

A woman with a red and black patterned headscarf and a purple and black patterned dress is sitting under a large, thick tree trunk. She has a small nose ring and is looking towards the camera. The background shows a rustic structure made of corrugated metal and wood. The ground is dirt, and there are some woven baskets and a blue mat in the foreground.

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING VIGILANTE GROUPS IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN REGION

**Background study in support of the Lake Chad Basin
Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and
Resilience for Areas Affected by the Boko Haram Crisis**



United Nations Development Programme
Regional Hub for West and Central Africa
Regional Stabilization Secretariat-Lake Chad Basin
N'Djamena, Chad

Authors

Daniel E. Agbibo, Assistant Professor of African and African American Studies, Harvard University
Chika Charles Aniekwe, Ph.D., Senior Adviser, Head of Programme, UNDP Support to the Lake Chad Basin

Edition

Julia Stewart

Design

Phoenix Design Aid

Credit pictures

RS-SRR

Coordination

Laetitia P. Ouoba

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Acronyms

BIR	Rapid Intervention Battalions (Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide)
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
JAS	"People of the Prophetic Model, Calling People to Islam and Engaging in Jihad"
JTF ORO	Joint Task Force Operation Restore Order
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
MNJTF	Multinational Joint Task Force
NGO	non-governmental organization
PRESBY	President Biya's Youth
UPC	Union of Cameroonian Populations (Union des Populations du Cameroun)
VGN	Vigilante Group of Nigeria

1. Context: The Lake Chad Basin region

The Lake Chad Basin is a culturally and geographically porous region that includes territory of six countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, Niger and Nigeria. Covering nearly eight percent of the African continent, the region is home to an estimated 45 million people. For this study, however, we will focus on the four riparian states worst affected by the Boko Haram conflict, namely Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria.

For centuries, this vast territory, has housed mostly itinerant and nomadic populations, many with trans-local identities, from ethnic groups including the Hausa, Kanuri, Buduma and Junkun, among others.

Today, the region is troubled by a potent mix of mass poverty, political fragility and climate variability. On top of that, starting in mid-2009, the region has been threatened by violent extremist groups, primarily Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad ("People of the Prophetic Model, Calling People to Islam and Engaging in Jihad," or JAS)¹ and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). The latter is now the largest Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-affiliate in Africa based on the number of fighters in its ranks. In this report, these non-state armed groups will be collectively termed "Boko Haram," the colloquial name used by locals in the Lake Chad Basin to refer to both groups.

The violent extremism of Boko Haram has devastated local economies and impinged on the lives of millions living in the poorest and least-served parts of the Lake Chad Basin: northeast Nigeria, southeast Niger, far northern Cameroon and the islands of Lake Chad. Violence in these areas has uprooted an estimated 3.3 million people, creating over 300,000 Nigerian refugees and some 2.2 million internally displaced persons.²

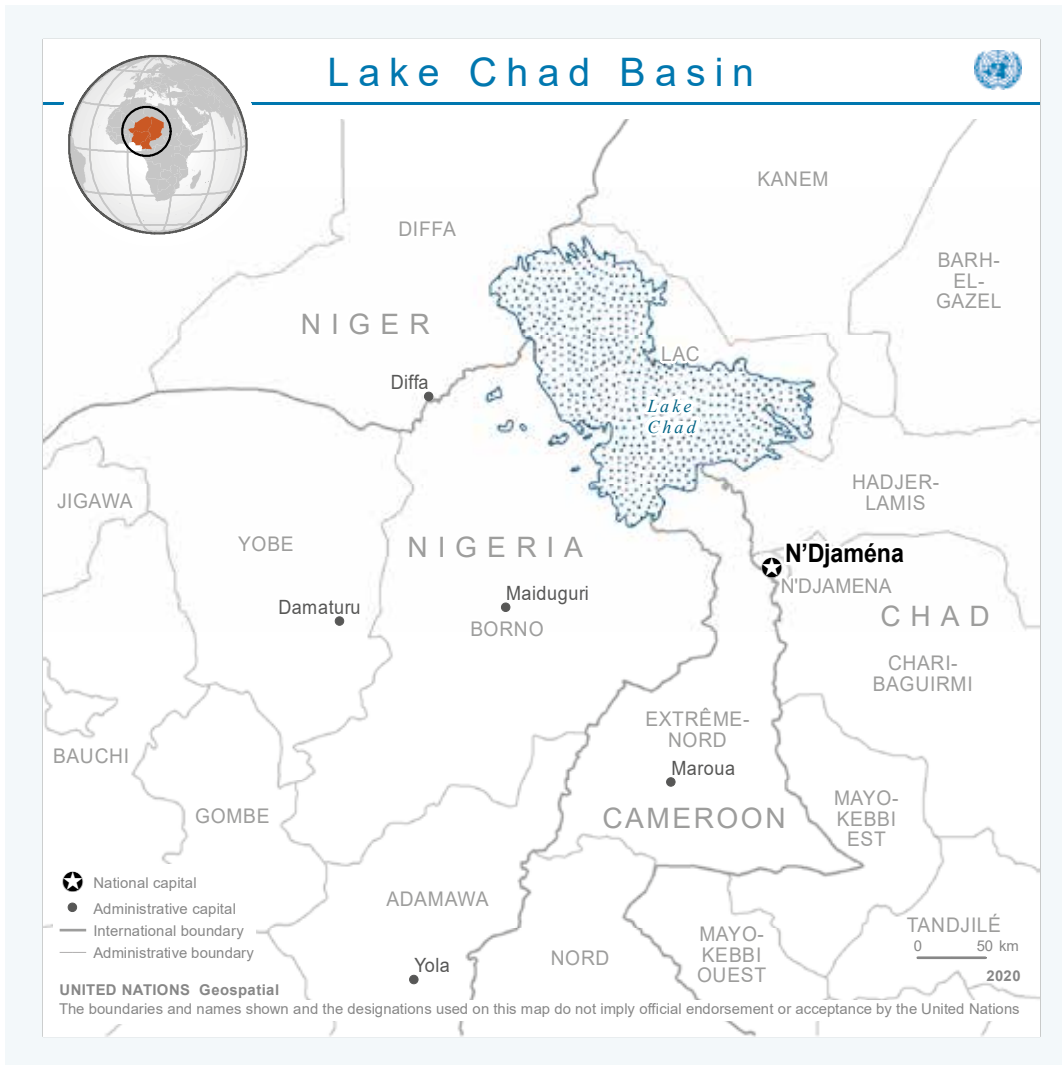
Boko Haram originated in northeast Nigeria around 2002 with the aim of carving out an Islamic caliphate under strict

Sharia law. This violent extremist group is a by-product of an intolerant and austere Salafist strand that challenged the Sufi hegemony in West Africa starting in the 1970s. Most Boko Haram members come from the grassroots level, including motorcycle taxi drivers (*achaba*), security guards (*mai-gadfi*), load carriers (*daukan kata*), water hawkers (*mai-ruwa*), the guild of shoe recyclers (*katsa katsa kimaka*) and traditional Qur'anic school children (*almajirai*). Members joined for various reasons: economic gain, empowerment, coercion and ideological attraction. Boko Haram also had some connections within the ruling elite and big-men strata of northern Nigeria society.

The general appeal of Boko Haram's anti-establishment message to people struggling for survival on the margins of society suggests that the group is not only a religious movement but also a class-based movement. Regarding a section of Boko Haram's social base, a resident of Borno State, Nigeria, said: "They are frustrated; they...have a degree but cannot find a job. They see the successful and rich people and resent them. They want to kill them."³ A leader of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN) in Yola, Adamawa State, explains factors that allow Boko Haram to exist and why people are drawn to the group. "My thinking is around three things," he said, "economic reasons, social reasons and religious reasons. The economic reasons are poverty and joblessness because most Boko Haram members are unemployed local youth. And, as you know, 'an idle mind is the devil's workshop.' Second, is social issues. Many social vices are happening, including drug addiction, criminality, gangsterism and so on. All this also contributed to the formation of Boko Haram and its ability to recruit. And on the religious aspect, there is this religious intolerance. You will often hear one Muslim calling another Muslim a non-Muslim, thereby making him vulnerable to all sorts of dangers. And it was tolerated. So, the differences within the ideological circles are also a key reason why Boko Haram emerged."

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MAP 1: Lake Chad Basin region



Source: Agence française de développement.

In 2012, the Usman Galtimari Presidential Committee on the Security Challenges in the Northeast wrote a white paper that traced the region's youth militias, of which Boko Haram is an offshoot, to politicians who established them in the run-up to the 2003 and 2007 gubernatorial elections. The paper claimed: "The militias were allegedly armed and used extensively as political thugs. After the elections, and having achieved their primary purpose, the politicians left the militias to their fate since they could not continue funding and keeping them employed. With no visible means of sustenance, some militias gravitated towards religious extremism, the type offered by Mohammed Yusuf." Paragraph 40(b) of the Committee's report traced the roots of terrorism in northeast Nigeria, especially in the worst affected states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, to militia groups such as ECOMOG⁴

(not to be confused with the West African multilateral armed force known as the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group), Yan Kalare and Sara Suka, which are linked to prominent politicians and political godfathers in these states. During electoral cycles, these groups intimidated and assassinated political rivals. After elections were over, these groups got out of hand and became a threat to their political supporters and financiers or became involved in organized crime and communal wars. In its recommendations, the Committee report urged the Nigerian government to investigate and bring to justice politicians who sponsored and weaponized youth militia groups, such as Boko Haram.⁵

The extrajudicial killing of the Boko Haram founder and preacher, Mohammed Yusuf, in July 2009, confirmed by photos and

videos of his bullet-ridden corpse that circulated on the internet, transformed the group from a puritanical social movement into a full-blown, underground, violent extremist group—one that is fuelled by a psychology of injustice and retaliation. Yusuf's death while in the custody of the Nigerian police transformed him into a martyr, resulting in increased recruitment into Boko Haram and more anti-state rhetoric. In 2014, Boko Haram extended its violent extremism to Cameroon's Far North Region before turning, in 2015, to Chad and Niger.

Today, about a third of Boko Haram cells move across the borders of Lake Chad Basin countries, leaving a trail of death and destruction in their wake. Boko Haram's violent extremism has benefitted from Chadian wars, armed conflict in Darfur and the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in Libya, all of which also made technologies useful for war (in the form of AK-47 assault rifles, cell phones and motorbikes) cheaper and more accessible. Boko Haram extremists are well trained in exploiting the porous borders, large areas of desert, trading routes and socio-cultural affinities of the Lake Chad Basin region to smuggle weapons, recruit fighters, launch attacks (including suicide bombings, raids on military outposts, ambushes and kidnappings) and evade the security surveillance of states. One study calculated there are no less than 1,499 illegal and 84 legal entry points into north-eastern Nigeria from Cameroon, Chad and Niger. In Adamawa State alone, an estimated 25 illegal routes lead into Nigeria from neighbouring countries.⁶

Cameroonian historian, Saibou Issa, argued that, "Smuggling is at the heart of the conflict...Boko Haram is also a for-profit criminal enterprise that incorporates many smugglers and which depends on crime and violence that generate significant income in an environment of socio-economic distress."⁷ Issa observes that Boko Haram's arms smuggling thrives on "the use of specially crafted skin or thatched bags attached to camels, donkeys and cows where arms are concealed and moved across the borders with the aid of nomadic pastoralists or herders."⁸ The violent extremist group often connives with corrupt cross-border traders and custom officials to conceal arms, weapons and drugs with goods that are smuggled into Nigeria via heavy trucks, trailers and lorries. Given the sheer volume of goods overloaded on the large trucks, and the widespread nature of security force extortion on Nigerian highways, little or no inspection is conducted. Sometimes, Boko Haram extremists bypass roads by making use of traditional long canoes to smuggle fighters, motorcycles and other items from the Lake Chad Basin region into Nigeria.

A significant portion of Boko Haram's finances comes from levying taxes on goods transported via controlled check-

points. In Borno State, Nigeria, the group has strategically positioned checkpoints along main supply arteries, such as Maiduguri-Monguno, Monguno checkpoints -Gajiram, Maiduguri-Dambo, Magumeri-Gubio, Chabbal-Magumeri, Gubio-Kareto, Kareto-Damasak and Damboa-Biu. Extortion at such checkpoints make up the bulk of Boko Haram's \$5 to 10 million annual income, the other sources being cross-border fish trade, donations, kidnapping for ransom and bank robberies.

The Boko Haram conflict is complicated by highly variable rainfall and climate change in the Lake Chad Basin region, which has severely impinged on the livelihoods of communities, many of whom are fishermen, crop farmers and nomadic herdsman. Climate and security risks have drastically affected fishing livelihoods and irrigation farming, forcing farmers and fishermen ("lake nomads") to migrate. Drought-induced transhumance has intensified communal conflicts over the use of scarce common resources (e.g., land and water), resulting in bloody clashes between farmers and nomadic herdsman and between upstream and downstream users.⁹

Since its violent turn in 2009, Boko Haram has killed over 36,000 people¹⁰ and displaced 2.6 million others across the Lake Chad Basin region,¹¹ prompting the United Nations in 2016 to call the humanitarian crisis in the region the worst on the African continent.¹² In 2015, the Global Terrorism Index reported that Boko Haram had overtaken ISIL to become the world's deadliest terrorist group. That year alone, Boko Haram accounted for no less than 6,644 deaths, an increase of 317 percent from the previous year.¹³ In March 2015, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau pledged the group's allegiance to ISIL and changed its official name from JAS to ISWAP. In August 2016, however, ISIL named Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the rumoured son of the late Boko Haram founder, Mohammed Yusuf, the new leader of ISWAP. This change of leadership did not go down well with Shekau and, ultimately, caused a rift in the relationship between JAS and al-Barnawi's ISWAP. ISWAP's propaganda promotes the idea that Muslims are safe with them. In mid-May 2021, during a clash with ISWAP fighters in Nigeria's Sambisa Forest, Shekau detonated his suicide vest to avoid being taken prisoner. The death of Shekau led to the mass surrender of many JAS members.

A Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) for Lake Chad Basin was re-operationalized in 2015¹⁴ to fight Boko Haram, with troops drawn from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. The MNJTF has succeeded in recapturing most of the areas once under Boko Haram's control, freed thousands of captives and prevented terrorist attacks. This notwithstanding, issues of trust, coordination and funding have continued to undermine the effectiveness of the MNJTF.

2. Study aims and approach

In accordance with the Lake Chad Basin Commission's Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience (RS-SRR), Pillar Two, Strategic Objective Seven, this study aims to better understand the role of vigilante groups in the fight against violent extremism in the region. It explores and proffers guidance on how to manage the vigilante groups to ensure effective demobilization and reintegration of the various groups.

The study looks at seven affected territories in the region. These are in the Far North Region of Cameroon (1. Amchide, Kerawa, Limani, Moskota and Tolkomari; 2. Chari and Logone; 3. Mayo Sava and Mayo Tsanaga), the southwest region of Chad (4. Hadjer-Lamis Province and 5. Lac Province), the southeast of Niger (6. the Diffa Region) and the northeast region of Nigeria (7. Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States).

The study does not delve deeply into the origins or mission of Boko Haram, about which a dizzying corpus of work is already available. Instead, it focuses on a poorly understood yet vital aspect of the fight against violent extremism, which is the resistance to Boko Haram by vigilante groups. The study explores how and why these anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups emerged; the nature of their interactions with state security forces and civilian communities; their impact on the prospects for peace and security in the Lake Chad Basin region; and how best to effectively manage the real risks and dangers that anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups pose to state legitimacy and regional security.

Long-term security in the Lake Chad Basin region will depend not only on neutralizing the threat of Boko Haram but also on determining the future trajectory of anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups who expect to be rewarded and compensated for their sacrifices and losses. Without an intentional workable plan for managing vigilante groups during and after the Boko Haram conflict, the Lake Chad Basin region risks winning the war and losing the peace.

This study draws primarily on existing knowledge. The researchers gathered information mainly through desk research, that involved collecting, organizing and synthesizing available information on anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups in the Lake Chad Basin region. To mitigate possible gaps, this desk review was augmented with primary data collected between 2017 and 2020 through key informant interviews and focus group discussions with members of and leaders of vigilante groups, security forces, traditional rulers and community members. The study benefitted from a workshop with civil society organizations who deal with vigilante issues in affected parts of the Lake Chad Basin region, which took place in N'Djamena, Chad, in July 2021.

The study report is divided into five main parts. The first examines vigilante groups and their basic typologies. The second part focuses on state responses to Boko Haram in north-east Nigeria, specifically Borno State. The third part focuses on the origin of anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups in the city of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State (before spreading to neighbouring Yobe and Adamawa States). These vigilante groups operate with some level of support from the state, civilian communities and traditional authorities. The fourth part extends the analysis to the spread of vigilante groups to Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The fifth part explores options and best practices for building on the positive potential of anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups, but also argues for mitigating the risk they could pose to community safety, state authority and regional stability.

