MILITARISED PEACE: CIVILIAN COSTS AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF NIGERIA'S NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY IN BORNO STATE

Oluwatosin Ruth Ifaloye
Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria
oluwatosin.ifaloye@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Ruth Modupeoluwa Joseph
Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria
ruth.josephpgs@stu.cu.edu.ng

DOI: https://doi.org/10.64633/wissj.v10i8.05

Keywords

Biopolitics, Civilian Joint Task Force, Human Security, Militarised Peace, NACTEST

Abstract

Research Problem: *This article examines the disconnect between what works in counterterrorism and its implications for civilians' security in Borno State. Although Boko Haram's territorial control and large-scale attacks have declined, prolonged displacement, restricted mobility, disrupted livelihoods, and psychological distress continue to affect civilians. This raises questions about whether reduced violence can be regarded as peace when civilians remain insecure.*
Methods/theory: *The study uses a qualitative research design based on coding secondary sources, such as human rights reports, policy documents, and peer-reviewed literature. It adapts and extends the concept of Militarised Peace, guided by Human Security theory and Biopolitics, to examine how checkpoints, curfews, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) affect civilian mobility, livelihoods, education, health, and psychological well-being.*
Results: The results reveal that security practices under NACTEST may reduce violence without creating conditions associated with positive peace. Restrictions on civilian life continue to affect mobility, livelihoods, education, health, and psychological well-being, which conventional security indicators may overlook.
Conclusion: *Reduced violence does not necessarily amount to peace for civilians in Borno State. The effectiveness of counterterrorism should also be assessed by whether civilians can resume normal economic, social, and psychological activities without fear of attack or excessive security restrictions.*
Key Contribution to Knowledge: *The article extends the concept of Militarised Peace by showing how reduced violence can coexist with restrictions on civilian well-being. It proposes a multidimensional approach to counterterrorism assessment that places civilian recovery alongside conventional operational measures.*
Recommendation: Nigeria's National Counter Terrorism Centre

Strategic Plan for 2025-2030 provides an opportunity to incorporate human security indicators and independent civilian monitoring into NACTEST assessment. These measures can provide a fuller account of civilian recovery outcomes under NACTEST.

Introduction

The dividing line between security and civilian life in the face of, or in the presence of, terrorism is often poorly defined. The Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State has resulted in high mortality rates, displacement, destruction of livelihoods and disruptions of local governance. Boko Haram began as a religious study group in the early 2000s in Maiduguri and has, since the 2009 uprising, become a significant insurgent group (Thurston, 2018; Bukarti, 2021). Its operations in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa drove millions of people from their homes across the Lake Chad Basin (Comolli, 2017). Nigeria, in turn, has depended on military force, civilian auxiliaries, and stabilisation efforts. These responses have mitigated some of the insurgents' violence but have not fully addressed the conditions that continue to affect civilian lives in the region (Omenma, 2018; Bamidele, 2020; De Simone & Iocchi, 2022; Egbuta, 2024).

Nigeria's early counterterrorism response was largely military. The National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), formulated under President Goodluck Jonathan in 2014, aimed to integrate military and non-military measures, such as prevention, deradicalisation, community engagement, and peacebuilding. Under the Buhari administration, the strategy was revised in 2016 (NCTC, 2025). Its implementation has produced operational improvements. The territorial control of Boko Haram has weakened, and conventional attacks are below their previous peak. NACTEST often relies on these indicators, such as reductions in insurgent capacity and recovered territory (Ugwueze & Onuoha, 2020; Basheer & Tunde, 2024). However, displacement, limited mobility, livelihood disruption and humanitarian needs remain. That poses a bigger question of what success actually is. Reduced violence does not always mean that civilians can safely return to their farms, rebuild their livelihoods, or live in safety.

Existing studies explain this tension. Eji (2016) identifies weaknesses in NACTEST, such as unclear institutional roles and its narrow focus on armed groups other than Boko Haram. Human security studies, however, link vulnerability to violent extremism with poverty, unemployment and inadequate public services (Ike, Antonopoulos & Singh, 2025; Nwadike & Ani, 2026; Ogbozor, 2026). Human rights studies also document arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings and the detention of children suspected of insurgent links (Amnesty International, 2020; United Nations Security Council, 2024). Human Rights Watch (2022a) reported that more than 140,000 people were forcibly displaced from eight Maiduguri camps between May 2021 and August 2022, despite the lack of shelter, food, livelihoods or protection.

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is another example of the tension. Its members provide local intelligence and support community protection; however, reports also link some members to coercion and abuse (Omenma & Hendricks, 2018; Bamidele, 2020). Agbiboa (2021) offers a more conservative understanding of the concept, noting that local actors can be better at collecting intelligence, due to their knowledge of the community, but they can also be targets of retribution and generate new forms of insecurity. Community participation alone

should not be considered a measure of better human security.

The central gap addressed in this article lies in how these outcomes are connected. Existing studies have examined the operational performance of NACTEST, human security conditions and rights violations; however, there has been less focus on whether measures that reduce insurgent violence also limit civilian life. Checkpoints, curfews, movement restrictions, and community-based security practices can help deter insurgent activity and also restrict access to farmland, markets, education, and livelihoods. This perceived decrease in violence could therefore coexist with conditions that still constrain civilian security and welfare. Building on this, the article seeks to answer two questions: How has NACTEST impacted civilian experiences in Borno State? What are the hidden costs of peace in terms of military methods?

