strategies, data collection procedures, and limitations. However, concerns remain regarding security-related access restrictions, which may have constrained fieldwork and introduced selection bias, as researchers often relied on interviews with accessible CJTF members or urban communities while neglecting remote rural perspectives. Moreover, the political sensitivity of the subject may have influenced self-reporting, particularly when respondents feared reprisals. Overall, while the evidence base on the CJTF is substantial and multi-faceted, it is characterised by methodological imbalance, with a dominance of qualitative case studies and underrepresentation of quantitative, longitudinal, and comparative approaches. Addressing these gaps in future research will be critical to producing a more comprehensive and



balanced understanding of the CJTF's role, challenges, and long-term implications for security governance in Borno State and Nigeria.

Discussion

The evidence reviewed in this study highlights the dual character of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in counter-insurgency operations in Borno State between 2015 and 2025. On the one hand, the CJTF has emerged as a critical tactical partner to the Nigerian military, leveraging its local knowledge, community legitimacy, and grassroots surveillance capacities to facilitate intelligence gathering, secure liberated areas, and disrupt Boko Haram's operations (Agbiboa, 2015; Kassim, 2018). This operational value is widely acknowledged in both scholarly and policy-oriented sources, situating the CJTF within broader patterns of community-driven security responses observed in conflict-affected regions across Africa, such as vigilante groups in Mali and neighbourhood militias in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Debos, 2016; Krause, 2019).

At the same time, the evidence underscores profound protection risks and human rights concerns associated with the CJTF. Reports document incidents of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, forced recruitment, including child soldiers, and abuses against women and girls (Amnesty International, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2018). These findings align with global literature on irregular armed groups, which warns that community militias often replicate patterns of abuse when left without clear oversight and accountability mechanisms (Schuberth, 2015). The CJTF's ambiguous legal status has further complicated efforts to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights standards, creating a tension between immediate security gains and long-term rule-of-law imperatives.

Another major theme emerging from the literature concerns the governance and professionalisation dilemma. While some steps have been taken to integrate CJTF members into formal security structures, such as recruitment into the Nigerian Army or the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, these processes remain ad hoc, inconsistent, and limited in scope (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). This echoes challenges in other African contexts, where governments have struggled to formalise local defence groups without undermining central authority or exacerbating security fragmentation (Bøås & Dunn, 2017). The Nigerian case demonstrates both the necessity and



difficulty of balancing community empowerment with state control in fragile security environments.

The reviewed studies also converge on concerns regarding the long-term risks of militia institutionalisation. Without comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) strategies, there is a danger that CJTF fighters could transition into criminal networks, political thugs, or new insurgent groups, perpetuating cycles of violence (International Crisis Group, 2017). Evidence from other post-conflict settings, such as Sierra Leone and Liberia, shows that failure to provide viable livelihoods and reintegration pathways for irregular fighters often results in relapse into instability (Knight, 2010). The Nigerian experience, therefore, is not isolated but reflects a wider regional challenge of safely transitioning community-based armed actors after counter-insurgency campaigns.

Synthesising across these themes, the review suggests that the CJTF's contribution to Nigeria's counter-insurgency operations is both indispensable and fraught with contradictions. The group's emergence underscores the adaptive capacity of local communities in times of existential threat, but it also raises fundamental questions about accountability, state legitimacy, and the sustainability of militarised civilian mobilisation. The evidence base, while rich in descriptive accounts, remains limited in comparative, longitudinal, and quantitative dimensions, leaving significant scope for further inquiry into the long-term governance and developmental implications of the CJTF model.

Policy Implications

The synthesis of evidence on the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) points to several critical policy implications for Nigeria's counter-insurgency framework, governance of irregular armed actors, and post-conflict stabilisation strategies. First, the CJTF experience demonstrates that community-based security actors can serve as indispensable tactical partners in counter-insurgency campaigns. Their knowledge of terrain, language, and social networks enabled Nigerian forces to penetrate Boko Haram strongholds and secure vital intelligence (Kassim, 2018). Policymakers should therefore consider frameworks for structured collaboration with local defence groups, but this collaboration must be grounded in legal recognition, oversight, and clear mandates. Without such



frameworks, community militias risk becoming parallel authorities or spoilers in the security sector (Debos, 2016; Krause, 2019).

Second, the human rights risks associated with irregular militias call for the institutionalisation of accountability mechanisms. Evidence of abuses by CJTF members, ranging from child recruitment to extrajudicial killings, indicates that operational effectiveness must not overshadow adherence to humanitarian norms (Amnesty International, 2017; HRW, 2018). Policies should therefore prioritise training in human rights and international humanitarian law, while establishing independent monitoring mechanisms to investigate and sanction violations. This balance would enhance both the legitimacy and sustainability of counter-insurgency operations.

