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Research article

Militia Counterinsurgency: Perspective on the Motivations of Civilian Joint Task Force Militia Participation in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract. Since the year 2013, Nigeria's northeastern region epicenter of the Boko Haram Islamist insurgency waging war for the establishment of an Islamic State has witnessed mass participation of people in a civil militia group. The militia group colloquially describing itself Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was formed to combat the Boko Haram rebellion. Perhaps, the participation of the CJTF in the combating activities was reportedly influential in reducing the Boko Haram hostilities in most communities. Prior to the CJTF, the counterinsurgency approaches of the Nigerian governments' Special Joint Task Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force of the Member States of Lake Chad Basin Commission was faced with lackadaisical performances. Whereas the CJTF was reportedly successful, however, the interrupted participation of the people despite the attendant human and material cost has risen suspicion among the population and the critical literature about the groups' true motivation. This article, therefore, investigated the motivations of the CJTF in northeastern Nigeria. The study was conducted through a qualitative approach designed in a case study. The data was collected from thirteen informants from three groups – CJTF, Community Leaders and State/Local Government authorities. The technique of data collection is in-depth interviews and non-participant observation. The finding revealed personal incentive factors of monetary/material gains, and the futuristic interest of employability drives peoples' participation. To address the economic interests of the CJTF and as a panacea to prevent the manifestation of the security threats associated with the CJTF group, the study recommends for the establishment of charity centers to receive contributions from well to do citizens to ameliorate the economic needs of the participants. The government should also propound strong legal mechanisms to regulate the activities of the CJTF militia.

Keywords: militia, Civilian Joint Task Force, counterinsurgency, motivations

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Introduction

Since the year 2013, the northeastern region of Nigeria devastated by the insurgency rebellion of Boko Haram witnessed widespread participation of civil militia group colloquially Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) into the counterinsurgency operation. The militia was dubbed after the country's Special Joint Task Force (SJTF) and the Multinational Joint Task Force formed by the Member States of the Lake Chad Basin Commission comprising – Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Chad, and Cameroun. Although the process how the group mobilized has been a discourse of different scholars with some attributing to it to the courageous role of Baba Lawal Jafar of Hausari ward in Maiduguri [1; 2; 3; 4], others, however, claimed it as a surrogate force deliberately ignited by the state. In either case, growing pieces of evidence suggest that since the mobilization, the CJTF was pointed out successful in the combating operation; project of which was challenged of lackadaisical performance previously. In fact, there are inadequate official accounts revealing the nature of the groups' operation, however, the successes made by the group cannot be overestimated. For instance, one empirical comparative analysis of pre-CJTF and post-CJTF mobilization revealed that the participation of the CJTF militia has reduced the Boko Haram attack frequencies by nearly half. The mean attack rate before the CJTF is 11.83 and stood at 4.92 after the mobilization of the CJTF group [5].

The group was also instrumental in conquering many towns and villages occupied by the insurgent including Gwoza, the spiritual home of the insurgent. Besides the abating of attacks on the civilian population, the CJTF was also instrumental in abating numerous attacks targeted on Nigeria's security formations, including attacks launched on the notorious Giwa barrack in the city of Maiduguri. In fact, some analysts claimed that CJTF militia was virtually responsible for nearly 60% of the counterinsurgency mercenaries in the north [6]. Perhaps, despite the presence of heavy state security apparatus in the Nigeria northeast, which some conservative accounts estimated it to over 100,000 [7], there is a popular belief that the CJTF might be an alternative security option for the Nigeria government.

