



Community-Centered Security and Human Rights: The Role of Civil-Military Cooperation in Nigeria's Counter-Terrorism Strategy

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Abstract. Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy, particularly in the Northeast, has been marked by an overreliance on military force, which while weakening Boko Haram and ISWAP, has simultaneously deepened distrust between security forces and local communities due to recurring reports of human rights violations. This study interrogates the prospects of a community-centered security model that foregrounds civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) as a means of reconciling state sovereignty with humanitarian imperatives. Anchored in Human Security Theory, Social Contract Theory, and Institutional Theory, among others, the paper situates Nigeria's counter-terrorism challenge within broader debates on people-centered security and legitimacy. Drawing on case studies from Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, alongside comparative lessons from Kenya and Niger, the research examines how participatory approaches such as community-led intelligence gathering, inclusive policing, and post-conflict reintegration can enhance operational effectiveness while reducing abuses. The findings highlight that where trust-building mechanisms and civil-military dialogue have been institutionalized, communities have provided more reliable intelligence and shown greater willingness to cooperate with state forces. However, structural weaknesses, poor accountability, and entrenched militarization continue to limit outcomes. The paper contributes to methodological literature in political science and development studies by proposing a framework for participatory counter-terrorism in fragile states. Policy recommendations emphasize rights-based engagement, institutional reform, and multi-stakeholder collaboration as prerequisites for sustainable peace and security in Nigeria.

Keywords: Counter-terrorism, Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), Insurgency, Human Security.

1. Introduction

Nigeria's security landscape has been transformed over the past decade by an insurgency that originated in the country's northeastern provinces and has reverberated across the Lake Chad basin and the wider Sahel. What began as a locally rooted movement opposing Western-style education and weak governance in Borno State has evolved into a complex, adaptive jihadist insurgency that has inflicted profound humanitarian and state-capacity costs (Thurston, 2017). Estimates vary, but scholars and international agencies agree that the Boko Haram phenomenon including its splinter factions, has been responsible for tens of thousands of deaths, the displacement of millions, and widespread destruction of infrastructure, livelihoods and civic trust in the region (International Crisis Group, 2024; O'Connor et al., 2021). The scale, geographic diffusion, and endurance of the insurgency mark it as one of the most consequential security challenges facing Africa in the twenty-first century. Boko Haram's trajectory has been neither static nor singular. Scholarly research has traced its roots to charismatic preaching, local grievances, and weak state presence, and has emphasized the group's ability to exploit networks of grievance, patronage and economic marginality in northern Nigeria (Thurston, 2017; Ahmad, 2017). From the mass protests and violent confrontations of 2009 through successive waves of violence, the movement reinvented itself—splintering, shifting tactics, and increasingly adopting transnational jihadist linkages. In 2015–2016 a major schism produced two principal strands: the faction loyal to Abubakar Shekau (commonly referred to as JAS or Shekau's group) and the faction that aligned with the Islamic State, operating as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Each has pursued different operational logics, targeting patterns, and relations

with local communities, complicating Nigeria's response options (International Crisis Group, 2024; UN Security Council, 2020).

The regionalization of the conflict spreading from northeastern Nigeria to parts of Niger, Chad and Cameroon around Lake Chad, has multiplied the humanitarian and security implications. International observers and humanitarian agencies emphasize the combined effect of climate stress, livelihood collapse around Lake Chad, porous borders and weak multi-national coordination in creating a permissive environment for armed groups (New Yorker, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2024). Furthermore, Boko Haram's use of widespread atrocities including abductions (notably the 2014 Chibok kidnappings), forced recruitment of children, sexual violence, and the deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, has created long-term social trauma that complicates stabilization and reconciliation efforts (Human Rights Watch, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2021). Nigeria's official counter-terrorism posture has been dominated by kinetic military responses and a securitized approach framed around restoring territorial control. The Federal Government has developed formal strategies, including the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), and relied heavily on conventional armed forces, special task forces, and multinational military cooperation to degrade insurgent capabilities (NCTC, 2016). These operations achieved tactical successes—dislodging insurgent territorial control in parts of the region and degrading command centres, but have often fallen short of producing durable security or addressing the root causes that sustain violence (Campbell, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2024).

