

Civilian Joint Task Force and Countering Violent Extremism in the Northeast, Nigeria

Adamson Duncan Ganiyu¹, Nsemba Edward Lenshie², Ibrahim Mohammed Nasiru¹ and
Ajayi Oluwaseun Clement¹

¹Department of Political Science, Kogi State University, Kabba, Nigeria

E-mail- gdadamson@ksukabba.edu.ng mnibrahim@ksukabba.edu.ng, ocajayi@ksukabba.edu.ng

²Department of Political Science and International Relations, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

E-mail- Edward.lenshie@tsuniversity.edu.ng

Corresponding Author: gdadamson@ksukabba.edu.ng

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Abstract

Recent years have witnessed the emergence of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) as a major collective actor in countering violent extremism in the northeast Nigeria. This study, focused on the role of Civilian JTF in countering violent extremism in the northeast Nigeria. The article used the twin theories of partnership policing and community participation, the article also used qualitative analysis to examine how the CJTF counter violent extremism in the northeast Nigeria. These theories, argued that no government or authority has the means to solve all the public problems adequately, and in the case of security challenge in the northeast Nigeria, the local people in their communities not only understand their neighbourhoods better, but share the common aspiration of promoting and protecting their communities. The study argues that, community based security outfit in the northeast should be legally constituted, to enhance their capacity to counter violent extremism in northeast Nigeria.

Keyword: Extremism, Violent Extremism, Civilian JTF, Military JTF, Civilian Collaboration.

Introduction

The northeast (NE) Nigeria, which was one of the most peaceful regions in Nigeria, has become a beehive of violent activities that characterized the series of insurgents and extremist attacks that have wreaked havoc on the stability of the region affecting its socio-economic and political activities for more than a decade now. These challenges has its causative factors to include weak institutional structures in the northeast region and Nigeria as a whole, political gansterism, high unemployment rate, manipulation of religious practices for political gains, increase of small weapons and arms among the youths in the northeast Nigeria e.t.c. All of these factors combined together culminated to the formation, in 2002, of the militant Jihadist organization, *Jamati ahlus Sunna liddawati wal Jihad* (popularly known as Boko Haram). It is relevant to denote that this group later transformed from Jihadist group to an extremist group terrorizing the whole of northeast and some states in northern Nigeria. In this study, it is shown that, countering and degrading violent extremist activities, self-help effort of the youths and Civilian JTF have achieved results that enhance the stability of the northeast Nigeria.

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) emerged as a response to the security challenges posed by the activities of insurgents in parts of the northeast Nigeria. It was established as a community based security organization. CJTF is made up of mainly young men and women. This self-help group was born out of necessity, first in Maiduguri Borno State, and later the idea spread across other parts of the region (Umara, 2018). CJTF was set up as a community-based security outfit with a command and control structure starting from the unit, ward, district, local government, and state level, they swore to an oath and the oath is often repeated in the process of recruiting new members. It is said that the oath, especially because it is administered with the Holy Qur'an, instills confidence in the recruits and members that they are doing God's work.

Despite several military strategies, the military joint task force (MJTF) constituted by the Nigerian government to counter the Boko Haram extremist in northeast Nigeria recorded little success, as attacks on civilian lives and destruction of properties by the extremist continued amidst heavy presence of the security forces in the northeast region. This is largely due to inability of military joint task force (MJTF) to identify the hideouts of the terrorist group who use guerrilla style of warfare by using civilians as shield in attacking the security forces (Dan-Azumi & Ademola, 2018).

Due to the implication of violent extremism on security of lives and property, economic growth and national development, the northeast youths began their resistance and countering of the Boko Haram extremist group first, as an unorganized group known as *yan gora* (Youth with sticks), their emergence was spontaneous. According to Oarhe (2013: 65) in reaction to the extremist's activities, the Federal Government deployed the Military Joint Task Force (MJTF), but unfortunately, the MJTF could not identify the extremists and the innocent youths roaming the streets of the major cities and towns of the northeast Nigeria, as the extremists were living among the people while perpetrating their violent activities. This made the MJTF to result to dragnet arrests of many innocent youth, as well as the extremists, were arrested and sometimes executed.

The creation of civilian joint task force (CJTF) as part of the mechanisms for countering the menace of violent extremist group in the northeast Nigeria represents a veritable example of community based communal response to security challenge and an indication of how terrorism can be tackled and prevented. The civilian JTF group exploits the knowledge of the communities they are part of to identify suspected violent extremist members of the suspicious individuals (Okereke, 2013). According to Umara (2018), the northeast, which was one of the most peaceful geo-political zone in Nigeria, has in the last ten years become characterized by series of security challenges that has wreak havoc on the stability of the region affecting its socio-economic and political activities. To Umara, these security challenges in the region find their roots in various causative factors including weak institutional structure in the country Nigeria, high unemployment rate, political gangsterism, manipulation of religious practices for political gains, proliferation of small arms, and ever-eroding social fabric.

