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Emergence of Non-State Security Actors: Drivers of Human Rights Abuses in Borno State Nigeria

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Abstract

In a continent plagued by violent conflicts, the emergence of non-state security actors has become a significant phenomenon, particularly in Nigeria's Borno State, where the Boko Haram insurgency has severely strained formal security institutions. While these volunteer groups, like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), have played a critical role in complementing government counter-insurgency efforts, their rise has created a dual security threat for civilians. This study, therefore, explores the nature, causes, and consequences of human rights abuses by these groups in Borno State. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, using both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (KIIs and FGDs) approaches. Data were collected from a purposively selected sample of 377 respondents in three significantly affected LGAs: Bama, Monguno, and Gwoza. The findings revealed that NSVGs emerged as a community-driven response to the state's failure to provide adequate security, driven by a need to protect against persistent Boko Haram attacks. However, their involvement in human rights abuses was primarily caused by a complex combination of factors, including a lack of formal oversight and accountability mechanisms, coupled with a perception among members of being above the law. The study concludes that while these groups are a vital protective hedge for communities, their lack of regulation and oversight has led to widespread abuses, including arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings. Therefore, the study recommends that the government urgently implement strict oversight mechanisms, clear rules of engagement, and continuous human rights training for all NSVG members to ensure accountability and restore public trust.

Keywords: Non-State Security Actors, Human Rights Abuses, Boko Haram Insurgency, Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), Borno State

Introduction

In Africa, the issue of insecurity has attained a worrisome level, as the history of the continent is tainted with different forms of violent conflict. Alimba and Ngige (2020) ^[5] observed that violent conflict remains one of the events that have halted the growth and development of African societies. The dimensions and patterns of manifestations of violent conflicts have prevented Africa from living up to its

expectations among the continents of the world. Furthermore, Alda and Sala (2015) ^[3] stated that rebel and extremist groups are increasing and often fracture into additional groupings in Africa. This has brought about a strong link between transnational organized crime and terrorism as the allegiances between Africa's domestic violent radicals and those in the Middle East have shifted from al-Qaeda to Islamic State (FATF-GIABA-GABAC,

2016)^[12].

The northern region of Nigeria has been experiencing severe levels of insecurity for more than two decades. The northwest geopolitical zone for instance has witnessed religious, ethnic and communal conflict on a large scale. In addition to that, banditry has become the order of the day in the region, this is evident in the prevalence of killings and kidnappings for ransom in the region. The northwest has become a hotbed of crime, which includes communal conflict, ethnoreligious conflict and banditry. In the fight against insecurity, the joint military operations contained the activities of the insurgents in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, but the sect has continued to ransack where the presence of the security forces are greatly invisible. Consequently, indigenes, especially the youths, hunters and vigilante members had to stand up to partner with the government security agencies in the fight against Boko Haram insurgency. Considering the fact that majority of the members of Boko Haram were once together with these people in different communities and villages, they were able to identify them in person when the members of the sect came to spy on the communities for the purpose of conducting attacks. Onuoha and Owonikoko (2019)^[25] indicated that the non-state volunteer groups became a child of necessity as their contribution to countering Boko Haram cannot be overemphasized. The local people became the eyes on the street for the military, supplying valuable intelligence which helped in crimping down the insurgents and identifying their spies in communities. These civilians use their knowledge of local inhabitants, geography, languages, and cultures to a great effect in counterterrorism efforts.

However, although the CJTF has contributed to reclaiming territory and restoring relative order, numerous reports have documented cases of extrajudicial killings, sexual abuse, arbitrary detention, forced recruitment of children, and extortion (Human Rights Watch, 2018; Amnesty International, 2015)^[6, 13]. These violations often stem from the lack of formal training, weak accountability mechanisms, political manipulation, and the absence of legal oversight. Most of these groups operate outside any codified command structure, making it difficult to monitor their conduct or prosecute wrongdoings. In some cases, they receive tacit or open support from the state, which further complicates efforts to address their human rights violations (Okeke, 2021)^[23].

In Borno State, some hunters and vigilante members are known for arresting suspects and beating them mercilessly in an attempt to gather information from them. Furthermore, they have turned themselves into police in communities, due to the way they determine who is right and not right. Ideally, they ought to act as a fraction of an intelligence gathering unit for the security operatives and report whatever they find out to them for necessary actions. Mbah and Nwangwu (2014)^[20] reported that C-JTF has been alleged to commit detention-related human rights breaches. The majority of the Boko Haram suspects are held in custody for years without trial. This in itself is a breach of their right to a free and fair trial. With their prolonged stay in detention, other abuses are inevitable.

This study, therefore, explores the nature, causes, and consequences of human rights abuses by non-state volunteer

groups in Borno state, with a particular focus on LGAs Bama LGA (Borno Central), Monguno LGA (Borno North) and Gwoza (Borno South). It also examines the role of government, civil society, and international organizations in addressing these abuses and promoting human rights in conflict-affected areas. It is in the light of the above that the study examined the emergence of non-state security actors: drivers of human rights abuses in Borno State.

Problem Statement

Borno State, Nigeria has been characterized by insecurity as a result of the activities of Boko Haram insurgents. Amidst this complex security landscape, non-state volunteer groups emerged, purportedly to fill the security vacuum and protect communities from insurgent attacks. Okoli (2016)^[22] reported that the attacks of the insurgents presented a situation that looked as if the government and its security forces were running out of options in fighting the insurgents and restoring peace to the region. Moreso, the protracted insurgency by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Borno State, Nigeria, has severely strained formal security institutions, leading to the emergence of non-state volunteer groups like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).