Perhaps, the extant literature largely attributed the successes of the CJTF to their sociocultural ties with the host population, combined with an in-depth knowledge of the terrain with all its attendants' forest, water creeks, and hills. The technical knowledge thus influences accesses to timely and credible intelligence about the insurgents' movements, hideouts, sponsors and collaborators. However, the purported successes of the CJTF are not without a price. To date, about 700 CJTF members were brutally murdered and hundreds of others were injured. The group has also provoked reprisal attacks by the insurgents targeting communities allegedly hosting the CJTF participants. However, these threat factors have not deterred the unprecedented participation of people in the militia. In fact, since 2013, the increasing participation of the people despite the attendant human and material cost rises suspicion that the militia was promoted with hidden motivations. The International Crisis Group described the CJTF as a time bomb; an explosion of which can further jeopardize the security atmosphere of the country [8].

Consequently, the increasing security concern and the undeterred participation of people have thus risen the need to investigate the motivations triggering participation in the CJTF. However, despite interest to know the motivations, existing studies have not adequately addressed this perspective. Evolving studies mostly focused on counterinsurgency successes of the CJTF [1; 9; 10; 5], and others on the security issues associated with the groups combating [1; 8]. This article thus aimed to investigate the motivations that incited the mass participation of people in the militia movement. The importance besides contributing to the scholarly literature, it will benefit policymakers toward addressing the militia problems in Nigeria and other countries facing similar militia movement. In addressing this issue, the article proceeds in five sections. The first section explains the methodology of the study, the second highlights an over of the Boko Haram history, the third is an explanation of the CJTF, the fourth is the analysis/discussion of the motivations of the militia, whereas the fifth section is the conclusion and recommendations.

Methodology

This study was approached on a qualitative method. It is a case study design. The case study was conducted in Yobe State of northeastern Nigeria. The large presence of the militia in Yobe State and the inaccessibility of Borno State (the worst affected by the Boko Haram) limited the data collection. The research was conducted between the months of February 2018 and June 2019. The data was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprised of an in-depth interview and non-participant observation. The interview was conducted with thirteen key informants from three groups – CJTF Participants, Community Leader and State/Local Government authorities in the study area. Interviews were conducted on face to face method that enabled uninterrupted interaction between the researcher and the informants. Interview data were supplemented with the on the site observation of events and behaviors of the participants, as well as interactions between the CJTF and other members of the community. The primary data was supported with existing information from secondary sources including but not limited to journal articles; bulletin, magazines and other publications from the government and international agencies.

The research was conducted in strict compliance with the ethical principles of qualitative research. For instance, prior to each interview, key informants were informed of the voluntariness of their participation, as well as the right to withdraw at any stage of their research. All interviews were conducted in designated places with the dates, times and venues mostly suggested by the informants. Interview data and observational notes and pictures were also kept confidential. Importantly, to avoid beneficently, informants' identities were replaced with three distinct pseudonyms – A, B and C to represent the CJTF Participants, community leaders and the State/Local Government authorities respectively. The credibility of this

study was guaranteed through a pilot study, extensive triangulation of data from different sources, member checks, expert reviews and peer debriefed of findings.

Genesis of Boko Haram

Accounts of the origin of Boko Haram are diverse and no consensus exists among both the critical academics and the members of the popular press. Some attributed the genesis to the period of the 1980s by linking it to the Maitatsine movement that ravaged most of the northern states of Nigeria [10; 11]. Some accounts attributed the origin to the period of the 1990s connecting it to the activities of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhoods northern Nigeria. Some commentators have also pointed the origin of the movement to the activities of some disgruntled youth that withdrew themselves to Kanamma; a border community in Yobe State to practice mundane life in 2002. The isolationist described themselves as the ‘Nigeria Taliban’ supposedly claiming affiliation to the murderous Taliban group in Afghanistan. However, to date, there is little scholarly evidence of tangible affiliation between the two movements.

Nevertheless, the popular account of the origin of Boko Haram was in 2009, especially when its leader started speaking against the government; western cultures; formal school and working for the government. In July 2009, its leader Mohammed Yusuf lead a team of indoctrinated youth to rebel against the state first in Maiduguri, a city of about 2million population. The rebellion subsequently escalated to other cities and towns of the country. The two days rebellion left many government establishments torched including a popular police college and prison building where the groups’ arrestees are jailed. It was estimated that uprising and military aggression left nearly 1000 people murdered, the majority are of the groups’ followers. Dead include Mohammed Yusuf, the spiritual leader of the movement, Buji Foi, and Baba Fugu; the earlier financiers of the movement.