Scholars (Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019; Agbiboa, 2015; Onuoha & Oyewole, 2018; Umara, 2018; Dlakwa, 2018 and Mustapha, 2013) argued that it is important to counter violent extremism in order to reduce the rapidly growing spate of suicide attacks on soft targets in communities in the northeast, reduce the numbers of internally displaced persons (IDP's), enhance farmers' access to their farmlands and promote food security. It is therefore unsurprising that Civilian joint task force (CJTF) focus on providing community-level interventions to tackle the elementary desires of people who are of great vulnerable to recruitment by extremists. Hence, civilian joint task force (CJTF) main role and duty is to assist the law enforcement agencies in their job of providing security to the society and assist the military in countering the extremist. This study examines the role of civilian joint task force (CJTF) in countering VE in NE Nigeria from 2013 to 2019.

Literature Review

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) emerged as a response to the security challenges posed by the activities of extremist in parts of the northeast Nigeria. It was established as a community based security organization. CJTF is made up of mainly young men and women. The CJTF was born out of necessity, first in Maiduguri Borno State, and later the idea spread across other parts of the region (Umara, 2018). The CJTF is a voluntary movement of mostly men and women who swore by the Holy Qur'an to fight Boko Haram extremist to the death. Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) gained a widespread acceptance in the northeast region where they engaged in conducting security checks, acting as informants to security agents on Boko Haram extremist members in their midst and exposing the extremists hideout to the Nigerian security forces. Sometimes, CJTF operatives fight alongside with the military against the insurgents on the battle front and carried out rescue missions to save those in captivity of the extremist group (Ibekwe, 2016). Thus, Civilian JTF is viewed by the Voice of the Persecuted as follows;

Civilian JTF is defined as a child of necessity because it was a dynamic intervention of God Almighty to the prayers of his people day and night. When God saw the tears of widows, orphans and innocent Muslims and Christians that were massacred and slaughtered in northeast of Nigeria; He mercifully had compassion on the people to originate a group of '*Yan Gora*' (Youth with Stick) but later called Civilian JTF to fight the extremists to the last point (Voice of the persecuted in Africa, 2013).

The creation of civilian JTF as part of the mechanisms for countering the menace of violent extremist group in the northeast Nigeria represents a veritable example of community based communal response to security challenge and an indication of how terrorism can be tackled and prevented. The civilian JTF group exploits the knowledge of the communities they are part of to identify suspected violent extremist members of the suspicious individuals (Okereke, 2013). The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) acted as the eyes and ears of the Nigerian security forces and is often the first responder to trouble (IRIN, 2004). With local skills and intelligence, the Civilian JTF has successfully fish out hiding Boko Haram extremist in their various neighbourhoods. In the process, they have greatly helped in improving civil-military relations.

The CJTF as a community-based security outfit enjoys the full support and cooperation of members of the society and the various governments of northeast states of Nigeria. For instance, at a time, most residents of Maiduguri considered themselves to be affiliated to the CJTF. While there were a few commissioned members, the group enjoyed the support of most of the residents of the cities in the northeast. This caused Boko Haram, in one of its videos, to declare war on all residents of Maiduguri (Umara, 2018).

Agbibo (2015) in his work, Youth as Tactical Agents of Peace building and Development in the Sahel, cited in Dan-Azumi & Ademola (2018), observed that an area that is overlooked but critical in the ongoing war against the extremist group in the northeast, is the manner in which the angry youth in the northeast Nigeria are contributing their quota as the conflict upholds. In complementing the efforts of the Nigerian military, the CJTF enlist against the extremist with bow and arrows, swords and machetes in their communities and in rare occasions locally made guns, thereby giving combat and intelligence support respectively, this is however contrast to the accusations that the Civilian JTF members are bunch of thugs, the CJTF members undertake the function of community-based policing.

The northeast Nigeria as at today accounts for 20% of the population of the country (World Bank, 2018). "A healthy, well-educated, well-nourished and skillful population not only give the basis for a productive life and permits future employees to contend in the dynamic labour markets of the evolving digital economy; it gives citizens a stake in their community and country, helping to build greater stability and reducing the drivers of conflict. This is particularly important for the northeast Nigeria." As one of the largest and most populous geo-political zone in the production of food, a stable and prosperous northeast is critical for stability and faster poverty reduction in the northern Nigeria. More so, in a research conducted on youth vulnerability in the northeast by the World Bank (2018), after critical observation, it reveals that extremism has brought about serious humanitarian crisis in the northeast Nigeria. Poor education and health

outcomes have dim the prospects of achieving poverty reduction and sustained growth in the northeast Nigeria. Studies by Hsieh and Peter (2010), shows “that between 10% and 30% of the differences in per capita income between countries can be attributed to human capital.” According to the report of an oral interview conducted in 2019, Ibrahim Umara of the Department of Political Science University of Maiduguri confirmed that youth vulnerability in the northeast Nigeria, if not addressed with utmost priority, the consequences will be beyond the borders of northeast region. He argued further that the region’s high rate of fertility, explosive population advancement and the extremist attacks, tied with continuing underinvestment in healthcare, education and high unemployment have led to national pandemics, migration and further conflicts in the region.