In the fight against the insurgency activities, civilians in Borno State face a dual threat: from the insurgency and from some of the very groups formed to protect them. This perpetuates a cycle of trauma and distrust, hindering humanitarian access and recovery efforts in a region already grappling with a severe humanitarian crisis. Addressing this problem requires navigating the delicate balance between leveraging the indispensable support of volunteer groups and ensuring strict adherence to human rights principles and effective accountability.

Aim and the Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study was to examine the emergence of non-state security actors: drivers of human rights abuses in Borno State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the factors responsible for the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in securing the communities in Borno state.
2. Identify the causes of the involvement of the non-state volunteer groups in human rights abuses in Borno state.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the factors responsible for the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in securing the communities in Borno state?
2. What are the causes of the involvement of the non-state volunteer groups in human rights abuses in Borno state?

Concept Clarification

Human Rights

Human rights are moral principles or norms for certain standards of human behavior and are regularly protected in municipal and international law. Simmons (2019)^[30] observed that they are commonly understood as inalienable, fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because she or he is a human being and which are inherent in all human beings, regardless of their age, ethnic

origin, location, language, religion, ethnicity, or any other status. They are applicable everywhere and at every time in the sense of being universal, and they are egalitarian in the sense of being the same for everyone. They are regarded as requiring empathy and the rule of law and imposing an obligation on persons to respect the human rights of others, and it is generally considered that they should not be taken away except as a result of due process based on specific circumstances (Simmons, 2019) [30].

Icelandic Human Rights Centre (2017) [17] argued that human rights are at the core of international law and international relations. They represent basic values common to all cultures, and must be respected by countries worldwide. Human rights are inalienable fundamental rights to which a person is inherently entitled simply because he or she is a human being. The principle of equality and non-discrimination, as stipulated in Article 2 of the Declaration, is the cornerstone of the human rights protection system, enshrined in every human rights instrument, stipulating that: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty (Icelandic Human Rights Centre, 2017) [17].

Human Rights Abuses in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the worst victims of human rights abuses in Africa. Consequently, many Nigerians today live in fear and terror, torture, unlawful detention, unfair trial and possible death. Even though Nigeria has a National Human Rights Commission, a constitution modelled after the United States of America, and a signatory to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, various governments (both military and civilians) have always treated the issue of human rights with contempt and levity. The uneasiness about the flagrant abuses of human rights in Nigeria and the outrages that have occurred are the major threats to peace and stability in the country. Adem (2011) [1] noted that the Nigeria police force participates in mass killings, burying suspects in shallow graves, while their personnel fail to keep adequate records of people in custody, knowing well that their failure to do so facilitates abuse against detainees and suspects. There is also failure on the part of the government to institute or exercise due intelligence in investigating or ensuring accountability for police abuses. The police were empowered to make arrests without warrants if they believed that there was a reason to suspect that a person had committed an offence. They often abuse this power. Under the fundamental rights Enforcement Procedures Rules of the 1999 Constitution, police may arrest and detain persons for 24 hours before charging them with an offence. The law requires an arresting officer to inform the accused of the charges at the time of arrests and to take the accused persons to a station for processing within a reasonable amount of time. However, the police generally do not adhere to these legally mandated procedures (Adem, 2011) [1].

According to the Human Rights Situation Report (2002) [16], the security forces in Nigeria have a history of abusing the human rights of the citizenry ranging from detention due to refusal to give bribe, sexual and physical assault of those in police custody, use of torture to extract confession, extra judicial killings engaged in by police personnel and many other acts which have turned the police to a blood sucking monster in the eyes of the citizenry. In view of this, many citizens see police personnel as an everlasting enemy and relate to them as such. These human rights abuses have led to the maiming, physical and psychological trauma of many citizens. Many citizens have died and continue to die in police detention centers and even on the highways as the police commit acts that for the most part go unpunished. Another dimension to this is that these human rights abuse are mostly committed against some sections of the society as the poor, uneducated citizens who are defenseless and unable to enforce their rights because they are neither seen or heard (Human Rights Situation Report, 2002) [16].

Amnesty International (2022) [7] further reported that the state failed in its responsibility to protect people from various abuses committed by Boko Haram and ISWAP as well as unknown gunmen. According to media reports, they killed at least 6,907 people, abducted 6,157 and forcibly transferred or internally displaced at least 2,000. Attacks by Boko Haram, which had been predominantly in the north-east, spread to some states in north-central and north-western Nigeria during the year. Attacks by Boko Haram directed against civilians, such as those targeting villagers, farming communities and highway and train passengers, amounted to war crimes. Civil society organizations reported that, on 26 May, Boko Haram killed at least 60 people in Rann community, Borno state. On 5 July, gunmen attacked Kuje Prison in Abuja and freed more than 60 suspected Boko Haram members. According to media reports, on 15 November, Boko Haram reportedly killed more than 15 women in Gwoza community, Borno state, after accusing them of being witches. Of the hundreds of schoolchildren abducted by Boko Haram in previous years, 110 girls remained in captivity at the end of the year (Amnesty International, 2022) [7].

Non-State Volunteer Groups

Public safety and security are important for communities and for this reason people sometimes join together to provide for their own safety and security, for example, by forming neighborhood watch associations, community patrols, self-defense groups, or guard systems to deter theft in markets and shopping areas, trade associations, among others. In a similar way, communities sometimes have their own processes and authorities who can deal with community problems that might otherwise involve courts of law or other parts of the justice sector, for example, dealing with issues of minor crime, resolving disagreements within families or between community members, or mediating between groups or individuals with competing claims to local resources. When arrangements to provide security and justice are established outside a state mandate or public authority, they are sometimes called nonstate, hybrid, informal, or community security and justice actors.