A persistent and worrying feature of Nigeria's counter-insurgency has been the recurrent allegations of human rights abuses by security forces and pro-government militias. Major international human rights organizations and investigative reporting have documented instances of extrajudicial killings, unlawful detention, torture, and abuses directed at women and children alleged to have links with armed groups (Human Rights Watch, 2015, 2019; Reuters reporting citing Amnesty International, 2024). These practices not only raise serious legal and ethical concerns but also undermine legitimacy, erode community trust, and in many instances fuel cycle of grievance that insurgents exploit thereby creating strategic blind spots in Nigeria's campaign against violent extremism. Compounding the problem is the uneven capacity of state institutions at the subnational level. Weak public service delivery, limited rule of law, corruption, and the absence of credible local

governance have left communities reliant on non-state actors for security and basic services. In certain areas, community self-defence groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) emerged as de facto security providers; while they have played important roles in local defense, they have also been implicated in abuses and operate with varying degrees of state oversight, further complicating civil-military relations (The Guardian, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2024).

Contemporary analyses stress that military victory alone will not deliver sustainable peace. Leading authorities including practitioners at International Crisis Group, scholars such as Alexander Thurston and Aisha Ahmad, and policy analysts at Brookings and CFR emphasize that long-term stabilization in Northeast Nigeria requires a rebalancing of counter-terrorism policy toward approaches that combine security, governance, development and human-rights protections (Thurston, 2017; Ahmad, 2017; Campbell, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2024). In particular, community-centered security models that build trust between security forces and local populations, integrate local knowledge into intelligence and policing, and prioritize protection of civilians are increasingly seen as critical complements to military operations (UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy; International Crisis Group, 2024). This study responds to that policy and scholarly imperative by examining how civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) and community-centered approaches can be structured to reduce abuses, enhance intelligence gathering, and support reintegration and resilience in Nigeria's Northeast. It seeks to probe the institutional barriers and enabling conditions for effective CIMIC, evaluate comparative lessons, and propose concrete, rights-based models for participatory intelligence, local policing, and post-conflict reintegration. By situating analysis at the intersection of security effectiveness and human rights protection, the study aims to contribute empirically grounded recommendations that can help reorient Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy toward sustainable, community-anchored security.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's long war with violent extremist groups, chiefly Boko Haram and its offshoots such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), has produced a security policy paradigm dominated by kinetic responses and military-centered counter-insurgency campaigns. While military operations have been central to denying territorial control and degrading insurgent capabilities, they have also been associated with repeated allegations of excessive

force, unlawful detention, and other human-rights violations (Human Rights Watch, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2024). These patterns create a fundamental dilemma: operations intended to protect citizens and restore state authority can at the same time undermine the legitimacy of the state by alienating the very communities whose cooperation is essential for sustainable counter-terrorism outcomes (Campbell, 2014; Thurston, 2017). A growing body of evidence indicates that heavy-handed security measures and impunity for abuses corrode local trust in state actors and push communities toward non-state security arrangements or passive accommodation of armed groups (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Ahmad, 2017). Notably in Nigeria's Northeast, the emergence of local self-defense groups such as variants of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and informal protection networks reflects both community resilience and a loss of confidence in formal security institutions (International Crisis Group, 2024). Where security forces are perceived as threats rather than protectors, civilians withhold intelligence, disengage from formal cooperation, or even sympathize with anti-state actors, dynamics that directly impede counter-terrorism effectiveness (Thurston, 2017). These dynamics raise three interrelated methodological and policy problems for Nigeria's counter-terrorism architecture. First, there is the operational problem of intelligence scarcity: reliable, timely human intelligence from local communities is indispensable for locating and neutralizing insurgent cells, but such information flows depend on trust and protection from reprisals, conditions often absent where abuses have occurred (Campbell, 2014). Second, there is the legitimacy problem: repeated allegations of unlawful conduct by state forces delegitimize the government's monopoly on force and weaken the social contract that underpins citizens' cooperation with security institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Third, there is the sustainability problem: military success without parallel investments in rights-respecting civil-military relations, community policing, and reintegration initiatives risks creating short-term tactical gains but long-term instability (International Crisis Group, 2024; UN, 2006).