The study therefore has two objectives: to examine how NACTEST's implementation has shaped civilian lives in Borno State, and to assess the potential costs that may arise in the pursuit of peace, particularly through militarised security mechanisms. It adapts the concept of Militarised Peace, as introduced by Meger and Sachseder (2020) in their study of post-accord Colombia, and applies it to Borno's ongoing counterinsurgency. The concept does not rule out military action or a decrease in violence. Instead, it questions whether a reduction in violence is matched by increased civilian safety, freedom of movement and access to social and economic opportunities.

The analysis is based on the concepts of Human Security and Biopolitics to analyse the impact of security practices on civilian life. It then applies the Militarised Peace framework to link counterterrorism measures to cycles of violence, population control, limited mobility, displacement, and humanitarian pressure. Borno State is used as an empirical case study to illustrate these relationships. The article then reflects on the implications of the findings for the evaluation of NACTEST and for the NCTC Strategic Plan 2025-2030.

The article is divided into six sections. The next section reviews the literature on NACTEST, militarisation, human rights, community-based security, civilian cost, and the gap that the study seeks to fill. The following section sets the theoretical basis of the study, drawing on Human Security and Biopolitics. The next section presents the research methodology and case selection. The results are then analysed using the Militarised Peace framework, with a discussion of the implications of the findings for the analysis of counterterrorism policy, followed by a conclusion, and directions for future research.

Literature Review

2.1 NACTEST, Counterterrorism and Civilian Experiences

The National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) has been formulated to offer a more comprehensive response to terrorism. The 2014 edition, released by the Office of the National Security Adviser, outlined a whole-of-government strategy, which involved prevention, response, and recovery alongside military operations. It also acknowledged the necessity to improve conditions so civilians could live with a reasonable sense of security. This structure remained unchanged in the 2016 revision, which remains the version of NACTEST assessed in this article. Nigeria's National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) has since developed a separate Strategic Plan for 2025–2030, formally unveiled in November 2025; that plan sets out the current strategic planning framework and confirms that NACTEST itself was developed in 2014 and revised in 2016, rather than superseding the 2016 NACTEST document (NCTC, 2025).

It is important to note that since 2016, Boko Haram has had two factions. The group, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), has since broken away from the Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li al-Da'awa wa al-Jihād (JAS) faction, and in rural areas of Borno, has adopted a more informal approach to territorial control, taxation, and even limited service provision, in contrast to JAS more indiscriminate violence (Bukarti, 2021; Samuel, 2020). These two threats have not been treated in the same way by NACTEST security response; the term 'Boko Haram' is used in this study in the general sense, and its use should be understood in this light.

In their assessment of the strategy's capabilities, Basheer and Tunde (2024) reported that Nigerian security agencies have made progress in identifying the sources of terrorist financing but have been less successful in detecting and preventing attacks before they occur. This weakness applies to the "Forestall" and "Identify" pillars of NACTEST, which focus on identifying and forestalling threats before they escalate. There is a substantial body of literature on NACTEST's effectiveness in operational outcomes, such as territorial recovery, the destruction of Boko Haram's command structure, and the appropriateness of Nigeria's legal and policy framework (Eji, 2016; Ugwueze & Onuoha, 2020; Basheer & Tunde, 2024). These studies highlight the disconnect between the strategy's goals and objectives and its implementation, and military solutions continue to dominate the discussion despite NACTEST's emphasis on a more holistic approach (Ugwueze & Onuoha, 2020; Chukwuma, 2025).

This concern is part of a larger discussion of the effectiveness of counterinsurgency. Kalyvas (2006) categorises violence into selective and indiscriminate, and provides evidence that the nature of violence can influence civilian cooperation with government forces. These distinctions are relevant to NACTEST, as policies and initiatives aimed at protecting communities can also affect how civilians view and respond to security agencies. Human security studies, on the other hand, emphasise a more comprehensive approach to NACTEST, but one that does not fully capture the impacts of routine security institution activities on civilians in counterterrorism actions. Much of the current literature, therefore, assesses success in terms of state objectives rather than civilians' experiences of security; civilian experiences of security are studied far less than whether counterterrorism has led to safer communities.

2.2 Militarisation and Civilian Security

Implementation has been undertaken by traditional security agencies and the community-based security agency known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), which has existed in Maiduguri since 2013, when security agents were replaced by civilians who wanted to take action against Boko Haram attacks in Borno State. Saheed and Onuoha (2019) credit this local security need for the emergence of the group and its integration into the broader counterterrorism system by the Borno State Ministry of Justice. The CJTF's responsibility for maintaining checkpoints, conducting searches and providing local intelligence has since made it an important part of security provision. Ashindorbe, Afatakpa and Owonikoko (2021) also demonstrate the CJTF's use of its local defence duties to integrate a system of population control through checkpoints and surveillance.

Human rights violations provide further evidence of the costs of Nigeria's militarised response. Amnesty International (2015) reported on the scale of military detention and extrajudicial killings that occurred with both

state security services and the CJTF in the Northeast of Nigeria. A subsequent investigation by Amnesty International (2024), based on interviews with 126 girls and women who were formerly linked to Boko Haram between December 2019 and May 2024, also revealed that girls and women who escaped from Boko Haram were often detained in military facilities for long periods and without lawful authorisation. The findings indicate that fears of state-caused harm have persisted during the insurgency and not only at its outset.