In Nigeria, the police force, the armed forces and the intelligence community are the three core agencies of the

state originally mandated by the constitution to provide certain security services. Today, the internal security provision and other public order maintenance are the responsibilities of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and other paramilitary agencies. However, even with the existence of these agencies in the state's security sector, the non-state security outfits have continued to grow and gain prominence and acceptance within the society due to the failure of the state agencies and invariably a continuation of the culture of self-reliance. The state security agencies' failure in dealing with these challenges are attributed to many negative conditions including inadequate labor force (personnel), poor training, lack of modern policing and security techniques, inadequate and outdated equipment, insufficient fund, low remuneration, low morale, understaffing of the state security sector against the population, language differences, arbitrary exercise of power, institutionalization, lack of political will to reform the security sector and non-decentralization of operations (Bashiru 2018) ^[10]. The citizens are left with the option of alternative means of guaranteeing their security and safety. Therefore, the state's failure to provide security to its citizens is boldly linked to the growing trend of non-state security agencies in the country and most other fragile countries. Odo (2016) ^[22] pointed out that, vigilantes flourish not only in places where the state lacks the capacity to protect citizens from crime, but also where the state is believed to be corrupt or untrustworthy.

Goddey (2018) ^[14] further noted that CJTF is just a group of volunteers who took their sticks according to native language Kanuri (gora) in which they use in fighting the BH. Thus, what compel them to kick against the activities of BH, due to frustration and frequent attacks on people. Inspired by the zeal of CJTF, government now recognize their efforts and gave them support. The CJTF came as a 'child of necessity,' as compelled by the menace of BH, given its attacks on innocent citizens of Borno State, and the incapacity of the Nigerian military forces in the early days of insurgency. It is worthy of mention that the government security men arrested and tortured innocent locals for allegedly harboring miscreants. Thus, innocent locals were dying daily from both BH attacks and apprehension by the military forces. In order to arrest the situation, the CJTF came into existence. Its formation is legitimized by the severe consequences suffered by the locals (Goddey, 2018) ^[14]. It took some processes for the group to be well established, which started with a call for volunteers by locals.

Non-state actors, from armed groups to private corporations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), play a critical role in heightening or lessening human security. The measures required to enhance human security often call for action from numerous non-state actors, particularly NGOs. These include, for example, addressing the needs of displaced populations, advocating stronger control of the arms trade and helping governments preserve and restore fragile environments. Human security can act as a platform to help state and non-state actors alike address the causes of global insecurity. Non-state actors are particularly well suited to engendering human security in the new world context. Indeed, in failed states, they are the only actors who are present to do so. During internal conflicts, non-state

actors benefit from close involvement with local communities and they are better able than traditional actors to build local capacity. Nonstate actors can and do play many roles in the protection of human security. For example, organizations such as the ICRC and Oxfam act as relief agencies even when governments are unable to respond to emergency needs; NGOs such as the Community of San Egidio facilitate negotiations between warring parties; efforts such as Radio Ijambo in Rwanda aim to help re-establish peace.

For Ogbozor (2016) ^[22], informal security actors are key players in security provision in many African communities. Studies on informal policing structures often focus on victims of vigilantism and breaches of human rights perpetrated by vigilantes, neglecting the beneficial role vigilantes play in ensuring the safety and security of local communities in Nigeria, vigilantes have both negative and positive impacts: abuses by vigilantes must be addressed formally and structurally while preserving the important role of vigilantes as protectors of their communities. Informal mechanisms for protection have thrived in certain rural areas, where the majority of the people are excluded from mainstream security provisioning (Kwaja, 2014) ^[19]. In these cases, nonstate security actors have increasingly bridged the vacuum created by the inability of formal security institutions to ensure the safety of citizens. Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano states have long histories of ethnoreligious and political-related violence. A number of informal actors are active in these states, which have high rates of violence. This report provides an analysis of the informal security providers in Plateau, Kaduna, and Kano. It discusses the informal security actors present in these states, their structures, their recruitment and training mechanisms, accountability issues, their relationships with formal security actors, and perceptions of them (Ogbozor, 2016) ^[22].

Vigilantism is an organized attempt by a group of ordinary citizens to enforce norms and maintain law and order on behalf of their communities, often by resorting to violence, in the perceived absence of effective official state action through the police and courts (Alemika and Chukwuma, 2004) ^[4].

In Maiduguri, the CJTF is currently made up of two groups, the volunteers and those absorbed into the newly created Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme (BOYES). The Department of State Services vets and profiles the volunteers recruited into BOYES, while the Ministry of Justice regulates the activities of the CJTF (Felbab-Brown, 2018) ^[13]. The creation of BOYES is an attempt by the state government to formalize, restructure and legitimize the CJTF. BOYES recruits wear uniforms, are trained by the military and other organizations, are permitted to carry arms, and receive a monthly stipend of 20,000 Naira. BOYES is structured into units. These include the rapid response squad and special forces, which collaborate, through joint tactical operations, active combat and patrols, with the military and the police. Other units, such as the agro-rangers, work with the NSCDC to protect farmers against attacks by the insurgents. The neighborhood watch unit of BOYES primarily targets the enforcement of order and crime control at the neighborhood level and in public spaces. The creation of BOYES has, however, left many

volunteers feeling excluded from what they perceive to be the reward package for privileged members of the CJTF (Felbab-Brown, 2018) ^[13].