Against this backdrop, the promise of community-centered security and structured civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) warrants rigorous evaluation. International practice and doctrinal guidance (IASC, 2008; UN, 2006) suggest that civil-military coordination, when grounded in humanitarian principles, respect for human rights, and local participation can improve protection outcomes, facilitate access to populations, and enable more credible intelligence partnerships. In the Nigerian

context, a rights-based CIMIC approach would aim to (a) strengthen mechanisms for accountability and civilian protection, (b) institutionalize channels for community input into operational planning, and (c) build joint civilian–security platforms for prevention, response, and post-conflict recovery (Campbell, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2024). However, important questions remain unanswered or under-researched. There is limited systematic evidence on what specific CIMIC modalities are practicable and effective in Nigeria's sociopolitical environment, and how these can be designed to minimize human-rights risk while preserving operational security. The Nigerian National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) and other policy instruments identify civil–military coordination and community engagement as priorities, yet implementation gaps persist, stemming from institutional fragmentation, weak oversight, and inadequate human-rights training for security personnel (NCTC, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Additionally, scholarship has yet to produce robust comparative frameworks that translate international CIMIC doctrines into actionable, culturally-attuned models for the Northeast Nigerian theatre (Thurston, 2017; Ahmad, 2017).

This study addresses these gaps by evaluating how community-centered approaches and CIMIC can be operationalized in Nigeria to rebuild trust, enhance human-sourced intelligence, and reduce rights abuses without compromising sovereignty or operational efficacy. The research will examine institutional barriers (command structures, legal frameworks, oversight mechanisms), socio-cultural dynamics (local authority structures, gendered experiences of violence), and operational constraints (force protection, information security), and will propose a set of participatory models for intelligence-gathering, community policing, and reintegration consistent with human-rights obligations (Bayley, 2006; IASC, 2008). By situating civil-military cooperation within a human-security and rights-based paradigm, the study aims to demonstrate that protecting civilians and building trust are not ancillary to counter-terrorism but central to its success. The evidence will inform policy prescriptions that reconcile Nigeria's duty to uphold sovereignty and territorial integrity with the equally compelling obligation to protect human rights and rebuild state–society relations in the Northeast. If properly designed and systematically implemented, CIMIC and community-centered security can transform the operational landscape, turning distrust into cooperation, information deficits into actionable intelligence, and ephemeral military gains into durable stability (UN, 2006; International Crisis Group, 2024).

1.2 Research Questions

- How has the overreliance on military force in Nigeria's Northeast affected the relationship between security forces and local communities in the counter-terrorism context?
- What are the key features and benefits of a community-centered security model in addressing terrorism threats in Nigeria?
- How does civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) and approaches such as community-led intelligence gathering and inclusive policing play in enhancing operational effectiveness against Boko Haram and ISWAP?
- What institutional and structural challenges hinder the institutionalization of trust-building mechanisms and civil-military dialogue in Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses the critical gap between military-centric counter-terrorism approaches and the need for human rights-centered, community-engaged security strategies in Nigeria's Northeast. By applying Human Security, Social Contract, and Institutional theories, the research offers a theoretically grounded framework for civil-military cooperation that balances security and humanitarian imperatives. The study provides empirical insights from Nigeria, supported by comparative analysis from Kenya and Niger, thus enriching academic literature on participatory governance and security sector reform in fragile states. Practically, it informs policymakers on how to build trust, improve intelligence sharing, and reduce human rights abuses through inclusive and institutionalized civil-military partnerships. The findings advocate for reforms that could lead to sustainable peace and security, ultimately contributing to more legitimate and effective counter-terrorism strategies that protect human rights and foster community resilience.

2. Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this paper, the researches adopted a multi theory approach.