It is hoped that governments, the public, policymakers, security agencies, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders operating in the region will find this study report resourceful and of value.

3. Understanding vigilante groups

Vigilante groups are a familiar component of armed conflicts around the world. According to one cross-national study, governments collaborated with vigilante groups in no less than 80 percent of all recorded armed conflicts from 1981 through 2007.¹⁵ In Africa, pro-government vigilante groups assume mostly local intelligence and limited combat roles. In Sierra Leone, for instance, the Kamajors emerged as the focal point of community-defence mobilization against the rebel armed forces of the Revolutionary United Front. In Uganda, the Arrow Boys of Teso protected villages against the Lord's Resistance Army. In Burkina Faso, self-defence groups, known as Koglweogo ("bush guardians"), appeared in 2015. Further afield, the Sons of Iraq joined forces with the American-led Coalition forces in Iraq to secure their neighbourhoods from both Sunni extremists and Shiite militias. In Turkey, there has been an appreciable rise in armed pro-government vigilantes.¹⁶ So, how should we understand the emergence and mutation of vigilante groups?

Vigilante groups are a subtype of the broader category of non-state armed groups. They are generally understood as groups which concerned citizens have joined for self-protection under conditions of local disorder.¹⁷ These groups do not necessarily seek to challenge state power by their actions. To the extent that their *raison d'être* is community protection, vigilantes are neither militias nor gangs, who typically pursue their own political or economic interests. At the same time, vigilante groups fit rather awkwardly with civil society and grassroots movements. These distinctions notwithstanding, the identity of vigilante groups is often marked by fluidity. That is to say, vigilante groups have the potential to transform into terrorists, insurgents, militias and gangs, in the same way that a non-state armed group can transform into a political party or become integrated with the state. Take the case of South Africa's People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), an urban community protection movement that transformed into a vigilante group and then a terrorist movement. Another case in point is the Dozos of Côte d'Ivoire, which evolved from rural hunting groups to community and state-sponsored private security groups and then to an ethnic militia when the state turned against them.¹⁸

Defining vigilante groups has proven especially difficult because of their multiple types and characteristics and because they are usually located in zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of law and order. Across the Lake Chad Basin region, vigilante groups have organized along various affiliations (e.g., from lineage to ethnic group), in various spaces (e.g., from village ward to city streets) and for various reasons (e.g., from crime fighting to political lobbying to counterinsurgency).

Vigilante groups draw their legitimacy from multiple and, at times, competing sources. To wit: traditional and communal establishments, religious establishments and political establishments. Populated mainly by community members, predominantly young men, vigilante groups deliver political and public goods that range from maintaining law and order, to establishing public norms of compliance with local populations, to providing dispute resolution services. At the same time, vigilante groups can, and frequently do, threaten domestic security through active involvement in political violence, communal wars, organized crime, extortion, sexual exploitation and extrajudicial killings. What is more, vigilante groups are susceptible to political manipulation and hijacking. The challenge for scholars and policymakers is to recognize and build on the positive potential of vigilante groups, while working to minimize their destructive potential.

The emergence and popularity of vigilante groups in the Lake Chad Basin region is a product of three gaps: (1) a security gap: when the state is unable to provide security to its citizens; (2) a capacity gap: when the state is unable to provide basic services to its citizens; and (3) a legitimacy gap: when the state lacks legitimacy among its own people and therefore governs by force.¹⁹ These intrinsically interwoven gaps are implied in the concepts of state failure, state weakness, state fragility or limited statehood.

Vigilante groups are characterized by three fundamental elements: (1) they are sizeable groups with access to or in possession of weapons or arms; (2) they have the capacity to perpetrate organized violence that could alter the envi-

ronment of peace; and (3) they are not part of the state's formal national security institutions, even though they may have some relations with state institutions or actors.²⁰

Available research on vigilante groups in Central and West Africa tells us that they are likely to turn bad and become threats to the very communities whose interests they swore to protect.²¹ Evidence in the African context suggests that vigilante groups can transform from the saving grace of communities to the primary threat to them, reproducing the same weaknesses and abuses of power that plague formal state institutions. One example emerges from Nigeria, where vigilante groups such as the Bakassi Boys and Oodua People's Congress were politically hijacked and reoriented as political thugs and used to feed ethno-religious cleavages.²²

Three fundamental categories of vigilante groups may be identified: (1) groups that organize to fight violent extremism, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (Yan Gora) in northeast Nigeria; (2) groups that emerge to fight crime, such as the Sungusungu village groups in Tanzania; and (3) groups that are manipulated by the state to target ethnic, religious or political rivals, such as the Mungiki youth movement in Kenya.

Our main concern in this study lies in the first category, of which remarkably little is known: vigilante groups whose mobilization is a direct result of the threat of violent extremism. In other words, the study is not about anti-state armed groups who seek to instil fear in society, but about non-state armed groups who seek to protect members of their society in collaboration with the state. Consisting of vigilantes, neighbourhood guards and hunter's guilds, these community-based armed groups are often seen as "children of necessity" that rise up in support of, rather than in violent opposition to, the formal security apparatus of the state. Theirs is not a politics of resistance but of redress through direct civil-military cooperation. Although technically "non-state," in the sense that they are not (fully) integrated into formalized state security architectures, such as regular armies, presidential guards, gendarmerie or police forces, vigilante groups are closely

entwined with state power and state agents in exceptionally dense ways.²³

Despite the diversity of the threats facing vigilante groups in contemporary Africa, they all seem to have emerged from a precarious and corrupt environment in which the state is unable or unwilling to deliver security and other political goods to its citizenry. Contrary to popular view, the relationship between vigilante groups and governments in post-colonial Africa has not always been that of violent resistance and exit, but has also been characterized by complementarity and voice. Historically, vigilante groups in Central and West Africa, including hunter associations, night guard systems and village patrols, have assumed security prerogatives and service provision in the absence of, or alongside, the state. Their emergence echoes decades of selective, limited and unrepresentative policing during colonial Africa, which alienated local communities and forced them to look for security beyond the formal state.

The relative absence of protective policing under weak, corrupt, illegitimate and often violent colonial states encouraged local communities to develop their own solutions to violent crime and challenges to the social order. In areas of limited statehood, that is, zones of limited policing (such as rural areas), the maintenance of law and order typically fell to community-based armed groups. Vigilantes stepped in to enforce law and order, often in unconventional ways. The colonial state in Africa frequently relied on native actors to maintain law and order and to extend its authority. These local actors mobilized labour, collected taxes and suppressed dissent. Across the Lake Chad Basin region, enduring insecurities—from slave-raiding to banditry and cattle rustling—have often occasioned the rise of vigilante groups, including the brotherhoods of hunters (*yan baka*) and the traditional chief's palace guards (*dogari*). Thus, the state is not a neutral actor but an active participant in the rise and functioning of vigilante groups. Which is to say, non-state forms of order and informal modes of policing are embedded within ideas and structures of the state.

4. State responses to Boko Haram

To understand the rise of anti-Boko Haram vigilantes in the Lake Chad Basin region, we must first understand the manner of government response to Boko Haram in northeast Nigeria (particularly in Borno State, but also in Yobe and Adamawa States). Government response to Boko Haram extremism may be subsumed under two simultaneous but contrasting approaches: negotiation overtures and military tactics. Between 2011 and 2016, at least five negotiation attempts took place between government delegates and Boko Haram leaders, namely the Obasanjo talks in 2011, the Datti Ahmad talks in 2012, talks initiated by the state-led Turaki committee, the Chad initiative and the negotiation process facilitated by Switzerland in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross.²⁴ To some extent, these talks signalled the Nigerian government's attempt to identify and constructively engage key Boko Haram leaders and to develop a workable framework for amnesty and disarmament of the insurgents. However, none of these talks culminated in a ceasefire due to a searing mistrust on both sides, made worse by Boko Haram's infighting and the government's reluctance to cease military offensive operations while negotiations were underway.

On 12 June 2011, as Boko Haram extremism intensified, the Nigerian government established an ad hoc military unit called the Joint Task Force Operation Restore Order (JTF ORO) to combat insurgents in Borno State. Special purpose security organs, such as the JTF, which for all intents and purposes represent the militarization of policing, are not the exception but the rule of crisis management and response in Nigeria. In fact, these organs are operational in at least 28 of Nigeria's 36 states. JTF ORO was comprised of 3,872 security forces, drawn from the Nigerian Armed Forces, Nigerian Police Force, Department of State Security, Nigerian Customs Service, Nigerian Immigration Service and the Defence Intelligence Agency. Its mandate was to restore law and order to northeast Nigeria. However, an inadequate knowledge of the local ecosystem around which Boko Haram navigates and the major languages spoken by its members (such as Babur Bura, Gwoza, Hausa, Kanuri and Shuwa Arabic) made it difficult for JTF ORO to build the networks of trust and reciprocity that are required to overcome an invisible enemy.

Dispensing with any effort to win hearts and minds, JTF ORO proceeded to lump affected communities into the 'suspect community.' In so doing, JTF ORO borrowed from Napoleon Bonaparte's playbook for General Guillaume Brune as he was gearing up to quell the monarchist rebellion: "Burn some farms and some big villages in the Morbihan and begin to make some examples. It is only by making war terrible that the inhabitants themselves will rally against the brigands and will finally feel that their apathy is extremely costly to them."²⁵

As a strategy of war, labels have a lethal quality. With the label of "suspect community" stamped on them by JTF ORO, civilian populations, and particularly young men, were rendered disposable and their spaces of survival and manoeuvre transformed into spaces of insecurity, fear and death. A resident of Maiduguri put it bluntly: "To the military, the locals are Boko Haram and to Boko Haram, the locals are traitors." Under JTF ORO, notions of unarmed civilians and armed insurgents became tragically blurred. Perceptions rather than facts became sufficient grounds for arrest, indefinite detention, torture and in some cases, killings. In a context where the enemy was invisible to state security forces, civilians replaced the enemy and were indiscriminately targeted.²⁶ At the height of Boko Haram's campaign from 2010 to 2013, Nigerian soldiers are reported to have killed three times more civilians than Boko Haram extremists.²⁷ By pursuing indiscriminate violence against civilian communities, Nigeria's counterterrorism approach to Boko Haram offered a breeding ground for local youths to seek refuge in Boko Haram, while also bolstering the group's message of state oppression and victimhood.²⁸

In January 2012, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan, in a desperate effort to overcome Boko Haram, declared a state of emergency in Borno, Niger, Plateau and Yobe States, granting sweeping powers to the military. In May 2012, the White Paper on the Report of the Presidential Committee on Security Challenges in the North-East noted "allegations of high-handedness against the JTF, bordering on rape, destruction of property belonging to sect members, extrajudicial killings and harassment of Maiduguri residents." The White Paper concluded that JTF ORO had compromised its



ability to win “the hearts and minds of the people” and, therefore, called for its immediate replacement with a new cohort that are familiar with the local terrain, speak the local languages and, above all, “have a human touch, care and concern by avoiding unnecessary brutality and ruthlessness.”²⁹ In May 2013, another state of emergency was declared in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States where Boko Haram bomb attacks and drive-by shootings were occurring night and day. In August 2013, JTF ORO was dissolved, and the Nigerian Army assumed full control of operations under the 7th Infantry Division, called *Operation Zaman Lafiya*. In July 2015, with the election of President Muhammadu Buhari, the Division was renamed *Operation Lafiya Dole* (“Peace by Force”) as part of renewed efforts to win the faltering war against Boko Haram. A cross-border security task force, the MNJTF which included troops from the Lake Chad Basin Committee (LCBC) countries, was also revived. Despite the change of administration and security tweaks, Boko Haram’s extremist attacks and human rights abuses continued.

The stage was set for the rise and reconfiguration of community-based armed groups—from the newest vigilante movement in the form of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) to

more established groups that predated Boko Haram, such as the State Hunters Association and the Vigilante Group of Nigeria (VGN)³⁰—with the common objective of fighting terror and keeping the peace. Given its effectiveness, the CJTF model in Borno State spread to nearby Yobe and Adamawa States before making its way, starting in 2014, to Cameroon’s Far North Region in the form of neighbourhood-based vigilance committees. In 2015, both Chad and Niger saw the rise of vigilance committees. However, as will be seen later, compared to Cameroon and Nigeria, Chad and Niger have been less willing to deploy and support vigilante groups in their anti-Boko Haram operations. Chad sees these groups as a real threat to state monopoly over the use of legitimate violence, while Niger’s past struggles with ethnic militias in the 1990s makes them wary of using community-based armed groups of any sort. Meanwhile, in Cameroon and Nigeria, the superior linguistic, topographical and social skills of anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups proved critical to gaining the upper hand in the fight against Boko Haram. The groups helped to identify and capture Boko Haram members, thwart suicide attacks and reduce the conflation of civilian populations with terrorists. At the same time, violent attacks on local communities by vengeful Boko Haram fighters increased.

5. The rise of the Civilian Joint Task Force in Borno State, Northeast Nigeria

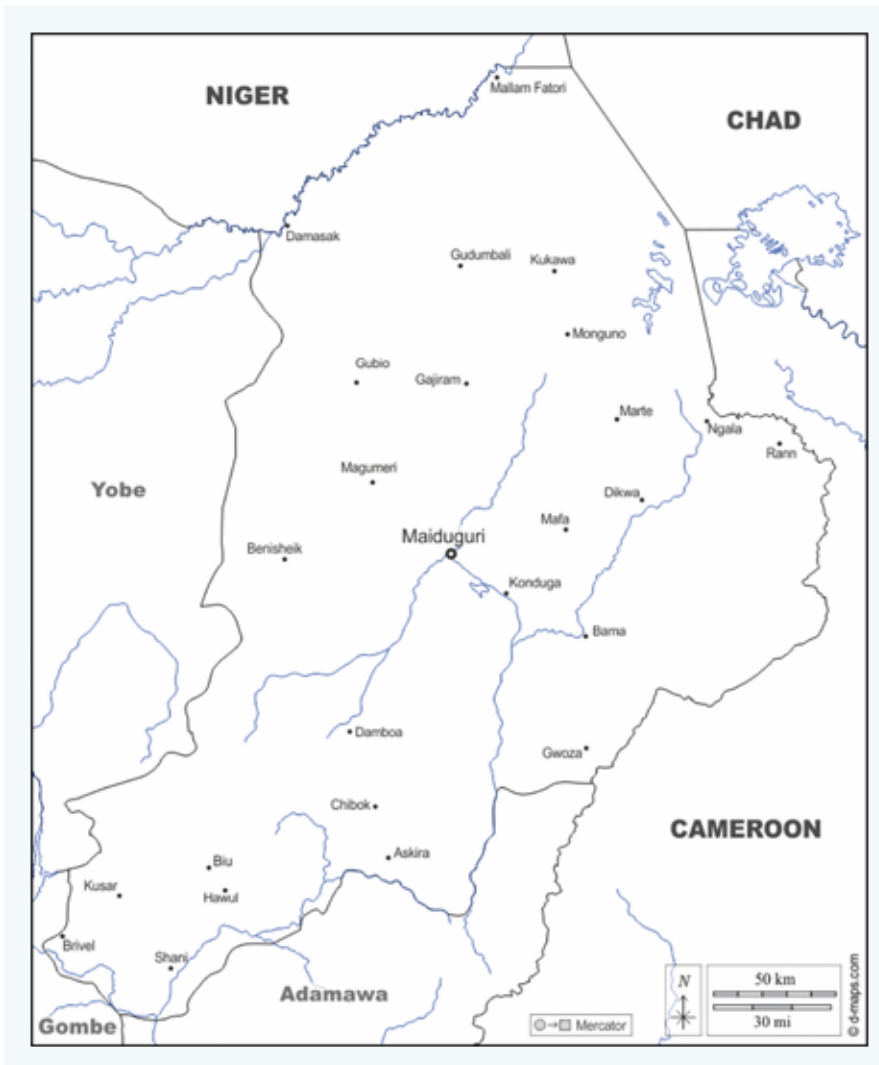
At the outset, it should be acknowledged that most residents in northeast Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin region are not drawn to the message and modus operandi of violent extremist groups.³¹ To the contrary, many are committed to countering forms of radicalization and contributing to security provisioning in their communities through volunteering as state informants. This is the context in which the anti-Boko Haram vigilante group known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) emerged in the city of Maiduguri, Borno State—the epicentre of the Boko Haram conflict. Non-state armed groups, which constitute the primary focus in this section, are among several civilian defence groups in Borno State, which include hunters (*kungiyar maharba*), vigilantes (*yan baga*) and Shuwa vigilantes (*kesh kesh*). These local security providers predate the CJTF, which emerged specifically in response to the threat of Boko Haram. In the wake of Boko Haram, pre-existing vigilante groups have transitioned from shielding their communities from criminality to fighting armed opposition groups, reinforcing the fluidity and manipulability of vigilante groups.