Non-State Volunteer Groups and Human Rights Abuses in Nigeria

Non-State Actors in Security Sector known as the CJTF, a local group formed in 2013 to support the Nigerian security forces in the fight against Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria and to protect local communities from attacks by Boko Haram, progressively expanded over the years. The group have been engaged in security operations and more recently, involved in providing security to camps for internally displaced populations (UNICEF 15 September, 2017) ^[31]. In 2016, the CJTF was listed in the annexes of the Secretary-General's Annual Report for Children and Armed Conflict for the recruitment and use of children. Following the listing, UNICEF, in its role as Co-chair of the United Nations Country Task Force for the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave abuses against children, has been working with the group and Nigerian authorities to develop the Action Plan signed today. Through the Action Plan, the CJTF commits to put in place a number of measures to end and prevent child recruitment and use. Identifying and releasing all children within the group's ranks and instructing its members not to recruit or use children in the future are examples of such measures (UNICEF, 15 September 2017) ^[31]. Members of civilian vigilante groups known as the Non State Security Actors are taking an increasingly active role in the government's fight against Boko Haram (BH). But while some residents call them heroes, others fear they are inciting BH to more directly target civilians, that they are committing abuses themselves and that they are eroding the already strained rule of law in Nigeria's northeast (OCHA, 2013) ^[21]. Mbah and Nwangwu (2014) ^[20] noted that the Chapter Four of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and other laws established under it recognize the fundamental rights of the nationals as sacred and inalienable. For instance, Sections 33 and 35 of the Constitution guarantee that every person has the right to life and personal liberty and shall not be arbitrarily deprived of these rights. The Constitution also provides that every citizen is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, including the right not to be subjected to torture. Similarly, Nigeria is a party to several international human rights treaties. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights which prohibit arbitrary deprivation of the right to life, torture and arbitrary arrest and detention.

Empirical Review

Mallam (2019) ^[13] worked on the Boko haram insurgency and human rights violation in North Eastern Nigeria. The insurgency caused by Boko Haram's insurgency is among the primary challenges faced by Nigeria. The group's activities in the North have resulted in thousands of casualties, the displacement of more than one million people, the destruction of hundreds of schools, mosques, churches and government establishments and have ravaged the economy of the region. The sample size was 25 participants who included camp leaders, security agents,

local leaders and human rights experts. The research instrument was key informant interviews. The study found out that human rights abuses by Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, specifically, in the States of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa included: deprivation of right to life, right to education and right to healthcare. The study concluded that Boko-haram insurgency has greatly impacted on the right to life, education, and healthcare. The study made the following recommendations: The government should ensure that right to life is protected first above every other thing. Emmanuelar (2015) ^[11] worked on insurgency and humanitarian crises in Northern Nigeria: The case of Boko Haram. Insurgency has become a threat to global peace and security in the 21st century due to the fact that it constitutes the highest contributor to humanitarian crises in the form of rise in human casualties, internally displaced persons, refugee debacles, food insecurity and the spread of various diseases. This paper adopts the State Fragility theoretical framework as well as the survey method involving the use of questionnaires (the regression technique) and in-depth interview (index matrix and table technique) which focuses on three internally displaced Camps in the region for analysis. The empirical findings indicate that, there is a significant relationship between Boko Haram insurgency and humanitarian crises, when variables such as impact on human casualties (IHC), food insecurity (FI) and internally displaced persons (IDP's) are held constant, while no significant relationship exists when the variables such as loss of livelihood (LoL) and government response (GR) are held constant.

Akani (2024) ^[2] worked on the comparative analysis of insurgency and counter-insurgency approaches in Nigeria and other jurisdictions. Insurgency is, arguably, one of the greatest threats to global peace, security and development in the contemporary times. Since the dawn of this millennium, the incidence has been on a steady rise worldwide. The rising wave of insurgency has assumed a crisis dimension in Nigeria, resource-based and sectarian insurgency have claimed many lives, destroyed sources of livelihood, and created a climate of perpetual fear and insecurity across the country. Indeed, the worldwide manifestation of insecurity has not only been evident in Africa but in other parts of the world. In Nigeria, the phenomenon has found expression in the emergence of Boko Haram. This paper compares and contrasts insurgencies in Nigeria and other countries, particularly insurgencies in Kenya, Iraq and India. It also compares and contrasts the counter-insurgency approaches by the Nigerian security forces with those of Kenya, Iraq and India. The paper found that while the insurgencies in all the countries compared share some similarities, the counter-insurgency measures differ somewhat significantly. It concluded that the approach of the Nigerian forces is still chaotic and ineffective. The paper recommends for Nigeria a comprehensive counter-insurgency policy that prioritizes respect for human rights and efficiency.

Ikedinma (2021) ^[18] examined the challenges of counter-terrorism strategies and human rights in Nigeria. This paper examined the political costs and consequences of counterterrorism strategies; x-rayed the challenges democratic governments face in confronting terrorism; examined the experiences of Nigerian counter-terrorism laws, policies and practices. The paper using secondary data

established that counterterrorist policies have the potential to undermine the democratic principles, institutions, and processes they seek to preserve. This demonstrates the effects of hastily drawn policies on civil liberties and constitutional norms. It concluded that preventing and countering terrorism is now a key policy priority for many liberal democratic states; and the political costs of confronting terrorism if not properly verified in most cases overshadows the main objective of countering terrorism. This is because both terrorist acts and counterterrorist strategies are political actions. The paper noted that terrorist designation lists are now more wide-spread internationally than ever before.

Omeni (2017) ^[24] worked on the counter-insurgency in Nigeria: The military and operations against Boko Haram, 2011-2017. The Boko Haram insurgency has lasted more than a decade in Nigeria. The protracted and intractable nature of the violence has established a context for mutual affront between the security agencies who seek to counter the insurrection on the one hand, and the militant Islamists who seek to enthrone a monolithic polity dependent on Islamic jurisprudence on the other hand. The religious fundamentalism of Boko Haram which has resulted in the abuse of human rights (especially religious freedom) is the main focus of this study. The comparative research methodology was adopted and data gathered from the study were content analyzed. Findings showed that kidnapping, forceful conversion, marriage, destruction of places of worship, opposition to western and Christian education are the central abuses to freedom of religion by the group occasioned by their fundamentalism. The study concluded that the violation of religious freedom as a fundamental human right has affected adherents of both Islam and Christianity. It recommends proper enactment and implementation of laws, education for peace, international support and intervention to mention but a few.

