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Between Punishment and Partnership: An Analysis of State-Civil Society Relations in Nigeria's Counterterrorism Efforts

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Abstract

This paper examines state-civil society relations within the context of counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria, focusing on the dual narrative of "continuous contentiousness" and "conditional cooperation." It explores how the Nigerian government often frames Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) as complicit in extremist activities, resulting in stringent regulatory measures that undermine their ability to deliver humanitarian and peace-building services. Despite this adversarial posture, instances of collaboration exist, particularly in resource distribution, de-radicalisation programmes, and advocacy for human rights. Employing Conflict Theory as its analytical framework, the study identifies the root of these tensions in the contest for power and dominance, with the state prioritising national security while CSOs emphasise human needs. The paper utilises qualitative data from secondary sources and a theoretical analysis of counterterrorism campaigns against Boko Haram and ISWAP. The findings reveal that while CSOs play a critical role in addressing the needs of conflict-affected populations, their operations are hindered by punitive state actions, leading to weakened counterterrorism outcomes. The study concludes that fostering cooperative state-CSO relations is imperative to enhancing counterterrorism effectiveness. It recommends the establishment of state-CSO liaison forums, improved transparency protocols within CSOs, and initiatives to bridge communication gaps. These measures are essential for aligning state and civil society efforts, thereby enhancing Nigeria's counterterrorism response.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, civil society, Nigeria, deradicalization, Conflict Theory

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Introduction

The escalating incidence of violent extremism across Nigeria within the past decade presents an opportunity for action and responses by various sectors of Nigerian society. As an essential sector of Nigerian society, the civil society space has become a prominent actor, particularly within state-led counterterrorism campaigns. International civil society organisations (ICSOs), specifically non-governmental organisations, have been recipients of sustained punitive actions by the Nigerian state on the grounds of complicity of such actors and complicity in terrorism, pointing towards the complicated nature of state-civil society relations (Njoku, 2020a; 2020b). The subjugation of civil society organisations to punitive state actions emanates from the expansion of their roles to encompass humanitarian aid and social service provision, which has presented ethical dilemmas that oftentimes present 'question marks' over their roles (Adeakin, Gray & Madu, 2022).

It may be articulated that the consistent eruption of punitive actions in the way of the civil society suggests a generally fractured state of play, or rather a situation where both entities share a relationship defined by 'lack of cordiality', borrowing from the well-identified general state of relations which continue to be defined by properties such as weak collaboration (Olayode *et al*., 2016; Omede et al., 2014), constant attempts by political elites to undermine these actors and victimisation (Kew et al., 2018; LeVan, 2011) which are rooted in negative views of civil society organisations adopted by the state (Umar et al., 2020). The tension produced by these relations points towards the need to re-evaluate state-civil society collaboration in the fight against violent extremism to identify pathways for a more cooperative relationship between state and civil society in countering terrorism. This paper is about this need. Engaging with this need, the paper acknowledges that state-civil society relations are characterised by nuances, which makes it possible that the relationship between the Nigerian State oscillates between partnership and punishment. This is advanced through an analysis of the context of civil society participation in the theatre of counterterrorism. The paper also discusses State responses to the contributions of civil society organisations (CSOs) to counterterrorism. The analytic focus for the paper's discussions on terrorism is the counterterrorism campaign against the Boko Haram group and its splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), which are referred to

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throughout the paper as violent extremist actors. These discussions are spread across the paper's six sections. The paper contributes to the literature on terrorism studies, particularly advancing the state of knowledge on the roles civic non-state actors play in counterterrorism and the alternating modes of state interactions with these actors, capitalising on the framework already established by prior studies, such as those represented by Njoku (2022), as it simultaneously provides direction and points of critique for further research. These discussions are oriented towards the paper's objectives, which are: 1. To examine the dynamics of state-civil society relations in the context of counterterrorism in Nigeria; 2. To assess the contributions of CSOs to Nigeria's counterterrorism framework; and 3. To explore the challenges faced by CSOs operating within the ecosystem of Nigeria's counterterrorism framework