5.1 The origins of the Civilian Joint Task Force

In December 2017, one of this report’s authors visited Maiduguri’s Hausari ward where the CJTF reportedly began. Residents traced the group’s origins to a Kanuri trader called Jafar whose brother was violently killed by Boko Haram jihadists. Out of anger, Jafar started to hunt down the jihadists in his neighbourhood, armed with little more than a stick (*gora*) and personal knowledge. Jafar’s courage emboldened other young men in Hausari to take up sticks in hot pursuit of the insurgents. By June 2013, more than 500 young men with sticks had sprung up across Maiduguri metropolitan and Bama areas in central Borno State, later extending to Gwoza and Damboa areas in southern Borno and Gubio and Magumeri in northern Borno.³² Today, the CJTF is present in most local government areas in Borno State, save for Bayo, Kwayakusar and Shani in southern Borno, where Boko Haram attacks have been sporadic.



These stick-wielding youth vigilantes conducted round-the-clock patrols, manning checkpoints and conducting house-to-house searches for Boko Haram members. “Within one week, we secured the whole centre of Maiduguri,” said Kalli, the CJTF coordinator for Borno State. “The army were strangers, but we live with Boko Haram in the same community. We know who the members of Boko Haram are.” The CJTF arrested several Boko Haram members, most of whom were handed over to the police and army, while others were subjected to mob justice. Hundreds of suspected Boko Haram members were detained by state security forces on tip-offs provided by CJTF members. A 58-year-old named Kawu noted that Boko Haram is not an Islamic sect but a “band of infidels,” insisting that “whenever we catch them, we do a thorough investigation to ascertain that they are involved in the senseless killings before we take care of them. We don’t just injure or kill them without investigation.”

MAP 2: Borno State (showing main cities)

Source: d-maps.com.

5.2 A turning point? The Baga Massacre

To appreciate the circumstances surrounding the emergence and reach of the CJTF in Borno State in May 2013, one must pay careful attention to the infamous Baga massacre a month earlier in which 200 civilians (although this number is disputed) were killed and 2,000 homes and businesses burned by the Nigerian military following a Boko Haram attack on a military post, in which a soldier was killed.

In retaliation for the attack on their post, soldiers returned with reinforcements. “They were firing from armoured vehicles,” said one trader in Baga, adding “I saw them putting fire on people’s houses. They are the security of the state. They have no right to kill anybody. They are supposed to

protect the people.” The Nigerian Army, however, denied any wrongdoing, claiming instead that the carnage was the handiwork of Boko Haram’s armed insurgents, adding that anyone putting the blame on Nigerian soldiers must be a Boko Haram supporter. This claim was countered by a 2013 interim report by Nigeria’s National Human Rights Commission, which found that soldiers in Baga “started shooting indiscriminately at anybody in sight” and that five neighbourhoods were “completely razed down by soldiers.”³³

The massacre ultimately convinced a frustrated section of Borno State residents that their hitherto self-protection tactics, in the shape and form of silence, neutrality and avoidance, were no longer effective in the face of unceasing collective punishment meted out to ‘suspect communities.’

In short, they needed to shift from the rule of silence and avoidance to voice and active engagement with state security forces.

While past massacres of civilian populations in retaliation for soldier deaths have gone under the radar, the scale of civilian casualties in Baga could not be simply brushed aside as an unintended result of fighting a dangerous insurgency. Following his visit to Baga after the massacre, Borno State Governor Kashim Shettima said: “This Baga is just on a bigger scale, but they [the army] have been doing this for ages. They’ve not adhered to the rules of engagement. When you burn down shops and massacre civilians, you are pushing them to join the camp of Boko Haram.”³⁴

Puzzlingly, what happened next was not a radicalization of the victimized civilians in Borno State, but the rise of anti-Boko Haram vigilantes eager to work with the Nigerian security forces in the volatile state to both repel Boko Haram extremists and protect their communities. Rather than withdraw from the state, community members mobilized in hope of strengthening and sharpening the war against Boko Haram. Theirs was not an anti-state movement but a pro-government movement that sought redress through direct civil-military partnership. In large part, this counterintuitive decision was because these concerned citizens nurtured a deep, patriotic love and close attachment to their land, people and culture and, unlike Boko Haram extremists, saw their fundamental role as bringing about social change from within the nation state rather than outside it. In addition, many locals are suspicious of the extremist message and methods of Boko Haram, especially its dubious (mis/re) interpretation of scriptural texts. Moreover, local youths (especially in Maiduguri and Jere local government areas) told one of the authors that they supported the JTF after losing their friends and relatives to Boko Haram and were eager to see justice served.

In May 2013, on the heels of the Baga massacre, coupled with the limited movement and attendant economic hardship resulting from a declaration of a state of emergency by President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration, a loosely knit group of stick- and machete-wielding young men (the *yan gora* in Hausa) organized themselves into a vigilante group with the sworn mission of protecting their communities and supporting the Nigerian war against Boko Haram.

Putting their superior knowledge of local communities, geography, languages and cultures to good effect, these spirited youth proved effective in identifying and arresting hundreds of Boko Haram members hiding in their neighbourhoods. In a matter of weeks, Boko Haram members were forced to

decamp to the surrounding bush and countryside where rural-based hunter militia groups (*kungiyar maharba*) took up the counter-extremism fight.

The CJTF became for many inhabitants of Maiduguri a fierce bulwark against Boko Haram’s terrorist violence. Given their knowledge of the local terrain, the CJTF undertook grassroots reconnaissance and combat roles in a brave effort to extirpate violent extremists from their communities and to deny access to these extremists from the outside. “Boko Haram were just like our brothers. We lived in the same community. So, we know them very well,” said one CJTF leader in Maiduguri, adding that young men united to start the CJTF because they were fed up with the spiralling violence and everyday insecurity that plagued their communities.

Another CJTF leader in Maiduguri described the security dilemma that compelled young men to engage in self-defence and community protection: “Boko Haram would kill, and when soldiers came, they kill too. We were in a fix. These people will kill us, those people will kill us. We felt that if we did not rise and do something, we would all be wiped out. Then we formed the self-help organization.”³⁵ Caught between the violent extremism of Boko Haram and the human rights violations by the JTF, civilian residents took matters into their own hands by leveraging their situational knowledge and numerical strength to weed out insurgents living in their midst. The modus operandi of the CJTF was simple but effective: young men from various wards would typically organize themselves and go to the army saying: “Don’t arrest us. We know these guys. We’ll go and get them for you.”³⁶

The above reveals two salient points. First, the CJTF did not organize in opposition to state security forces but became a complementary force in a collaborative and hybrid effort to shield their communities from perpetrators of violence. Which explains why the vigilante group took on the name “Civilian Joint Task Force,” which confirms their support for the official JTF. Second, the influential rise of the CJTF is linked to the JTF’s lack of local knowledge, which provoked oppressive tactics. For the majority of CJTF members, local knowledge and support for state security forces meant the difference between life and death.

5.3 Perceptions of the Civilian Joint Task Force

Communities in Borno State found it easy to relate to CJTF members since they were from the area and spoke Hausa and/or Kanuri—the dominant languages spoken in northern Nigeria. The local perception of the CJTF as “sons of the soil”

afforded them a privileged position of trust and access in their respective communities. As a traditional leader of the Berom community from Barkin Ladi, Plateau State, Nigeria, noted, “If you call the police, they may tell you, ‘We don’t have fuel, give us some and we will help you.’ It is not like that with the vigilantes. The level of determination is totally different. They show up immediately. They stay overnight. They know who we are.”³⁷ “When people see us, they trust us,” said one vigilante from Barkin Ladi; “It’s not like the army or the police. We are the community.” A CJTF leader recounted: “You know we are indigenes and like all the people living in this community, we suffer. We have been oppressed by Boko Haram for years with nowhere to go. People either have our phone numbers or that of our relations and they can always reach out to report anything unusual around them. The moment they notice any suspicious movement of car or motorcycle, they call one of us on phone or if there is no network or credit, they can use even a bicycle to connect with us and give vital information to be acted on.” This lends support to previous findings on armed conflicts in Africa, which demonstrate that civilian knowledge of the local terrain, especially their capacity to sniff out the smell of danger, is second to none.³⁸

The local knowledge and bravery of the CJTF endeared them not only to politicians and the public but to the JTF as well. In dire need of local support and cooperation, the overstretched JTF were quick to spot the importance of the CJTF as a force multiplier and an efficient means to collect local intelligence on Boko Haram members and their movements. As one CJTF member pointed out, “The Nigerian military is our strength, but we are their eyes.” CJTF members often knew most of the members of their local communities and could easily identify those who did not belong. As such, they provided actionable information to the JTF which proved critical to identifying and arresting several Boko Haram members, as well as thwarting countless Boko Haram attacks.

In 2013, the Goodluck Jonathan administration hailed the CJTF as “new national heroes.”³⁹ In a similar vein, in 2017, Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari described the CJTF movement as the backbone of the war against Boko Haram. In Buhari’s words: “They have been of tremendous help to the military because they are from there. They have local intelligence.”⁴⁰ After a Boko Haram attack in Borno State in February 2015, former Governor Kashim Shettima thanked the CJTF youth who quickly rallied in support of security forces “in a patriotic battle to defend the soul of Borno State and its people from being seized by determined insurgents.”⁴¹ In Maiduguri, residents (young and old) praised the CJTF’s daily patrols, with some claiming that any visitor to their neighborhood could be quickly detected by these vigilantes. This is crucial

because Boko Haram fighters infrequently send scouts to survey a neighbourhood prior to an attack. Maiduguri residents admitted that without the intervention of the CJTF in 2013, the capital city would have long succumbed to Boko Haram control. A local leader said, “the CJTF are a fearless band of committed youth who know Boko Haram members and the terrain very well.” A leader of the Borno State Elders Forum described the coming of the CJTF as nothing short of a *deus ex machina*: “Without their efforts, the insurgency wouldn’t have been put down by now. They organized themselves from every corner of the city and major towns and started fighting their own friends and relatives who were members of Boko Haram.” A resident of Maiduguri divulged that a large portion of CJTF members were close friends of Boko Haram youths. “They lived in the same neighbourhoods, and they are the army’s best chance of telling who is who.”

For many residents of Borno State, the mere presence of the CJTF in their neighbourhoods was reassuring and gave them a sense of security and safety. Farmers, traders and commercial drivers felt safe because the CJTF provided personal security escorts. One farmer described how CJTF escorts often perched atop trees to keep a watchful eye on the surroundings while he was working on his farmland. Residents talked of vigilantes chasing robbers, escorting villagers to markets with goods and carrying out patrols on market days. Internally displaced persons in Borno State noted that the CJTF imbued them with the courage to return to their communities after it was recaptured by the JTF. In short, the presence of the CJTF protected livelihoods by allowing people to go about their daily activities. Residents in Borno State spoke about being able to “sleep well” because of the daily and nightly patrols of the CJTF.

5.4 Membership: Why they joined

The CJTF has an estimated strength of roughly 30,000 members spread across virtually all of Borno State’s 27 local government areas.⁴² CJTF members range from 15 to 50 years of age, although there have been cases of underaged vigilantes in their ranks. Members include Christians and Muslims, men and women, people from many ethnic groups (Babur, Dogole, Hausa, Igbo, Kanuri, Lamu, Mafa, Margi, Shuwa, Tera, Yoruba and Zalitfa), many professions (traders, civil servants, taxi drivers, ex-servicemen, electricians, farmers, tailors, hunters, mechanics, tailors, teachers), students and repentant Boko Haram members. However, CJTF is male-dominated, with only an estimated 100 female members. These women rarely take up combat roles and are generally involved in community reconnaissance, including information gathering and stop-and-frisk activities of other women in affected

communities.⁴³ Most CJTF members do not have a college degree and typically get by on petty trading, public transport work and menial jobs. This diverse phalanx of actors is united by a goal of expelling violent extremists from their communities and restoring a sense of order and normalcy to daily life.

Like many other vigilantes in Borno State, a man named Buba joined the CJTF out of deep frustration with the state of insecurity and unpredictability in his community and out of his attachment to his community and love of country. “Our success rests on patriotism and bravery, he said. “For us, there was no going back and none of us ever deserted the war fronts.” In the Hausari and Jere areas of Borno State, youth said they joined the CJTF after losing friends or relatives to Boko Haram. These youths were eager to see justice served. One man said he joined to ensure that all those feeding and supporting Boko Haram received their just reward: “I want to see them arrested, captured and made to face trial for their numerous atrocities. It will mean a great deal of personal happiness and satisfaction to me because I have lost friends and persons close to me.”⁴⁴ A CJTF leader in Maiduguri said he joined after his childhood friends were killed by Boko Haram.

Prior to joining, Ganiyu, a leader of the CJTF in Maiduguri, spent 16 years of his life as a politician in the People’s Democratic Party. In 2013, as the violent insurgency intensified and his friends lost their lives, Ganiyu voluntarily resigned from the Party to join the fight against Boko Haram. “I feel happy because I am protecting the lives and properties of our citizens,” said Ganiyu. “And for now, I am a respected member of my community. Many of us sacrifice ourselves to defend our communities and our people. Just the respect we get from our communities is okay for us.”

The sense of personal loss that pulled Ganiyu into the CJTF is also palpable in Wanzam’s journey into the CJTF. From Gubja, Yobe State, Wanzam stated: “I joined this fight against Boko Haram to save our religion, our village and our people. I want to inform you that my father was slaughtered like a goat, and you can see why I had no choice but to join this fight. We saw these Boko Haram insurgents killing our parents and other relations so we sacrificed our lives and said these are also people like us and we must fight them to a standstill. So, we took up sticks and machetes to fight them and save ourselves. We all know the terrain and we want to bring back peace to our ancestral land.”

Abubakar, originally from Buni Yadi in Yobe State where 59 boys were killed at the Federal Government College in February 2014, recounted that Boko Haram’s suicide attacks and drive-by shootings forced many inhabitants to relocate

to the state capital, Damaturu. He said: “We all joined this CJTF because of patriotism to defend our fatherland. Boko Haram said Buni Yadi was no longer part of Nigeria, and we felt we had to come back to reclaim our land.” Gani, who worked as a civil servant in the Bama local government area before it was bombed by Boko Haram in May 2013, recalls what convinced him to become a CJTF member. “I joined in June 2014. At that time Boko Haram members were living in the same compound as us. We would see them carrying guns. They would come out and kill our brothers any time. My brother was killed. They came into our house and shot him in the evening. I was sitting right next to him. When I remember this incident, I don’t have mercy on them.”⁴⁵

One CJTF youth from Gubja recounted: “We are Nigerians and indigenes of Gubja. We were driven away from our homes by Boko Haram. We joined this group because of patriotism to defend our fatherland. Boko Haram said we were not part of Nigeria. We felt we had to reclaim our community.” A CJTF man from Damboa said he joined after seeing first-hand the brutality of Boko Haram. “There was a time I had left Maiduguri on my way to Damboa and I saw 17 people slaughtered by Boko Haram. When I reached home, I decided to join.”⁴⁶

At the CJTF headquarters in Maiduguri, one of this report’s authors met Bello who currently serves as Overall Provost of the CJTF but was a mechanic prior to joining the group in early 2014. “My role and priority are ensuring that our youth do not get involved in wrong things in the discharge of our duties,” he said. “We have a guard room where we detain our members that commit offenses.” Bello’s journey into the CJTF was born out of frustration with Boko Haram’s brutal killings of innocent members of his community. Asked why he continues to do CJTF work at great personal risk, Bellow responded: “What else should we do? We must do something. This is our ancestral land. I started doing this job because Boko Haram can kill any person: women, boys, old men, girls, Christians, Muslims, anybody. Boko Haram killed my elder brother. We are not politicians. We are not army; we have no arms. We are just tired. Maiduguri is the home of peace. We need that peace to return.”⁴⁷

That CJTF members include Muslims and Christians indicates that both major religious groups share a common enemy in Boko Haram. A leader of the Hunters Association in Borno explained that he joined to protect innocent civilians. “We vowed to fight and protect both Christians and Muslims wherever they are,” he said. In the Biu local government area in southern Borno, not only did Christians and Muslims join hands to form the CJTF, but they jointly safeguarded places

of worship from violent attacks during times of prayer and festivals. This collaboration goes beyond the usual narratives that cast the social mobilization of vigilante groups in light of ethnicity, religion and region.⁴⁸

“This work is 24 hours,” said Ali, who heads the CJTF’s Sector 5 in Maiduguri, comprising about two thousand youth. Ali noted that his work gives him sleepless nights. “My eyes are restless. They are all over Maiduguri. I can’t rest. I always check in with my chairmen throughout the night so that I can quickly send reinforcements if any of them needs it. Just last month, we lost 13 of our boys at one spot.” What limited data is available on CJTF deaths in northeast Nigeria indicate that between 2013 and 2017, close to 700 members were killed while fighting Boko Haram, not to mention those injured. However, leaders of the group believe the fatalities are much higher because rarely has any military operation against Boko Haram since 2013 not included the loss of at least one CJTF member guiding them. “It is very sad that the state like to benefit from our contributions, but they are not willing to contribute to our upkeep,” said one aggrieved CJTF member in Borno State.