Although the military crackdown forces the group to a year of silence, it, however, erupted more violently under Abubakar Shekau; the erstwhile deputy of the late Yusuf in 2012. There is no adequate account of where Boko Haram took refuge. Under Shekau the cruelty of Boko Haram increase featured in both attack frequencies and fatalities. In fact, besides the traditional tactics of the gruesome murder, kidnapping, and driving by shooting, the group adopted new tactics such as bombing making and an explosion, detonating vehicle-borne improvised devices as well as suicide bombings. As indicated by Olanrewaju [12], this category of armed violence crises is strange to Nigeria’s security history. In addition to its domestic attacks, Boko Haram started targeting foreign establishments. On 26 August 2011, the terror group attacks the office building of the United Nations in Nigeria’s capital city Abuja. The vehicle-borne attack left nearly 30 people killed with over 80 others wounded [13]. In his critical analysis of the Boko Haram attack frequencies, Azuma revealed that the insurgent is culpable for 31 attacks on Churches; 43 on Mosques and dozens basic social infrastructure since its resurgence in 2012. Since then, attack rates continued to proliferate in most of Nigeria’s north despite the concerted responses by the government in combating operation.

Responses to Boko Haram by Nigeria government

Since the eruption of the Boko Haram uprising, the Nigerian government responded to the Boko Haram hostilities through a combination of political and military approaches. The political approach mostly focused on dialogue attempts and deradicalization campaigns including the countering of insurgent spiritual thought. However, whereas the political approaches formed a facet of the counterinsurgency campaign and in most instances executed simultaneously, to date, the dominant approach remained the military aggression. The military approach reflected on the ideas of the enemy-centric counterinsurgency school that promote the use of aggression targeting both the insurgents and host populations. The approach is in variance to the proposition of people-centered authors whose philosophy focused on winning the hearts and minds of the host population. According to Falode [7], the kinetic responses partly emanated from the perception that insurgent is national traitors and thus need a crush, and sympathizer be intimidated, while the population hosting them to maim to withdraw support for the insurgents. The kinetic approach of the government symptomized in 2009 when Umar Musa Yar'adua ordered a military crackdown on the insurgent when the insurgent embarked on the weeklong anti-government and anti-west uprising in Maiduguri [14]. The most popular account of military history is the mobilization of the Special Joint Task Force (SJTF), a combine security formation of the Nigerian army, navy, air force, police, customs, and other allied agencies. Accurate size of the SJTF is scarce, but anecdotal has estimated to be over 100,000 armed security personnel in Nigeria's northeast [7].

However, arising from the transnationalism of the group violence orchestrated on sporadic trans-border attacks, recruitments, training, and accesses to logistics and funding, the member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Cameroun), a sub-regional military 8700 squadron 'Multinational Joint Task Force' was formed to support the Nigeria combating efforts. The MNJTF reflected partly to functionalist thought that advocates for transnational cooperation in tackling modern security challenges around the world. Tar and Mustapha in particular summarized the Multinational Joint Task Force as a kind of security regionalism within the Lake Chad Basin Commission. Growing pieces of evidence suggest that despite its financial, logistics challenges, the MNJTF has proven successes especially appeared influential in conquering many towns along the shore of Lake Chad in Nigeria.

Paradoxically, for many observers, the prioritization of the military of military combat over the hearts and minds approach was culpable for the protraction of the insurgent hostilities. Sampson claimed that since its engagement, the SJTF remained anathema to the local communities in the northeast. The arbitrary and indiscriminate use of violence, widespread arrest, detention without trial and alleges disappearances of suspect undermined the support and confidence of the armies. In retrospect, it suppressed their access to credible and timely intelligence on the insurgents' movements, hideouts, and potential attacks. Allegations are enormous that grievance on the armies has forced many locals in the northeast to render support for the insurgent group. Therefore, arising from the persistent

ineffectiveness of government responses, a civil militia colloquially Civilian Joint Task Force ramped into the counterinsurgency campaign to outroot the insurgents.

