

## A Tale of Two Tastes: Contradictions of Civil-Military Cooperation in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This paper delves into the complex and multifaceted landscape of civil-military interactions in Nigeria, uncovering the inherent contradictions that shape this critical relationship and the embedded social identity issues. As a nation with a history marked by sociopolitical turbulence, ethnic diversity and security challenges, Nigeria's civil-military interactions carry profound implications for its stability and continuity as a state. The paper is a contribution to the existing literature by offering a distinctive understanding of the contradictions inherent in civil-military interactions in Nigeria. It underscores the necessity of harmonizing this relationship for the sake of national unity, and effective security strategies. The findings have implications not only for Nigeria but also for countries facing similar challenges globally, thereby inviting further research and policy deliberations to navigate the intricate terrain of civil-military relations in diverse societies.*

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**Keywords:** *Civil-military relations, civil-military cooperation, civil-military interaction, Nigerian military*

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### **Introduction**

Military personnel are immensely admired and respected (even feared) by Nigerian citizens. The embedded admiration, respect and fear may not be peculiarly Nigerian. However, the early intervention in the state affairs and governance of the newly independent Nigerian nation in January 1966 has made the surrounding challenging scenarios more pronounced. Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) thus becomes a crucial aspect of existence in countries like Nigeria. In such countries, the relationship between the civilian population and the military has long been a topic of discussion. Under these matrixes, governance has become complicated by deficient performances made even more complex by sundry insecurities (Gbandi & Amissah, 2022). Then a specific brand of such multifaceted uncertainties in the country is the insecurity of life itself (Joshua et al., 2021). Nigeria, as a diverse nation with numerous security challenges, has witnessed

a range of efforts aimed at fostering collaboration between the civilian and military sectors. However, despite these initiatives, the nature of civil-military cooperation in Nigeria is marked by inherent contradictions and challenges that hinder its effectiveness and ultimately undermine the desired outcomes.

This essay essentially explores the contradictions present in civil-military cooperation in Nigeria and examines their impact on the nation's developmental strides. Then it is considered instructive to introduce a disambiguation to this contribution at this introductory stage. Strictly conceptually therefore, the paper is not focused on civil-military cooperation (civil-military relations) as common in extant literature. Under such existing tendencies, civil-military relations are principally conceptualized with regards to the linkages (expected and subsisting linkages) between military authorities or the military institution and the government in power. Under such existing scholarship too, when military regimes are in charge in different locations, civil military cooperation / civil military relations are treated as how the authoritarian military rulers relate with either the civilian politicians or the citizenry as large. To that extent, it is highlighted that this work is not focused on relations between civilian governments or governmental institutions and the military. The study essentially examines the drivers of the inevitable and multifaceted interactions between civilians in the society or the generic society and military personnel in Nigeria. The paper therefore appraises distinctively the social identity undertones of civil-military relations.

The research elucidates the complexities and contradictions inherent in such civil-military scenarios. Furthermore, “the military” as nomenclature actually refers to the armed forces, the combined bodies of troops of a country, who fight on land, at sea, or in the air (army, navy and air force). But more often than not, particularly in emergent states, the army is the face of the military and it is so portrayed in this paper. After this introduction, the work continues in this sub-thematic order: a digest of the Nigerian Army, theoretical framework of the study, the contradictions, and finally a conclusion.

### **A DIGEST OF THE NIGERIAN ARMY**

The Nigerian Army, as the land-based component of the Nigerian Armed Forces, plays a pivotal role in maintaining national security, promoting stability, and supporting civil authorities within Nigeria. Established shortly before the country gained independence in 1960, the Nigerian Army has been involved in various internal and external operations throughout its history. It is organized into several divisions, brigades, and units, each with specific roles and responsibilities. These units are categorized into infantry, armored, artillery, engineering, and support units, enabling the Army to address a wide range of operational and security challenges (Mabia & Nweke, 2014).. The Nigerian Army is deeply involved in addressing internal security threats in Nigeria such as insurgency, terrorism, and ethnic conflicts. It has conducted operations to combat groups like Boko Haram, which have posed significant challenges to the country's stability (Joshua et al, 2021; Nwagboso, 2018)