The consequence of the above is that the youth and children become vulnerable to the extremist groups. It has also led to forced migration of such hunger population resulting into multi-dimensional problems ranging from social, political, to economic. As stated by Dlakwa (2018), at the social front, the displaced persons lost their sense of belonging to families, households, and communities that provided them with sense of identity, security and social safety networks that hitherto served as insurance against unforeseen calamity. Migrants in the communities left their place of abode with a heavy burden of psycho-social trauma caused by the exposure to the gruesome murder of their family members by the Boko Haram extremists. Some Women and Girls were sexually violated and physically abused before opportunity of escape came their way. Others witnessed the death of their children and loved ones in the course of the journey from their communities to safer communities owing to hunger, thirst, physical exhaustion and snake bite. Amidst all these, vulnerable youths were easily recruited by the extremist, children in these areas were removed from school and deprived of food and nutrition.

It was observed that Politics wise, displacement has transformed power relationship among members of the affected communities. It uprooted the people from their ancestral homes, destroyed the community as a political entity and technically dethroned the traditional title holders among them. The simple ordinance of traditional institution is for the traditional heads to establish and maintain affective control over a defined territory and subjects who share common belief, customs and ancestral homes (Dlakwa, 2018). The Boko Haram extremist-induced migration has violated this simple ordinance of traditional authority, as traditional rulers of the affected communities, and their subjects have been forcefully conscripted into the extremist group, while some subject has run to exile.

At the economic front, communities that were attacked and taken over by the Boko Haram extremist were not only dispossessed of their accumulated wealth but also lost their source of livelihood. In a study conducted by USAID (2017) it was revealed and attested by the Cattle Breeders Association in the North Eastern Nigeria, that by the end of 2016 Boko-Haram extremist had killed 1,900 herdsman and stolen about 169,000 Cows, 63,000 Sheep and Goats, and 400,000 sacks of grain. However, when statistics generated from Niger and Cameroon on the same atrocity was added to those of Nigeria’s “the extremists had stolen at least 370,000 head of Cattle by the end of 2016” (USAID, 2017: p.12). Also during the period, freedom of movement in the captured communities was so restricted that the affected persons could not engage in any meaningful economic activities. For instance, food production in the Lake Chad Basin Area was well over 90% below average of what was produced prior to the extremist activities (USAID, 2017: p.10).

However, scholars dwell on the socio-economic view which opines that “the extremist crises is merely a symptom of the larger underling problem of poverty and exclusion and lack of engaging the youth and the vulnerable, which is at the heart of all violence in Nigeria whether in the Delta, Jos or Maiduguri (Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019).” Foreign Policy (FP) Magazine summarizes the socio-economic view as follows:

With Yusuf out of the image, assuming the problem is over would be stupid. These kinds of episodes will continue to pop up as they have over the last centuries throughout the North until the root of the issue is corrected (http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/31/mayhem_in_nigeria).

For some scholars, “the role of religion in the eruption of violent extremism in the north-east of Nigeria is recognized but presented as epiphenomenal and relatively insignificant. The depth metaphor is used to characterize the true cause of violence, strengthening the concept of the causes of violence as the root of a plant spreading under the ground.” Foreign Policy (FP) states: “Religious abuse is just as simple a response—and right on the surface

(http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/07/31/mayhem_in_nigeria).”

The surface is meaningless because the true cause of economic deprivation is digging deeper and extending to Abuja (Roelofs, 2014). Even religious events cannot be described explicitly by socio-economic variables, with regard to religion. The causes of violent extremism and youth vulnerability in the northeast of Nigeria are socio-economic deprivation, and the political elite are to blame for the failure of the state's main mission providing for the youths and the vulnerable. The emergence of violent extremism in north-eastern Nigeria ought to be viewed from the context of a fragile or failing state.

In his presentation, Bisalla (2009) argues that if the Nigerian state operates properly, the root cause of youth vulnerability will be solved. He claims that the alternative is to replace the failed state with a country that offers excellent governance and economic growth model in the northeast Nigeria. The failure he said is sometimes not the model of the state but rather the inability of the individual office holders to carry out the duties that the western liberal model of the state's free market demands.

In another development, Meagher (2014), argues that “economic marginalization is one of the critical factor behind (the profound poverty and deprivation affecting the Muslim north) youth vulnerability in northeast Nigeria. Although Nigeria as a whole has enjoyed a decade of growth averaging 7% per year, the nature of this growth has exacerbated rather than eased long standing patterns of regional inequality and social cleavages between the Muslim – majority north and the Christian – majority South. Owing to a history of educational disadvantage in the Muslim north, the region has been perversely affected by economic restructuring, leaving it less able to seize the new opportunities created by Nigeria’s economic resurgence. Recurrent drought, neglect of agriculture, deindustrialization, and public sector retrenchment have gutted the northern rural and urban economy, while the more educated southern zones of Nigeria have been able to benefit from liberalization and diversification into high – value services. Meagher argued further that the above has resulted to an accentuation of inequality and disaffection between north and south. Poverty levels in the Northeast and Northwest are 40% higher than those in the south west of the country and unemployment are three times higher. Lack of education contributed to the problem, barely one in five adult in the Muslim north are literate, compared to 80% in the southern Nigeria, but even educated northern youth struggle to find work in the collapsing northern economy battered by the extremists. Even in the informal economy there is growing competition over jobs. Unemployed graduates are beginning to crowd out the traditional occupants of informal activities. In the once vibrant northeastern cities of Maiduguri and Yola young men with post-secondary school qualifications can be found working as tailor, load carriers and hawkers, while the poor and uneducated struggle to find even lowly informal work (Meagher, 2014). This has unleashed significant resentment against the failure of western education to deliver on the promise of dignified work as well as anger over the incursion of western graduates into the little informal work available for the poor. This dual frustration is reflected in the presence of both western educated actors that have become vulnerable to the extremist group membership and those with no education (ICG, 2014).”