Civilian joint task force

There is inadequate empirical account revealing the origin of the CJTF, its modus operandi, and its missions. In respect to the origin, most analysts attributed the philosophy to the courageous role of one Baba Lawal Jafar of the Hausari ward in Maiduguri [1; 10]. Lawal according to the source either killed, accosted or captured a Boko Haram fighter in Maiduguri using his bare hand. As presented by Hassan and Pieri [15], the courageous news of Lawal went viral thus fascinated even the most passive citizens to support the militia in combating the insurgent group. Thereafter, coupled with the local grievance toward the capabilities of State machinery of combating the insurgent, participants rushed to take the law into hands to combat the insurgent. In fact, within the shortest time, the philosophy of the CJTF spreads to other towns and states and in the northeast.

Consequently, at the earlier stage, participants mostly operate as neighborhoods watch. They only emerged upon the alarm of sighting the Boko Haram fighter in their area. Subsequently, challenged by increasing reprisal attacks by the Boko Haram, the participants started roadblocks to check on passer-by and thoroughly investigate unknown faces in the neighborhood. Other tactics subsequently adopted are patrolling streets, guarding markets, worship centers, and other vital social infrastructures. The caliber of weapons at the earlier stage was generally mundane such as sticks, cutlasses, and knives. However, impressed by the performance, the state authorities in the northeast offered numerous support including patrol vans, light rifles, and monetary incentives. The military under the aegis of SJTF also regimented the participants into commands and sector commands to ensure the coordination of their activities.

Perhaps, since its mobilization, credible shreds of evidence showed that mobilization of CJTF has drastically reduced the Boko Haram hostilities. In their comparative analysis of the pre-CJTF and post-CJTF mobilization attack frequencies, [5] revealed that the participation of the CJTF has significantly reduced the insurgent attacks by nearly half. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of Boko Haram attack rates before the CJTF is stood at 11.83 and 4.926 respectively. However, between the years of 2013–2017 of the participation of the CJTF, the mean (M) and the standard (SD) dropped to 5.35 and 4.248 respectively. The militia id pointed out influential in conquering many towns and villages occupied by the insurgent such as Bama, Damboa, Gwoza, Chibok and Madagali in Borno and Adamawa States. There is populist believe that the successes of CJTF were triggered by a sense of shared purpose, operational urgency, mission focus, and cordial relationships as well as socio-cultural ties with the local population. [5] revealed that the active support of the civilian population increases the strategic and operational competence, intelligence gathering and on the target attacks thus minimized civilian casualties.

Consequently, even as the CJTF reportedly influential in combating Boko Haram, there is a growing fear that the group is capable of jeopardizing the security situation. International Crisis Group [16] described the CJTF is a time bomb, the explosion of which may challenge both formal authorities of the State. The reality of this often holds as militia when engaged in State function tends to appropriate power as well prolong the period of violence. Since 2013, there are accusations that some participants are using personal scores to victimized unsuspecting citizens. The diversionary motives of the CJTF participants' were further compounded by the undeterred participation of people despite the attendant cost of lives and injuries. Prevailing evidence shows nearly 700 members of the CJTF participants are brutally murdered. The number of wounded is countless. Yet, people continued to participate. In 2013 for instance, CJTF was estimated at 1000 members, but recently, the number is estimated at 15,000 [1]. Therefore, what triggers the participation of people has been adequately addressed. The following subsection explained the motivations of the CJTF.