2.1 Human Security Theory

The Human Security paradigm emerged in the 1990s, with its most authoritative articulation in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human

Development Report of 1994. *Proponents* such as Amartya Sen (1999) and Sakiko Fukuda-Parr (2003) argue that security should not be defined solely in terms of protecting state sovereignty or borders, but in safeguarding individuals from threats to survival, dignity, and livelihood. The human security framework emphasizes “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”, shifting attention from military strength to people's well-being (UNDP, 1994). This study employs human security theory to critique Nigeria's predominantly militarized counter-terrorism approach, which has often prioritized territorial control over civilian protection. By focusing on individuals' safety, trust, and dignity, human security provides a normative justification for community-centered and rights-based counter-terrorism, aligning security with humanitarian imperatives (Newman, 2010). It underscores why civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) must place civilian protection and community resilience at its core.

2.2 Social Contract Theory

Rooted in the works of Thomas Hobbes (1651), John Locke (1689), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), social contract theory posits that the legitimacy of political authority is derived from a tacit agreement between citizens and the state. Citizens surrender certain freedoms in exchange for the state's provision of order, protection, and justice. When the state fails to provide security or abuses its powers, the social contract is eroded, leading to disobedience, conflict, or alternative governance structures. In Northeast Nigeria, widespread human-rights abuses by security forces and persistent insecurity have strained the social contract (Thurston, 2017; Campbell, 2014). Communities lose faith in the state when security operations victimize rather than protect them, thereby legitimizing insurgents or informal militias. By situating Nigeria's counter-terrorism challenge within the framework of social contract theory, this study demonstrates why civil-military cooperation and participatory security models are critical to rebuilding state legitimacy and restoring citizens' trust in government institutions.

2.3 Civil-Military Relations Theory

The field of civil-military relations is shaped by scholars such as Samuel P. Huntington (1957) in *The Soldier and the State*, and Morris Janowitz (1960) in *The Professional Soldier*. Huntington advanced the concept of objective civilian control, arguing that a professionalized, autonomous military subject to civilian oversight preserves democratic governance. Janowitz, by contrast, emphasized the “constabulary

concept,” where the military adapts to societal norms and engages in cooperative roles, especially in peacekeeping and low-intensity conflicts. Contemporary scholarship (Cottey et al., 2002) extends these ideas to contexts where militaries are involved in internal security operations, counter-insurgency, and post-conflict stabilization. Nigeria’s counter-terrorism experience reveals tensions between military autonomy and civilian oversight. Allegations of abuses suggest weaknesses in both accountability and societal integration. Applying civil-military relations theory enables this study to evaluate how CIMIC can serve as a corrective mechanism, fostering professional conduct, human-rights compliance, and cooperative engagement between the armed forces and civilian populations in counter-terrorism contexts.

2.4 Community Policing and Participatory Security Theories

The notion of community policing was pioneered in the 1970s by scholars and practitioners such as Herman Goldstein (1979), who advocated “problem-oriented policing.” The framework emphasizes decentralization, trust-building, and collaboration between police forces and communities to prevent crime and enhance legitimacy (Skogan & Hartnett, 1997). Later, participatory security models expanded the concept beyond policing, stressing the role of local communities in shaping security priorities, contributing intelligence, and co-managing reintegration processes (Bayley, 2006). Applied to counter-terrorism in Nigeria, participatory security theory underscores the necessity of building bottom-up security partnerships. Local communities in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa often possess invaluable intelligence on insurgent movements but are reluctant to cooperate due to mistrust. Integrating community policing principles into CIMIC strategies can bridge intelligence gaps, reduce abuses, and enhance legitimacy, making counter-terrorism operations more effective and rights-compliant.

2.5 Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict transformation theory is most closely associated with John Paul Lederach (1997), who stressed that sustainable peace requires addressing the root causes of conflict, transforming relationships, and empowering local communities. Unlike conflict resolution, which seeks to end immediate violence, conflict transformation focuses on building long-term structures for reconciliation, inclusion, and justice. In Nigeria’s Northeast, insurgency is rooted not only in extremist ideology but also in governance failures, poverty, and marginalization (Agbibo, 2013).