Yusuf (2013) ^[32] access the harvest of violence: the neglect of basic rights and the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Drawing on the core commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies, and mostly, the ethic of emancipation, this article focuses on the Boko Haram insurgency to investigate recurring violent conflict in Nigeria. It identifies a governance gap not adverted to in the official narrative which has led to gross discontent at the lower levels of the society. The governance gap has created fertile breeding grounds for the recruitment of disillusioned youths who are easily mobilized to violence and lately, insurgency. There are normative and pragmatic reasons to adopt and priorities social welfare through the implementation of economic, social and cultural obligations and due-process rights as a viable approach to at least reducing the spate of violence in the country. The discussion has relevance for resolving situations of violence and conflict in sub-Sahara Africa in particular and elsewhere in the developing world.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Critical theory. This theory is a philosophical and interdisciplinary approach for analyzing society, culture and politics that originated with the Frankfurt School in the 1920s and 1930s. The Frankfurt School was a group of scholars, including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich From, who

were critical of both traditional Marxist theory and mainstream social science (Rensmann, 2017) ^[28]. They sought to develop a theory that could explain the persistence of capitalism and the rise of fascism in Europe, while also providing a basis for social critique and transformation. Reeves (2009) ^[27] stated that the development of critical theory can be traced through several stages. In its early stages, critical theory was heavily influenced by Marxist theory, particularly in its emphasis on the critique of capitalism and the analysis of class struggle. However, critical theorists quickly realized that traditional Marxist theory was inadequate for understanding the complexities of modern society (Scheuerman, 2011) ^[29]. They began to incorporate insights from other disciplines, such as psychoanalysis, sociology, and cultural studies, into their work.

Using this theory to analyze human rights abuses will give a deeper understanding of their root causes and consequences of the abuse. This will help to ensure that governments and policy makers works towards creating a more just and equitable society where human rights are respected and protected for all.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The research was conducted in three LGAs (Bama, Monguno, Gwoza) in Borno State, Nigeria, a region significantly affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, with the population comprising 385 respondents, selected using Cochran's formula for calculating large Populations. A sample size of approximately 385 respondents was needed for a quantitative survey aiming for a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error from a very large population. The chosen formula is a statistically sound and widely accepted method for determining sample size in quantitative studies with large populations while purposive sampling was applied to select participants based on accessibility, availability, and involvement in field aid delivery. Data collection instruments included a researcher-designed structured questionnaire, tagged "Human Right Abuses and Non-state Volunteer Groups Questionnaire" (HRANVGQ)" and a Key Informant Interview (KII) guide was validated by experts in peace and conflict studies and trial-tested in Adamawa State, yielding a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86. Data collection involved obtaining official approval letters, seeking consent from community leader and Traditional rulers, NGO heads, CSOs heads Working in these LGAs and training research assistants to ensure proper administration of questionnaires and adherence to ethical considerations. The process spanned three weeks, during which the questionnaires were distributed and KIIs conducted. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation with SPSS version 27, applying a 3.50 mean cut-off point for decision-making. Qualitative data from the KII were analyzed thematically. This methodological approach ensured triangulation, improved validity, and provided an in-depth understanding of the emergence of non-state security actors and their activities in human rights abuses in Borno State.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the factors responsible for

the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in securing the communities in Borno state?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the factors responsible for the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in securing the communities in Borno state

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Std
1	Protection of their community from constant attacks of Boko Haram insurgency	165 (51.4%)	137 (42.7%)	13 (4%)	6 (1.9%)	3.43	0.66
2	Failure of the state security forces to adequately secure communities	55 (17.1%)	142 (44.2%)	96 (29.9%)	28 (8.7%)	2.69	0.85
3	Stoppage of harassment/intimidation of people by Boko Haram insurgents in communities.	100 (31.2%)	157 (48.9%)	53 (16.5%)	11 (3.4%)	3.07	0.78
4	Lack of trust on the security agencies by the people make them to fight insurgents in their communities.	82 (25.5%)	117 (36.4%)	100 (31.2%)	22 (6.9%)	2.80	0.89
5	The determination that they can stop the continued attacks of Boko Haram in their communities.	93 (29%)	161 (50.2%)	50 (15.6%)	17 (5.3%)	3.02	0.81
6	The continued loss of lives resulting in the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in their communities.	67 (20.9%)	99 (30.8%)	116 (36.1%)	39 (12.1%)	2.60	0.94
7	Understanding of the local terrain caused them to come to fight the insurgents.	89 (27.7%)	166 (51.7%)	45 (14%)	21 (6.5%)	3.00	0.82
8	To ensure that the insecurity manifesting in the communities is contained.	79 (24.6%)	179 (55.8%)	48 (15%)	15 (4.7%)	3.00	0.76
9	The believe that they are capable of fighting Boko Haram insurgents makes them to come out.	105 (32.7%)	151 (47%)	48 (15%)	17 (5.3%)	3.07	0.82
10	Humiliation faced by community members caused non-state volunteer groups to get involved in the fight against Boko Haram.	95 (29.6%)	146 (45.5%)	63 (19.6%)	17 (5.3%)	3.00	0.84