The reasons why residents joined the CJTF reflects and reinforces the wider lack of support for Boko Haram among northern Nigerians.⁴⁹ A CJTF member from Yobe State, who saw the Boko Haram founder Mohammed Yusuf preach several times, recalled why he refrained from joining the sect: “Yusuf used to come to Bindigari and preach. I personally saw Yusuf preaching at least five times. I don’t even stop to listen because they say “boko haram” (which literally translates as “Western education is forbidden”) and my own children go to “boko” (so-called Western schools). I don’t fancy listening to them or what they say.”

This supports a recent study that uncovers why northern Nigerians do not join Boko Haram. “Some did not join because they did not believe in Yusuf’s teachings, or stopped attending Boko Haram’s preaching after it became clear its leaders were advocating violence,” found the study. “Others did not like Boko Haram because they felt the organization was not sincere: they saw Boko Haram as more interested in power and money than religion and felt it was ‘taking advantage of the sentiments of the poor youth and the lapses of government.’ Still others were interested in Western education and, as such, found their ambitions incompatible with the injunctions of Boko Haram against Western education.”⁵⁰

One reason why some youth do not join Boko Haram—or better still, why they turned to CJTF membership—was out of fear of the JTF. As one commentator explained, “Everybody

is scared of Boko Haram, but everybody is terrified of the army” (Boghani, 2014). Some residents said they joined the CJTF to avoid being arrested, tortured, killed or branded a Boko Haram by the JTF. For these youth, joining the CJTF sent a clear message to members of the Nigerian JTF: “We are on your side.” This point was confirmed by Shehu Sani, a human rights activist from Kaduna State: “The safest way for young people not to be thought of as violent extremists is for them to join the youth militia. And young men who refuse to be part of the militia stand the risk of being accused of being extremists.”⁵¹

It was against this backdrop of indiscriminate violence that youth decided to join forces with the military to identify and arrest Boko Haram members in their communities. These youth reasoned that the origins of their predicament stemmed not so much from the (in)actions of the Nigerian JTF as from the violent extremism of Boko Haram. As one CJTF member from Bama put it: “We said to ourselves that enough is enough. It was the Boko Haram war that stopped us from staying, from sleeping. They stopped our daily quest for a livelihood. Today they will kill one of our own. So, we decided to come together and pick up the stick and fight them.”⁵² Many more CJTF members probably felt an underlying sense of compulsion, even if they were not open about it—perhaps due to the emasculation associated with fear in northern Nigeria.

While some CJTF members admitted that fear of what the Nigerian JTF might do to them and their loved ones shaped their decision to join, they also admitted to fearing the wrath of Boko Haram members who “have their eyes everywhere” and had a habit of killing residents working as state informants. Yet, it was patriotism and social bond—the strong commitment and valued attachment to their land and people—that ultimately convinced CJTF members to fight alongside the state and prevented them from taking other viable, even safer, options available to them, such as defecting to the Boko Haram camp or even doing what many people facing similar pressures do: cut and run. The salient point here is that CJTF members were neither powerless nor devoid of viable alternatives. The decision to take up sticks in support of the military ultimately boiled down to love of their community and zeal for their nation, perhaps more than economic factors. Comments such as “We are doing it to protect our people,” “We are doing it because of the community,” “It was patriotism that made us pick up the stick, to save the honest from the dishonest” were recurrent explanations for why CJTF members chose voice and loyalty over exit.

The interplay of fear and love is typified by the story of Sheriff, the CJTF Chairman for Abadam town, Borno State. Sheriff

is based at a camp for the internally displaced in Abadam, where his boys secure camp gates and provide security in the absence of Nigerian security forces. Until 2015, Abadam was under Boko Haram's violent control. Abadam has a population of 100,000 people and is one of the sixteen local government areas that constitute the Borno Emirate. In October 2014, Boko Haram captured Abadam, killing up to forty people and forcing residents to flee to neighbouring Niger. In February 2015, a multinational joint task force of Cameroonian and Nigerian soldiers recaptured Abadam. But into August 2016, Abadam remained a major Boko Haram hideout. Sheriff, who also holds a political position in Abadam, first became involved in security surveillance work on behalf of Borno State in 2011, when members of the Nigerian JTF posted to Abadam sought his help finding a suitable location to settle down. Sheriff's cooperation with the soldiers soon exposed him to the wrath of Boko Haram. "You know," he said, "Boko Haram has strong local intelligence and social networks. So, if there is any cooperation between you and the JTF, they will know and they will try to eliminate you." Previously, when Sheriff served as the Vice Chairman of the CJTF in Abadam, both he and then Chairman, Buba, received death threats from Boko Haram, warning them to cease their work as state informants or "prepare to die." Boko Haram made real its threat when it brutally killed Buba in his house, leaving a warning note for Sheriff. Following Buba's death, Sheriff assumed the headship of the CJTF in Abadam and vowed to continue working as a state informant.

Because Sheriff was on Boko Haram's "most wanted list" in Abadam, his friends and relatives were also endangered and distanced themselves from him. "People around me reacted in two ways," explained Sheriff. "People in Abadam started hating me and isolating themselves from me. They didn't want to talk or sit next to me at public gatherings out of fear of being linked to me. People tried to convince me to abandon my work for the security forces to save my head and that of my family. But I told them that if you join the CJTF, Boko Haram will not rest until they finish you. They will target you until the end." Sheriff understood that there was no easy way out of his precarious life. "When you identify yourself with the CJTF, even when you stop doing that work, even when you resign publicly, you have only resigned for yourself in the eyes of Boko Haram. They will still hunt you down and kill you." There was also the small matter of dealing with the Nigerian military. As Sheriff noted: "If you begin like me by giving them information about the insurgents and then you later decide to stop, they too will start suspecting and targeting you. They will say you have changed your mind and started to work for Boko Haram."

Sheriff's situation reflects the difficult choices facing residents who work as state informants. As the human rights activist Shehu Sani put it: "It's the choice between a rock and a hard place...If anyone chooses to cooperate with the military or security forces, he finds himself at the mercy of the insurgents. If you cooperate with the insurgents, you find yourself at the mercy of the security forces. It has reached a point where people couldn't even define and clearly draw a line between the wanton violence and evil unleashed by the insurgents and the fear of the security forces."⁵³ Be that as it may, Sheriff insists that "nobody forced me to join this group. I do it out of love for my country and my people and a desire to see Maiduguri return to what it used to be before, a Home of Peace. If I don't do this, Boko Haram will still hunt me down."

One question remains: How do the motivations of CJTF members differ from those who joined Boko Haram? Maiduguri is the birthplace of both Boko Haram and the CJTF. Members of both groups are mainly Muslim and Kanuri and are drawn from disgruntled youth crushed by the socio-economic system and then repressed by the state. In the case of Boko Haram, state repression came in the form of Operation Flush II. The CJTF was a reaction to the JTF first sent to the region in 2011. Like the youth drawn to the CJTF ranks, Boko Haram youth are not the "violent outliers" that they are often painted to be.⁵⁴ As one tricycle driver in the Wulari area of Maiduguri explained: "These Boko Haram youth are normal people like us. You pray with them in mosques, go to the same markets, engage in business transactions and attend social events like weddings and naming ceremonies. But you don't know who they really are." Yet, while the CJTF opted to support state security forces, Boko Haram withdrew from and violently challenged the state.

Thus, it is clear that the most salient pull factors of CJTF membership are patriotism, attachment to the community, collective yearning for normal lives, personal loss, quest for justice and fear of the military. In addition, many youth joined the CJTF in hope of securing a government job in the security sector and, more immediately, as a source of earning a living wage. However, this economic logic was more implied than explicit during conversations with CJTF members. Others joined out of the power, prestige and respectability that comes with collaborating with the state. These factors contrast sharply with why individuals said they join Boko Haram. One study suggests that religious and ideological motivations were key to joining Boko Haram before 2009 but gave way to more coercive and opportunistic motives after the July 2009 violence, especially the extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf.⁵⁵ This finding resonates with other empirical studies that have emphasized the significance of religion,



social ties, opportunities and security as central pull factors of Boko Haram membership. A shared pull factor of both Boko Haram and CJTF membership relates to the pursuit of security and protection, triggered in part by the coercive tactics of the Nigerian JTF.

5.5 Support and structure

Following its formal recognition in May 2013, the CJTF received varying levels of support from the Borno State government and traditional authorities in the form of equipment, training and weapons. Under the state-sponsored Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme (BOYES), 1,850 CJTF members were enrolled in a four-week paramilitary training course (some CJTF members received their training from the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center in Accra, Ghana) and placed on a monthly stipend of N15,000 (\$48). Members of BOYES are easily recognized in Borno State by their sky-blue shirts, trousers and face caps which they wear during formal operations. BOYES training included in-

telligence gathering, the tenets of human rights, the art of self-protection and the dynamics of civil-military interactions. However, this initiative was soon halted after the training of the first batch due to the army's uncertainty about training potentially unreliable youth and possibly Boko Haram spies in CJTF clothing. In 2015, the military integrated 250 former CJTF members into its organization as recruits. At the time of writing, two predominant types of CJTF exist: the 1,850-strong BOYES CJTF who are well trained and receive stipends from the state and the remaining members of the CJTF ("Youth Vanguard") who have not been absorbed into BOYES. The distinction between both groups has been a source of internal tension, which extends to the lack of clarity regarding the criteria used by the state to select some youth for BOYES and regular stipends, while leaving others behind.⁵⁶

CJTF leaders repeatedly complain about lack of government support for their members killed in the line of duty. As one vigilante man in the region lamented during a focus group discussion:

Our first commander, Ali Dallatu, was killed by the insurgents and we found his dead body in the bush. He left behind a pregnant wife and all of us had to contribute money for her upk eep and naming ceremony of the baby she delivered after his death. But government did not do anything. And another member called Abacha was missing in action and we have not heard from him up until today. His wife was not given anything. There is also Bakura Wanzam. When he got injured in Shangamari forest nothing was done to help him. We have pictures of his injured face and knee.

Asked about the extent of financial support for the CJTF by the state government, Wokenso, who heads a CJTF sector in Adamawa State, responded: "Sometimes, the military gave us cartridges for our Dane guns and the government gave us a meagre sum of N10,000 [\$24.30] monthly but nothing sustainable. This money [from the state] is nothing because from here to Madagali [town] one can spend it all going and coming. *It's just patriotism and love of our country and our local community that drives us forward.* Right now, even as I am talking to you, some of our boys are in liberated areas sleeping in the open, exposed to mosquitoes and the elements, relying on food and small allowances from members of the community, churches, mosques and some local politicians, but nothing from government." This statement suggests that monetary incentives or greed are not the driving factor of CJTF membership, as other studies have portrayed. However, it also indicates that vigilantes are not satisfied with the level of material support coming from the state and of-

ten complain that they receive zero support from the federal government.

Under close supervision of the army, the CJTF is structured along military lines into sectors under sector commanders, just like the JTF. Borno State is divided into ten sectors, each led by a unit chairman selected by army commanders to whom the rest of the vigilante group reported. CJTF sectors are generally equipped with pickup trucks and charged with collecting local intelligence, patrolling towns and villages, joining in military operations to raid insurgent hideouts and rescue abductees, carrying out “security sweeps” in re/captured towns, providing personal protection for farmers and traders and conducting stop-and-frisk operations for mosque and church goers. The CJTF is also invested with powers to mount roadblocks, raid houses to search for insurgents and arrest and beat confessions out of suspects.

During fieldwork at checkpoints leading into and out of Maiduguri, one of the authors engaged in a conversation with small groups of machete-wielding CJTF boys working with soldiers carrying AK-47s. These boys frisked vehicles as the soldiers kept a watchful eye on them from behind sandbags, indexing the checkpoint as a terrain of anticipated violence. As one soldier said, “Forget what you read in the newspapers that all is well. We are on serious alert here.” Throughout the day and at night, these CJTF boys peer into vehicles as drivers moved slowly past. Those deemed “suspicious” were pulled over for questioning and inspection, which involved asking drivers to open the trunk of their vehicles and conducting a pat-down screening of their bodies for improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Regular questions posed by the CJTF included: Who are you? Where are you coming from? What brings you to this area? What are you carrying? Anyone with an unsatisfactory answer was detained for further screening. At a checkpoint in Gujba, along the Damaturu-Biu Road, a CJTF member said: “We try to search vehicles to see if they carry arms or food stuff to Boko Haram.” Another claimed that “body language” was his key to singling out, and in some cases arresting, motorists when their vehicles are stopped.

The CJTF boys manning the checkpoints volunteer on a part-time basis. One of them explained: “This is rainy season. Every day we go to farms and when we are back, we help mount the checkpoints to check what cars are carrying to ensure that no one is passing through with arms or armaments that could harm others.” “We normally come out in the morning,” said another. “If there is anything new the soldiers will alert us and we will go out with them. If nothing new, we

will get to the community entrance on the major road from Damaturu to Biu and mount the checkpoint there to keep an eye on anyone that enters and exits the community. We have been arresting insurgents on this road. We once arrested someone that drove the car of Boko Haram that launched an attack on the state capital last December, and he confessed that himself.” According to a recent report, CJTF-controlled checkpoints in northeast Nigeria have “stopped many people before detonation, had people who had been forced to carry IED vests surrender to them, or enabled detonation in such a way that minimized civilian casualties.”⁵⁷ For the boys manning the checkpoints, the ability to smell or anticipate danger is key to survival.

Beyond its core responsibility of community policing, the CJTF also displays its commitment to the common good through engaging in the provision of public goods, such as helping to fill potholed roads with sand, resolving local disputes and regularly donating blood to victims of Boko Haram attacks through a partnership with the International Red Cross Committee (ICRC). As one CJTF leader proudly noted: “Even now when I walk into the blood bank of the ICRC at the general hospital in Maiduguri, everyone there would begin to hail me ‘Chairman!’ ‘Chairman!’ Why? Because whenever I see or hear of any bomb blast, I will just gather about 50 CJTF boys and go and donate blood.” A traditional leader in Maiduguri noted that “if there is a kind of misunderstanding within a community, they look for the CJTF rather than the official police or army to come to settle the dispute.”⁵⁸ Disputes relating to housing, land and property rights were especially common among returnees, that is, people returning from displacement inside Nigeria or other Lake Chad Basin region countries to their place of origin.

The Boko Haram conflict has exacerbated underreported clashes between pastoralists (many of whom identify as Fulani, Kanuri and Shuwa Arab ethnic groups) and farmers. In 2016, these conflicts resulted in no less than 2,500 deaths.⁵⁹

5.6 CJTF weapons

It is a public secret in Borno State that CJTF weapons (e.g., machetes, bows and arrows, swords) and bodies are believed to be fortified with charms of invisibility and immunity, consisting of incisions on the head, small amulets on the belts and around the neck and red ropes tied to sticks and cutlasses. “Some of these boys if you shoot them the bullet will not penetrate their bodies because they have taken bulletproof medicine. So, they fear nobody,” said a security man in Maiduguri. Revealing some intricate incisions

on his forehead, Bitrus, a vigilante from Gombi, in Adamawa State, brags that his parents have embedded some protective charms on his head that makes him impregnable to gunshots. The belief in magic as a powerful tool of warfare is steeped in the warring tradition of West Africa, a region where “the re-making of selves out of the secrets of the supernatural are familiar and effective frameworks in the quest for order and certainty.”⁶⁰

The CJTF was initially armed with sticks, knives, machetes, bows and arrows. These basic, affordable weapons constituted part of the traditional technology of hunting in northern Nigeria. However, as the CJTF forced Boko Haram fighters to retreat to the bushy and mountainous countryside, as noted above, select members of the vigilante group were vetted and given military training and later became known as the CJTF Special Forces. “They [army] took us and trained us for four weeks. They formed us so that we could be their boys. And said they’ll support us in our operations,” said one member of the Special Forces. Crucially, the CJTF Special Forces were permitted to carry pump-action shotguns during bush operations. As a leader of the anti-Boko Haram vigilante group in Maiduguri explained: “Before we were using sticks and machetes. But as the insurgents forced out of Maiduguri took cover in the surrounding bush, some army commanders decided to give those of us who are trustworthy pump-action [guns] that will protect us when we go to the bush.”

Dane guns are originally a type of long-barrelled flintlock musket imported into West Africa by Dano-Norwegian traders prior to the mid-19th century. Traditional Dane guns are commonly used by local hunters and measure about 58 inches long. Over time, local gunmakers refined their skills and began to produce short and portable Dane guns that resemble pistols. In northern Nigeria, Dane guns are variously known as *adaka* (which means “pounding” in Hausa, derived from the pounding of the gun powder into the barrel with a thin iron rod before firing); *harba ruga* (“shoot and run” in Hausa, derived from the fact that one can only fire one shot at a time and then run away to reload before firing another); *durum kangiya* (in Kanuri language, this imitates the sound and smoke emitted by the Dane gun after firing a shot); and *baushe* (which means “the hunter and the gun” in Hausa). Each Dane gunshot requires two tablespoons of gunpowder mixed with very tiny balls or fragments of iron to make it lethal. A modern version of the Dane gun (see image below) uses spark plugs for bullets instead of the little iron balls or fragments. This is extremely dangerous and a vigilante and hunter said, “We don’t use this to kill but to incapacitate a dangerous human target by shooting and damaging the legs.”