Conflict transformation theory suggests that counter-terrorism cannot succeed without reintegration, rehabilitation, and local empowerment. Thus, CIMIC must go beyond military cooperation to include socio-economic programs, community dialogue, and transitional justice mechanisms that address grievances fueling insurgency.

The theoretical frameworks employed in this study provide a multidimensional lens through which Nigeria’s counter-terrorism strategy can be critically examined. The human security paradigm underscores the primacy of civilian protection, emphasizing that the safety and dignity of individuals must remain central to any security operation. In contexts such as Nigeria’s Northeast, where Boko Haram and ISWAP have deeply disrupted communities, this framework highlights that the legitimacy of counter-terrorism depends not merely on defeating insurgents but also on safeguarding the lives and livelihoods of ordinary citizens. Equally important is the social contract theory, which offers a conceptual basis for understanding how state legitimacy is eroded when security operations are associated with abuses, neglect, or violations of rights. When the state, through its armed forces, fails to uphold its obligations to protect citizens, it risks weakening the very trust upon which governance and stability rest. This theory is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where cycles of mistrust between local populations and security actors have undermined counter-terrorism effectiveness. Civil-military relations theory provides another crucial perspective, clarifying the need for professional, accountable, and rights-based engagement by security forces. It draws attention to the balance between civilian oversight and military effectiveness, while stressing the importance of building cooperative relationships between armed forces and local populations. When integrated with the principles of community policing and participatory security, this framework operationalizes trust-building and intelligence-sharing by emphasizing inclusive approaches that empower communities as active stakeholders in their own security. Conflict transformation theory extends the analysis by insisting that counter-terrorism strategies must move beyond immediate security measures to address root causes of insurgency such as poverty, inequality, marginalization, and weak governance. By incorporating this perspective, the study recognizes that sustainable peace requires structural reforms and social reintegration mechanisms that dismantle the drivers of violent extremism. Together, these frameworks establish a strong normative and analytical foundation for assessing how community-centered security and civil-military cooperation can

reconcile Nigeria's sovereignty imperatives with its human rights obligations in the ongoing fight against Boko Haram and ISWAP.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, case study research design, which is particularly well suited for exploring complex social and political dynamics such as civil-military cooperation and community-centered security. By focusing on specific cases such as Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, the research provides in-depth insights into localized experiences of counter-terrorism that may be obscured by broader quantitative analyses. A case study approach allows the investigation of how theoretical frameworks, such as human security and civil-military relations, manifest in practice within Nigeria's counter-terrorism context (Yin, 2018). Data will be drawn from multiple sources to ensure triangulation and enhance validity. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a diverse range of actors, including military and police officers, members of the CJTF, traditional and religious leaders, representatives of women's and youth groups, and officials from NGOs and humanitarian agencies. In addition, policy documents, official reports, and secondary literature will be analyzed to provide institutional and historical context. The combination of primary and secondary data will enable a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.

Analytically, the study will employ thematic analysis, coding the data to identify patterns and themes aligned with the study's theoretical frameworks. Specifically, the concepts of human security and civil-military cooperation will guide the categorization of findings, ensuring that the analysis captures both the protective dimensions of security and the relational aspects of trust, legitimacy, and dialogue. This approach will not only illuminate how community-centered strategies are being implemented in practice but also evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing Nigeria's counter-terrorism framework.

4. Literature Review

This literature review explores the scholarly and policy debates on counter-terrorism, civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), and community-centered security in fragile states, with a focus on Nigeria. To critically evaluate Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy and its human rights implications, the review is in part structured around four guiding research questions: (1) the impact of overreliance on military force on security-community relations; (2) the features and benefits of community-centered security models; (3)

the role of CIMIC, intelligence-sharing, and inclusive policing in enhancing counter-terrorism effectiveness; and (4) the institutional and structural barriers to embedding trust-building mechanisms in Nigeria's security architecture. To contextualize these questions, the review draws on global experiences (Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia), regional African cases (Kenya, Mali, Niger), and Nigeria-specific literature, highlighting conceptual frameworks, debates, and knowledge gaps.