Third, the CJTF highlights the need for a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) strategy tailored to the Nigerian context. Many CJTF members remain armed and unemployed, creating potential risks of remobilisation into criminal networks, political militias, or renewed insurgencies (ICG, 2017). Policymakers should invest in reintegration programmes that combine vocational training, psychosocial support, and community reconciliation, drawing lessons from successful DDR experiences in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Knight, 2010). Such measures would reduce the risk of security relapse while facilitating long-term peacebuilding in Borno State.

Fourth, the evidence underscores the importance of professionalisation pathways for those CJTF members who wish to remain in the security sector. Current ad hoc recruitment into the Nigerian Army or Civil Defence Corps lacks coherence and transparency. A national policy should be developed to regulate the absorption of vetted CJTF members, ensuring equitable access, proper training, and career progression opportunities. This would prevent arbitrary selection, reduce grievances, and strengthen Nigeria's overall security sector reform agenda.

Finally, at the broader governance level, the CJTF case illustrates the dangers of over-reliance on militarised civilian mobilisation in fragile democracies. While effective in the short term, such groups can erode state monopoly over violence, foster political patronage networks, and entrench cycles of violence (Bøås & Dunn, 2017). Policymakers should therefore adopt a whole-of-society security approach that combines military measures with political dialogue, socio-economic recovery, and trust-building between communities and formal state institutions. This would



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address the root causes of violent extremism while ensuring that community resilience efforts complement, rather than undermine, state authority. In sum, the CJTF experience provides valuable lessons for Nigeria and other conflict-affected states in Africa: community militias can be strategic allies in counter-insurgency, but only when embedded in legal, accountable, and forward-looking frameworks that prioritise human security, reintegration, and state legitimacy.

Research Gaps and Future Directions (2015–2025)

Although the evidence based on the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is relatively robust, covering operational, governance, and human rights dimensions, significant research gaps remain that limit a comprehensive understanding of its role in counter-insurgency operations in Borno State. Identifying these gaps provides a foundation for future scholarly inquiry and policy-oriented research. First, there is a notable paucity of longitudinal studies that trace the CJTF's trajectory over time. Most existing research captures snapshots of its activities in the early to mid-phases of the insurgency (2013–2018) but offers limited insight into its transformation during the later years, particularly between 2020 and 2025. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to assess how the CJTF has evolved in composition, tactics, and relationship with state security forces, especially in light of shifting insurgency dynamics and post-conflict stabilisation efforts.

Second, the literature is dominated by qualitative case studies and advocacy reports, with very few quantitative or mixed-methods analyses. Empirical surveys of community perceptions, statistical evaluations of CJTF contributions to security outcomes, and econometric analyses of their socio-economic impact are largely absent (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Expanding the methodological toolkit would allow for more generalisable findings and enable policymakers to measure systematically the cost–benefit trade-offs of engaging with militias.

Third, there is limited research on the gender dimensions of CJTF participation. While some reports acknowledge the involvement of women, either as fighters, informants, or victims of abuses, systematic analyses of women's roles, vulnerabilities, and agency within the CJTF remain scarce (Amnesty International, 2017). Future scholarship should explore the gendered dynamics of militia engagement, including the implications for women's empowerment, protection, and reintegration in post-conflict Borno. Fourth, the DDR and reintegration pathways for CJTF members are under-examined. Although some policy reports warn of the risks of remobilisation



into criminal networks or political violence (ICG, 2017), there is insufficient empirical research tracking the actual trajectories of demobilised or absorbed CJTF members. Longitudinal follow-up studies on livelihoods, social reintegration, and community reconciliation are essential for assessing the long-term sustainability of Nigeria's DDR initiatives.

Fifth, there is a gap in comparative and cross-regional analyses. Much of the CJTF scholarship remains Nigeria-centric, with limited attempts to situate the group within wider African or global patterns of community-based militias in counter-insurgency contexts. Comparative studies with vigilante groups in Mali, Cameroon, or the Democratic Republic of Congo could enrich theoretical debates on hybrid security governance and militia professionalisation (Krause, 2019; Debos, 2016). Finally, more research is needed on the political economy of the CJTF, including the role of patronage, funding streams, and the potential instrumentalisation of the group by political elites. While anecdotal evidence suggests risks of politicisation and corruption, systematic studies exploring these dynamics are rare. Understanding how resource flows and political manipulation shape militia behaviour would deepen insights into their sustainability and governance challenges.