Literature Review

Historicising Nigerian State-Civil Society Relations

Civil society is a label often applied to discuss organisations of diverse identities (Neji & Edet, 2023), which is often inclusive of groups from gender-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations and community groups (Doyle, 2017). Increasingly, the civil society space has been dominated by organisational entities that are increasingly prominent in governance. As co-present actors in governing, civil society organisations have tended to develop fractious relationships with state-based entities. Within the Nigerian context, this has been the dominant paradigm for civil society relations with the Nigerian state. This antagonistic interaction arguably descends from colonial dynamics. Attempts at rule consolidation and state formation during that epoch aimed to drive a wedge between the colonial state and the civil society space, which traditional indigenous institutions had hitherto dominated. This created a situation where institutions embedded in civil society were emasculated (Sambo *et al*., 2021).

This emasculation represented a carefully calculated strategy centred on the brutal alienation of Indigenous communities from the political space, using symbols of political power as instruments (Ogbonna, Aluko & Adeyanju, 2022). As such, an "epileptic state-society relation"

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emerged, which was subsequently worsened by "the utilisation of indigenous police under the authority and organisation of the native rulers to subjugate, oppress, and intimidate the indigenous people, groups, and societies whose opinions might contradict that of the imperial authorities" (Ogbonna et al., 2022, p. 23). These fractious relations consequently informed the emergence of civil society organisations as prominent actors in Nigeria's anti-colonial struggle, front-lining decades of nationalist and pro-independence movements (Falola & Heaton, 1983).

In the post-independence period, relations between the state and civil society have complied with the character set by colonial political complexities. From this standpoint, competitive, conflictual norms have replaced the state's and civil society's complementary roles. High marks of this paradigm of interaction are visible in the Niger Delta region, where civil society and the Nigerian state have often taken polar stances. The former has consistently taken control of resource control agitations, successfully re-characterising such struggles as existential fights for self-determination, equity, and eco-civil rights (Ikelegbe, 2001). Additionally, civil society organisations have often positioned themselves as vanguards of indigenous rights, with groups such as the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) becoming critical watchdogs against human rights abuses committed by state actors (Ojakorotu, 2010).

Another significant point in state-civil society relations arose during the resistance to military rule, wherein civil society organisations were notable vocal opponents of authoritarianism and spearheaded protest politics and activism (Olukotun, 2002; Amao & Omilusi, 2019) while also maintaining a spotlight on illicit state actions (Ndegwa, 1994). Repressive state behaviour became a dominant fixture of political life during the military period as the suppression of critical voices, represented by civil society organisations, became a prevailing value. As such,

> "… the government proscribed several civil society organisations, mostly labour unions and professional organisations, that dared to criticise its policies or embarked on public demonstrations and strikes or called for an announcement of the date of return to civil rule. Many individuals were harassed and detained by extrajudicial processes. Even the press was muzzled" (Aiyede, 2003, p. 8).

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However, under certain conditions, civil society organisations have been at the forefront of attempts to enhance state capacity to address social issues within the context of the Niger Delta crisis, often aiding in generating grassroots legitimacy for the amnesty programmes implemented by the Nigerian government in 2009 (Popoola, 2020). Even during periods of military rule, the Nigerian state included civil society organisations, especially professional organisations such as the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), in constitutional conferences and sector-specific policies. In the post-1999 period, the Nigerian state has integrated civil society organisations (CSOs) such as Cleen Foundation, Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), and YIAGA Africa into election administration processes, specifically in voter education and election monitoring.

However, such instances of collaboration remain contextually limited and do not reflect a structural change like state-civil society relations. Primarily, state behaviour consistently seeks to delegitimise and manipulate, ensuring that the dynamic of state-civil society relations tends toward "co-optation," with actors in the state arena endeavouring to generate qualitative alterations to the operations of civil society through the formation of organisations. Aiyede (2003) observed that the state used various tactics to undermine civil society organisations, including placing spies and intelligence assets within civil society structures, creating a vertical and horizontal trust deficit. Such tactics, as elaborated by the same author, were on display in the situation described below:

> "The regime bankrolled several NGOs to canvass openly for the prolongation of military rule and counter democratisation pressures. Worse still, different popular struggles between the generally closed North and the open South created the impression that pro-democracy NGOs largely concentrated in the South, particularly in Lagos, were pursuing a largely Southern agenda. In any case, the government manipulated ethnicity in an effort to consolidate power and tried to create a division between urban and rural segments of society. The government reorganised the community development associations and subsumed them under the state's Ministry of Community Development, undermining their effectiveness and affecting their focus. Many of these organisations began to enjoy some measure of state patronage under the government's supposedly renewed drive to develop rural areas" (Aiyede, 2003, pp. 9-10).