It was observed that at the bottom of northeastern Nigeria society, poverty, unemployment, and rapid rural-urban drift are unraveling communal support mechanisms and eroding traditional Koranic education systems (Hoechner, Forthcoming). Members of youth gangs has flourished, while millions of itinerant Koranic students are subjected to increasing deprivation and neglect, unleashing a growing problem of feral youth across north-eastern Nigerian cities.

However, in sharp contrast against the above analysis, in a study conducted by Meagher (2014) it reveals that “the rise of vulnerable citizen in the northeast is not simply a result of poverty and inequality, but of

how these issues have been shaped by religious and political actors.” The research conducted reveals that “in other Muslim West African societies, like those of Senegal and Niger, their levels of poverty and unemployment are higher than that of Nigeria and a larger share of Muslims in the two countries remain peaceful. More extreme inequality in Nigeria is part of the problem. While Senegal and Niger have an inequality profile similar to that of Eastern Europe, Nigeria’s approximates that of Latin America. Escalating inequality is accompanied by severe religious polarization at the national level. A fairly equal proportion of Muslims and Christians in Nigerian society have fostered a comparative political brinkmanship between Christians and Muslim elites in struggle over control of the country’s oil wealth, festering rising Christian-Muslim violence since the 1980’s. Religious polarization between Christians and Muslims has exacerbated an internal dynamic of religious fragmentation and radicalization in northern Nigerian Islam, manifested in growing religious intolerance, extremist views, and vulnerability of the citizens which led to the discourses of violence among radical Muslim preachers.”

While scarcity and exploitation have created a productive recruitment ground for the extremist group in the northeast (International Crisis Group, 2014), the continuous transformation and evolution of the extremists has frustrated any clear assessment and its objectives and membership. The shift of the Boko Haram group to fierce extremism since 2009 (Onuoha & Oyewole, 2018) has been conveyed by changes in both its purposes and enrollment tactics, as well as by a disintegration of the group itself. For Nwangwu & Ezeibe (2019), the stability of northeast Nigeria is critical for the stable and faster poverty reduction of the region and the whole country.”

Having gone through several scholarly contributions on Civilian JTF response to security challenges and youth vulnerability to violent extremism in the northeast Nigeria, we were able to establish factors responsible for formation of Civilian JTF which led to the reduction of youth vulnerability to violent extremism in the northeast. As argued by scholars like Nwangwu & Ezeibe 2019; Nwanolue & Ezeibe 2020; Agbiboa 2015; Onouha & Oyewole 2018; Bisalla 2009; the Nigerian State is to be blame for youth vulnerability to violent extremism in the northeast. They argued that if the Nigerian State operates properly, starvation, social and economic deprivation that expose the youth and children to all kind of vices, will be solved. However, none of the scholars was able to interrogate and identify the response of the government regarding the solution to youth vulnerability to violent extremism in the northeast Nigeria. Though scholars like Nwangwu & Ezeibe, 2019; Onuoha, Nwangwu & Ugwueze, 2020 and 2018, looked at the reasons why the youth in the region are vulnerable to violent extremism and it was shown by the scholars that it was failure of adequate human capital development in the region.

Partnership Policing and Community Participation Theory in the Context of Civilian Joint Task Force and Countering Violent Extremism

To explain the role of civilian joint task force (CJTF) in the northeast Nigeria as well as consider its efforts in countering violent extremism in the Northeast region, this study is fastened on the “twin theories of partnership policing and community participation. The partnership policing and community participation theory provides a framework for understanding this collaboration. The choice of these theories is informed by the simple fact that involving the people in solving their own problems brings many lasting solutions to said problems or challenges. The former which is associated with Rosenbaum (2003) and the latter propounded by Arnstein (1969), posit that partnerships or coalitions represents a unique hybrid organism in the world of social interventions.”

The criminal justice system cannot address the complicated issues of crime and disorder on its own, including violent extremism affecting societies in northeastern Nigeria. Consequently Human resources are therefore required from outside the security system, as a fresh ways of thinking about various issues. By creating alliances that can bring unique but complementary abilities and resources to the table and that can generate coordinated and targeted answers to public safety issues, with these societal issues can be resolved.

The aptness of this theories is underscored by the growing realization that no government or authority has the means to solve all the public complications sufficiently, this is applicable to Nigerian government and in the case of security challenge in the northeast Nigeria, the local people in their communities not only understand their neighbourhoods better, but share the common aspiration of promoting and protecting their communities. Seen against the background of the war against violent extremist, the understanding is that even though extremist threat comes from a tiny and marginal minority, these individuals are nonetheless integrated within their communities and not, on the whole, loners working on their own. Thus, communities involved in the fight against violent extremist, act as an early warning system for the government security and intelligence services, should they come across information or have concerns about particular individuals or groups. This underscores the need why Nigerian government/security agencies gives part of the control of affairs and decision to the people most affected by violent extremism, in this instance, civilian joint task force (CJTF) vis-à-vis effort of the youth of the northeast region.”