One explanation for this pattern is provided by securitisation theory. If a problem is portrayed as an existential threat, it can justify unusual security measures that might otherwise face political opposition (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998). The policing practice of checkpoints, curfews, military searches, CJTF mobilisation and others could be explained within this broader policing logic in Nigeria. Studies on the CJTF provide a more local perspective on how such practices are experienced. Saheed and Onuoha (2019) demonstrate how community-based security groups can offer protection to civilians, but also render them vulnerable to coercion, extortion, and abuse. Gulyás (2021) sees the checkpoint task as an ongoing component of CJTF activity.

Gender studies add a further layer to the discussion. Women's experience of the Boko Haram conflict is not singular. It cannot be categorised as one of victimisation, as women can be coerced, participate, and be active in a variety of ways (Matfess, 2017). This is also important for any evaluation of civilian security, since the impacts of counterterrorism are unlikely to be uniform across all communities. Read together, this literature shows how security is actually experienced and implemented at the community level, including through military practices, checkpoints, the CJTF, coercion and differentiated civilian experiences. While it makes security more familiar in civilian life, it tends to focus on specific actors and groups; it does not provide a broader view of the effects of the entire security system developed through NACTEST.

2.3 Civilian Insecurity and the Limits of Counterterrorism

Human security studies take a different position on what drives Borno's crisis. Insecurity in Northern Nigeria has been linked to poverty, lack of jobs, inadequate education, poor health services and limited economic opportunities. In his comparative study of Boko Haram and the Niger Delta Avengers, David (2025) adopts a greed-need-creed framework and Sen's (1999) capability approach to show that socioeconomic deprivation can provide the conditions in which insurgent groups gain support; in this context, military efforts alone will not be sufficient to address the conditions that sustain violent extremism. This is valuable as it extends the concept of security to encompass civilian welfare, and highlights the factors that can make recruitment more appealing where livelihoods are already precarious. However, its overriding concern is with the elements that contribute to insurgency, not the damage that counterterrorism itself can cause.

The humanitarian crisis in Borno is not solely due to NACTEST or military operations. According to Aina and Ojo (2025), environmental transformations around Lake Chad, alongside climatic pressures affecting agriculture and fisheries, are drivers of displacement and recruitment by armed groups in the Lake Chad Basin. Farmer-herder conflict has also caused the displacement of communities and disturbance of local markets, while Boko Haram has continued its own attacks, abductions and taxation of civilians.

Such factors are important to consider when assessing counterterrorism efforts, as they provide alternative explanations for poor

humanitarian outcomes. This article does not suggest that NACTEST is the cause of Borno's crisis or that the security architecture in place is the underlying cause of all civilian suffering in Borno. Rather, it is the fear that the effects of extended military-style security measures may be part of a larger issue, one that is not often viewed as independent of other causes in official assessments. The gap this article identifies is that existing studies do not sufficiently consider the role of security practices in contributing to civilians' sense of insecurity, in addition to their security benefits.

Taken together, these strands of literature represent an identifiable gap. Studies on human security focus on the socioeconomic aspects of insurgency, while studies on countering terrorism focus on operational performance. Apart from the harms experienced by civilians documented in human rights and gender studies, studies of the CJTF have analysed the positive and negative effects of community-based security, and other drivers of displacement and insecurity, such as ecological and inter-communal conflict, are also evident. What is still missing is a framework for understanding civilian insecurity within the wider security architecture and its longer-term impact, as well as institutional practice, the lived experience of civilians, and the cost of ongoing militarisation, all within a single analytical framework.

Theoretical Framework: Human Security and Biopolitics

This study employs Human Security and Biopolitics as complementary lenses to look at the implementation of NACTEST in Borno State. The term human security is used as a basis of assessing what effective security should mean for civilians, and the term biopolitics is used to help explain how security institutions shape civilian life through policies, restrictions and security practices. Combined, these two lines of analysis make it possible to examine the outcomes of counterterrorism and the institutional practices that create those outcomes.

Human Security rose to prominence after the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report, which shifted the focus of security analysis from territories to people (UNDP, 1994; Haq, 1995). The idea was advanced by Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, who broadened security beyond protection from armed threats to include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. Furthermore, Kaldor, Martin and Selchow (2007) maintain that the nature of conflict today, with attacks on the civilian population and the distinction between combatants and non-combatants becoming blurred, necessitates the assessment of security in individual and community terms.

However, the concept of Human Security is not without controversy, given its wide applicability. According to Paris (2001), the concept encompasses too many issues, from armed conflicts to disease and environmental insecurity, making it hard to prioritise or draw clear connections between variables. With a more specific approach, physical safety or freedom from fear has been the focus. This facilitates an empirical application of this concept, but MacFarlane and Khong (2006) and Gasper (2022) warn that protection from violence alone may reflect the state-centred paradigm which the broader concept aimed to critique. The UNDP's subsequent work also adopts a context-sensitive understanding of human security, acknowledging that various dimensions of insecurity may overlap rather than exist as distinct categories (UNDP, 2014).