In light of these gaps, future research should prioritise multi-disciplinary, mixed-method, and comparative approaches, drawing on security studies, anthropology, development studies, and political economy. Such efforts would not only strengthen the academic understanding of the CJTF but also provide evidence-based guidance for Nigerian policymakers and international partners seeking to manage community militias in ways that balance short-term security imperatives with long-term peacebuilding.

Limitations of this Review

This systematic review, while offering a comprehensive synthesis of the evidence on the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and its role in counter-insurgency operations in Borno State (2015–2025), is subject to several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the review relied on published academic sources and grey literature (policy reports, NGO publications, and media accounts), many of which may reflect selective emphases or advocacy-driven framings. For example, while human rights organisations provide indispensable documentation of abuses, they may underplay the CJTF's operational contributions. Conversely, military and government-aligned reports may



prioritise tactical successes while neglecting governance or protection concerns. This unevenness in perspectives introduces the possibility of narrative bias.

Second, the security environment in Borno State constrained the scope and quality of primary data available in the reviewed studies. Researchers often faced restrictions in accessing rural areas and relied heavily on urban-based interviews, particularly in Maiduguri. As a result, the voices of communities most directly affected by CJTF activities in remote areas are underrepresented, creating a potential selection bias in the evidence base. Third, the review is limited by the scarcity of longitudinal and quantitative research. Most studies employed qualitative methods and short time horizons, making it difficult to assess causal relationships or long-term trends in CJTF operations, governance, and post-conflict reintegration. This restricts the ability of the review to provide robust generalisations or measurable estimates of the CJTF's impact on security outcomes.

Fourth, the review period (2015–2025) covers a decade of dynamic conflict and post-conflict transitions, but much of the available literature disproportionately concentrates on the earlier years of CJTF activity (2013–2018). This temporal imbalance means that more recent developments, such as shifts in the insurgency after 2020, DDR efforts, or the evolving relationship between the CJTF and formal security forces, are not as extensively documented in peer-reviewed scholarship. Finally, while systematic in its approach, this review was conducted within the linguistic constraint of English-language sources. Relevant works published in Hausa, French (given the Lake Chad Basin's cross-border context), or Arabic may not have been captured. This limitation narrows the scope of comparative and regional perspectives.

Taken together, these limitations suggest that while the review provides a balanced and structured synthesis of existing knowledge, the evidence base remains partial and evolving. Caution is therefore warranted in interpreting findings as definitive, and further research—especially multi-lingual, longitudinal, and community-based studies—will be essential to deepen and broaden the understanding of the CJTF's role in Nigeria's counter-insurgency and post-conflict governance.

Conclusion

This systematic review has examined the role of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in counter-insurgency operations in Borno State between 2015 and 2025, situating the group within broader



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debates on irregular armed actors, community militias, and hybrid security governance. The evidence reveals that the CJTF has been both a strategic asset and a source of long-term risks for Nigeria's security and governance landscape. Operationally, the CJTF provided indispensable support to the Nigerian military through intelligence gathering, territorial control, and community mobilisation, thereby contributing significantly to the degradation of Boko Haram's territorial influence. This aligns with global and African experiences where community-based defence groups have played crucial roles in asymmetric warfare. However, the tactical benefits of CJTF engagement have been offset by persistent protection risks, including human rights abuses, forced recruitment, and gender-based violence, which undermine the legitimacy of both the militia and the state.

The review further highlights challenges in governance, legal recognition, and professionalisation. While ad hoc recruitment of CJTF members into formal security institutions has occurred, these efforts lack a coherent policy framework and risk entrenching cycles of insecurity. The absence of a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) strategy compounds these challenges, raising the danger of remobilisation into criminal, political, or extremist networks. Policy implications point to the need for structured engagement that balances operational collaboration with legal accountability and long-term peacebuilding. Frameworks that embed the CJTF within Nigeria's security sector reform agenda, alongside targeted DDR and reintegration programmes, are vital for ensuring sustainable stability in Borno State and beyond.

The review also underscores research gaps, particularly the lack of longitudinal, quantitative, gender-sensitive, and comparative studies. Addressing these gaps would enrich academic understanding and strengthen evidence-based policymaking. Methodological limitations, including reliance on qualitative and advocacy-driven sources, limited rural perspectives, and temporal imbalances, further highlight the need for more inclusive and rigorous future research.

In conclusion, the CJTF represents a paradox: it embodies the resilience and agency of communities under siege, yet also exposes the vulnerabilities of states that outsource security functions to irregular actors. Managing this paradox requires policies that reconcile immediate counter-insurgency imperatives with long-term commitments to human rights, state legitimacy, and post-conflict governance. The Nigerian experience offers valuable lessons for other conflict-



affected regions grappling with the dilemmas of civilian militias, hybrid security governance, and the transition from war to peace.

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