This instrumentalisation of civil society organisations is often driven by the logic of politics and status-quo maintenance rather than a developmental orientation. As Ogbonna et al. (2022) argue,

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the civil society arena has been populated by ethnic-oriented organisations that lack a claim to the status of the people's representatives, contributing to complex state-civil society relations.

As stated previously, the generally tense nature of relations between the state and civil society can arguably be an extension of civil society's expansion of functions, which engenders the appropriation of supposedly traditionally state-based roles. According to Obi (2018, pp. 7-8), "civil society has emerged as the non-state actor for providing critical social welfare, social services, humanitarian services, socioeconomic empowerment, political participation, [and] human capital."

The 'encroachment' on state functions presents a situation where the state's monopoly on such functions is undermined and can often imply perceptions of weakness. Such weaknesses may stem from refocusing citizen expectations away from state institutions to civil society organisations (CSOs), such that the organisations become the recipients of public demands and expectations, potentially altering the social contract and undermining state authority. This erosion can lead the state to view CSOs as competitors or threats, particularly in contexts where it struggles to maintain its capacity to deliver essential services effectively. This may foster a sense of mistrust between the state and civil society, further straining their relationship.

Theoretical Framework

This paper's theoretical frame is constructed from the Conflict Theory. This theory, which extends from the Marxian tradition, is a multi-disciplinary paradigm which advocates the inevitability of conflict as a fixed component of social reality (Eitzen, 1988). However, this occurrence has its social basis in contests for power and resources as much as it reflects the dialectics of divergent interests. This perspective is an essentially useful frame for understanding the complex issues surrounding Nigerian state-civil society relations. It becomes, from the theory's perspective, evident that the relations between the state and civil society institutions are moderated by the contest for power and dominance. At one end, there is a conscious attempt by the state to maintain dominance through the deployment of its administrative and regulatory apparatus, which often results in the development of a dynamic wherein civil society organisations are coerced into maintaining no identity other than that of an institution which is

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subservient and lacking agency. Much of this derives from the interests of civil society organisations, which are opposites to those of the state, with the human-needs approach of the latter contrasting the emphasis of the latter on national security.

Methodology

This paper pivots on a qualitative approach to interrogating the relations between the Nigerian state and the civil society space within the context of Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts. The study's dataset is constructed from qualitative data drawn from academic literature and domestic and foreign media reports, which are analysed using textual analysis to extract thematic content germane to the objectives adopted by the study. This approach is considered suitable for this study, as it allows for the discussion of the complexities of interactions within Nigerian state counterterrorism efforts, including the relations between government institutions and civil society actors.

Discussion of Findings

CSOs as Actors in Nigeria's Counterterrorism

Counterterrorism encompasses actions undertaken by the government to inhibit terrorist attacks, mitigate their consequences, and expedite post-war recovery (Sandler, 2018). It includes aggression towards non-combatants and aims to influence an audience rather than achieve a specific political goal (Kruglanski & Boyatzi, 2011). In some cases, such as the United Kingdom's CONTEST programmes, counterterrorism focuses on preventing radicalisation, reducing tacit support for violence, and increasing community resilience to combat radicalisation and extremist messages (Briggs, 2010). Typically, it combines both "hard" and "soft" approaches, including a deradicalisation programme (Stanley, 2019).