Source: original fieldwork.

The author asked a CJTF leader in Borno State if he had ever killed a person during his operations with the military. “I can’t even count. Too many!” he replied. He proceeded to describe his first experience of killing in March 2014: “I first killed Boko Haram insurgents when they attacked us at the Giwa Barracks in March 2014. We [vigilantes] were the first responders. That time the military had not yet trained us as special forces. So, we only used normal double barrels, but we were in front with the military. That day I suffered. The way the war happened is that we and the soldiers took cover at the Capital Primary School. From there, we suddenly attacked the group. They were firing, we were firing. We matched them and pushed them out of Maiduguri. We killed so many insurgents, but they also killed some of our members. I did my best. Later, when I got to my house, my whole head was just turning. It was my first time of killing somebody. For three days, I lost a grip of myself.” The common practice is for Nigerian soldiers to retrieve firearms handed to CJTF Special Forces after each operation as they were reluctant to arm an improperly vetted community-based vigilante group that could potentially turn on them. The fears extended to disloyalty and double-dealing within the ranks of the CJTF. The lack of proper firearms is a source of frustration among some anti-Boko Haram vigilantes. As one vigilante from the Konduga local government area of Borno State bemoaned: “There is nothing we can do. When there is an attack, we just run because those people that are coming, they are better equipped than us. Even the military were running.”⁶¹

5.7 Boko Haram’s reprisal

Studies on the logic of violence in internal armed conflicts suggest that armed groups are more likely to use or intensify violence against civilians when they feel most vulnerable.⁶² Boko Haram is a case in point. The emergence of the CJTF and its effectiveness as a counterforce to Boko Haram transformed the conflict from an anti-state insurgency into full-blown terrorism,⁶³ putting civilians at daggers drawn with Boko Haram. As one Boko Haram member claimed in 2013: “Our original target was security operatives and politicians. But since the formation of the CJTF who now reveal our identities and even arrest us, we decided to kill anyone that is

from Maiduguri because we believe every person there and some other towns of Borno State are members of the CJTF.”⁶⁴ By forcing Boko Haram to decamp to the countryside, the combined power of CJTF and Nigerian security forces made everyday life precarious for residents and villagers. In the first half of 2014 alone, Boko Haram launched an estimated 95 attacks that killed no fewer than 2,053 civilians, with 1,446 murders taking place in Borno State, 151 in Adamawa State and 143 in Yobe State.

In June 2013, Boko Haram released an audio clip declaring “all-out-war” on the youth of Maiduguri “because you have formed an alliance with the military and police to fight our brethren. We call on parents that value the life of their son to stop him from exposing our members. Otherwise, he is dead.”⁶⁵ In September 2013, following the Benisheik massacre, Shekau labelled the CJTF “infidels” for supporting the military and threatened to avenge the death of his followers at their hands. “We warn the CJTF to back out now,” he reportedly said, “if not, there will be no place for them to hide. We have evidence of how you killed our brethren whom you asked if they are Boko Haram before you killed them. We will get to you. We will smash your heads and kill you all. Even if you don’t do anything to us, we will kill you.”⁶⁶ This statement reinforces the view that civilian collaboration with the state poses a grave threat to insurgent activities and, for this reason, insurgent leaders often do all within their powers to discourage further collaboration with the state, including carrying out acts of terror and reprisal attacks against innocent civilians.⁶⁷

Considering Boko Haram’s rage against local communities that form vigilante groups in alliance with the state, many civilians have become increasingly fearful of identifying with the CJTF. For their part, CJTF members say they have crossed the Rubicon in their vow to fight terror and restore order. As one vigilante noted: “There is no going back. Boko Haram have declared war on us and even if we stop hunting them, they will come after us. So, we have to fight them to the finish.” The resilience of the CJTF in the face of immediate threats to their lives has come at a huge cost. “We have created a lot of enemies in this vigilante work,” said one sector leader of the CJTF in Borno State. “There are people that are still after us.”

5.8 Are vigilantes Nigeria’s next security threat?

Despite initial praise for the CJTF as national heroes, the group has since been linked to a growing list of atrocities, including indiscriminate killing of suspects, using children in

its vigilante work, trading in stolen goods, extorting bribes from travellers at security checkpoints, engaging in cattle rustling and sexually harassing and exploiting women in camps for internally displaced persons. These wrongdoings eroded much of the local support the CJTF enjoyed during its formative years from 2013 through 2014. Many commentators in Borno State trace CJTF corruption and its downfall to its association with the Nigerian state. These residents are convinced that the CJTF has lost its way and degenerated into a money-hungry and power-driven criminal entity. The group, some local inhabitants claim, has morphed from community protection to community predation.

In June 2019, disappointed and angry residents in the Borno capital, Maiduguri, took to the streets en masse in peaceful protest against the activities of the CJTF, calling on the state government to ban the anti-Boko Haram vigilante group. The mass protest erupted hours after a commercial taxi driver was shot dead at a CJTF-operated checkpoint near the state capital on suspicion of being a Boko Haram member. “We want the CJTF to be banned from the city because of abuses we suffer in their hands,” said Shaleh, a resident of the area of Maiduguri where the incident occurred. He added, “They have become a law unto themselves and are treating us badly. And now they have started killing us. The victim was a known resident and his name was Modu but the CJTF shot him for no reason.”⁶⁸ While the former governor of Borno and major supporter and financier of the CJTF, Kashim Shettima, has never hidden his love for the group, calling their rise a “divine intervention” and a “game changer,” he has since admitted that “unless deliberate efforts are made towards addressing issues of unemployment, illiteracy, hunger and poverty, the CJTF may be the Frankenstein monsters that might end up consuming us.”⁶⁹

Members of the CJTF have been accused, credibly so, of subjecting Boko Haram suspects and captives to torture during interrogation in an attempt to extract information or a positive confession from them. A 19-year-old man recounted how he and his brother were tortured at Bama Prison after fleeing his village as a child. He said: “CJTF men were the ones beating us, while the soldiers sat and watched. My legs and hands were bound together at the back and I was hung from a tree, head facing down. When they untied me, I couldn’t feel my legs and hands and could barely walk. The same thing was done to my younger brother. They did that to us because we refused to accept that we were Boko Haram, during interrogation. The interrogation was done by soldiers and CJTF. They said it wasn’t possible we would live for years with Boko Haram and not join them, so they said we were lying. My brother was beaten so badly that he could



not eat with his hands.”⁷⁰ In Biu, residents described how CJTF members killed suspects and burnt their houses during their night patrols and street surveillance. These egregious actions were justified on the grounds of shielding the community from Boko Haram. “We run from Boko Haram, then our CJTF is again punishing us, where do we go?” asked a man from Gwoza.⁷¹ CJTF members are also accused of projecting a perception of superiority (e.g., claiming they are military), which has strained their relationship with civilian populations and even the police.

While certain sectors of the CJTF in Borno State have internal disciplinary measures aimed at holding members accountable for their actions, these measures are not always applied consistently. CJTF leaders have sought to improve accountability by requiring new members to provide the names of persons of impeccable character that can represent them as guarantors. All verified CJTF members in Borno State are

issued with an official identity card. In all police stations in Maiduguri, a CJTF desk facilitates smooth relations with the police and public. The effectiveness of these measures is not exactly known.

As the CJTF evolves, fears exist that this group of mostly unwaged youth, desensitized to violence, may become Nigeria’s next security threat, in the same way that remnants of the ECOMOG militia group in Maiduguri reportedly morphed into Boko Haram. Yet for the Nigerian state, getting rid of vigilantes is not a feasible option given Boko Haram’s continued attacks which force the overstretched Nigerian security forces to prioritize the protection of urban areas, leaving rural communities and smaller towns to be protected by local vigilantes and hunters. Consequently, most local-level stabilization efforts have prioritized more secure and accessible areas in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States, leaving thousands of people still outside the reach of humanitarian assistance.⁷²

6. The Rise of Anti-Boko Haram Vigilance Committees: The case of Cameroon

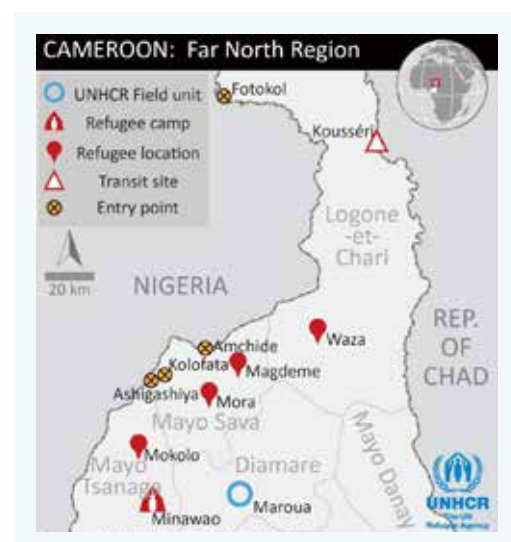
6.1 Background: Vigilantism in Cameroon

The use of vigilantes as customary police groups to extend the limited reach of the state is hardly a recent development in Cameroon, with vigilante origins predating the birth of Boko Haram. The outsourcing of vigilante groups can be traced to the 1960s, when the newly independent Cameroon under Ahmadou Ahidjo (1960-1982) had to overcome armed national rebellion by the outlawed political party, the Union of Cameroonian Populations (*Union des Populations du Cameroun*, or UPC), especially its armed branch the Organization National Committee (*Comité National d'Organisation*), between 1961 and 1971. The UPC's armed insurrection began in the mid-1950s as a protest against French rule and continued after independence. During this state of emergency, the so-called Bamileke vigilance committees were mobilized, trained and armed by the Cameroonian armed forces (the military services, the National Gendarmerie and the National Police). With the support of the French military and these community-based vigilantes, several UPC leaders were executed or forced into exile.

In 1993, President Paul Biya (1982-) established a Committee for Self-Defence, with a social base mainly formed by ethnic Beti students. The overriding mission of the Committee for Self-Defence was to protect Beti interests by opposing the actions of the Student's Parliament at the University of Yaoundé and instilling fear on the university campus. Committee members wielded small arms and light weapons, including clubs, knives and pistols, with impunity, which they used to attack members and supporters of the Parliament. The Committee joined forces with other Beti vigilante groups on campus, especially the pro-government group of students known as Direct Action, that claimed that the University of Yaoundé should be under Beti control because it was built on Beti land. From 1990 through 1996, the activities of the Committee destabilized the University of Yaoundé.

In 1996, the Committee for Self-Defence was succeeded by President Biya's Youth (PRESBY), an ethno-political armed militia group established to intimidate political opponents of the regime, particularly Anglophone movements and parties, such as the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), the Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), the Social Democratic Front (SDF) and the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC). PRESBY was composed primarily of people from the majority Beti ethnic group, including President Biya's Bulu ethnic subgroup. PRESBY members were recruited primarily from (former) students and unemployed youth, who were then transformed into infrastructures of political violence and intimidation. Closely linked to the ruling party, the *Rassemblement Democratique du Peuple Camerounais* (RDPC), PRESBY has been credibly charged with various high crimes, including violently disrupting opposition meetings, terrorizing Anglophone secessionists and rigging elections.

MAP 3: Cameroon's Far North Region



Source: ISS.

In other parts of Cameroon, such as Yaoundé's densely populated Nkom-Kana and La Briqueterie neighbourhoods, popular security initiatives since the early 1990s have revolved around vigilante committees, organized in reaction to rising insecurity, especially recurrent cases of thefts and house break-ins. These vigilance committees relied predominantly on unemployed youth and school dropouts from the area, as well as on the existence of neighbourhood social networks.⁷³ Since 2017, in the wake of conflicts between government forces and armed separatist groups, more than 30 vigilante groups have mobilized across the Anglophone regions.⁷⁴

6.2 Cameroon's Far North Region: The rise of vigilance committees

With approximately four million inhabitants, accounting for 20 percent of Cameroon's total population, the Far North Region is the most populated region in Cameroon and home to its largest Muslim concentration. The region, which houses several ethnic groups, including the Arab-Choas, Fulbe, Kotoko, Mafa, Massa, Musgum and Tupuri, suffers from acute poverty and relative deprivation that stymies human development. Access to basic social amenities (including roads, clean water, education, health care and electricity) is considerably poor compared to the southern part of the country. In January 2018, nearly half of the Far North's population were in dire need of humanitarian assistance.⁷⁵ This is a key causal factor for why young people turned to Boko Haram; many were in search of survival opportunities and social recognition.

Cameroon's Far North, especially localities in Chari, Logone, Mayo Sava and Mayo Tsanaga, has borne the burden of Boko Haram's terrorist attacks. This is a spill over from jihadists fleeing Nigeria through Cameroon's porous northern border. Government figures indicate that between April 2013 and 2017, Boko Haram killed up to 2,860 civilians.⁷⁶ In one year alone, from July 2015 to July 2016, Boko Haram launched no less than 200 terrorist attacks in the Far North, 38 of which were suicide bombings that killed 470 persons. In July 2015, 50 people died in five consecutive suicide attacks by Boko Haram, three of which occurred in the main city of Maroua.⁷⁷

In 2017, Boko Haram continued to exploit Cameroon's long and porous far northern border with Nigeria to attack nearby villages through suicide bombings, targeted killings and kidnappings and to steal food and money and transport them to Nigeria. Since January 2018, Boko Haram has killed 135 civilians and eighteen soldiers in this region.⁷⁸ The group has cashed in on the Far North's religious, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic affinities to recruit marginal youths, often forcibly, into its violent campaign. The fact that some people

with the same language and descendants are found on both sides of the border makes it hard to identify strangers. From 2012 to 2016, thousands in the Far North joined Boko Haram, and for a variety of reasons, including ideological conviction, financial opportunities and coercion.

However, Boko Haram's capacity to conduct large-scale attacks has weakened in the Far North, as corroborated by an appreciable decline in the number of civilian and military victims, which fell about 60 percent since 2014-2015.⁷⁹ While Boko Haram's capacity to conduct large-scale attacks may be weakened, the group is far from defeated. It continues to be a threat in the form of sporadic suicide bombings against civilians and military targets. As Boko Haram has shown in the past, it can bounce back from setbacks. In 2019, at least 275 people were killed by Boko Haram, which is nearly double the number in 2018. In June 2019, the sect attacked Darak Island near Lake Chad and killed 24 people, 16 of which were soldiers.⁸⁰ Notably, this was the largest single casualty figure from a Boko Haram attack since the group first started attacking the Far North Region in 2014. From January through November 2019, Boko Haram fighters killed approximately 111 civilians and 32 soldiers. The current situation, especially on the western border with Nigeria and in the northern tip of the Far North, remains volatile and demands collective civil-military vigilance.

The dire economic situation in Cameroon's Far North, made worse by the thin presence of state security architecture and popular perceptions among southern Cameroonians that the Far North aids and abets Boko Haram, compelled concerned civilian populations from vulnerable border villages to form vigilance committees (*comité de vigilance*) as a bulwark against Boko Haram. Since 2014, these vigilance committees have become the most visible and effective form of security in the Far North, carrying out local surveillance and intelligence operations in protection of their neighbourhoods. In so doing, these anti-Boko Haram groups complement the operations of the 2,000 elite units of the Rapid Intervention Battalions (*Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide* or BIR) prosecuting the war against Boko Haram, and include the army, police and gendarmerie. This move towards civilian self-defence has received strong support from regional and central governments, who see civil-military partnership as key to restoring peace and security to the restive region. As the former Cameroonian Minister of Defence, Edgar Alain Mebe Ngo'o, said: "Boko Haram is becoming a serious nuisance, menacing the population more than ever before with the use of suicide bombers, burning and looting. I am asking all Cameroonians, especially in border zones, to join vigilante committees and collaborate with the military to make sure that this new form

of Boko Haram attacks is stopped.”⁸¹ The plea came after a Boko Haram suicide attack in Kolofata left nine civilians dead and 24 injured.