Table 1 showed the factors that factors responsible for the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in securing the communities in Borno State. From the responses of the respondents, it was clear that all them agree that the factors are significant motivator to for the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in communities. However, a total of 94.1% indicated that the emergence of non-state volunteer group were as a result of the protection of their community from constant attacks of Boko Haram insurgency. The mean score of the item was ($\bar{x} = 3.43$), indicating that it is agree. Also, the respondents that agree to the fact that the stoppage of harassment/intimidation of people by Boko Haram insurgents motivated the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in communities recorded a mean score of ($\bar{x} = 3.07$), and 80.1% of the respondents indicated agree to the statement. The believe that they are capable of fighting Boko Haram insurgents makes them to come out ($\bar{x} = 3.07$), while 79.7% of the respondent supported the idea. Another factor that makes non-state volunteer groups to emerge is the determination that they can stop the continued attacks of Boko Haram in their communities ($\bar{x} = 3.02$). Based on this statement, a total of 79.2% agree to it. The assurance that they understand the local terrain caused them to come to fight the insurgents ($\bar{x} = 3.00$), and 79.4% of the respondents agree to the statement. Their emergence is to ensure that the insecurity manifesting in their communities is contained ($\bar{x} = 3.00$). A total of 80.4% of the respondents supported the idea. Equally, humiliation faced by community members caused non-state volunteer to get involved in the fight against Boko Haram ($\bar{x} = 3.00$), while 75.1% of the respondents agree to the statement. Lack of trust on the security agencies by the people ($\bar{x} = 2.80$), and the failure of the state security forces to adequately secure communities ($\bar{x} = 2.69$) make them to fight insurgents in their communities. A total of 61.9% and 61.3% respectively of the respondents agree to the idea. Also, the continuous loss of lives resulted

in the emergence of non-state volunteer in their communities ($\bar{x} = 2.60$), while 51.7% of the respondents agree to the statement.

During the KII, the respondents asserted that

Community leader in one of the wards in Bama LGA

“Program officer: Yes, suicide bombing is definitely one of the tactics Boko Haram uses against aid convoys. We have heard witnessed situations in which vehicles carrying aid workers were targeted by suicide bombers to cause maximum damage and create fear in them.

A community leader in one of the wards in Bama LGA

observed that: “Before the rise of non-state volunteer groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), local hunters, and vigilante associations, the community's security environment was critically unstable. There were frequent attacks by insurgent groups, including raids, abductions, and destruction of property. Civilians had little to no warning before these attacks occurred, leading to widespread fear and uncertainty”.

An FGD of NGOs and CSOs who actively participated helping the abused individual in Monguno LGA that:

“In Monguno LGA here, There were frequent attacks by insurgent groups, including raids, abductions, and destruction of property. Civilians had little to no warning before these attacks occurred, leading to widespread fear and uncertainty. Though the military is their best but they cannot be everywhere at the same time. So, CJTF really saved the situation to some extent in this LGA.”

In support of the above, a commandant of one of the NSVG has this to add:

“In our local communities, the official security forces, including the police and the military, were often under-resourced, slow to respond, or most times

completely absent entirely in many rural areas where these attacks happened. This left large gaps in security coverage and allowed non-state armed groups to operate with relative impunity...our group really came in to help the situation and we are doing our best in that aspect.”

An FGD of woman leaders in Kasugula ward asserted that: “...in our ward, many residents were forced to flee their homes due to persistent insecurity, resulting in internally displaced persons (IDPs) and disrupted livelihoods. Even, there was growing distrust in formal security agencies, reflected in a sense of abandonment and frustration among community members. The absence of grassroots-level intelligence hindered the ability of state security agencies to preempt attacks or apprehend perpetrators effectively”.

A religious leader in Buduwa/Bula Chirabe ward added that: “As a religious leader, I can give you a first-hand account of what actually happened. There was a frequent and constant danger and helplessness before the emergence of organized volunteer community security groups in our locality. The introduction of groups like the CJTF and local vigilantes later shifted the security situation by providing local support, acting as early warning systems, and cooperating with official forces. Farming, trade, and schooling were frequently disrupted, leading to economic

hardship, food shortages, and a breakdown in community cohesion”.

From the above, it is clear that before the formation and activation of non-state volunteer groups such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), hunters, and vigilantes, the security environment in affected communities was highly precarious and unstable. From the KIIs and FGDs, there was a frequent insurgent attacks, communities regularly experienced raids, kidnappings, killings, and property destruction by insurgent groups. Civilians were often targets, and attacks could occur without warning. Ineffective State Protection: State security forces, including police and the military, were typically under-equipped, late in response, or completely absent, especially in remote and rural locations. This resulted in significant gaps in security coverage. Ongoing threats forced many residents to abandon their homes, leading to large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and further destabilizing communities. Fearful of violence, community members restricted their movements, especially after dark, and avoided social gatherings. Daily routines were frequently and severely disrupted.

Research Question 2

What are the causes of the involvement of the non-state volunteer groups in human rights abuses in Borno state?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the causes of the involvement of the non-state volunteer groups in human rights abuses in Borno state

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	Std
1	Weak/ poor governance system makes non-state volunteer groups to abuse people in communities	125 (38.9%)	81 (25.2%)	82 (25.5%)	33 (10.3%)	2.92	1.02
2	Non-state volunteer groups operate without checks due to a lack of accountability mechanisms.	120 (37.4%)	106 (33%)	75 (23.4%)	20 (6.2%)	3.01	0.92
3	Patterns of recruitment process of non-state volunteer groups make them to misbehave in communities.	124 (38.6%)	92 (28.7%)	86 (26.8%)	19 (5.9%)	3.00	0.94
4	Non-state volunteer groups understand that there is no law strictly regulating their activities which make them to get involve in human right abuses in communities.	133 (41.4%)	99 (30.8%)	63 (19.6%)	26 (8.1%)	3.05	0.96
5	The problem of illiteracy also makes them to be involved in abuse of people in communities	120 (37.4%)	117 (36.4%)	57 (17.8%)	27 (8.4%)	3.02	0.94
6	When people refused to comply with their instructions/orders, they will violate their rights	116 (36.1%)	117 (36.4%)	72 (22.4%)	16 (5%)	3.03	0.88
7	The feeling that they are above the law, make them to get involve in abusing people in communities	121 (37.7%)	90 (28%)	89 (27.7%)	21 (6.5%)	2.96	0.95
8	Ineffectiveness of local control mechanisms make them to get involve in abuse of the people	109 (34%)	112 (34.9%)	79 (24.9%)	21 (6.5%)	2.96	0.92
9	The problem of poverty also makes them to abuse people in communities	103 (32.1%)	105 (32.7%)	80 (24.9%)	33 (10.3%)	2.86	0.98