In Nigeria, the spread of violent extremism—particularly the Islamic fundamentalist insurgency in the northeast—has made counterterrorism a pressing national security issue (Agbiboa, 2015; Abare, 2017). State responses have encompassed a spectrum of tactics, both "hard" and "soft,"

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including deploying the criminal justice system and mobilising various social resources. The development of a deradicalisation programmes, which aims to dismantle the ideological foundations of violent extremism and facilitate the effective reintegration of demobilised members of Boko Haram, arose from the failures of a militaristic approach. The hard knock strategy, which often denied civic rights, has frequently extended the life cycle of violent extremism (Sowale & Aduloju, 2023). However, the military's administration of deradicalisation programmes has been plagued by political and bureaucratic inefficiencies. These inefficiencies include "the absence of structures capable of allaying fears and encouraging community engagement in the deradicalisation programmes" and the exclusion of "systems of reconciliation and forgiveness in the process of reintegrating individuals back into society" (Sowale & Aduloju, 2023, p. 179). Ultimately, the programme's flawed nature reflects a need for more effective synergy and input-output-feedback relations between the Nigerian state and the violence-ravaged communities it seeks to aid. Nonetheless, these programmes have created an opportunity for civil society organisations (CSOs) to engage in the counterterrorism process, leading to an interesting scenario.

The Neem Foundation, a prominent non-state civil society actor, has engaged in the deradicalisation process through several programmes and initiatives. This CSO implemented a Radicalisation Monitoring and Response Systems (RMRS) project across three states in Nigeria—Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe—designed to inhibit the proliferation and persistence of radicalisation. It employs various activities, including education, sports, and cooking, to foster peacebuilding attitudes and skills (Neem Foundation, n.d.). Among its initiatives is the development of a training programme for indigenous CSOs to counter violent extremism and terror propaganda (Global Sentinel, 2024) and a grassroots therapy program known as "Counselling on Wheels" (Merritt et al., 2020). A more renowned initiative is the Yellow Ribbon Initiative (YRI), which is "an education-based empowerment programme focusing on deradicalising and empowering former/captured young female adults and children who were once associated with Boko Haram" (Salihu, 2021, p. 34). However, the operations of civil organisations have often encountered bureaucratic challenges. Despite having individuals involved with the Operation Safe Corridor programme (Bryson & Bukarti, 2019, p. 10), the

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organisations have existed in an information black hole characterised by infrequent information sharing (Lyon, 2023). Essentially, the Neem Foundation has operated as a protection and social cohesion organisation within the broader efforts to address extremist violence, establishing itself as integral to the Nigerian state's soft approach to counterterrorism.

The protective function has also been typical of the operations of another civil society organisation, Amnesty International (AI). The organisation's activities have sought to align state-led counterterrorism efforts with human rights frameworks, publishing various reports documenting rights abuses. Notable publications include "Stars on Their Shoulders and Blood on Their Hands," released in 2015, which extensively documented and analysed a wide range of rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, and unlawful detention of civilians. It also highlighted extreme conditions in detention facilities, as noted in "If You See It, You Will Cry," and addressed sexual violence in "They Betrayed Us" (Amnesty International, 2016; 2018). AI's monitoring of rights abuses also extended to actions committed by Boko Haram, as detailed in its report, "Our Job Is to Shoot, Slaughter, and Kill," which contained graphic illustrations of anti-civilian violence by members of the extremist organisation (Amnesty International, 2015).

Furthermore, CSOs participate in counterterrorism measures designed to mitigate the consequences of violence. According to Njoku (2020),

> "… following the rise of terrorism by Boko Haram and ISWAP, CSOs were vocal in denouncing terrorism and were mitigating the effects of terrorism and counterterrorism operations through service provision and advocacy in North-East Nigeria, where counterterrorism operations are ongoing" (Njoku, 2020, p. 195).

Humanitarian action in this context has been spearheaded by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The number of such organisations has risen from 28 NGOs and 33 local and national NGOs (Stoddard, Harvey, Czwarno & Breckenridge, 2020) to 48 NGOs and 47 national NGOs as of the second quarter of 2021 (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA, 2021).