Partnerships on the other hand are more suitable than individualism to identify and precisely define the major problems of utmost concern in a given community, partnership policing suggest that forming partnership to police the communities, they are more likely to include different perspectives to counter whatever problem the communities are facing; secondly, partnership policing are better suited to emerging creative ideas and targeted interventions because they contain a diverse group of persons representing a diverse establishments with diverse philosophies of interventions, this has been achieved in the northeast (CJTF and MJTF) Nigeria.

Study Context and Methodology

Northeast region, located in Northern Nigeria, is the focal area of this study (See Figure 1). To investigate the complex partnership and the contribution of Civilian JTF in countering violent extremism in the northeast Nigeria, this study used the qualitative technique to collect the data from interviews and written documentation. Using a snowball sampling technique, stakeholders were interviewed for primary data collection through a referral process between June and November 2022. The sampled population for this study totaled 12 participants, including local business people, CJTF members, Military JTF, security personnel from the military, and traditional rulers in some northeast communities.

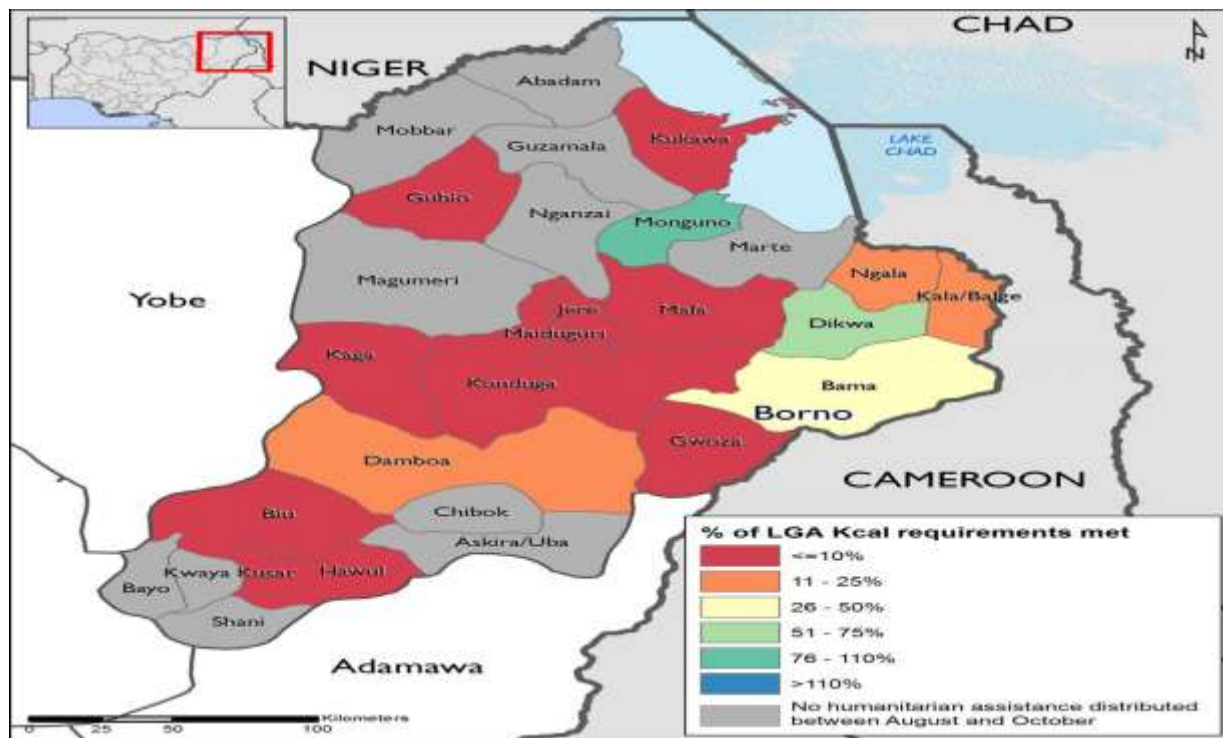


Figure 1. Map of the Northeast showing state with CJTF state and its neighbours. Source: <https://maps-nigeria.com/north-east-nigeria-map2024>

The participation of these stakeholders in the data collection process was entirely voluntary and followed the principles of availability, accessibility, and anonymity. This study generated documented evidence from academic and grey literature to support field data. In qualitative analysis, researchers examine a class of social articles that usually are written documents such as newspaper editorials, web pages, books, magazines, speeches, e-mails, bulletin board postings on the internet, laws and constitutions, as well as any components or collection thereof (Eneaya, 2012, p. 212). The primary message of qualitative analysis is centered on methodology. The authors followed a subset of qualitative analysis referred to as CJTF and violent extremism qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis is “a well-established research methodology”, (Macnamara, 2005, p.1) which can be traced to the seminal work of Harold Lasswell (1927) as cited in Sarisky (2015, p.27) explains that it comprises “who says what through which channel to whom it affect”. Thus, we the authors carried out a qualitative analysis articles sleeved from google search using the keywords. We decide to use googles search for this work because it is the most used search engine (Livenon, 2013, cited in Tarisayi &Manik, 2020).

Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and Self-Help Efforts in Degrading Violent Extremism (VE) in the Northeast Nigeria

The northeast Nigeria is a beehive of commercial and economic activities and this is as a result of the international trade going on in different borders linking the northeast Nigeria and other countries. However, with the emergence of the dreaded extremist group (Boko Haram), commercial and economic activities of the northeast region were seriously battered. There was forced migration and displacement of such huge population resulting into multi-dimensional problems ranging from social, political and economic degradation. In response to the escalating crisis, with the rise of the people and the self-help efforts of the Civilians JTF, the extremist were degraded and commercial and economic activities is gradually taking shape in the northeast. The strategy’s objectives and respite from attacks carried out by the extremist group

(Boko Haram), was hard fought and community based (self-help efforts by CJTF) set-up to collaborate with the military in fighting the extremist group.

The locally made weapons used by the Civilian JTF, during the combatant operations together with the military to counter the Boko Haram extremists, and the stop and search operations around some states in the northeast and sometimes the provision of intelligence information, may have endeared most populace of the northeast to them. Whereby the military with sophisticated weapons was unable to defeat the extremists, without the help of the youths whose weapons are homemade machetes, bows and arrows, is a tale of bravery of these youths, this perhaps is the defining in the way the society regards the Civilian JTF (Lawal, 2020). The other side of the analysis is the fact that the extremists, who reject western education, are using the product of western education (arms, ammunitions and gun trucks, while the Civilian JTF who do not reject western education, are using traditional weapons. Thus, the question the society should ask the Boko Haram extremist is, who is truthful about preserving the culture of the people and who is deceitful about what they stand for.

Evidences are in place to show that Maiduguri in Borno State, Damaturu in Yobe State and Yola in Adamawa State has witness significant progress in the degradation of the violent extremist group. Findings revealed that most communities attacked and taken over by Boko Haram extremist have been recaptured by the Joint Military Task Force and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and most of the residents of these communities have return to their homes and continued with their commercial and economic activities. Furthermore, those that were displaced and went through excruciating pains caused by lack of shelter, clothing, food and access to basic health facilities in the host communities (Dlakwa, 2018: p.9), have received or are receiving succor from Civilian JTF (CJTF) and various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Interview report obtained from Baba Mohammed, Gettado Umar and Usman Bala residents of Maiduguri, Yola and Damaturu, it was revealed that with the formation of Civilian JTF and its self-help efforts in countering VE, the spate of attacks on civilians have reduced. Responses obtained from some residents of these cities shows that civilians collaboration in the northeast has reduced youth's vulnerability to violent extremism and the collaboration has also promote the degradation of Boko Haram extremist in NE. Our research finds out that the approach of Civilian JTF in the northeast "is rooted in top-down intervention. The Civilian JTF used local skills and intelligence to fish out hiding Boko Haram extremist in their various neighbourhoods. In particular, the CJTF cooperation with regular security forces has also helped deter attack in Maiduguri, Yola and Damaturu, the capital of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe respectively, pushing the extremists out into more remote villages (Siollun, 2014, Cited in Agbiboa, 2015).

Inspite of the above findings, studies has shown that forced displacement has been a traumatic experience for affected households in the northeast. "Nevertheless, in other case, it has present new opportunities to generate new stocks of social capital that can be critical for long term recovery and re-settlement. Kolade (2017:3) observed that forced displacement has helped in positively affecting victims of VE to have certain skills – such as vocation and technical – they can use to create value and generate income. This combination of social and human capital has made a big difference in the design and implementation of more effective interventions in humanitarian crises."

Yusuf (2014) argued that activities of Civilian JTF in the northeast contributed in countering of the extremist. He argued further that the youths, whose ages are between 15 to 30 years, said they were left with no choice than to join the manhunt of the Boko Haram extremists from bringing untold hardship on residents of the towns and local communities farmers, thus, putting their future in great danger. In carrying out this gigantic but worthy assignment, many youths (Civilian JTF) paid the supreme price (death) and many others sustained various degrees of injuries and permanent deformities. As Civilian JTF, they played several roles including forming a fighting vanguard in combat support operations with the military against Boko Haram extremists. The Civilian JTF operatives understood the terrain of northeast and therefore were

able to guide the military and helped in the fight to counter the extremists. Civilian JTF has helped to support both combat and non-combat operations which assisted in restoring normalcy in many towns and communities in northeast Nigeria.

In the perspective of Baba Lawan Jafar who is the general chairman of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in the northeast region of Nigeria asserted during an interview session with him, that Civilian JTF was the first youth who courageously with self-help effort hurtled a gun man with only a stick in May, 2013, he said presently in the northeast region of Nigeria, we have an estimated number of 15,541 (Fifteen thousand five hundred and forty one) Civilian joint Task Force Members (CJTF).