Vigilance committees were created in Cameroon’s Far North Region in June 2014 by virtue of a regional decree issued by the governor, Augustine Awa Fonka. The decree came on the heels of an intensification in Boko Haram’s terrorist attacks on border communities. In the month preceding the decree, Nigeria’s Gambaru town, on the border with Cameroon, was attacked by Boko Haram jihadists, who killed more than 300 residents, before assuming control of the town that August. Gambaru was later liberated by the Chadian Army in February 2015.⁸² Boko Haram’s terrorist attacks exposed the security gap in Cameroon. To fill this gap, vigilance committees initially mobilized as Christian coalitions in communities such as Amchide, before being dissolved for harassing Muslims and being reconfigured by authorities as a more religiously mixed group.⁸³

Today, anywhere between 14,000 and 16,000 vigilantes are securing the Far North, with virtually every neighbourhood forming a vigilance committee to protect themselves from Boko Haram. Through routine checks, intelligence gathering and early warnings, these groups of ordinary residents have succeeded in protecting their localities and bolstering the war on terror by thwarting suicide attackers (in three years, vigilance committees foiled over 80 suicide attacks),⁸⁴ tracking down suspicious individuals and locating landmines planted by Boko Haram along the Cameroon-Nigerian border. During prayer time every Friday, vigilance committee members carry out stop and search operations at entrances to mosques.

According to one resident from Mokolo, the largest city of the Mayo-Tasnaga Department: “We can sleep today with our eyes closed due to the effort of our children, brothers and sisters who act as vigilante in our territory. We think they have been very instrumental in the fight against Boko Haram. They patrol at night when most of us are sleeping while they risk their lives for our safety. Most of them also stand at border villages like Amchide guiding the local people. They also identify strange people in our communities and this helps to track Boko Haram suicide bombers. So, I believe they are playing a vital role in maintaining peace and security here.”⁸⁵ Another resident, Hassan Ali, noted that vigilance committee members “are the ones who know every path here and the military rely on them for guidance. They also go to the bush and look for Boko Haram hideouts and expose it to the military.”⁸⁶ Like the CJTF, some committee members are fortified with charms that embolden them to run at and grab suicide bombers before detonation.

Given their success in repelling Boko Haram members and discouraging residents from joining the violent extremist group, the BIR have increasingly “outsourced” security and protection duties to vigilance committees in some far northern communities frequently targeted by Boko Haram, among them Amchide, Kerawa, Limani, Moskota and Tolkomari. Operating under the authority of sub-prefects and traditional chiefs, these vigilance committees are charged with collecting critical intelligence and acting as scouts, guides and force multipliers for the BIR. In the town of Kolofata, which is approximately 20 kilometres from the Nigerian border, machete-wielding young men, responding to government calls for local communities to form vigilance committees, mobilized to protect their town from Boko Haram. One member of the Kangueleri vigilance committee described the level of trust and collaboration between vigilante groups and the Cameroonian army: “We work in perfect collaboration with them. When we get information, we immediately transmit it to the military and our information is always credible.”⁸⁷ Despite this claim of a “perfect collaboration” between the military and vigilance committees, a climate of mutual distrust between Cameroonian security forces and local communities is widespread.

6.3 Membership in vigilance committees

Like the CJTF, vigilance committees consist of residents from the area, mostly unemployed young men, who have in-depth knowledge of the physical and social terrain and can, therefore, alert the Cameroonian army and gendarmes to the presence of suspicious individuals in their communities. Vigilance committees tend to operate in small groups of at least three members, spearheaded by leaders closely related to the district or village chief (djaoro). Their members typically range from 15 to 40 years old and are popularly seen as more courageous and determined to shield their villages than the elite BIR army, whose members are mostly from the south and tend to come and go.

As with the CJTF in northeast Nigeria, residents joined vigilance committee for a variety of reasons. Most joined out of a deep sense of patriotism and love for their community, inspired by recurrent calls from the Far Northern government for local communities to join hands and fight Boko Haram. Some joined because they were tired of running away from Boko Haram. Others joined to ensure that their loved ones killed in Boko Haram attacks did not die in vain. Yet still, some youths saw membership in vigilance committees as a gateway to a living wage.⁸⁸

While in a few communities, a rigorous process of registration, selection and vetting was put in place for incoming vig-

ilance committee member, in the majority, there was a lack of adequate background checks and selective recruitment. In Maroua, all vigilance committee members are required to submit a copy of their National Identification Card to the Divisional Officer and to all the police stations in the division. This enables local law enforcement agencies to keep a tab on vigilantes. In other areas, former cattle thieves, smugglers, bandits and highway robbers often and quietly made their way into vigilance committees. In some cases, residents were coerced by the BIR into joining vigilance committees. A July 2020 report by Human Rights Watch found that from mid-March through late April, soldiers in Mozogo forced scores of men and boys to perform local night guard duty to protect against attacks by Boko Haram.⁸⁹ When individuals refused to join vigilance committees, they were often accused of being Boko Haram members.

Being members of the community, vigilantes often possess intimate knowledge of the geography, language and local culture, which is often lacking in the regular army. This explains why they are generally effective at identifying and properly vetting strangers to ensure that they have no links to Boko Haram or that they are not concealing weapons. Vigilance committee members have been largely successful at arresting insurgents and thwarting scores of Boko Haram suicide attacks since 2015. Vigilantes generally have cellular phones which they use to contact the BIR when they observe suspicious behaviour or activity in their neighbourhoods. A handful of vigilance committee members are women, who provide security forces with vital local intelligence about strange movements in the community.

Similar to Nigeria, Boko Haram has sought to discourage and deter local communities from supporting state security forces by punishing those that form vigilance committees and work as state informants through various acts of terror: suicide attacks, ambushes, kidnappings, raids, beheadings, looting and the selective burning of villages, laying of landmines on main roads and farmlands and targeted killings of vigilance committee members and traditional chiefs who collaborate with BIR. In Amchide, for example, Boko Haram attacked and shot indiscriminately at residents, accusing them of cooperating with BIR to identify and arrest Boko Haram members. “They told us we were traitors and should be killed,” said one 26-year-old man from Amchide.⁹⁰

6.4 Level of support

Available evidence suggests that since 2015, more than 200 local vigilance committee members have died while protecting their communities and defending their country.⁹¹ The

number is likely much higher since many vigilante deaths go unnoticed or unrecorded. As recent as January 2021, Boko Haram shot dead three members of the Kaliari vigilance committee.⁹² The heroism, courage, patriotism and sacrifices of vigilance committee members have not gone unnoticed, especially among government officials and Cameroonian displaced persons. In his New Year’s Eve speech in December 2015, Cameroonian President Paul Biya described vigilance committees battling Boko Haram in the Far North Region as “models of our nation,” replicating the national heroes’ tag for the CJTF in northeast Nigeria. At the presidential speech, several members of the vigilance committees were honoured, some posthumously, with the prestigious Order of Merit, the second highest honour that can be bestowed on a Cameroonian national. In May 2016, during the celebration of Unity Day in Cameroon, members of the vigilance committee were honoured with a banner that read: “Vigilance Committees: A vital force in the fight against Boko Haram.”

Despite high praise for and symbolic gestures towards vigilance committees, its leaders have lamented the lack of proper equipment for committee members in the frontlines as well as adequate material support for families of fallen or injured members. A leader of the vigilance committee in Fotokol, located at the border of Cameroon and attacked several times by Boko Haram in 2015,⁹³ criticized the lack of adequate firearms to enable vigilance committee members to effectively carry out their fight against Boko Haram terrorists and protect their communities. In his words: “We [vigilance committee members] are on the dangerous frontlines, defending our various villages, but we are only armed with rudimentary weapons like machetes, spears and bows and arrows.” The leader added: “Our knowledge of the geography of this place is what is helping us for now, but I am afraid if the government does not give us guns, it will indeed be very difficult for us to continue keeping these terrorists at bay, when they begin to get more understanding of our territory.” In a similar vein, another member of the vigilance committee in Limani explained: “We spend every night awake. We work in close collaboration with the [Cameroonian] defence forces to ensure the security of the population. Our main difficulties in this work are mainly related to the fact that we don’t have adequate equipment to confront people who are often heavily armed.”⁹⁴

Calls to arm vigilance committee members in the Far North Region have grown louder considering Boko Haram’s targeted kidnappings and killings of vigilantes and civilians who support military operations with vital information. As noted above, most vigilance committee members rely on rudimentary weapons—poisoned arrows, spears, machetes and hunt-

ing rifles—to fight heavily armed extremists. Like the CJTF in Nigeria, the Cameroonian authorities have been reluctant to arm these home-grown security providers for fear that they may one day turn to organized crime, fuel communal wars or morph into an uncontrollable anti-state militia. In place of firearms, local authorities have provided vigilance committee members with basic equipment, such as megaphones, telescopes, whistles, boots, flashlights, phone cards, headlamps, hand metal detectors, boats and rain jackets. In a few cases, vigilance committees were trained and equipped with motorcycles and bicycles, which they used to monitor cross-border movements and to report anything suspicious to the Cameroonian security forces. Cameroon authorities claim that vigilance committees are different from self-defence groups since they do not carry weapons.

Aside from demands for upgraded and modern weaponry, vigilance committee members complained of a lack of financial support. In 2015, President Biya ordered the disbursement of CFA 10 million (\$20,000) to support some vigilance committees. Also, in 2019, Biya provided financial and material support to vigilance committees on the frontlines of the war against Boko Haram. However, members see this support as inconsistent and grossly incongruous with their huge sacrifices for the greater good. They want the Cameroonian government to place members on a monthly subsistence allowance. As a vigilance committee member from Fotokol pointed out: “We have abandoned our daily chores to defend our villages, so I think government should look for a permanent mechanism to help us provide the basics for our families. I also think that a special fund should be created to help the families of those who die on the frontlines.”

In July 2019, the Cameroonian state launched a “Youth and Stabilization for Peace and Security” project in the Far North. The initiative, which aims to promote tolerance and coexistence, is expected to finance studies, training and the establishment of income-generating activities for some 30,000 youth (between 12 and 25 years of age) from six of the worst affected Far North municipalities, particularly 12 localities in the Logone-et-Chari Division, Mayo-Tsanaga Division and Mayo-Sava Division, where Boko Haram attacks are rampant. Technical and financial support, to the tune of \$2.5 million, have come from global partners, such as the United Nations (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF) and the European Union.⁹⁵

6.5 “Little Warlords:” Abuses by vigilance committees

In the absence of an outside set of checks and balances, vigilance committees have been accused of excesses and human rights abuses, either independently or alongside BIR. Accusations of wrongdoing include extrajudicial killing of Boko Haram suspects, forced disappearances, torture and denial of the liberty of suspects, some of whom were falsely identified and extrajudicially killed. In April 2020, President Biya ordered a formal investigation into the alleged killings of 23 civilians in the village of Ngarbuh in the Northwest Region. A summary of the investigation’s findings showed that seventeen vigilance committee members were charged for participating in the egregious assault, alongside two soldiers.⁹⁶ Beside this, vigilance committee members have been accused of using and recruiting children (as young as 12) in their counterinsurgency operations. Members of vigilance committees have also been implicated in theft, poaching and human rights violations. In several cases, members of the community neighbourhood watch groups have abused their power and privilege to settle personal scores, extort money from motorists, engage in massive poaching and harass women.⁹⁷ Also, several vigilance committee members have been accused of cattle theft and forcing locals to pay for the security provided by vigilance committees.

In Amchide, the first vigilance committee was Christian-based and implicated in the harassment and violent extortion of the local Muslim majority. In some cases, members of vigilance committees appropriated Boko Haram’s loot, sometimes in collusion with Cameroonian security forces. Some vigilance committee members were suspected of collaborating with Boko Haram by furnishing the group with critical operational and economic support. For instance, some committee members stand accused of leaking critical information on army positions, abetting the entry of Boko Haram insurgents into communities in exchange for monetary gains and for providing cover for the sale of stolen goods and livestock.⁹⁸ As a result, some local inhabitants have grown suspicious of the activities of vigilance committees. Considering these wrongdoings, vigilance committee members are sometimes described by locals as “little warlords”—a name which captures the fear that residents feel towards these anti-Boko Haram vigilantes.

7. The case of Chad and Niger

MAP 4: Vigilance committees in Chad



Source: International Crisis Group (ICG).

By all human development indicators, from UNDP's Human Development Index to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index and the World Bank's Human Capital Index, Chad and Niger are at the bottom of the world rankings. Unlike Cameroon and Nigeria, where anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups have gained deep roots and gathered nationwide recognition, the governments of Chad and Niger

have been more cautious about outsourcing security to vigilantes. Anti-Boko Haram vigilance committees in Chad and Niger are not as widespread, central and politically engaged as in the other two countries. This is partly because the threat of violent extremist attacks is considerably less in Chad and Niger compared to Cameroon and Nigeria. Chad and Niger perceive the deployment of vigilante groups to fight Boko

Haram as both a sign of weakness and a real threat to the state's authority and power. Given their similarly situated experiences and trajectories, Chad and Niger are sequentially discussed in this section.

7.1 Chad: Life after Idriss Déby

Chad, a developing country with a reputedly strong army, is home to roughly 17 million people. For many Chadians, news of the death of 68-year-old President Idriss Déby on 20 April 2021 crowned that year as an *annus horribilis*, while sending shockwaves through the wider Sahel region and around the world. Déby, in power since 1990 when his rebel forces deposed then-President and autocratic leader Hissène Habré, died from gunshot wounds sustained on the frontlines in northern Chad when fighting rebels from the Front for Change and Concord in Chad (*Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad*). His death came just one day after winning his sixth term as president, amid boycotts from the main political opposition party.

On the one hand, President Déby was applauded for playing an active (mostly military) role in regional counterterrorism campaigns, including sending his battle-hardened troops to multiple armed conflict zones on the continent, from Sudan and the Central African Republic to Mali and the Lake Chad Basin region. Critics, on the other hand, adduced chronic issues of corruption, nepotism, extreme poverty and human rights violations that haunted Déby's 30-year rule. Under Déby's watch, Chad was ranked 187 out of 189 countries on the UNDP's 2020 Human Development Index, 160 out of 180 countries on Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perception Index and last in the World Bank's 2020 Human Capital Index. This speaks volumes.

Hard on the heels of Déby's death, the Chadian military dissolved the National Assembly and elected government and established a Transitional Military Council (CMT) headed by his 37-year-old son Mahamat Déby, with a spine of 14 generals close to Déby. The CMT's suspension of the 2018 Constitution of Chad paved the way for Mahamat to become president pro tempore and army chief.

Chad shares boundaries with conflict hotspots, such as Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Libya, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan. Understandably, Déby's death generated questions about repercussions for regional security and stability. Under his reign, Chad played a central role in the war on terror in Africa. With his death, some observers fear that growing domestic rebellions and suspected fractures in the Chadian military may not only spill over but could weaken Chad's role

in countering violent extremism in Central and West Africa, Sudan and the Maghreb. Others fear that the CMT may prioritize internal security over regional stability. But the CMT has already moved to allay these fears by pledging its continued support for the G-5 and Operation Barkhaine, which leads counterterrorism operations across the Sahel.

Chad's prominent role in fighting jihadist terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin region through, for instance, Operation Barkhaine and the MNJTF, has invited reprisal attacks from Boko Haram. Since 2015, the country has been the target of Boko Haram's jihadist attacks through suicide bombings in the capital N'Djamena and on the islands and shore of Lake Chad. These terrorist attacks have killed hundreds and displaced thousands—an estimated 363,807 persons are currently displaced in Chad's Lac Province, bordering Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria.⁹⁹

Once one of the world's largest lakes, Lake Chad has shrunk about 90 percent from its size in the 1960s. The shrinking lake has dealt a major blow to local economies which are mainly built on fishing and livestock. Meanwhile, Boko Haram attacks have disrupted the trade routes between Chad and Nigeria, resulting in reduced supplies of basic goods and price hikes. The resultant poverty and immiserating conditions have created a fertile recruitment ground for Boko Haram, which is looking to replenish its military ranks and expand its jihadist campaign.

In March 2020, Chad lost 100 (some sources say 92) soldiers to a Boko Haram ambush in Boma in Lac Province, the largest military fatality since the Boko Haram incursion in 2015. The seven-hour attack prompted the Chadian government to declare the Lake Chad borderlands a war zone,¹⁰⁰ thus giving the military additional powers of arrest and surveillance. Among Chad's military operations was the launching of Operation Wrath of Boma on 31 March 2020, spearheaded by President Déby himself. On 9 April 2020, Chadian forces announced the killing of over 1,000 Boko Haram fighters.¹⁰¹ Chad's military approach has often come at the expense of critical development interventions, such as addressing the real effects of climate change on local livelihoods. The threat of Boko Haram and other insurgent groups (e.g., *Front pour l'alternance et la concorde au Tchad*) has forced the government to divert national spending away from basic services to security operations.

7.2 A community-led security strategy

In February 2015, Boko Haram violently attacked and killed 24 people on the islands of Lake Chad, including in the lo-

calities of Kaiga-Kingiria, Kangelom and Ngouboua. Following these acts of terror, the Chadian government called on traditional chiefs to increase their vigilance and to mobilize civilian vigilante committees to neutralize Boko Haram's expansion into Chad. Thus, the government relied on chiefs to oversee the selection and control of vigilantes, perhaps due to its weak bureaucratic situation. As part of its community approach, authorities in Chad tend to use a blend of pressure and incentives to mobilize and inspire youth to join vigilance committees and protect their communities alongside the regular army.