This study follows the more general UNDP definition, but acknowledges Paris' interest in conceptual breadth. This is not used here to account for the causes of insurgency or institutional failure. Rather, it provides a

foundation for evaluating NACTEST's impact on civilians. No military victory can create a sustainable counterterrorism presence if communities remain displaced, food insecure, lose their livelihoods, are fearful or if security forces have poor relations with them. This approach is viable because NACTEST has both military and non-kinetic components that have a ripple effect to reduce violence.

The second perspective is biopolitics. Foucault (1978, 2003) describes biopolitics as a form of power that is not simply coercive, but one that acts through the regulation of populations and the management of daily life. In his later writings on governmentality, he focuses on the techniques used to govern populations, on the control of conduct, movement, welfare and security. Borno State can then be studied as a place where civilian freedom of movement, employment, trade, and access to services are influenced by checkpoints, curfews, movement restrictions, and controlled access to territory in response to threats from insurgents.

Agamben's (1998) notion of the state of exception takes this discussion to a new level by analysing the conditions under which emergency situations grant the power to suspend normal laws. This analysis is furthered by Mbembe's (2019) view on necropolitics, which asks how political power is distributed in terms of exposure to violence and whose lives are at increased risk. Necropolitics is not a new theory but rather a more restricted version of the biopolitical view, as used in this study. It is relevant when security measures increase the level of insecurity for certain civilian groups or impede access to safety for some civilian groups.

Caution is needed when using this application. Rabinow and Rose (2006) caution that not every form of population management can be considered biopolitical domination, as this obscures the distinction between normal government and extreme forms of compulsion. The study thus focuses primarily on Foucault to explore population regulation, and then on Mbembe, in which security practices create different exposures to violence and/or insecurity.

The two points of view then have different but related functions. Human Security sets a benchmark for civilian welfare, and Biopolitics is an account of how security practices shape everyday life. This is where necropolitics can be sharpened, in cases where such practices are distributed unevenly. These perspectives, along with the concept of Militarised Peace constructed in the following section, form the foundation for NACTEST security practices and their impact on civilian life and security in Borno State.

Conceptual Framework: Militarised Peace

The current studies on counterterrorism outcomes have accounted for some of the security changes in Borno State, but not comprehensively for the circumstances under which civilians have experienced them. The results of counterterrorism operations are frequently measured by decreases in attacks, control of territory and the ability to weaken insurgent groups. While these measures offer valuable information on changes in violence, they are not always representative of a return to normal civilian life. Attacks can be reduced, as can ongoing restrictions on movement and access to farmland, disrupted livelihoods, and limited access to basic services. What is more relevant, then, is the question of whether there are gains in physical security that are matched by gains in freedom, and in the quality of everyday life.

In this study, we define the concept of Militarised Peace as a situation in which the use of violence has been reduced, but militarisation is deeply rooted in civilian societies. Security measures can help deter attacks and limit insurgent activity, but can

also restrict the movement of people, their livelihoods, and access to services following a reduction in attacks. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is an example of this tension. Bamidele (2024) speaks of the CJTF as an "insurgent peace", reminding the reader of the role local security structures could play in reducing violence, as well as their incorporation into local governance and security arrangements.

The idea is based on Galtung (1969) distinction between negative and positive peace. Negative peace is the absence of direct violence, while positive peace is the set of conditions that foster justice, dignity and social well-being. Militarised Peace occurs when there is a positive aspect of peace without commensurate gains in freedom and welfare for civilians. So, while attacks may drop, movement and access to agricultural land and other daily activities remain restricted. Dan-Azumi (2025) echoes this concern about the ongoing use of military responses and the need to increase efforts in community-based approaches.

The concept further relates to the current application of militarised peace, but in important ways, these are different from the Borno case. For example, Meger and Sachseder (2020) discuss post-accord Colombia and demonstrate that violence and militarised power persisted following the 2016 peace agreement with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). Their analysis takes into account the role of military force in relation to economic, gender, and racial relations. The Borno case is unique for one reason. There is no comparable peace agreement, and counterinsurgency operations are ongoing, with a reduction in violence. What is important here is not violence following a formal peace agreement, but the possibility of coexistence of reduced violence and continuing military authority and limitations on civil activity prior to peace.

The idea is also new in comparison to Neocleous's (2014) general rejection of classical ideas on the difference between war and peace and between military and police power. As applied here, Militarised Peace is not synonymous with military dictatorship, nor with all temporary limitations for security reasons. It is less widely used. It can be used in situations where violence has reduced, but civilian movement, livelihoods and access to services are restricted for a prolonged period. This difference also gives room for an empirical evaluation. If this is accompanied by the restoration of civilian mobility, the improvement of access to farmland and markets, the improvement of public services and the gradual withdrawal of restrictive security measures, then it would not be Militarised Peace.

The following is a possible scenario in which security and civilian restrictions can coexist. Military action can help quell insurgent violence, and prolonged population control can limit movement and livelihood opportunities. Even if open violence has decreased, these limitations can lead to economic suffering, forced migration and psychological distress. In the long run, it can lead to a limited form of peace in which there is rarely physical violence, but some elements of civilian security are still limited. There is no set order or inevitability; the nature of the relationship between these processes will vary depending on the security measures adopted and on whether and when restrictions are eased as violence decreases. Instead, it offers a framework for analysing how these conditions can feed into each other as military operations diminish.