Table 1: Numbers of Civilian Joint Task Force in the Northeast (State Wise)

State	Estimated Numbers of CJTF
Adamawa	10,000
Bauchi	1,200
Borno	23,000
Gombe	715
Taraba	1,156
Yobe	670
Total	36,741

Source: Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) Office Maiduguri

Irked by the UN report of 2018, that about 3,700 underage children are members of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), one of the top commanders of CJTF, Babashehu Ganiyu who participated in defending their communities when the going was tough, lamented that the UN report did not captured the true story about the use of children by the CJTF. He specifically cited instances where children were involved in CJTF activities. According to him;

We agree that we have the small children we are using in the activities and we have suspended them before the publication of the UN report of 2018, since we now know that our self-help effort has come under global scrutiny. Children are not members of CJTF, we only use the children during our action time, and they are used as porters to convey weapons such as cutlasses, sticks and clubs. Some of the children are kept at checking point to open and close gate and some are used as informants to report any activities of the extremists. If we recruit children we have to arm them, which CJTF is not doing at present (TVC News Sunday Specials, 2nd June 2019).

Available evidence as at the time of carrying out this research shows that children are not among the members sited at the CJTF headquarters in Maiduguri. To buttress their claim that children are not members of CJTF a picture of one of their actions on the field was given as evidence and the picture is shown below



Source: Picture retrieved from CJTF office Maiduguri

Table 2: The Most Prevalent Factors of Causes Violent Extremism in the Northeast Nigeria Indicated Below

	Push Factors	Pull Factors
Northeast Nigeria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Poverty -Drug and petty criminality -Low level of civic awareness / engagement. -Unemployment/under-employment. -Marginalization (pre-colonial, colonial) -Poor educational skills -Lack of critical thinking skills -Poor police-community relations (harassment, profiling) -Poor service delivery by government -Land alienation and other historical injustices -Lack of parental guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Politicization and instrumentalization of Jihad as extremist tool -Utilization of cult methods to confuse, brainwash, recruits and control. -Deliberate interpretation of religious texts to promote violent extremism and extremist ideas. -Flow of foreign monies to promote extremist and puritanical teachings -Hero worship of extremist individuals -Search for redemption -Search for affirmative identity

Source: Author's compilation on personal thought on the causes of violent extremism

Self-Help Efforts of CJTF to Protect Civilian Population and Degradation of Boko Haram Extremist

Self-Help and Civilian collaboration emerged as a response to the security challenges posed by the activities of the extremists in the northeast Nigeria. The community based security organization is made up of mainly young men and women. The community based security outfit was born out of necessity, first in Maiduguri, and later the concept spread across other states of the northeast region. The self-help efforts of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is a voluntary community based organization (CBO) of mostly men and women who swore by the Holy Qur'an to fight Boko Haram extremist to death. Their text of their oath includes:

We have committed our lives to fight the ungodly activities of Boko Haram and we cannot implicate any innocent person as a result of hatred, rivalry, or any other differences. We will not take any bribe, including money, from anybody. We swear by the Holy Qur'an that we would expose any member of the sect, be they our parents, relatives, neighbor, or friends. We will not turn our back on them. It is this mission that is the true Jihad not their act of wickedness (Umara, 2018, P.5).

This Community self-help effort was set up as a community- based security outfit with a command and control structure starting from the unit, ward, district, local government, and state level. Umara (2018) puts it that “in terms of support, the Civilian Collaboration and self-help enjoys the full support and cooperation of members of the society and the government”. For instance, at a time, most residents in the Cities of northeast considered themselves to be affiliated to the CJTF. While there were a few commissioned members, the group enjoyed the support of most of the residents of the towns and communities. This caused Boko Haram, in one of its videos, to declare war on all residents of the northeast Nigeria.

“Strengthening of community security through dialogue mechanisms, Peace Clubs, and early warning systems have generally worked and contributed to the success story of civilian collaboration against the extremists in the northeast. We found out in the course of our interview that community based mechanisms have proven particularly effective if they are inclusive, convene regularly, reach the right government and security stakeholders, and are adequately prepared. In some communities, for example, they were able to reduce fear of extremist attacks through these mechanisms. Thus, the efforts of Civilian JTF has helped to recapture villages and ensured that normalcy returned to communities, help rescue abducted girls, children and women (Oluwaseun, 2016). Lawal (2020), noted that Civilian JTF has ensured that their communities were safe, socio-cultural activities most ensured. Thus, without the Civilian JTF many communities in the northeast would have been routed from their normal socio-cultural life perhaps into camps or other communities as internal displaced persons (IDPs).

Violent extremism (VE) thrives where there are local networks that support their activities. That is why it was possible for the Civilians to identify the extremist from among the people they have lived with all their lives. The threat from the Boko Haram extremist has not been affective against the combined work of self-help, the community based security outfit- CJTF and the security agencies. The security situation in the northeast has improved significantly because of the improved quality of intelligence available to the military and the implementation of human capital and self-help effort of the civilian populace. Northeast towns and communities' ones lived on the edge but now there is a fluid movement of people all over the place, for some of the indigenes life is back to normal, it is business as usual and the fear that grips them in those trying times has all but disappeared, they all have stories to tell, their tales of terror and oppression in the hands of the extremists, which has been degraded.