The Nigerian Army also actively participates in international peacekeeping missions under the United Nations. It contributes troops to various conflict zones in the world to help restore peace and stability, showcasing Nigeria's commitment to global security efforts (Obi, 2019). Nigeria's history is marked by periods of military rule and civilian governance. In these regards, the Nigerian Army has played a significant role in the nation's political landscape, both as a stabilizing force

and at times, as a political actor. Therefore, striking a balance between civilian oversight and military professionalism remains a challenge (Animashaun & Borisade, 2021). Nigeria's ethnic and cultural diversity is reflected within the Army's ranks. While this diversity can present challenges, it also offers an opportunity for the military to demonstrate unity and integration, reflecting the broader societal context (Adeakin, 2015). The Nigerian Army focuses on continuous training and modernization to enhance its operational effectiveness. This includes efforts to improve equipment, tactics, and coordination with other security agencies.

Furthermore, this land-based segment of the Nigerian Armed Forces faces several challenges, including inadequate funding, corruption, internal divisions, and concerns about human rights abuses during military operations. These challenges then impact its ability to effectively address security threats and maintain public trust (Oshita et al, 2019). But beyond security operations, the Nigerian Army is involved in humanitarian efforts, such as disaster relief and providing medical assistance to communities in need (Ayemoba et al, 2022). According to Abdullahi (2021, p.140) “the Nigerian Army has been highly active in using medical outreach as part of the strategies under the Directorate of the Civil-Military Relations of the Nigerian Army to relate with Nigerian citizens and this has positively impacted the lives of the targeted population in Nigeria through effective treatment of diseases and free medication to people who cannot afford the medical bills and other charges in conventional Hospitals or Clinics due to financial constraints”. Essentially, the Nigerian Army is a critical institution in Nigeria's quest for stability and security. Its history is intertwined with the nation's sociopolitical landscape, and its actions have far-reaching implications for Nigeria's governance and unity.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The work is framed on the social identity theory, which owes its origin to the pioneering contributions of Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and the 1980s (Brown, 2020; Renström et al, 2021). This theory explores how individuals derive their sense of self and social belonging from the groups they identify with. According to this theory, people categorize themselves and others into various social groups (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, gender, occupation) to establish a sense of identity and self-esteem. These group identities can lead to both positive feelings of belonging and negative perceptions of other groups (Bochatay et al, 2019). Social identity theory essentially consists of three main components:

- **Categorization:** People instinctively categorize themselves and others into different groups to understand their social environment. This categorization helps simplify a complex world, allowing individuals to identify similarities with their in-group (the group they belong to) and differences with out-groups (other groups).
- **Social Comparison:** Individuals often compare their in-group positively with out-groups to enhance their self-esteem and social identity. They tend to perceive their in-group as superior, which boosts their self-worth by association. This comparison can lead to biases, stereotypes, and even discrimination against out-groups.
- **Social Identity and Self-Esteem:** People invest their self-esteem in their group identities. Successes and positive attributes of their in-group contribute to personal feelings of accomplishment, while failures or negative attributes can lead to lowered self-esteem. As a result, individuals may strive to enhance the status and reputation of their in-group to

bolster their own self-worth (Hoffmann et al, 2020; Kim & Ko, 2020; Peterson & Stewart, 2020; Scheepers et al, 2019).

Social identity theory explains the dynamics of intergroup behavior, such as prejudice, conflict, and cooperation. It highlights how individuals' self-concept is closely tied to their group memberships, influencing their attitudes and behaviors toward members of their own group and other groups. This theory also underscores the role of social context in shaping these perceptions and behaviors. The theory elucidates how group identities play a crucial role in shaping individuals' self-perception, attitudes, and interactions with others (Brown, 2020; Cruwys et al, 2016; Renström et al, 2021). It enables researchers and conflict management practitioners to understand how people identify with and differentiate between groups, to gain insights into intergroup dynamics, which can have implications for addressing prejudice, conflict, and fostering positive intergroup relations.

In applying this framework to civil-military cooperation in Nigeria, the paper focused on how group identities and perceptions of civilian and military roles either generated contradictions or shaped cooperation.