Table 2 showed the causes of the involvement of the non-state volunteer groups in human rights abuses in northeast, Nigeria. The respondents agree with the fact that all the items are significant factors in driving non-state volunteer groups into committing human rights abuses in communities in the Northeast, Nigeria. The major factor identified by 72.2% of the respondents as the driving factor is the understanding of NSVG that there is no law strictly regulating their activities, which make them to get involve in human right abuses in communities ($\bar{x} = 3.05$). Also, 72.5% of the respondents indicated that when people refused to comply with their instructions/orders, they will violate their rights ($\bar{x} = 3.03$). The mean score of ($\bar{x} = 3.02$)

represented views of respondents that agree that the problem of illiteracy also makes them to be involved in abuse of people in communities. Thus, 73.8% of the respondents agree to the statement. Another factor identified by 70.4% of the respondents was that non-state volunteer actors operates without checks due to a lack of accountability mechanisms ($\bar{x} = 3.01$). A total of 67.3% of the respondents agree that the patterns of recruitment process of non-state volunteer make them to misbehaviour in communities, while the mean score was ($\bar{x} = 3.00$). The respondents 65.7% agree that the feeling that NSVG are above the law, make them to get involve in abusing people in communities ($\bar{x} = 2.96$). Also, the mean score of ($\bar{x} = 2.96$) represented the views of

68.9% of the respondents that agree that the ineffectiveness of local control mechanisms make them to get involve in abuse of the people. The respondents that agree that weak/poor governance system makes non-state volunteer to abuse people in communities constituted 64.1%, while the mean score was (\bar{x} = 2.92). A total of 64.8% of the respondents agree that the problem of poverty also makes them to abuse people in communities (\bar{x} = 2.86).

During the KII, the respondents asserted that Community leader in one of the wards in Monguno LGA stated that: “From the experience in our community, security personnel often operate without proper monitoring or disciplinary consequences. Most of the abusers are proud abusers and they often tell you “I will kill you and nothing will happen”. As a Nigerian thing, abusers are rarely prosecuted, creating a culture of “no consequences.”

An FGD of NGOs and CSOs who actively participated helping the abused individual in Gwoza LGA listed the following as the types of human abuse that occurs: “Abuses continue because victims lack safe, accessible ways to report violations. Even when these cases are reported, nothing rarely happens to the abusers. And of course, many officers are unaware of international and national rights frameworks. They see human right abuse as normal thing. They also claimed that sometimes exhaustion and trauma from security work leads them to overreact and act brutally. Civilians are sometimes profiled or suspected based on location or identity...especially after attacks on security forces, soldiers may retaliate on communities”.

In support of the above, a commandant of one of the NSVG asserted that: “Some of our members and security agents often act with impunity despite efforts to curb the menace. We do punish reported cases...maybe it is not enough, but we punish severally. Again, people claim we are not trained, but we are trained...probably not enough. After all, formal security outfits like police and army men do abuse civilian too. Some of our men are naturally corrupt and this motivates abuses such as extortion and illegal detention”.

An FGD of women leaders in Bama LGA agreed that: “Some security agents exploit their authority for personal gain, particularly in environments lacking robust anti-corruption mechanisms. Even when these cases are reported or case file at the court, weaknesses in the judiciary including slow processes, lack of independence, and political interference discourage victims from seeking justice. With civil remedies rarely enforced and lack of repercussions for violations, security agents face minimal risks for abusive practices”.

A community leader added also that: “Some of them often resort to repressive actions, including torture, arbitrary detention, and excessive force, under the pretext of protecting and providing security. Also, absence of safe, accessible, and credible channels for citizens to report abuse fosters a cycle of impunity. Human rights abuses by security agents are a result of entrenched structural issues, institutional flaws, and the persistent challenges of operating in high-risk, resource-scarce environments”.

Discussion of Findings

Factors Responsible for the Emergence of Non-State Volunteer Groups in Securing the Communities

The factors responsible for the emergence of non-state volunteer groups in securing their communities in Borno State as discovered in this study were: the study found that non-state volunteer groups in Borno State emerged as a community-driven response to severe insecurity. Key drivers included the need to defend against persistent Boko Haram attacks, widespread harassment by insurgents, and the failure of state security forces to provide adequate protection. Their formation was largely a survival strategy, filling a critical security void left by the state. These findings underscore that the emergence of non-state volunteer groups was a desperate, community-driven response to an existential threat, born out of necessity and a perceived void in state protection. These findings tally with the assertions of Panki and Rufus (2023) ^[26] that in recent years, armed vigilante groups have proliferated in Nigeria, dedicating their efforts to fighting crime, protecting and defending lives and property. The authors went ahead to state that its security agencies are perceived as becoming less and less able to reduce insecurity throughout the country, which is a key influencing factor in the emergence of these new security outfits (Panki and Rufus, 2023) ^[26].