The motivations of civilian joint task force participants

The empirical data revealed the incentives factor is the key driver of participation in the militia movement. The incentives for the participation as revealed by the informants are of two categories – pecuniary and non-pecuniary incentives. The pecuniary incentives relate to tangible material and monetary goods offered to participants either by the State, local authorities, community leaders and nongovernmental groups. The non-pecuniary incentive refers to a kind of incentives that relate to non-tangible goods such as expectations of employment and other futuristic rewards in anticipation.

In respect to the pecuniary incentives, the finding shows members of the CJTF receive a monthly stipend of about #50,000 (\$139) offered by the State at the end of each month. This payment according to the informants started accruing to the members one year after the mobilization of the group. Reflecting on this contention, informant A2 explained:

“Since 2015, we have started receiving an allowance of 50,000 through the state ministry. This is a very big amount if you compare to those working with the local government. In spite of their school certificates, many people I know are collecting 17,000 Naira as basic salary and others even less”.

Moreover, some informants indicated the opportunities for collecting food aids from both nongovernmental organizations behind their participation in the CJTF group. Explaining this perspective, informant A1 described:

“We are collecting food aids from NGOs [Nongovernmental Organizations] like COOPI, Action against Hunger and Red Cross. However, such types of aids are mean not only to us alone, but we are offering special consideration whenever they are distributing”.

Furthermore, observation during the fieldwork confirmed to the collection of aid services by members of the CJTF group. On several occasions, the researcher sighted participants' line up at aid collection centers of such organizations such as Cooperazone International, World Food Program, and the United Nations International Children, Education Fund (UNICEF) collecting food and other related aid. Although, finding revealed these aid services are not solely mean for the CJTF participants, however, the key informants revealed that by being in the militia, there are high chances of obtaining than in the normal private citizens. Informant A5 narrate in this perspective:

“There is a better chance of obtaining once you are in the CJTF than being a private. Before I participate in the CJTF, I rarely get a single chance, even in the event of three different distributions. Now, I am accessing in almost all distribution. Not just for myself, I am capable of enhancing means for others (informant A5)”.

Observation during the fieldwork also shows that the militias receive additional incentives for special services renders to the community, such as escorting traditional rulers, securing public gatherings such as marriages and burials. Although, while these services are not negotiable, but there is strong evidence that the continued accrual of such emolument has significantly contributed to participating in the CJTF group. This is particularly compelling for young people who are eager to escape poverty.

Consequently, closely related to the financial gain, finding shows the desire and aspiration of the participants to be offered formal employment equally instigates the participation. Informant A4 explained in this narrative:

“Although, we participated in the group as voluntary, however past experience that whenever people participate in this type of voluntary militia activities, government at the end of the day permanent the participants. Therefore, we believe that by being in the militia is a viable opportunity for the participant to get government employment”.

Informants C2 supported:

“Since rumor circulates that, the government is willing to permanent the CJTF in the post insurgent period, people rushed tremendously to participate in the group. Almost all able youth, men are now interested in involved in the group. Everybody is assuming that the CJTF is a key to the permanent government job in the state”.

Based on the above assertions, one may plausibly argue that the participation of people in the CJTF is linked to the skyrocketing unemployment in northeastern Nigeria. This assertion confirmed to some previous studies notably [11] and Bamidele [17] that show the relationship between staging poverty in northern Nigeria and the widespread militia actions in the region. In fact, according to Justina

population devastated by poverty can easily drive into violent conflict. Earlier work by Collier and Hoeffler [18] using a data of 45 different civil wars between 1960 and 2011 shows economic motivation as the most contributing factor for militia mobilization into violent conflict. In a period of wars Humphreys and Weinstein [19] shows people participate or cooperate with militia forces to ensure survival.

However, finding contrasts with numerous studies. In Northern Ireland, Cramer [20] documented that labor market discrimination rather than the aggregate levels of unemployment as the driving factor for the participation of paramilitary force. In his analysis of the motivations of militia participation in Sierra Leone, Keen [21] revealed unemployment is not the only motivation of recruits, but resentment due to class politics and social discrimination as a factor. Berman [22] claimed unemployment does not significantly explain the participation of pro-government militia in Iraq and the Philippines rather grievance of increasing threat and poor protections by the state.