Table 1. The Militarised Peace Conceptual Sequence

Stage	Mechanism
Military operations to Population control	Even after redeployment, military operations may prolong the state's control over civilian areas by consolidating populations in super camps and deploying the CJTF
Population Control to Restricted Mobility	People are kept in restricted zones and at checkpoints, and curfew times are enforced to limit access to surrounding communities and economic activities
Restricted Mobility to Economic Disruption	Movement restrictions may delay access to productive areas and markets and make farming, fishing, trading, and other livelihoods more expensive and riskier
Economic Disruption to Displacement	Lack of sustained income, coupled with ongoing violence exposure, could push households to abandon their communities and seek better living conditions and livelihoods elsewhere
Displacement to Psychological Trauma	Loss of livelihood, community separation and continued exposure to security presence compound trauma
Psychological Trauma to Fragile Peace	Unresolved civilian grievances lead to a reduction in violence, which is unstable

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine the implementation of NACTEST in Borno State within the framework of Militarised Peace. Borno was selected specifically as the primary theatre of Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgencies and NACTEST operations, and because it engages both conventional military forces and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). The analysis period is from 2014 to 2025.

The study is based on 38 secondary sources, which were retrieved through targeted searches on Google Scholar, JSTOR, and relevant institutional publications, using the search terms NACTEST, Boko Haram, Borno, CJTF, human security, and biopolitics. Citation tracking was also done to find relevant sources. Eligible materials included those that discussed NACTEST, counterinsurgency, or the CJTF in Borno, or offered empirical information on conditions in Borno or similar Lake Chad Basin environments, including conditions among civilians in terms of displacement, mobility, livelihoods, health, education, and psychological well-being. The corpus consists of 27 academic publications, one government or strategic planning document, four human rights reports, and six humanitarian, conflict monitoring and policy reports. Theoretical literature was used to inform the analytical framework, but was not coded as empirical evidence.

All empirical sources were read and manually coded into three categories: security outcomes, security practices, and civilian consequences. The areas included were territorial control and attack patterns, checkpoints, curfews, searches, CJTF activities, and population control; changes in mobility, livelihoods, displacement, education, healthcare, and psychological well-being; and trust. Recurring patterns were organised into themes using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006). The impact on the civilian population was then understood through the lens of "everyday peace" (Mac Ginty, 2014) and structured into a six stage Militarised Peace sequence: military operations, population control, limited freedom of movement, economic disruption, displacement, and psychological trauma.

When sources conflicted, the accounts were not assumed to be incorrect, but both were

kept. Where possible, the analysis also distinguished between the civilian costs of security practices and those associated with insurgency, environmental pressures, or inter-communal conflict. Practices were assigned to NACTEST only if sources explicitly made the connection. There are four limitations: reliance on secondary sources, difficulties with institutional and causal attribution, a geographical focus on accessible areas, and variance in timing and definitions across sources. Therefore, the study will focus on the coexistence of security practices and civilian restrictions but will not assume a cause-and-effect relationship.

Findings: Militarised Peace in Borno

This section charts the Militarised Peace identified earlier, drawing on experiences from Borno State. It follows the same content levels and the three coding categories as in Section 5: security outcomes, security practices, and civilian consequences.

Military operations to population control: The trend is seen in the military's 2019 super camp strategy, which involved grouping forward operating bases into bigger garrisons and fewer troops in rural areas. ISWAP and JAS then took control of some abandoned areas, setting up checkpoints, controlling markets and taxing visitors (Samuel, 2020). Meanwhile, police roadblocks and checkpoints were targeted in urban areas. Population control was thus not removed by the reorganisation. Rather, state forces gained control over movement, markets, and access to community space, and insurgent groups took over some areas. However, these advances have not had a comparable impact on the well-being of the civilian population, as noted by Lawal and Saliman (2026).

Population control to restricted mobility: In Maiduguri and other LGAs, military and CJTF checkpoints have become a way of life, with people being searched, identity checked, and movement restricted (Gulyás, 2021). Routine activities such as trading, farming, and visits to relatives are affected by curfews and searches, which can lead to delays, repeated searches, extra expenses, and arbitrary treatment (Bamidele, 2020; Saheed & Onuoha, 2019; Kolawole et al., 2026). Checkpoints are now part and parcel of civilian life and not only a response to an immediate insecurity.

Restricted mobility to economic disruption: In Maiduguri, arrested traders were reported to have their consignments destroyed and prices of fish rose, while restrictions were imposed in the fishing trade along the Maiduguri-Monguno-Baga and Maiduguri-Gamboru-Ngala corridors to prevent Boko Haram from benefiting from the trade (Hoinathy & Tayo, 2022). The measures thus aggravated the situation of fishing communities. The same impact would be felt when farmers and fishermen are unable to access their land or waters. These restrictions can reduce household incomes even in the absence of attacks, and can also delay economic recovery.

Economic disruption to displacement: In an August 2022 report, Human Rights Watch (2022a) reported that over 140,000 persons were forcibly displaced from eight camps in Maiduguri between May 2021 and August 2022 due to failure to provide them adequate shelter, food, livelihoods, and protection. Displacement and mobility limitations have also affected access to education and health services (Human Rights Watch, 2022b). Women can be at further risk in conflict and security setups such as being coerced or exploited, and children can be recruited into armed groups or detained by state forces (Matfess, 2017). It is clear from these conditions that the counterterrorism response and insurgent violence influence the process of displacement, a process that has impacts on issues related to economic security, food security, and gender security (Abba, 2026).