The participation of civil society organisations in counterterrorism has revealed their vulnerability to antagonistic framing by two major non-state conflict actors: the Islamic State

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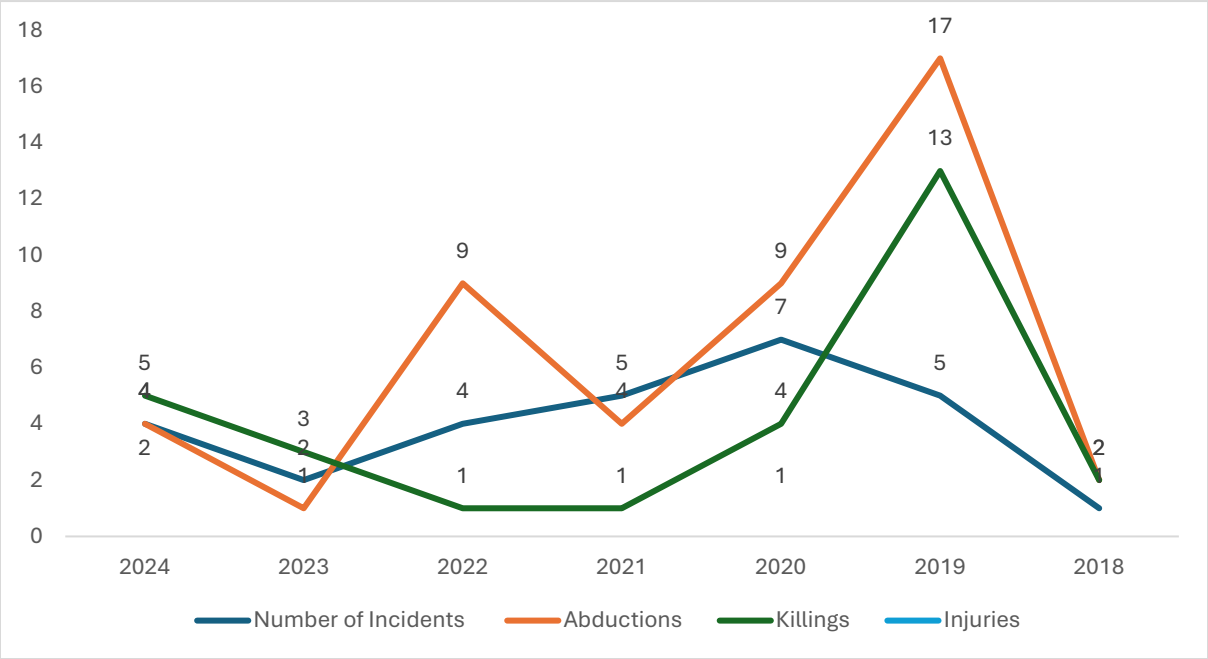
West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram. Over the past three years, CSOs have become targets for these extremist groups. Between 2016 and 2024, civil society organisations and their personnel were involved in more than 20 security incidents initiated by extremist actors (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of Security Incidents Resulting from Hostile Actions By Violent Extremist Actors Targeted at Civil Society Organisations (2017-date)



Source: Authors' adaptation from "Humanitarian Outcomes, Aid Worker Security Database, aidworkersecurity.org"

Typically, these incidents resulted in the abduction of personnel working with or affiliated with CSOs in the three hotspot states of the crisis: Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. Notably, the abduction of individuals affiliated with CSOs in these states peaked in 2019 (cf. Figure *1*).

The susceptibility of CSOs to violent attacks stems from their portrayal as "threats" and "economic opportunities." On the one hand, they have been conscientiously deemed as "agents of Nigerian and Western governments", with such services considered part of the broad plan to enhance the legitimacy of the Nigerian state. As economic opportunities, the deliveries offered by these institutions often retain logistical significance for the activities of the insurgents.

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Nigerian State Responses to Civil Society Engagements

State responses to civil society engagements have typically taken punitive measures. In 2021, the Borno State government suspended the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) following a security incident during a Maiduguri training exercise involving dummy weapons and simulated gunfire (Abdullahi, 2021a). The same year, the state government announced the proscription of food relief distribution activities by non-governmental organisations across five local government areas in Borno State (Haruna, 2021). In 2024, the Borno State Government sealed the offices of iMMAP France, an NGO it declared to be "illegally operating" in contravention of existing laws regarding the registration of NGOs in the state (Illiya, 2024, p. 1).