4.1 Military Reliance and Community-Security Relations in Nigeria

Globally, scholarship shows that overreliance on military solutions in counter-insurgency often generates unintended consequences, particularly in contexts of fragile state-community relations. In Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S.-led campaigns relied heavily on kinetic operations, which alienated local populations and undermined long-term stabilization (Kilcullen, 2009; Jones, 2012). Similar dynamics have been observed in Somalia, where AMISOM's military offensives against al-Shabaab frequently resulted in civilian casualties that eroded trust (Williams, 2018). In Africa, militarized responses to violent extremism have produced mixed outcomes. In Mali, for instance, French-led counter-terrorism operations achieved short-term battlefield gains but failed to dismantle insurgent recruitment, largely because of persistent human rights violations (Cold-Ravnkilde & Albrecht, 2019). These lessons suggest that military overreach without community consent risks perpetuating insurgency cycles.

Nigeria reflects these patterns. The military has been central to countering Boko Haram and ISWAP since 2009, but evidence consistently points to abuses that undermine legitimacy. Human Rights Watch (2014) and Amnesty International (2018) report widespread extrajudicial killings, torture, and sexual violence committed by security forces in the Northeast. Scholars argue that this reliance on military force has created a "legitimacy gap" between the Nigerian state and communities, limiting intelligence cooperation and deepening grievances (Onuoha, 2014; Agbiboa, 2021).

4.2 Community-Centered Security Models

Literature on community-centered security emphasizes shifting from state-centric to participatory approaches. Globally, Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and community policing initiatives in Iraq illustrate the potential of empowering local populations to shape security outcomes (Perito, 2005). Though uneven in execution,

these initiatives highlight the importance of legitimacy and cultural sensitivity in counter-terrorism. In Africa, Kenya's community-policing model after the Westgate Mall attack exemplifies the benefits of involving local actors in early warning systems and intelligence gathering (Botha & Abdile, 2019). In Niger, peace committees provided dialogue platforms that defused tensions and reduced extremist recruitment (Agbiboa, 2020). Such models show that participatory security builds resilience by addressing grievances and fostering ownership of counter-terrorism processes.

For Nigeria, a community-centered model would mean integrating local leaders, traditional institutions, and youth groups into intelligence structures, reinforcing humanitarian protection, and creating reintegration pathways for repentant fighters (Aghedo & Osumah, 2014). Research highlights that communities, when empowered, are better placed to identify threats early and to resist extremist narratives (Higazi, 2015).

4.3 The Role of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC)

Civil-military cooperation is defined as the coordination between military forces, civil authorities, and communities to support stabilization and security objectives (NATO, 2003). International scholarship emphasizes that CIMIC strengthens intelligence flows, humanitarian access, and legitimacy (Sheeran & Bailey, 2012). In Somalia, CIMIC-enabled dialogues between AMISOM and local elders improved operational effectiveness against al-Shabaab (Williams, 2018). In the African context, CIMIC has been employed in peacekeeping and stabilization, notably in Mali, where community dialogues moderated tensions, albeit inconsistently (Cold-Ravnkilde & Albrecht, 2019). However, weak institutionalization often limits CIMIC's sustainability.

In Nigeria, CIMIC has taken forms such as humanitarian assistance, military–community forums, and partnerships with the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). While these efforts have enhanced local intelligence and disrupted Boko Haram networks, they also carry risks. The CJTF, though effective, has been implicated in abuses, highlighting accountability gaps (Higazi, 2015). Scholars argue that structured CIMIC, anchored in transparency and inclusivity, could enhance Nigeria's operational effectiveness by institutionalizing dialogue and trust-building (Akinola, 2019; Agbiboa, 2021)

4.4 Institutional and Structural Barriers

Finally, the literature highlights institutional and structural challenges that undermine participatory counter-terrorism in Nigeria. Globally, weaknesses such as fragmented command structures, limited oversight, and poor coordination between military and civilian agencies hinder the sustainability of CIMIC (Jones, 2012). In Africa, state fragility, corruption, and politicization of security institutions constrain inclusive approaches (Agbiboa, 2020). Nigeria exemplifies these challenges. Despite adopting the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) in 2014, implementation has remained highly militarized, with insufficient attention to community participation (Abdulaziz, 2020). Structural problems include underfunded reintegration programs, weak accountability for security abuses, and poor interagency collaboration (Akinola, 2019). Moreover, deep-seated mistrust between communities and security forces makes institutionalization of dialogue difficult (Onuoha, 2014). These barriers underscore the difficulty of embedding trust-based approaches into Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy.