These findings agree with the ideas of Bamidele (2017) ^[9] that for the region's overstretched and under pressure military, they have somewhat filled the security gap and provided local knowledge and NSVG can be a powerful counter-insurgency tool. Also, the assertions of Anjoh and Ngafi (2020) ^[8] agreed with the findings of this study that NSVG were able to carry out their role of watchfulness with probity and contribute to combat or reduce Boko Haram activities in the region. This study equally found out that the assurance that they understand the local terrain caused them to come out to fight the insurgents; humiliation faced by community members caused non-state volunteer groups to get involved in the fight against Boko Haram. The assertions of Anjoh and Ngafi (2020) ^[8] that NSVG contributed greatly to the reduction of the activities of Boko Haram in the region tally with the findings of this study.

Causes of the Involvement of the Non-State Volunteer Groups in Human Rights Abuses

The study also identified several critical factors contributing to the involvement of non-state volunteer groups (NSVGs) in human rights abuses within Borno State communities. The findings collectively point to a challenging environment where a lack of formal oversight, internal discipline, and a broader governance deficit create fertile ground for human rights violations by groups initially formed for protection. On the consequences of human rights abuses by non-state volunteer groups, the study reveals that human rights abuses by non-state volunteer groups (NSVGs) have deep and widespread consequences. These include escalating community violence through retaliation, eroding public trust in the groups, and causing serious psychological harm like PTSD and depression among victims. Overall, such abuses weaken community stability, disrupt governance, and worsen conditions in already fragile, conflict-affected areas. This finding is in agreement with the positions of Hassan and Pieri (2018) ^[5] that NSVG organize themselves into

groups to take the law into their own hands in order to reprimand criminals, or as associations in which citizens have joined together for self-protection under conditions of disorder. By taking law into their own hand, mean that they can misuse at any time. Bamidele (2016)^[12] attested to this idea that it should be recognized that NSVG, in different ways, challenge the rule of law and the state's monopoly of using legitimate force and often severely infringe on citizen's rights. This shows that NSVG can easily abuse the law because they are not strictly regulated by them. They violate the rights of people when they fail to comply with their instructions/orders they will violate their rights; the problem of illiteracy also makes them to be involved in abuse of people in communities. The report of International tally with the findings of this study, on the ground that NSVG have been accused severely that they violate the rights of community members, mistreated others, and usurped power from traditional chiefs, threatening community relations in the process. they operate without checks due to a lack of accountability mechanisms; the patterns of recruitment process of non-state volunteer make them to misbehave in communities; the feeling that NSVG are above the law, makes them to get involve in abusing people in communities; the ineffectiveness of local control mechanisms make them to get involve in abuse of the people and that weak/poor governance system makes non-state volunteer to abuse people in communities.

The findings of this study is in line with the opinions of Owonikoko and Onuoha (2019)^[25] that the abuses can result in victims developing hatred for them and can lead to break down of law and orders in communities. Also, abuse can cause a deep hatred on the victim for non-state volunteer groups operating in their communities. Abuse can also promote depression/anxiety on individual concern in communities; and results in breakdown of social cohesion in communities as well as result in breakdown of law and order in communities and that abuse can make the community to stop the operations of non-state volunteer groups in communities.

The findings of the study reveal that non-state volunteer groups (NSVGs), such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and other local militias in Borno State, became involved in human rights abuses due to a complex combination of structural, operational, and psychological factors. A primary cause identified is the security vacuum created by the inability of state security forces to adequately protect civilians from Boko Haram insurgents. This compelled local communities to form volunteer groups to fill the gap (Human Rights Watch, 2018)^[13]. However, many of these NSVGs were not properly trained in human rights principles, legal procedures, or rules of engagement, which often led to abuse of power and unchecked aggression (Amnesty International, 2015)^[6]. Additionally, lack of formal oversight and accountability mechanisms has been a significant enabler. Once these groups gained recognition, especially with some being armed or indirectly supported by the state, their operations became militarized, and impunity increased (Okeke, 2021)^[23]. In conclusion, the findings underscore that while NSVGs may arise from a desperate need for protection in contexts of state weakness, their operational shortcomings, lack of oversight, and the broader governance deficit create fertile ground for human

rights abuses. These abuses, in turn, have devastating consequences that perpetuate cycles of violence, erode public trust, foster psychological distress, and ultimately undermine the prospects for sustainable peace and recovery in affected African communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The non-state volunteer groups served as a protective hedge over their communities and they become popular and won the trust of the people, based on their capacity to counter the insurgents. However, as time unfold itself, the momentum gathered by the non-state volunteer groups culminated into human rights abuses. NSVGs were engaged in arbitrary arrest of community members without investigating the issue; they were involved in illegal detention of community members with interrogation and they seek revenge and physically assaults people. They equally engaged in extrajudicial killings of suspected community members without following due process of the law and violated the rights of people and also were accused of sexually abusing women and girls in communities. Apart from these positive conducts from NSVG, they worked with the military force in their communities, giving information and showing direction based on the terrain, which they have a good understanding to attack the insurgents. They also supported the military force in fighting the insurgents and helping them to reclaim communities previously controlled by Boko Haram. Non-state volunteer groups adopted various approaches in abusing people. They use discrimination as tool against certain persons they do not like and they subjected people to torture, cruelty or degrading treatments. The study therefore recommends that community stakeholders and the government should provide essential support and assistance to these groups including financial aid, uniforms, vehicles, and weapons to encourage their continued activity and focus on counter-terrorism operations, aiming for more effective outcomes. The study also recommends urgent government action focused on accountability and reform. Key steps include: enforcing strict oversight mechanisms; establishing clear rules prohibiting abuses like arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings; setting up safe, independent complaint systems; ensuring justice for victims; and providing continuous human rights training to NSVG members. These actions are essential to restore community trust, uphold the rule of law, and prevent further violations.

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