Conclusion

Generally, this study revealed the personal motives of material gains are behind the participation of people in the CJTF militarism. The finding, therefore, challenges the popular and pre-existing thoughts of communal interest and national patriotism as the drivers for the participation. In retrospect, the finding corresponded to the opportunism factor in the participation of paramilitary force popularized by Weinstein [19]. In this context, the findings besides its relevance to the literature of paramilitary motivations, it has practical implications for policymakers and practitioners. It incredibly contributed to the knowledge of post-conflict peace-building and sustenance. Perhaps, considering the attendant security threats associated with the CJTF participants, understanding the motives of the militia should be helpful for promoting sustainable peace and stability. It is also an eye-opener for the State authorities to adopt strategies of addressing the needs of CJTF militias toward empowering the participants or terminating their operations. Therefore, as a guide for future policy options toward addressing the CJTF problems, the study offered the following recommendations.

1. There is an urgent need for government and organized groups to support the members of the CJTF in certain aspects of improving social welfares and emolument helpful for catering needs of the participants' including their immediate needs, the needs of their family members and the families of fallen heroes.

2. Since the main militia interest is monetary and materialistic, to prevent the possible threats, well-meaning citizens in the northeast and the rest of Nigeria should propound charity centers where donations to be raised to support the immediate and long-term needs of CJTF members. This approach should help suppress the abuses of extortions, thievery and other allege crimes perpetrated by the CJTF members.

3. Government should provide strong legal mechanism that must ensure CJTF operate in a manner that promotes stability. To be effective, the local, state and the federal governments of Nigeria should establish tight control mechanisms capable of preventing the militia from challenging the state autonomy.

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Антиповстанческое ополчение: взгляд на мотивацию участников гражданского ополчения в Северной Нигерии

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Аннотация. С 2013 года северо-восточный регион Нигерии, являющийся эпицентром восстания исламистской группировки Боко Харам, ведущей борьбу за создание исламского государства, продемонстрировал массовое участие людей в формировании гражданского ополчения. Для борьбы с восстанием Боко Харам была сформирована группа ополченцев, в разговорной речи называющая себя «Гражданская совместная целевая группа» (СЛТФ, ГСЦГ). Возможно, именно участие ГСЦГ в боевых действиях оказало влияние на сокращение военных действий «Боко харам» в большинстве общин Нигерии. До ГСЦГ подходы к борьбе с повстанцами Специальной совместной целевой группы правительств Нигерии и Многонациональной совместной целевой группы государств в бассейне озера Чад не получали позитивного отклика у населения. Однако в то время, как действия ГСЦГ были в целом успешны, несмотря на сопутствующие человеческие и материальные потери, некоторые действия повстанцев привели к росту подозрений среди населения об истинной мотивации группы. Поэтому в этой статье были исследованы мотивы ГСЦГ в северо-восточной Нигерии. Исследование проводилось с применением качественного метода, данные были получены от тринадцати информаторов из трех групп – ГСЦГ, лидеров сообществ, органов власти штатов и местных органов власти. Методика сбора данных – углубленные интервью и наблюдение за участниками. Полученные данные позволили выявить личностные факторы стимулирования людей к участию, основанные на денежной / материальной выгоде и интересе к будущему трудоустройству. Чтобы удовлетворить экономические интересы членов ГСЦГ, и в качестве универсального средства для предотвращения угроз безопасности, связанных с этой группой, в исследовании рекомендуется создать благотворительные центры для получения взносов от состоятельных граждан, чтобы улучшить экономическое положение участников группы. Правительство должно также разработать сильные правовые механизмы для регулирования деятельности ополченцев ГСЦГ.

Ключевые слова: Нигерия, ополчение, Гражданская совместная целевая группа, антиповстанческая борьба

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