Displacement to psychological trauma: The long term effect of violence, displacement, and the presence of armed men and women have been associated with fear, trauma, and distrust within affected communities (Egwuaba, Achebe & Iliemena, 2025). In a systematic review and meta-analysis of 14 studies (5 from Nigeria), Tesefaye and colleagues (2024) calculated a pooled prevalence of PTSD of 51% among IDPs, with the more common and longer duration of displacement associated with more common and more persistent symptoms. However, NACTEST evaluations focus more on the operational indicators, and psychological effects may be less discussed despite a drop in attacks.

Psychological trauma to fragile peace: Overall, the situation looks better for conventional security, due to declines in Boko Haram territorial control and in major attacks, but civilian mobility, livelihoods, education, health and psychological security is uneven. Oyawale (2025) also demonstrates that women and men are impacted by these security measures in different ways.

Discussion

This section offers an interpretation of the findings in the light of the concepts of Human Security and Biopolitics introduced in Section 3 and asks what the concept of Militarised Peace contributes to the assessment of NACTEST.

The study concluded that the downfall of Boko Haram's territorial power and the decline in large-scale attacks have not resulted in better civilian security in Borno State. Military victories come at a cost of restrictions on daily life, such as checkpoints, curfews, restrictions on farm land and markets, displacement, economic losses, and psychological distress. However, these circumstances suggest that a decline in violence could indicate negative peace rather than civilian security.

Human Security helps explain why traditional counterterrorism strategies are only a partial indicator of security outcomes. As UNDP (1994) broadened the definition of security to include economic, food, health, and personal security, NACTEST should also ask whether civilians have freedom of movement, access to livelihoods and essential services, and a lack of persistent fear. A checkpoint could be an asset to surveillance efforts, but it could also hinder travel and/or open avenues for corruption. Biopolitics introduces another layer by revealing how processes like checkpoints, curfews, and searches manage civilian life and privilege some with mobility while denying it to others, thereby unevenly distributing exposure to risk. Foucault (2003) and Mbembe (2019) provide insight into how these mechanisms of control operate, and Doucet (2024) demonstrates that civilian protection can also be a mode of control.

The notion of Militarised Peace combines these concerns. It does not say that military action is, in itself, illegitimate or that it is impossible to achieve security gains in Borno. Instead, it highlights situations where there is a reduction in violence, yet parallel and ongoing constraints on civilian mobility, livelihoods and well-being. This coexistence is demonstrated in the evidence on checkpoints, super camps, displacement and trauma. The unresolved grievances of civilians can lead to renewed violence, including those generated by security practices, as Bara, Deglow, and van Baalen (2021) state.

This implies that evaluation should not be restricted to attack frequency, territorial control and military activity for NACTEST. The assessment should also include assessments of civilian mobility, access to farmland and markets, food security, personal safety, and access to essential services. The impacts of checkpoints, curfews, and CJTF operations should be explored through independent civilian monitoring, and security

planning should be informed by farming, schooling, healthcare, and local markets. Independent oversight is also needed for delegated powers to security. These measures may be incorporated into the NCTC's adoption of the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan and into the current NACTEST evaluation processes.

Table 2. Operational and human security indicators of counterterrorism success

Dimension	Operational Indicator (current)	Human Security Indicator (proposed)	Possible measure
Territory	Areas recaptured from Boko Haram	Freedom to move freely as civilians in recovered territory	Survey data on civilian mobility, travel time, or access in recovered areas.
Violence	Attack frequency and casualty counts	Checkpoint and curfew density experienced by civilians	Number of checkpoints in each LGA; hours of curfew recorded
Economy	Insurgent revenue and capacity degraded	Market access, farming and fishing activity restored	Market price and trading volume information; restricted access to fishing grounds and farms.
Population	Insurgent fighters killed or captured	Displacement driven by economic and mobility disruption	IDP registration data by cause of displacement
Wellbeing	Absence of large-scale attacks	Increased school attendance, access to health care and psychological safety.	Student enrolment/attendance, use of health facilities, and verified psychological wellbeing checks

Note: the indicators and measures proposed are a future evaluation framework for the NACTEST assessment, and were not measured empirically in this article's design from secondary sources

Conclusion

The reduction in attacks does not imply that civilians in Borno State are enjoying peace. While the counterterrorism efforts have curbed Boko Haram and ISWAP violence, humanitarian needs, displacement, limited movement and economic difficulties persist. The Borno incident shows that success in operations and in civilian security can diverge. This article uses the term Militarised Peace in this context and proposes indicators for future evaluation. The analysis illustrates how state measures aimed at reducing insecurity can generate further insecurity. The measures associated with NACTEST have influenced civilian life through population control, limited mobility, displacement, economic disruptions, and psychological insecurity. The costs have been borne by civilians whose mobility, livelihoods and sense of security are still restricted in the face of reduced violence. Reduced levels of violence have accompanied the presence of checkpoints, curfews, super-camp consolidation, and CJTF activity, but no causal link between these practices and the reduction of violence has been concluded in the study. Militarised Peace can demystify the connection between security and civilian restrictions. NACTEST should evaluate

civilian-centred indicators as well as operational indicators such as those specified in the NCTC's Strategic Plan 2025-2030. Interviews and surveys of civilians should be conducted; counterinsurgency contexts such as Kashmir and the Sahel should be compared; and the indicators of human security, as detailed in Table 2, should be measured in future research.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to the Covenant University Centre for Research, Innovation, and Discovery (CUCRID) for funding this publication.