## **THE CONTRADICTIONS**

The paper consequently proceeds to present the perceived incongruities below:

### **Divergent Interests and Objectives**

One of the primary contradictions of civil-military cooperation in the country lies in the divergent interests and objectives between the civilian and military spheres of the population under the same nation. The civilian segment seeks security, peace, and development in Nigeria, while the military hierarchy prioritizes national defense and safeguarding of the nation's territorial integrity. But to guarantee security, peace, and development in Nigeria, reach national defense goals and safeguard the nation's territorial integrity requires civil-military cooperation. Hence, the identified differing priorities often lead to conflicts of interest, making it challenging to achieve a unified and coherent approach to civil-military cooperation. The military's heavy-handed approach to issues that border on internal security and peace, at times, clashes with the civilian population's aspirations for full democratic governance and respect for human rights, resulting in a strained relationship. During the ENDSARS protests in October, 2020 for instance, the military was widely accused of taking part in the shooting of protesters in Lagos.

The nationwide protests, which eventually spread to the Nigerian diaspora was principally coordinated to battle police brutality against Nigerian youths. It is commonly held that "the Nigerian government deployed armed forces on the 20th of October 2020, to open gun-fire at the peaceful protesters in Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos, the symbolic center of the protest leading to the death of approximately forty-nine (49) civilians together with many civilian casualties (Oluyemi, 2022; Oluyemi, 2023, p.303) Amnesty International (the influential international non-governmental organization focused on human rights) also strongly believed that the Nigerian military was culpable in the killings at the Lekki Toll Gate (Amnesty International, 2020). When Nigerians are not engaged in massive protests in the category of the ENDSARS uprising, it is the military personnel they prefer to engage in settling unnerving interpersonal disputes.

In sundry business relationships, a stronger party often invites a military acquaintance or relation to settle a matter in his or her favour even when the other party is guiltless. Aggrieved

female partners in the country frequently threaten their partners with a relationship they have with a third partner who is a member of the Nigerian armed forces. Even at that, there remains an immense trust deficit and perception challenges in civil-military cooperation in the country essentially bordering on social identity factors. This creates the scenario of a tale of two tastes. Nigerian citizens and the soldiers alike have continued to harbour the positive feelings of belonging to their own groups and negative perceptions of the other group, akin to a fundamental factor in social identity theory.

### **Trust Deficit and Perception Challenges**

There is accordingly, a significant contradiction arising from an inherent trust deficit between civilians and the military in Nigeria, which is also in tandem with the positions of the social identity theory. This mistrust actually stems from historical experiences of military rule, continuing human rights abuses, and excessive use of force by the military in relating with their civilian counterparts. The military have continued to perceive their group as superior, as this boosts their self-worth. Under the social identity theory, such perceptions can lead to biases, stereotypes, and even discrimination against out-groups. Civilian populations in the country therefore still view the military as an instrument of oppression rather than a protector, leading to continuing skepticism and resistance towards seamless cooperation efforts. Such perceptions hinder the establishment of robust channels of communication, mutual understanding, and shared decision-making, thus undermining the effectiveness of civil-military initiatives.

### **Lack of Institutional Capacity and Coordination**

The Nigerian civil-military landscape is characterized by a lack of institutional capacity and coordination. While numerous initiatives have been launched to promote cooperation, there is often a lack of proper structures, processes, and mechanisms to facilitate effective collaboration. The absence of adequate training and education programs for both military personnel and civilians on civil-military relations further exacerbates the problem. Insufficient resources and weak inter-agency coordination further hinder the implementation and sustainability of cooperative efforts, limiting their impact on peace building and development.

### **Militarization of Public Spaces**

The militarization of public spaces is a visible contradiction within civil-military cooperation in Nigeria. The presence of armed forces in civilian areas, such as checkpoints, usually creates an atmosphere of intimidation and fear among the population. This militarization breeds resentment, exacerbates social divisions, and erodes the trust necessary for cooperation. Additionally, the military's involvement in civil affairs, such as law enforcement and governance, blurs the lines between civilian and military roles, further complicating the dynamics of civil-military cooperation in the country. For instance, there is a serious contradiction in the involvement of the military in conducting elections in Nigeria. In the viewpoints of Okechukwu et al. (2019, 90) "election is a civil affair where the citizens are constitutionally empowered to exercise their franchise, however in a country that has witnessed series of breach of security from the political class during elections since independence, as well as the current spate of insecurity in the country, it is incontrovertible that considering the lack of capacity of Nigeria Police in providing security

in the country, the military has a duty to assist in ensuring safety of lives and properties during elections”. It increasingly appears as if the military have become indispensable in Nigerian elections, the elections that lead to the formation of government at all levels in the country (federal, state and local government levels) but it is considered an aberration everywhere for the same military to be in power.