During President Deby's visit to Baga Sola in October 2016, he reiterated the call for traditional authorities to establish their own vigilance committees as a first line of defence against the very real threat of Boko Haram. While Chad's community-led security strategy, fronted by lake area chiefs and religious leaders, has bolstered local intelligence gathering and sharing and helped to thwart several Boko Haram plans—including in Koukilme and Kaiga Kindjiria in early and late 2016—it also has resulted in reprisal attacks from increasingly vengeful extremists who seek to punish communities, and especially traditional authorities, for acting as de facto state informers. In February 2015, for instance, Boko Haram targeted and killed the Ngouboua District chief for working as a state informant. Other local chiefs, such as the chief of Bol District, have received multiple death threats warning them against cooperating with state authorities.¹⁰²

Vigilance committees in Chad generally operate with the tacit approval of the state. These local security providers carry out a variety of quotidian security functions, including enforcing curfews and frisking people entering and exiting the markets, mosques and points of aid distribution. Vigilance committees serve as “eyes and ears” of the Chadian military, alerting them to any strange or suspicious behaviour in their neighbourhoods. In this way, vigilantes provide timely and actionable intelligence about Boko Haram activities. Vigilance committee members are armed with whips, machetes and cell phones. Given its violent cycle of rebellion, the Chadian government is reluctant to arm vigilantes, the fear being that they could transform into tribal militias and fuel communal wars, thereby undermining state authority and power. In contrast to their counterparts in Cameroon and Nigeria, vigilante groups in Chad rarely conduct joint patrols with the Chadian security forces nor do they receive vehicles. In Lac Province, the governor restricted the powers of vigilante groups to intelligence, frisking and surveillance.

While Chadian vigilante policing work is essentially volunteer based. The lack of (adequate) vigilante remuneration

has been a source of grievance among members. In 2016, vigilance committee members in Bol went on strike in protest, demanding (greater) compensation. Some members of vigilance committees have been accused of smearing residents with the Boko Haram label for the purpose of settling personal scores. Others have been complicit in the military's human rights violation, including the rapid trial and killings of suspects.

7.3 The case of south-eastern Niger

Of the four Lake Chad Basin region states discussed in this report, Niger is probably the least affected by Boko Haram. Niger is, therefore, more similar to the Chadian case, in the same way that Cameroon is closer to the Nigerian case by virtue of the intensity of attacks. Home to a total population of about 17 million, of which more than half (63 percent) live below the poverty line, Niger qualifies as a low-income country. Roughly 94 percent of Nigeriens are Muslim and 70 percent are under 25 years of age, making Niger one of the youngest countries in the world. Niger has been described as a weak link in the Sahelian region not only because of its reputation as a major transit route for migrants heading to Europe but also because of its location at the heart of an unstable region. Bordering northern Mali, southern Libya and northern Nigeria, violent extremists come into Niger in the West from Mali and Burkina Faso and in the southeast from northern Nigeria. Outside of Niamey, the capital city, the Nigerien state is largely absent from people's daily lives. Widely suspected as a fertile recruiting ground for extremist groups such as Ansaru, Boko Haram and ISWAP, Niger is replete with unemployed and idle youth who “ironically, often describe themselves as a ticking time bomb to underscore the urgency of addressing unemployment among the young. The state, their choice of language implies, ignores them at its own peril.”¹⁰³

Boko Haram's presence in Niger is especially felt in the Diffa Region, near Lake Chad in southeast Niger, which shares close historical, religious, linguistic, social and economic ties with northeast Nigeria's Borno State. the region's capital, also called Diffa, is only 125 kilometres from Borno State's capital city Maiduguri, and, therefore, is more accessible to residents than the Nigerien capital, Niamey. Most cars in Diffa with Nigerian plates bear the official Borno State slogan: “Home of Peace.” Both the Maiduguri and Diffa Regions belong to the Sahelian cultural belt, where Islam has exercised major influence for more than a thousand years. Both regions are united by the prevalence of the Hausa language and the use of the Nigerian currency, the naira. Niger and Nigeria are plagued by severe poverty and share a potent mixture of sectarian communities of Sufi Brotherhoods and Islamic



reformist strands, such as the Izala Society (a Nigerian Salafī movement whose influence in Niger in the mid-1980s inspired the birth of the Association for the Diffusion of Islam in Niger (Adini-Islam) in Niamey in 1993. Notably, all the leaders of Adini-Islam were taught by Nigerian Salafists.¹⁰⁴ The Qadiriyya-Tijaniyya conflicts that plagued Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s also took place in Niger. The Yan Banga vigilante groups (discussed below) that appeared in Niger in the 1990s first arose in northern Nigeria in the 1950s. The flow and ebb of ideas and people between Niger and Nigeria is reflected in the popular Nigerien saying: “When Nigeria coughs, Niger catches cold.”

Not surprisingly, then, Boko Haram’s anti-Western education and anti-secular state ideology found fertile ground in Niger, especially among marginalized youth who blame their lack of

upward mobility on “the West” and its tendency to prop up corrupt post-colonial governments. Both Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau preached in the Diffa Region. To be clear, most Nigeriens strongly denounce Boko Haram’s anti-state and rejectionist ideology. On 17 February 2015, for example, Nigeriens took to the streets of several cities en masse in protest against Boko Haram and in support of their soldiers.¹⁰⁵ That notwithstanding, Boko Haram has exploited the shared history, language and culture of Niger and Nigeria by establishing a base in the Diffa Region, which it uses to recruit young Nigeriens (especially members of youth gangs, petty criminals and thugs), escape from Nigerian soldiers and build coalitions with other transnational extremist movements. The group has established other rear bases in Niger, such as in Maradi and Zinder Regions.

An upsurge of Boko Haram attacks¹ in 2015 was likely connected to Niger's decision to participate in a cross-border counter-terrorism operation—alongside Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria—aimed at nullifying the threat of Boko Haram throughout the Lake Chad Basin region. In early 2015, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau had warned leaders from Cameroon, Chad and Niger to refrain from providing military aid to Nigeria or face terrorist violence on their own soil.

Niger had declared a state of emergency in February 2015, granting sweeping powers to the army, allowing them to search homes and outlaw subversive forms of mobility, such as commercial motorbike-taxis, which Boko Haram typically uses to launch drive-by shootings.¹⁰⁶ Authorities also banned the sale of peppers and fishing on Lake Chad to neutralize Boko Haram's financing. The economic fallout from the state of emergency was severe, dealing a key blow to a Nigerien economy already reeling from severe food shortages caused by drought and locust infestation, and amid a refugee crisis.

The Diffa Region hosts roughly 250,000 refugees, including IDPs who have crossed into the country from northern Nigeria fleeing Boko Haram. As of 2014, the United Nations estimated that no less than 500 Nigerians crossed into Niger every week, most of them through the Komadugu Yobe River that forms the natural border between the two nations.¹⁰⁷ Expanding refugee camps risk becoming recruitment centres for Boko Haram, which combines the call to jihad with practical material incentives (e.g., promises of living wages and cheap marriages). Many Diffa residents today face a difficult choice between relying on humanitarian aid or joining Boko Haram. The prospect of making easy money draws many young persons to Boko Haram. As one expert notes: "When they realize the state has given them nothing and Boko Haram is promising everything, it is very easy to see why so many [people in Diffa] made that choice."¹⁰⁸

Since May 2016, Boko Haram's operations in Diffa has intensified intercommunal tensions and violent struggles for access to local resources between the Buduma and Fulani communities. On the one hand, "Fulani and Mohammedan Arab herdsmen accuse the population groups living along the lakeshore, in particular the Buduma [and the Kanuri], of being allies of Boko Haram and stealing cattle and abducting women." On the other hand, "Buduma and Kanuri communities accuse Fulani chiefs of manipulating the situation to create private militias and, on

the pretext of supporting the security forces against Boko Haram, oust rival communities and seize the lake's resources, notably by organizing a profitable cattle trade."¹⁰⁹ In a September 2016 memorandum to the interior minister, Buduma and Kanuri representatives held Fulani and Mohammedan herders accountable for the death of 39 members of their communities and the theft of 3,000 head of cattle. Following violent clashes in May and June 2016, authorities in Niger sought to mediate intercommunal tensions and prohibit the creation of vigilantes, in the hope of a rapprochement between the various communities that were at loggerheads. Finally, a major source of tension in southeast Niger today is that many residents do not want former Boko Haram members and defectors reintegrated back into their towns.

7.4 The Yan Banga vigilante groups

Niger is no stranger to the use of vigilante groups to fight crime and instil public order, nor to the tendency for vigilante groups to turn bad and threaten their communities. In the 1990s, the country saw the rise of the Yan Banga vigilante groups (Hausa for "vanguards"). The Yan Banga originally appeared in northern Nigeria in the 1950s as thugs for an organized political party that were paid to terrorize rival political opponents and supporters. In Niger, especially in neighbourhoods such as Maradi and Zinder, Yan Banga were composed of youth from the neighbourhoods (*les enfants du quart*), especially unemployed youth. They were typically equipped with torch lights and handcuffs.

In Niamey, the country's capital, Yan Banga vigilante groups were created by neighbourhood chiefs (*chef de quartier*) and financially supported by community members and wealthy merchants, who furnished them with basic items such as money, tea, sugar, rice, beans and Kola nuts. The primary goal of the Yan Banga groups was to restore local order amid rising criminality and ineffective formal policing. During their nightly patrols, members often took the law into their own hands by beating up, humiliating and sometimes killing suspected thieves, with impunity. These excesses were initially overlooked by locals and the gendarmes because the Yan Banga succeeded in controlling crime and imposing a sense of order. Over time, however, the threat posed by the vigilante groups outstripped their perceived benefits. "Residents realized that the Yan Banga did not effectively prevent thieves from entering the neighbourhood; quite the

1 In February 2014, Nigerien soldiers captured 20 Boko Haram members from Nigeria who were reportedly preparing to attack markets in Diffa. On 10 February 2015, Niger declared, and later extended, a state of emergency in response to Boko Haram's armed incursions on the shores of Lake Chad, including the twin suicide bombings against the towns of Bosso and Diffa that left scores of people dead. On 3 June 2015, hundreds of Boko Haram extremists laid siege on a military outpost in Bosso, killing 26 soldiers. Three days later, the extremists returned for more, forcing many residents to flee to the western part of Diffa. On 16 June 2015, Boko Haram launched an attack on the IDP site of Gagam.

contrary, they were seen as cooperating with thieves (e.g., taking money from them for not arresting them) or turning into thieves themselves.¹¹⁰ Consequently, the Yan Banga groups lost their local support, popularity and legitimacy; local residents, neighbourhood chiefs, even the police, increasingly withdrew their endorsement. This culminated in their eventual decline.

7.5 Local informant network in the Diffa Region

Niger's approach to the threat of Boko Haram combines relative tolerance with surveillance of preachers and targeted actions.¹¹¹ The country's counterterrorism approach gives precedent to gathering intelligence and maintaining public order over a militarized response, based on a guiding philosophy that a legitimate monopoly of countering violence should be in the hands of the state, not citizens.

Given Boko Haram's relatively limited presence in southern Niger, especially the southeast, authorities have made the most cautious and conservative use of vigilante groups, preferring to deploy civilians as local knowledge brokers or intelligence gatherers who cooperate with the army and gendarmes to overcome the problem of knowledge. In other words, vigilance committees were used not so much to engage violent extremists in direct combat as to keep a watchful eye on their movements and activities and to reduce the chances of surprise attacks. Thus, the burden of identifying suspects typically fell on local public figures and village chiefs. In this way, the Nigerien government hopes to avoid the re-formation of the pro-government ethnic (Arab and Fulani) militias that helped fight against two large-scale Tuareg rebellions (in 1990-1995 and 2007-2009) in its northern territory, as well as the Yan Banga groups that initially emerged to instil security and order but ended up causing more harm than good. From 2017, the Nigerien government prevented the Fulani and Tubu from forming vigilante militias to chase Buduma and Kanuri Boko Haram fighters out of the Lake Chad Basin region.¹¹²

Niger is confident that its armed forces, who receive training, logistics and intelligence support from foreign allies, mostly the United States and France (who both have military bases in Niger), have the capacity to keep the threat of Boko Haram at arm's length. For this reason, as noted above, Niger favours the restriction of anti-Boko Haram vigilance committees to useful auxiliaries in security surveillance according to a system of "see something, say something." Instead of outsourcing security to vigilantes and making them play an

active role in counterinsurgency operations, as we saw in the case of northeast Nigeria and the Far North Region of Cameroon, authorities in Niger, especially in the Diffa Region, have relied almost exclusively on local informant networks, with only a modicum of vigilante groups operating in front-line communities, such as Bagara and Toumour. Populated mainly by local youth and IDPs, these vigilante groups help with manning security checkpoints and sometimes engage in nightly patrols and suspect interrogation. The common practice in Niger is for existing vigilante groups to register their own members and pass on their names and vital information to formal security and law enforcement agencies.

As it has done in the three other countries bordering Lake Chad (Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria), Boko Haram has violently targeted villages close to the Komadougou River that had established vigilance committees. Between late 2019 and early 2020, three Boko Haram attacks killed up to 174 people. Considering these attacks, the Nigerien government announced that it would double the size of its army to 50,000 in five years, resisting the temptation to mobilize youth as cheap and ready force multipliers.¹¹³ Niger already spends more than 10 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on defence and security.

Niger's intentionally cautious approach towards vigilantes is reinforced by the early problems connected to Nigerian vigilantes who sought refuge from Boko Haram in Bosso and Yebi localities. Locals accused these vigilante refugees of abusing their power and disrupting profitable cross-border trade. The situation was so bad that some vigilante refugees were detained in Niger before being expelled to Nigeria. Following this episode, Nigerien authorities banned residents from manning security checkpoints and bearing small arms and light weapons. Instead, residents who wanted to contribute to community protection were asked to serve as state informants and work with the army's civil-military cooperation teams.

The decision by local authorities in Niger to use vigilante groups sparingly may also be connected to the fact that Boko Haram has a habit of punishing communities that form vigilance committees, as we have seen in northeast Nigeria, Far Northern Cameroon and Chad. In June 2015, for instance, Boko Haram brutally attacked the communities of Lamana and Ngoumao that had formed neighbourhood watch committees, killing 38 villagers. In December 2020, about 70 Boko Haram jihadists attacked Toumour village in the Diffa Region, killing at least 27 people, before attacking the residence of the traditional chief.¹¹⁴

8. Conclusion

The Boko Haram insurgency constitutes one of the greatest security challenges facing countries in the Lake Chad Basin region today. This study has explored the emergence and contributions of vigilante groups in the riparian region, demonstrating how civilians in difficult situations protect themselves—in the absence of, or alongside, national security forces—through daily patrols, checkpoints, passing on actionable intelligence to local authorities, helping to improve the strained relations between security forces and civilian communities and in some cases direct clashes with extremists.

Vigilante groups are the by-products of multiple security gaps and governance deficits in the Lake Chad Basin region and they form a vital part of the evolving security landscape in the region. Today, many of these non-state armed groups constitute the spine of the war against Boko Haram. Their existence underlines the fact that security in Central and West Africa is a pluralized field of delivery rather than a state monopoly or simply a question of state weakness or government fragility. Weak and fragile states are ordinarily not able to provide security and other political goods on their own. Given their degree of embeddedness within their local communities and the popular legitimacy that they seem to enjoy, at least in the early phases, vigilante groups may be well placed to carry out everyday security functions, establish public norms of compliance and cooperation with local populations and provide order and dispute resolution services.

The fact that anti-Boko Haram vigilantes tend to originate from the communities affected by violent extremism furnishes these actors with a significant actionable and prosecutable intelligence advantage over state security forces (such as the police and army), the latter of which are frequently locally alienated. At the same time, vigilantes may exacerbate crisis situations as polarizers of communities and instigators of intercommunal violence, themselves sometimes resulting in violence against and even deaths of civilians. Moreover, conflicts involving vigilantes have been found to have a higher prevalence of human rights violations and civilian casualties. In the Lake Chad Basin region, vigilantes have been credibly implicated in political reprisals, communal violence, extortion and unlawful killings. This is partly because politicians often

create, align with and/or hijack these men and women to deal with various security concerns, personal disputes and to achieve their own political and economic ambitions.