Funding

This research is supported and funded by Covenant University Centre for Research, Innovation, and Discovery (CUCRID).

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The Authors do not have any form of conflict of interest

Data Availability Statement

No new primary data is generated for this article. It is based on secondary sources available to the public.

References

Abba, I. (2026). Between the sword and the shield: National security imperatives and civilian protection in Nigeria's counter-terrorism campaign in the Northeast. FUOYE Journal of Criminology and Security Studies, 5(2).

Agamben, G., & Heller-Roazen, D. (1998). Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life. Stanford University Press.

Agbiboa, D. E. (2021). The precariousness of protection: Civilian defence groups countering Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria. African Studies Review, 64(1), 192-216.

Aina, F., & Ojo, J. S. (2025). (De) Weaponizing Climate-Induced Recruitment: Prospects of Climate Change Adaptation as a Non-Kinetic Counter-Terrorism Strategy in the Lake Chad Basin Region. Global Society, 39(4), 446-469.

Amnesty International (2015, June 3) Stars on their Shoulders. Blood on their Hands: War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military. Amnesty International. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1657/2015/en/

Amnesty International. (2024, June 9). "Help us build our lives": Girl survivors of Boko Haram and military abuses in North-East Nigeria. Amnesty International. Retrieved from https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/help-us-build-our-lives-girl-survivors-of-boko-haram-and-military-abuses-in-North-east-nigeria/

Amnesty International. (2020, May 27). "We dried our tears": Addressing the toll on children of Northeast Nigeria's conflict (AFR 44/2322/2020). Amnesty International. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/2322/2020/en/

Ashindorbe, K., Afatakpa, F., & Owonikoko, S. B. (2021). Civilian joint task force and Nigeria's counter-terrorism operation: A critique of the community-based approach to insecurity. African Security, 14(3), 286-305.

Bamidele, S. (2020). "Sweat is invisible in the rain": Civilian Joint Task Force and counter-insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria. Security and Defence Quarterly, 31(4), 171-188.

Bamidele, O. (2024). On responsibility for the security of others: An ethnographic case study of Civilian Joint Task Force insurgent peace in Borno State, North-eastern region of Nigeria. In Africa's Engagement with the Responsibility to Protect in the 21st Century (pp. 93-111). Springer Nature Singapore.

Bara, C., Deglow, A., & Van Baalen, S. (2021). Civil war recurrence and postwar violence: Toward an integrated research agenda. European journal of international relations, 27(3), 913-935.

Basheer, O. U., & Tunde, A. (2024). An appraisal of the capacity of national counter terrorism strategy to prevent and combat terrorism in Nigeria. Journal of Social Sciences, (3), 164-177.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative research in psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

Bukarti, A. B. (2021). Violent extremism in sub-Saharan Africa: lessons from the rise of boko haram. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, 17.

Buzan, Barry, Wæver Ole, and De Wilde Jaap. 1998. Security: A New Framework for Analysis. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Chukwuma, K. H. (2025). Nigeria's Counter-terrorism Strategy: Constructions of Threat, Response and Identity. Edinburgh University Press.

Comolli, V. (2017, October 24). The evolution and impact of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. Humanitarian Practice Network, Issue 70. Retrieved from https://odihpn.org/en/publication/the-evolution-and-impact-of-boko-haram-in-the-lake-chad-basin

Dan-Azumi, D. V. (2025). Countering Boko Haram insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria: Indigenous knowledge as an incentive for rethinking approaches to counterterrorism in Africa. Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2025.2564140

David, J. O. (2025). Boko Haram and Niger Delta Avengers: unraveling the greed-need-creed spectrum in Nigeria's security-development nexus. Frontiers in Political Science, 7, 1562472.

De Simone, S., & Iocchi, A. (2022). The end of the security–development nexus? Reflections from counterinsurgency in North-eastern Nigeria. Third World Quarterly, 43(12), 2757-2774.

Doucet, M. G. (2024). The liminal figure of the civilian and the necropolitics of protection. Journal of Global Security Studies, n9(2). https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogae019

Egbuta, U. (2024). Winning the war and losing the peace: An analysis of counter boko haram terrorism in Northeast Nigeria. Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies, 4(3-4), 148-168.

Egwuaba, E. U., Achebe, S. C., Sunday, B. A., & Iliemena, D. E. (2025). Post-Conflict Trauma and Psycho-Social Rehabilitation among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Bama Local Government Area, Borno State: Challenges and Prospects for Sustainable Recovery. Journal of Arts and Social Sciences (ANSUJASS), 12(2), 40-55.

Eji, E. (2016). Rethinking Nigeria's counter-terrorism strategy. The International Journal of Intelligence, Security, and Public Affairs, 18(3), 198-220.

Foucault, M. (1978). The history of sexuality. Volume I: An introduction. New York: Vintage.

Foucault, M. (2003). Society must be defended. Point Par Point.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. Journal of peace research, 6(3), 167-191.

Gasper, D. (2022). Rethinking human development and/as human security for the anthropocene: An analysis of the United Nations development programme trilogy of reports 2020–2022. The International Journal of Social Quality, 12(2), 1-24.