At the economic front, there are signs of recovery in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe state. In general, most businesses closed down during the heat of the extremists attacks have started opening and reports made available to us shows these businesses are having more customers than during the insurgency. For example, a survey by USAID and Mercy Corps (2017) shows that in Damaturu the capital of Yobe State, over 650 shops are reported as damaged and returning traders have started to reconstruct some of the shops and vendor stalls that were destroyed. In other areas, small businesses are using their savings to rebuild their shops as a result of the degraded extremists. Communication mast and other communication gadgets destroyed by the extremists are been rebuilt with more security on these facilities.

Inspite of the above scenarios, studies has shown that with the intervention of civilian joint task force (CJTF) the extremist were degraded and the economy of the northeast gradually took a recovery dimension. Dlakwa (2018: p. 9) observed that people of communities that were attacked and source of livelihood destroyed by the extremist, were later returned back to their communities with source of livelihood restored

by the Civilian Joint Task Force which made effort to secure lives and properties of affected communities. Most markets in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe state communities that were not in operation as a result of fear of the extremist attack are now fully operational with different communities coming together to trade.

Conclusion

The study was designed to assess the civilian joint task force (CJTF) and countering violent extremism in the northeast Nigeria. The study which relied on partnership policing and community participation theory and utilised qualitative method for data collection, focused on the activities carried out by the self-help efforts of CJTF, a community based security outfit that collaborated to augment the efforts of the security agencies to countered and degrade the extremist powers and promote the livelihood of the population in the northeast Nigeria. It could be rightly argued that once upon a time moving freely on the streets of major cities and towns in the northeast was very risky, one could see fear and tension on the faces of residents then, unsure of what form an attack will take or what time an attack will occur. However, with the collaboration of civilians to fight and degrade the extremists, residents of this region are glad today that dark times are finally over and there are hopes that the peace will be maintained. The local population put their boot on the ground to defend their land and today they are glad they did. While the nature and character of the extremists' activities and attacks on cities, towns, and communities in the northeast are well documented, the role played by the civilian collaborations, that contributed in countering the extremists in the northeast remain inadequately addressed, thus, the need for this study.

Despite the effort of the Military joint task force (MJTF) and the federal government to counter violent extremism, the study found out that intelligence gathering by the CJTF, civilian collaboration and the gallantry of the self-help support of the people to the Special Military Task Force have been responsive in the protection of lives and properties and degrading of the extremists in the northeast. Thus, the efforts of community based organization like the CJTF in countering violent extremism in the northeast Nigeria is most significant.

There is no gain saying that "what the trends has shown so far is that the hard approach of the military containment and the supportive role of the civilian joint task force (CJTF), a community based security outfit has been successful, because territories have been taken back from the extremists, and the group has been severely degraded and countered. However, violent extremism remains a serious challenge to prosperity, good governance, law and order in Nigeria's northeast today. Civilian efforts in supporting the Security agencies are a laudable one. To be more effective in combating violent extremism, the security agencies must work smarter. This can be achieved by adopting a community security option like the Civilian JTF in the northeast. Civilian collaboration and the sharing of information and intelligence are critical to the success of the community security option."

Recommendations

As a preamble to the recommendations offered for the study, it is worthy to acknowledge the fact that efforts made by the government, security agencies, community based organizations, particularly the Civilian JTF, non-governmental organizations, self-help efforts of the citizens and other key stakeholders in countering violent extremists (VE) have achieved considerable level of success. Of a truth, the fact is that compared the security situation in the northeast Nigeria between 2013 and 2016, the current security situation has shown remarkable improvement. All thanks to the Nigerian security agencies and the Civilian JTF. However, we must not sing a song of total victory before the real deal is done in securing the northeast from the hands of the violent extremists.

Thus, against the above, our study was able to establish that activities of CJTF members to protect civilians against Boko Haram extremist in the northeast has reduced youth's vulnerability to violent extremism (VE) in the region and intelligence gathering by the CJTF operatives facilitates the degradation of Boko Haram in northeast (NE) Nigeria and In view of the above, we put forward these recommendations for implementation.

Firstly, there is need for the Nigerian government, in the short run, to look for a lasting solution to the challenges that causes violent extremism. In the northeast today, one of the critical factors behind the formation and rise of violent extremism is the profound poverty and deprivation affecting the population. In short, we can say poverty is the foundation (base), while religion is the superstructure of the causes of extremism in northeast Nigeria. “The mixed educational backgrounds of Boko Haram extremists and the economic bases of the extremist group’s recruitment tactics is a pointer to the fact that there is an imbalance in Nigeria’s current recovery strategy. International support for livelihood programmes appropriate to the varied needs and skills of those vulnerable to radicalization is crucial to addressing the incentives that fuel extremism. This ranges from public works programmes and social welfare support for the unemployed and uneducated to the location of more agricultural and industrial development programmes in the north, accompanied by technical training, to provide dignified livelihoods to secondary and post-secondary graduates. Nigerian government should show adequate commitment in eradication of poverty and securing of lives and properties in the northeast and Nigeria as a whole.

Secondly, self-help efforts of the Civilian JTF should be applauded and rewarded. The Civilian JTF should be made a legally constituted body, similar to Special Military JTF Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Centre, where information related to terrorism is collected from different security agencies, then processed, analyzed and interpreted. This will enable the CJTF to include diverse perspectives to counter whatever problems the communities are facing in the northeast; as they are part of the communities.

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