Given their complexity as simultaneously forces of hope and fear, as borne out by the existent literature on vigilantism, understanding and managing vigilante groups require nuance and, especially, recognition of their heterogeneity. Examples abound of vigilante self-defence groups providing security without transforming into sources of insecurity. A case in point is north-western Côte d'Ivoire, where the community based Benkadi movement, raised by the Dozos vigilante group in Mali, appear to have successfully combined tradition with bureaucratic measures to fight crime and re-establish order. This movement seems to have avoided the path of pragmatic opportunism associated with other vigilante groups in the region, largely due to their uncompromised commitment to shared ethical and moral values guiding hunters' actions. In short, they have managed to effectively combine tradition with bureaucratic measures.¹¹⁵ Another case is that of the Arrow Boys of Teso in eastern Uganda, where early oversight by the national army appears to have limited the group's human rights abuses. On the other hand, in places like Burkina Faso, the Koglwéogo self-defence groups (also known as "bush guardians") are simultaneously perceived as a source of community protection and of violent punishments inflicted on suspects.¹¹⁶ What is clear is that "internal functions, such as enforceable rules and external factors, such as strong state oversight or a conducive legal framework can prevent [vigilante groups] from turning into predatory sources of insecurity."¹¹⁷

Anti-Boko Haram vigilantes in the Lake Chad Basin region offer a hybrid form of security that fits awkwardly within a Western framework that revolves mainly around the state's legitimate monopoly over the use of force to prevent violence within a given territory. In the Lake Chad Basin region, the long durée of security has been more pluralistic than monopolistic. From a historical standpoint, local security initiatives have always constituted part of the region's security landscape. Protection has come in various forms: hunters' associations, village structures and political groups. The rise of anti-Boko Haram vigilantes is therefore part of a long tradition

of hybrid governance and the co-production of security in the region.

Vigilante groups have built considerable political capital with local communities that makes it difficult to do away with them, especially in the absence of deep police reform. As a result, rather than work against them, governments of the Lake Chad Basin region must learn to manage vigilante activities by harnessing their positive potential and mitigating their negative effects.

To address the challenges posed by vigilante groups, Lake Chad Basin Commission member states should facilitate the provision of human rights training to vigilantes. Training should be conducted by human rights groups and governments should fund such training (in partnership with international donors). In addition, adequate compensation, such as a living wage and education and health care provision, should be provided not just to vigilantes but also victims of vigilante and extremist violence, as well as for the families of deceased and disabled vigilantes and victims of extremist violence.

As noted above, based on history, vigilantes in the Lake Chad Basin region tend to be hijacked by opportunistic political officials engaged in power struggles, who seek to ride the coattails of the vigilantes' popularity by deploying them for electoral intimidation, rigging and as a repressive tool against rival politicians. Considering this, governments in the Lake Chad Basin region should support efforts to expose and limit political appropriation and extra-legal use of vigilante groups by political officials.

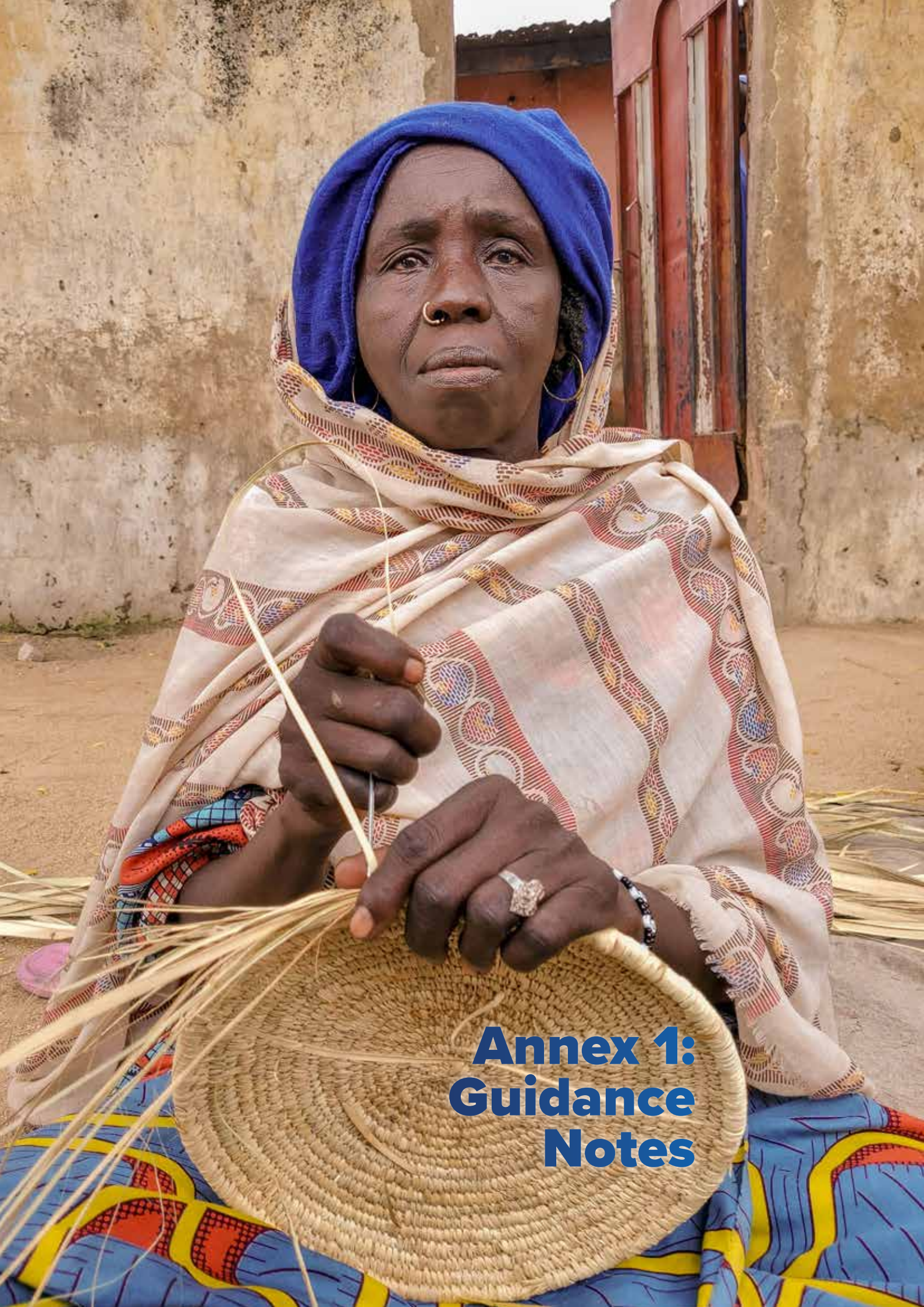
Governments in the Lake Chad Basin region must eschew a culture that praises the gallant efforts of vigilante groups while allowing a cloud of human rights abuses to hang over them, or that explains vigilante violations away as a case of the lesser evil compared to Boko Haram. Efforts should be made to investigate and prosecute crimes by these groups, including torture and execution of Boko Haram suspects, violent extortion of motorists and harassment of the public. Governments must show a determined willingness to hold each member of anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups accountable for their actions and inactions. This should involve establishing proper vetting mechanisms and weeding out of vigilante members that commit serious crimes.

It is not enough to simply integrate vigilante groups into state positions and payroll; accountability must be explicitly demanded, especially for state-permitted and state-backed vigilante groups. As a matter of urgency, the oversight and accountability mechanisms for vigilantes in the Lake Chad Basin region needs to be strengthened by creating credible, regularly updated and independently verifiable registries of vigilante membership, establishing enforced rules of conduct and providing adequate training in human rights and civil liberty protections, which most vigilante groups in the region lack. A reliable mechanism for registering complaints against vigilantes should be established, alongside a robust national and regional legal framework to regulate the formation, recruitment, training and operations of anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups (see Guidance Note: Annex 1).

It is hoped that this study on anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups in the Lake Chad Basin region—their origins, dynamics and drivers—clarifies for researchers and policymakers the multiplicity and overlapping relationships between these community-based security providers and the state, as well as their prominent and valuable roles and responsibilities in security provision and service delivery. Such clarification compels governments in the region to take immediate and affirmative steps to supervise and regulate the activities of these actors, uphold the rule of law and, more immediately, respond to the major material challenges that they face during their counterinsurgent vigilante work, especially non-lethal assistance, such as metal detectors, mobile phones, bicycles, flashlights, boots and means of transportation.

The study calls for the creation of a legal framework among Lake Chad Basin region states that clearly articulates rules of engagement for vigilante groups, establishes mechanisms for accountability and trains vigilantes on applicable standards of behaviour.

It is further hoped that the results of this study support ongoing efforts to improve civil-military relations and to foster a more stable and productive relationship between vigilantes and public officials. Insights from this study aim to enhance peacebuilding and state building in Boko Haram-affected parts of the Lake Chad Basin region, where the need is great.



**Annex 1:
Guidance
Notes**

Towards the Effective Management of Anti-Boko Haram Vigilante Groups in the Lake Chad Basin Region

The activities of jihadist organized armed groups, collectively termed Boko Haram/ISWAP, pose a major security threat to countries in the Lake Chad Basin region, and for the purposes of this Guidance Note, these include Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

Of the four countries, Niger is the least affected by Boko Haram/ISWAP attacks while Nigeria is the worst affected. In terms of intensity of attacks, Chad and Niger are lesser affected, while Cameroon is strongly affected, like Nigeria. Violent attacks by Boko Haram/ISWAP have targeted northeast Nigeria (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States), Cameroon's Far North Region, the southeast of Niger (especially Diffa Region) and southwest Chad (particularly Hadjer-Lamis and Lac Provinces), among other locations in the region.

In response to growing insecurities, anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups first emerged in 2013 in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, Nigeria, with the objective of protecting conflict-affected communities and working with national and multinational joint task forces to restore order and keep the peace. In 2014, these self-help groups spread to Cameroon, where they are known as village vigilance committees, with the goal of alerting security forces to the presence of suspicious individuals. In 2015, Chad and Niger also saw the rise of neighbourhood watch committees.

Vigilante groups in Cameroon and Nigeria have gained deep roots and nation-wide recognition (e.g., as "national heroes"), while Chad and Niger have been more cautious about outsourcing local security and protection to vigilante groups. Neighbourhood watch committees in Chad and Niger are not as widespread or central and politically involved as in Cameroon and Nigeria. This is in part because, as noted above, the threat of Boko Haram is considerably less in Chad and Niger vis-à-vis Nigeria and Cameroon.

Armies in Chad and Niger see the use of vigilante groups to fight jihadist groups as both a sign of weakness and a threat to the state's monopoly over legitimate power and authority. Niger, in fact, has banned civilian populations from manning checkpoints and carrying arms. Authorities there demand that vigilantes join forces with the army's civil-military cooperation teams as informant networks helping to flush out insurgents hidden among the population. In Chad, the powers of neighbourhood watch committees comprised of volunteers sometimes paid by mayors or traders to secure markets, are limited to intelligence, stop-and-frisk and surveillance of newcomers.

In contrast to Chad and Niger, Cameroon and Nigeria see vigilante groups as fundamental to extending the state's limited reach, especially in regard to stopping Boko Haram incursions and safeguarding communities. All four countries have been relatively wary of arming vigilantes for fear of creating another crisis.

As detailed in the Background Study, across the Lake Chad Basin region, vigilante groups are composed mainly of concerned local youth (predominantly young men and a handful of women) who are typically unemployed or volunteering part-time. Some vigilantes even quit their primary occupation to help fight terror and keep the peace in their communities. These self-described "patriots" have been crucial to identifying and arresting insurgents, especially at roadblocks and during house-to-house searches in their neighbourhoods. At the same time, in the name of protection or community policing, some vigilantes have been implicated in human rights violations, theft, poaching, racketeering and using their power to settle personal scores.

For their part, vigilantes often express frustrations over the absence of or minimal support from state and local authorities for their counterinsurgency work. Many vigilantes expect rewards for their service and compensation for their sacrifices and losses, in the shape of post-insurgency jobs, overseas scholarships or demobilization money. These growing frustrations and expectations will need to be seriously addressed if Lake Chad Basin countries are to avoid the likely scenario of winning the fight against Boko Haram/ISWAP and then losing the peace in the region.

Available evidence tells us that government neglect of vigilante frustrations and expectations can be a recipe for trouble (as noted in the Background Study). For better or worse, vigilantes are here to stay. For this reason, it is more useful to learn to work with them rather than against them. In Cameroon and Nigeria, neither neglect, suppression nor disbanding of vigilantes is a feasible option when state armies are already overstretched by Boko Haram/ISWAP's continued terrorist attacks and ambushes on local communities. In the case of Nigeria, these attacks have forced soldiers to prioritize the protection of vast urban areas, leaving rural areas and smaller towns to their own devices, thus in the hands of vigilante groups.

Against this backdrop, the following guidance notes are offered to Lake Chad Basin Committee (LCBC) member states and their international partners to help effectively manage and oversee the activities of vigilante groups—understood here as 'non-United Nations and non-government security

forces² — as well as to mitigate their adverse effects on civilians in conflict. Crucially, these guidance notes should be applied with care to the nuanced context.

1. ESTABLISH REGULATION AND OVERSIGHT MECHANISMS

Establish a robust legal framework and standard operation procedures (e.g., codes of conduct and rules of engagement) to regulate the routine operations of vigilante groups, with the overriding objective of enhancing their operational capabilities. Furthermore, make implementation of the standard operating procedures an indispensable condition for partnering with the state and its agencies.

2. OFFER NON-LETHAL ASSISTANCE

Support and finance the daily work of vigilantes through provision of non-lethal assistance that is often lacking, such as metal detectors, safety boots, mobile phones, torch-lights and transport.

3. BOOST ACCOUNTABILITY

Investigate all credible allegations of grave violations of human rights leveled against vigilantes by members of the local community, including abuses undertaken in conjunction with state security forces, and bring those responsible to justice in a swift and transparent manner. Member states should set up clear procedures for monitoring the compliance of vigilante groups with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

4. PREPARE AN ACTION PLAN TO END THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

Mandate vigilante groups to work with the United Nations to develop an Action Plan to prevent and end the recruitment and use of children in counterinsurgency operations. A useful example in this regard is offered by Borno State, Nigeria, where a 2017 Action Plan between the Civilian Joint Task Forces (CJTF) and the United Nations effectively ended the use of child soldiers.

5. MAINSTREAM GENDER CONCERNS

Encourage gender mainstreaming across all vigilante activities, in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, as related to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This would go a long way in ensuring that women are not only recognized as victims of terrorist violence but also are agents of counterinsurgency and peace.

6. ESTABLISH CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMMES

Make available to vigilantes, and mandate their attendance at, periodic training and sensitization regarding international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. This is consistent with the state's responsibility to promote and protect human rights, as established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

7. RESTRICT VIGILANTES TO INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

It should be understood that vigilante groups are used mainly for intelligence gathering rather than combat purposes. Thus, the role of vigilantes should be limited to defensive (e.g., screening of people and goods) rather than offensive operations. Perhaps, in this regard, Chad and Niger offer better practices for Cameroon and Nigeria.

8. ESTABLISH RIGOROUS VETTING SYSTEM

Establish systems to vet new vigilante recruits and weed out existing members that have committed serious crimes or questionable conduct. All vigilantes should undergo a rigorous vetting system that captures their biographical information and that reflects and scrutinizes any criminal record and complaints made against them by members of the community.

9. OFFER TREATMENT FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Recognize that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a likely result of engaging in vigilante work and provide treatment. All members of vigilante groups should be examined

2 Defined as: (a) national military, paramilitary, police, intelligence services, border-control and similar security forces; (b) national civilian, paramilitary or military authorities directly responsible for the management, administration or command or control of such forces; (c) peace-keeping forces of regional international organizations. See United Nations, General Assembly Security Council, "Identical letters dated 25 February 2013 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and to the President of the Security Council." A/67/775-S/2013/110.



for symptoms of PTSD and, if present, promptly placed on a treatment plan fully sponsored by the state.

10. PROVIDE ADEQUATE COMPENSATION

Invest in creating viable alternative livelihoods for vigilantes in recognition of their service and sacrifices. This could include, for instance, providing adequate healthcare, education, sustainable livelihood assistance and transitioning vigilantes of exceptional conduct to formal policing units. Families of deceased and disabled vigilantes should be included in this safety net. At the onset, states should be clear with vigilante groups about what is available and what they should expect as reward, actual payment and compensation.

11. MAKE AND BEGIN FUNDING CLEAR PLANS FOR DEMOBILIZATION OF VIGILANTES

Put in place clear plans of action to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate (DDR) vigilantes once the threat of violent extremist groups and violent insurgency has subsided. Efforts and resources should be directed towards helping vigilantes find gainful jobs in locally relevant sectors. Involve vigilante

groups, and not just leaders but also the rank and file, in the creation of DDR programmes and policies for their benefit.

12. INTEGRATE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE INTO DEMOBILIZATION PLANS

Transitional justice initiatives that prioritize victims of human rights abuses and years of violence should be integrated into demobilization processes.

13. UNDERTAKE SIGNIFICANT POLICE REFORM

Vigilante groups are often a product of gaps in formal policing and criminal justice systems. Governments in the Lake Chad Basin region should therefore undertake an in-depth police reform, as part of broader criminal justice reform. Not only should reform address issues of corruption and abuse of power but they must also improve the working conditions of police officers and security officials through, for instance, better salaries, integration of more women and other marginalized groups, education and training and improved retirement, injury and other benefits.



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