Gulyás, A. (2021). The role of the Civilian Joint Task Force in the improvement of security in Borno State, Nigeria. Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies, 1(4), 32-48.

Haq, M. ul (1995). Reflections on Human Development. Oxford University Press.

Hoinathy, R., & Tayo, T. (2022). Lake Chad Basin Socio-economic resilience in the shadow of Boko Haram. ISS West Africa Report, 2022(38), 1-24.

Human Rights Watch. (2022, November 2). Nigeria: Displacement camp closures worsen suffering. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/02/nigeria-displacement-camp-closures-worsen-suffering

Human Rights Watch. (2022, November 2). "Those who returned are suffering": Impact of camp shutdowns on people displaced by Boko Haram conflict in Nigeria. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/11/02/those-who-returned-are-suffering/impact-camp-shutdowns-people-displaced-boko

Ike, T. J., Antonopoulos, G. A., & Singh, D. (2025). Community perspectives of terrorism and the Nigerian government's counterterrorism strategies: A systematic review. Criminology & Criminal Justice, 25(2), 285-314.

Kaldor, M. (2007). Human Security: Reflections on Globalization and Intervention. Polity.

Kaldor, M., Martin, M., & Selchow, S. (2007). Human security: a new strategic narrative for Europe. International affairs, 83(2), 273-288. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2007.00618.x

Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). The logic of violence in civil war. Cambridge University Press.

Lawal, A. F., & Saliman, K. A. (2026). Evaluating counterinsurgency operations in insurgency-affected Borno State, Nigeria. Pakistan Journal of Integrated Social Sciences, 3(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.51846/pjiss.v3i1.5055

Kolawole, O. J., Babagana, S. A., & Bature, T. A. (2026). The impact of military checkpoints on commercial drivers: evidence from North-east Nigeria. International Journal of Intellectual Discourse, 9(2).

MacFarlane, S. N., & Khong, Y. F. (2006). Human security and the UN: A critical history. Indiana University Press.

Mac Ginty, R. (2014). Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-affected societies. Security dialogue, 45(6), 548-564.

Matfess, H. (2017). Women and the war on Boko Haram: Wives, weapons, witnesses. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Mbembe, A. (2019). Necropolitics. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478007227

Meger, S., & Sachseder, J. (2020). Militarized peace: understanding post-conflict violence in the wake of the peace deal in Colombia. Globalizations, 17(6), 953-973.

Neocleous, M. (2014). War power, police power (Vol. 153). Edinburgh University Press.

Nigeria Counter-Terrorism Centre. (2025). Strategic Plan 2025–2030. NCTC. Retrieved from https://nctc.gov.ng/books/strategic-plan-2025-2030/

Nwadike, G. C., & Ani, K. J. (2026). INSECURITY AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA 1980-2024. Journal of Terrorism and Defence Studies, 3(1), 5-25.

Ogbozor, E. (2026). Operation Lafiya Dole and the paradox of peace by force: rethinking counterinsurgency and human security in Northeast Nigeria. Small Wars & Insurgencies, 1-31.

Omenma, J. T., & Hendricks, C. M. (2018). Counterterrorism in Africa: An analysis of the civilian joint task force and military partnership in Nigeria. Security Journal, 31(3), 764-794.

Onuoha, F. C. (2012). The audacity of the Boko Haram: Background, analysis and emerging trend. Security Journal, 25(2), 134-151.

Oyawale, A. (2025). The state, Boko Haram and vernacular security: Gendering terrorism and counter-terrorism in Nigeria. Security Dialogue, 56(5), 630-647. https://doi.org/10.1177/09670106251351869

Paris, R. (2001). Human security: paradigm shift or hot air?. International Security, 26(2), 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753191141

Rabinow, P., & Rose, N. (2006). Biopower today. BioSocieties, 1(2), 195-217. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1745855206040014

Saheed, O. B., & Onuoha, F. C. (2019). Child of necessity:(Ab) uses of the Civilian joint task force in Borno State, Nigeria. AFSOL J, 3(1), 27-40.

Samuel, M. (2020, November 30). Nigeria's super camps leave civilians exposed to terrorists. Institute for Security Studies. Retrieved from https://issafrica.org/iss-today/nigerias-super-camps-leave-civilians-exposed-to-terrorists

Sen, A. (1999). Development as Freedom. Oxford University Press.

Tesfaye, A. H., Sendekie, A. K., Kabito, G. G., Engdaw, G. T., Argaw, G. S., Desye, B., ... & Abere, G. (2024). Post-traumatic stress disorder and associated factors among internally displaced persons in Africa: A systematic review and meta-analysis. PLoS one, 19(4), e0300894. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0300894

Thurston, A. (2018). Boko Haram: The history of an African jihadist movement. Princeton University Press.

Ugwueze, M. I., & Onuoha, F. C. (2020). Hard versus soft measures to security: Explaining the failure of counter-terrorism strategy in Nigeria. Journal of Applied Security Research, 15(4), 547-567.

United Nations Security Council. (2024, July 17). Children and armed conflict in Nigeria; Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/596). United Nations. Retrieved from https://undocs.org/S/2022/596

UNDP. (1994). Human development report 1994: New dimensions of human security. New York. Retrieved from https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1994

UNDP (2022). Special Report on Human Security. New York. Retrieved from

https://hdr.undp.org/content/2022-special-report-human-security