4.5 Kinetic Approaches to Counter Terrorism

One of the dominant critiques of Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy is the overreliance on kinetic approaches, which has often alienated local communities rather than winning their cooperation. The military's heavy-handed tactics, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and forced displacements, have exacerbated distrust between civilians and the state (Amnesty International, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2022). This erosion of trust undermines intelligence-sharing and complicates efforts to dismantle terrorist networks. As scholars like Kalyvas (2006) have argued, civilian collaboration is central to counter-insurgency success, since it is the population that often controls critical information about insurgents' movements and support structures. In this regard, the Nigerian case illustrates the tension between short-term tactical gains through force and the long-term need for legitimacy and community cooperation.

Global evidence also suggests that militarized responses, if not accompanied by community engagement, tend to produce cycles of violence. For example, research on Afghanistan and Iraq shows that civilian casualties and rights violations by security forces often fueled insurgent recruitment and radicalization (Kilcullen, 2010; Biddle, 2021). In Somalia, the African Union Mission (AMISOM) faced similar challenges, with community-centered

initiatives such as involving clan elders proving more effective than purely military campaigns (Williams, 2018). These comparative insights underscore the relevance of Nigeria shifting towards models that prioritize human rights, dialogue, and participatory security frameworks. Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) offers a pathway to bridging the gap between military imperatives and humanitarian obligations. Scholars of security sector reform argue that CIMIC, when properly institutionalized, enhances mutual trust by creating channels of dialogue, enabling humanitarian access, and facilitating joint problem-solving between soldiers and civilians (Fitz-Gerald, 2011; Olonisakin, 2020). However, in Nigeria, CIMIC remains underdeveloped and largely ad hoc, with coordination often limited to elite-level negotiations rather than grassroots inclusivity (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). The failure to integrate traditional leaders, women's groups, and youth associations into these mechanisms further reduces their legitimacy and impact, especially in diverse communities of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa.

A key gap in the literature lies in the relative neglect of participatory counter-terrorism models in Nigeria. While studies have examined the military's shortcomings and the rise of vigilante formations such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), fewer works have systematically evaluated structured approaches to community engagement within counter-terrorism strategy (Hoffmann et al., 2022). Existing accounts often treat local communities as passive victims or sources of intelligence, rather than as active stakeholders capable of shaping the trajectory of peace and security. This overlooks the potential of models drawn from Kenya's community policing initiatives and Niger's peace committees, which emphasize sustained dialogue, early-warning systems, and reintegration of defectors (Botha & Abdile, 2016; Aghedo & Osumah, 2014).

Finally, the literature highlights institutional and structural barriers that complicate the institutionalization of trust-building mechanisms in Nigeria's counter-terrorism framework. Bureaucratic fragmentation, lack of accountability in the security sector, and political interference weaken CIMIC and prevent the scaling of community-centered strategies (Adebajo, 2021). Moreover, the absence of coherent post-conflict reintegration policies means that former combatants and traumatized communities are left in limbo, perpetuating cycles of insecurity (Okoli & Agbibo, 2021). Addressing these gaps requires a fundamental reconceptualization of counter-terrorism not merely as a military campaign but as a governance and legitimacy project rooted in local participation,

rights protection, and long-term conflict transformation.

4.6 Knowledge Gap

Across global, African, and Nigerian scholarship, a consensus emerges: military dominance in counter-terrorism erodes community trust, while participatory approaches enhance legitimacy and intelligence. However, the literature also reveals major gaps. First, structured studies on community-centered models in Nigeria remain limited. Second, while CIMIC is discussed in peace operations, few studies evaluate its systematic integration into Nigeria's counter-terrorism framework. Third, institutional challenges such as accountability and coordination require more empirical exploration. Addressing these gaps, this study appraises the potential of community-centered security and CIMIC as transformative tools in Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy.