These actions reflect an adversarial conceptualisation of civil society organisations (CSOs), which has been present even at the federal level. This position is based on the argument that the activities of CSOs intersect with the objectives of terrorist groups operating in the northeast. It has been asserted that "terrorist groups fund their organisations by using CSOs" (Njoku, 2021, p. 195). Furthermore, the activities of CSOs, particularly those focused on advocacy, have been portrayed as contributing to a generally negative image of Nigeria on the global stage (Njoku, 2020). This is evident in the Nigerian Army's responses to reports from Amnesty International (AI). In reaction to a report published by AI, the Nigerian Army stated:

> "It is unfortunate that the organisations just went out and gathered names of specific officers in a calculated attempt to rubbish their reputation as well as the image of the Nigerian military. The action, no doubt, depicts more of a premeditated indictment aimed at discrediting the country for whatever purpose we don't know at this moment… Amnesty International has become more active in presenting distractive allegations whenever the terrorists are losing ground in the battle in Nigeria. It is very unfortunate that Amnesty International has again used that method in this report to further confirm the fact that they have been playing questionable roles in our counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria" (Clottey, 2015, p. 1).

A subsequent report published in 2017 elicited the following reaction from the Army:

> "Without mincing words, the allegations contained in the said report are not only inconceivable but also have no place in the Nigerian military… Inasmuch as the Nigerian military acknowledges and respects the views and constructive criticism of individuals, groups, or even international organisations, including Amnesty International, it will not

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> accept this deliberate falsehood. It is on record that Amnesty International has embarked on a series of false allegations against the Nigerian military and other security forces since the inception of military action against terrorists in the northeast. Amnesty International only encourages activities of non-state actors who take up arms against the state, killing, maiming, and destroying public property, while always accusing security forces who are sacrificing everything to restore peace and normalcy" (Channels TV, 2017, p.1).

The Army also reacted to a 2018 report in the following terms:

> "The actions of AI seem to be geared towards weakening the efforts of the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) to ensure peace and security in the country. It has been observed that AI has made it a routine duty to continue generating tension among citizens by releasing unconfirmed reports, unsubstantiated claims, and figures relating to military counter-insurgency operations and wanton killings by unknown groups or persons" (Ajibola, 2018, p. 1).

State-civil society relations have tended to operate under a regulatory regime instituted in response to the violent extremist threat. Within such regimes, the state has asserted its dominance over CSOs through legislation requiring them to be financially accountable by submitting documents to state bureaucratic structures (Njoku, 2021). The rationale behind such regimes is purportedly to contain the negative influence of certain CSOs. In rationalizing the tightening of financial regulations, the country's anti-corruption czar stated in 2019 that the Nigerian state has "been keeping an eye on the activities of persons and groups serving as humanitarian or aid workers" to combat terrorist financing (Sanni, 2019, p. 1).

In keeping with that objective, there have been reports of profiling civil society organisations aimed at "deregistering those that have deviated from their mandate" (Adesomoju, 2018, p. 1). In 2019, the Nigerian Army sealed the offices of Action Against Hunger and Mercy Corps, citing "credible intelligence" that the former was involved in subversive activities with terrorists (Sanni, 2019, p. 1). The organisations received a second ban from the Nigerian Army, which ordered it to close its office for "aiding and abetting terrorists" by supplying food and drugs (Africanews, 2024, p. 1). Recent reports of NGOs' complicity in arson attacks at IDP camps (Ogunseyin, 2024) have further bolstered the rationale for such actions.

Despite these challenges, various collaborative engagements between the Nigerian state and some CSOs have also existed. Partnerships have been recorded in the disbursement of grants

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(Marama, 2024), training workshops (Abubakar, 2024), town sanitation exercises for "repentant terrorists" (Agency Report, 2022), and the distribution of relief materials to flood-affected communities (National Accord Newspaper, 2024). Indications of partnerships between the Nigerian state and CSOs within the context of deradicalisation programming also exist, following the state-led development and execution of a "policy framework and a National Action Plan (NAP) in 2017, outlining a 'whole of society approach' for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), which placed significant emphasis on creating partnerships with CSOs, especially in rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives" (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, ICCT, 2019, p. 1).

State-Civil Society Relations and Counterterrorism in Nigeria

The interactions between the Nigerian state and civil society organisations (CSOs) paint a picture of a relationship characterised by antagonism and conditional cooperation. This antagonistic disposition often arises from the state's framing of CSO activities within a broader national security context. The government perceives these activities as overlapping with the objectives of violent extremist actors, which justifies the imposition of stringent financial and accountability regulations.