### **Limited Civilian Participation in Decision-making Processes**

The limited involvement of civilians in decision-making processes related to security and defense further hampers the effectiveness of civil-military cooperation in Nigeria. The military often dominates strategic planning and implementation, with minimal input from civil society organizations, community leaders, and other stakeholders. This exclusionary approach undermines the principles of democratic governance, hinders local ownership of security initiatives, and perpetuates a top-down approach that fails to address the diverse needs and aspirations of the civilian population. Limited civilian participation in decision-making processes in civilian-military cooperation in Nigeria can be illustrated through various specific cases. This issue often arises due to historical, structural, and cultural factors that have marginalized civilian input in security-related matters.

In tackling the Boko Haram insurgency for instance, the Nigerian military has played a significant role in counterterrorism operations. However, the civilian population, particularly in affected regions like the northeast, often had limited input in the decision-making processes related to military operations and humanitarian assistance, particularly at the earliest stages of the Boko Haram trouble. Civilians' voices were often marginalized, leading to concerns about the appropriateness of military strategies and the lack of a comprehensive civilian-centered approach. The Joint Civilian Task Force (JCTF) was subsequently introduced into the Boko Haram counter insurgency operations in Nigeria and refers to a grassroots civilian-led security initiative that emerged in response to the Boko Haram insurgency. It is also commonly known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). The JCTF/CJTF has played a significant role in supporting the Nigerian military and security forces in their efforts to counter the Boko Haram insurgency.

The JCTF/CJTF was formed in 2013 in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in northeastern Nigeria. It emerged as a response to the increasing threat of Boko Haram in the region. Omenma & Hendricks (2018) used stabilization theory in examining both civilian involvement and the impact of their relationships with the military on Boko Haram counterterrorism. The researchers drew their data from multiple quantitative and qualitative sources. Their statistical analyses included descriptive procedures, correlations and comparative analysis. They categorized the study into two periods (pre-Civilian Joint Task Force / Civilian-JTF intervention and post-Civilian-JTF involvement). They compared the consistency and intensity of Boko Haram attacks and Troop Responses (TRs) at pre-civilian and post-civilian counterterrorism periods. The researchers found that the mean number of Boko Haram attacks was significantly higher before than after civilian intervention. They concluded that the major contributory factors were the shifts “in active and passive supports of the civilian population to the military, which increased the strategic and operational intelligence gathering, combat strength, and more proactive military in counterterrorism”.

Additionally however, under the contexts of social identity theory, the civilian participants in the JTf operations must have invested their self-esteem in their group identities. The successes of Boko Haram were negating this self-esteem. A reversal of such trends would contribute to their personal feelings of accomplishment and enhance their own self-esteem. As a result, these individuals strove to enhance the status and reputation of their in-group as citizens to bolster their own self-worth. The researchers recommended the extension of the civilian and military synergy beyond the use of force to incorporate a political solution that will address some of the grumbles of Boko Haram.

The involvement of the Joint Civilian Task Force in the Boko Haram counterinsurgency efforts further illustrates the complex dynamics of civilian-military cooperation but this time, specifically in violent conflict zones. While the JCTF/CJTF has contributed to local security efforts and also had a significant impact on countering Boko Haram's activities, the challenges of integrating civilian groups into formal security frameworks and ensuring their accountability highlight the complexities and contradictions of such collaborations. Furthermore on this issue of limited civilian participation in decision-making processes, neglect of civilian involvement in decisions related to justice and accountability mechanisms can hinder efforts to address human rights abuses and provide redress to victims. In other words, when military personnel are involved in incidents of abuse, civilian oversight and participation are crucial to ensuring fair investigations and appropriate consequences and in so doing the chances of continuing civil-military cooperation is guaranteed.

### **Conclusion**

While civil-military cooperation is essential for social harmony in Nigeria, addressing Nigeria's security challenges and fostering development, the contradictions within this relationship pose significant obstacles. Divergent interests and trust deficits, institutional limitations, militarization of public spaces, and limited civilian participation all undermine the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. Addressing these contradictions requires proactive steps, including promoting open dialogue, establishing accountable institutions, and prioritizing the protection of human rights and democratic values. Only by acknowledging and resolving these contradictions can Nigeria pave the way for a more harmonious and effective civil-military cooperation that contributes to peace, stability, and sustainable development.

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