5. Case Studies

Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, provides an instructive example of how community-based initiatives can complement formal counter-terrorism measures. The emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in 2013 marked a turning point in the fight against Boko Haram, as thousands of young men and women organized to assist the military with intelligence gathering, patrols, and protection of neighborhoods (Agbibo, 2015). While the CJTF's contribution has been critical in reclaiming territory and reducing insurgent infiltration, their involvement has also raised questions about accountability, long-term sustainability, and the risk of human rights abuses. The Maiduguri experience thus underscores both the opportunities and challenges of incorporating grassroots actors into Nigeria's counter-terrorism framework. Beyond Maiduguri, community dialogue programmes in Adamawa and Yobe States have shown promise in fostering trust between local populations and security forces. These initiatives, often facilitated by NGOs and supported by international partners, bring together traditional leaders, religious authorities, women's groups, and security personnel to address grievances and develop locally tailored peacebuilding strategies (Okoli & Ugwu, 2021). Such forums have improved the flow of information between civilians and the military, reduced the stigma surrounding surrendered insurgents, and provided platforms for early-warning mechanisms. However, their reach has been uneven, often limited to pilot projects without systematic integration into the national counter-terrorism strategy.

Comparative lessons from other African contexts provide further insights into the relevance of community-centered approaches. Kenya's community-policing model, developed in response to terrorist threats from al-Shabaab, emphasizes partnership between police and local communities through neighborhood watch schemes and regular dialogue forums (Botha & Abdile, 2016). In Niger, local peace committees have played a vital role in preventing extremist infiltration by mediating disputes, fostering dialogue between state representatives and marginalized groups, and promoting collective responsibility for security (International Crisis Group, 2017). Both cases highlight how structured, inclusive platforms can enhance intelligence gathering, reduce mistrust, and strengthen state legitimacy, all lessons highly applicable to Nigeria's Northeast.

6. Findings and Recommendations

The study highlights recurring patterns of deep-seated community distrust of military operations, largely fueled by incidents of human rights abuses and heavy-handed tactics. This erosion of trust has often undermined the legitimacy of counter-terrorism operations in the Northeast. However, opportunities exist where Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) initiatives have created pathways for mutual understanding. In cases where dialogue and humanitarian assistance have been prioritized, trust has been rebuilt, and the quality of local intelligence has improved significantly, enhancing operational outcomes. Despite these gains, several challenges persist, including institutional resistance within the security sector, endemic corruption, inadequate resources, and cultural divides that limit effective collaboration. The implications of these findings underscore that participatory security approaches rooted in community engagement not only strengthen intelligence networks but also enhance Nigeria's broader legitimacy in its counter-terrorism strategy.

To address these gaps, counter-terrorism strategies should prioritize strengthening human rights training for security forces, ensuring that military conduct aligns with democratic and humanitarian norms. Institutionalizing community policing models in conflict-affected areas can provide a framework for participatory security and sustainable collaboration. Furthermore, the formalization of civil-military dialogue platforms in conflict zones would help foster trust and reduce friction. Reintegration programs must also be designed with sensitivity to local traditions and justice mechanisms, promoting acceptance of

rehabilitated individuals. Finally, effective counter-terrorism requires multi-stakeholder collaboration, bringing together NGOs, religious leaders, and international partners to create inclusive and comprehensive responses.

7. Conclusion

The overall conclusion reinforces the need to balance state sovereignty, human rights, and community engagement in Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts. Civil-Military Cooperation remains central to rebuilding trust and fostering durable peace in the Northeast, especially in areas long scarred by insurgency. Looking ahead, future research should explore under-examined dimensions such as the role of gender in CIMIC and the long-term effectiveness of reintegration strategies. By adopting a community-centered and rights-based approach, Nigeria can transform its counter-terrorism framework into one that is both legitimate and sustainable.

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