For instance, the actions of the Borno state government toward various organisations underscore this adversarial stance. In 2021, the government suspended the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) following a security incident during a training exercise in Maiduguri involving dummy weapons and simulated gunfire (Abdullahi, 2021a). In the same year, it announced a ban on food relief distribution by NGOs across five local government areas in Borno state (Haruna, 2021). More recently, in 2024, the Borno State Government sealed the offices of iMMAP France, claiming it was operating illegally contrary to existing laws regarding NGO registration (Illiya, 2024).

The Nigerian state has constructed an argument suggesting that some CSOs inadvertently support terrorist organisations by providing financial aid or services that such groups could exploit (Njoku, 2021). This perspective is particularly evident in the government's responses to reports published by Amnesty International (AI), which has consistently highlighted human

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rights abuses linked to state-led counterterrorism efforts. For example, the Nigerian Army has accused AI of undermining military operations by publishing reports that allegedly incite international condemnation and hinder access to foreign military assistance. The Army stated, “It could be noted that any time the AFN has reasonable assurances of getting military hardware and or expendables... AI would come forward with falsehood to weep up anti-Nigerian sentiments” (Ajibola, 2018, p. 1).

As a result, the Nigerian state's regulatory sovereignty has allowed it to foster a “patron-client” relationship with certain CSOs. CSOs must align their activities with state interests in exchange for operational legitimacy in this arrangement. However, this dynamic often leads to tensions, as the state's attempts to convert CSOs into “appendages” can hinder their capacity to deliver essential humanitarian services. For example, the actions taken against ACTED endangered over 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) reliant on the organisation for food and humanitarian assistance (Abdullahi, 2021b).

While instances of conditional cooperation exist—such as partnerships in grant disbursement, training workshops, and relief material distribution—the overall relationship is mainly adversarial. Recent initiatives, including the development of a National Action Plan (NAP) in 2017 aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), have emphasised collaboration with CSOs for rehabilitation and reintegration programmes (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, ICCT, 2019, p. 1). Nevertheless, these collaborative efforts are often overshadowed by the regulatory constraints imposed by the state.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed state-civil society relations within the context of counterterrorism in Nigeria, specifically as it relates to the Nigerian state's response to the violent activities of the Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). As noted, the relations between both organisational entities conform to a narrative of “continuous contentiousness” and “conditional co-operation”, wherein CSOs, regardless of their humanitarian and peace building contributions, have occupied an adversarial status within the frame of state perceptions, which often have depicted their activities as intersecting with and advancing the goals of these violent

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extremist groups, rationalising the imposition of stringent regulatory regimes. Cooperation has often occurred within the contexts of resource distribution and allocation superintended by the Nigerian state, wholly or to an extent, specifically in grants disbursement, training and relief efforts. Nonetheless, the imperative of improved relations cannot be overstated, given the increasingly limited capacity of the state and the simultaneous increasing importance of CSOs, specifically within the context of service provision and delivery to vulnerable populations. This creates a need for constructive relations between the Nigerian state and CSOs to allow for the smoother functioning of CSOs, as such a dynamic would also aid in advancing the goals and objectives of the Nigerian state in the long run.

Recommendations

Discussions within the compass of this paper highlight the imperative of improving relations between the Nigerian state and civil society organisations. The reality of the declining capacity of states and governments as hubs of effective social problem-solving, coupled with the corresponding rise of civil society as critical actors, necessitates the development of collaborative relations between the state and civil society organisations. This collaboration can take the form of measures such as state–civil society liaison forums and networks, as well as coordination hotlines, aimed at synchronising counterterrorism efforts and addressing communication gaps, thereby helping to mitigate tensions. Within this framework, similar initiatives can be undertaken to develop structures that integrate state authority with the expertise of CSOs, particularly in areas such as grassroots mobilisation and advocacy. Furthermore, civil society organisations can enhance their standing with state authorities by implementing transparency and accountability protocols. These measures could include institutionalising internal controls to prevent resource misappropriation and emphasising the principles of prudence, thereby reducing the reliance on punitive frameworks adopted by the Nigerian state. Such steps can foster a cooperative and effective relationship between the Nigerian state and civil society.

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