



## OPEN ACCESS

SUBMITTED 17 March 2025

ACCEPTED 13 April 2025

PUBLISHED 15 May 2025

VOLUME Vol.07 Issue05 2025

## CITATION

Christopher Mitchell Osazuwa, & Vitalis Odinaka Ugwukwu. (2025). Beyond the battlefield: the role of human intelligence (HUMINT) in addressing the socio-economic drivers of Boko haram in northeastern Nigeria. *The American Journal of Political Science Law and Criminology*, 7(05), 43–59. <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajpslc/Volume07Issue05-09>

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# Beyond the battlefield: the role of human intelligence (HUMINT) in addressing the socio-economic drivers of Boko haram in northeastern Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The Boko Haram insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria has led to regional destabilization, intensifying poverty, unemployment, and governance challenges. Despite extensive military interventions, socio-economic drivers persist, sustaining the insurgency and underscoring the necessity for alternative strategies. This study analyses the transformative potential of Human Intelligence (HUMINT) in addressing systemic issues, highlighting its role in mitigating grievances and promoting stability. The study employs Social Conflict Theory to examine the role of socio-economic inequalities in driving insurgencies and the potential of HUMINT to address these disparities. A qualitative research design was implemented using secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and case studies. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns between HUMINT and socio-economic interventions. The findings indicate that poverty, insufficient education, and unemployment heighten susceptibility to Boko Haram's recruitment and ideological influence. Human intelligence provides an essential understanding of insurgent networks and their grievances; however, it encounters challenges such as insufficient funding and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Instances such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) illustrate the efficacy of community-based

intelligence in countering insurgent operations. The research indicates that tackling the socio-economic factors driving Boko Haram necessitates the integration of human intelligence with specific reforms and community involvement. Recommendations involve improving HUMINT frameworks via localized training and international collaboration, investing in poverty alleviation and education, and building trust through grassroots initiatives. A comprehensive intelligence-driven strategy is suggested to tackle the underlying causes and expressions of insurgency, fostering enduring peace and development in the region.

**Keywords:** Human Intelligence (HUMINT), Boko Haram, Socio-economic Drivers, Insurgency, Community Engagement.

**Introduction:** The Boko Haram insurgency remains a critical threat to peace and security in Nigeria, particularly in the northeastern region. Originating in the early 2000s as a radical Islamic group advocating strict Sharia law, Boko Haram evolved into a violent insurgency by 2009. Its activities, including bombings, assassinations, and abductions, have caused extensive violence, displaced millions and undermined socio-economic structures (Buba, 2024).

The northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa have long faced socio-economic challenges such as poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment, conditions that Boko Haram has exploited for recruitment. The group capitalized on weak governance, systemic corruption, and the limited state presence in remote areas to consolidate its ideology (Mohammed, 2024; Oyewo, 2024). Initially addressing local grievances, Boko Haram later aligned with global jihadist objectives, resulting in over 35,000 deaths and the displacement of more than 2 million individuals as of 2023. Its activities have further disrupted agriculture, education, and healthcare, exacerbating regional poverty and underdevelopment (Kolawole, 2024; Nasidi, 2024). The 2014 Chibok schoolgirl abductions highlighted the group's gendered violence and drew international attention (Nwambuko & Nwobi, 2024).

In response, the Nigerian government has conducted various military campaigns, often in collaboration with neighboring nations through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). These operations, however, have faced criticism for human rights violations and insufficient civilian protection. International organizations, including the United Nations and NGOs, have provided humanitarian assistance and developmental support, yet achieving lasting stability

remains challenging (Lawan et al., 2024; Ajibade & Onibokun, 2024).

Despite recent military progress, Boko Haram endures, with factions like the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continuing to conduct attacks. Their resilience is linked to adaptive strategies, including exploiting porous borders and employing digital propaganda for recruitment and radicalization (Tahir & Alkali, 2024).

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) is an underutilized but vital tool for addressing the socio-economic drivers of insurgency. By engaging directly with affected communities, HUMINT can provide insights into grievances and vulnerabilities that facilitate Boko Haram's recruitment and influence. However, its effectiveness is hindered by the absence of institutional frameworks, ethical standards, and inter-agency coordination. The literature emphasizes the need for tailored intelligence strategies to integrate military and developmental approaches (Olojo, 2020).

This paper seeks to explore the transformative potential of HUMINT in addressing the socio-economic factors underlying Boko Haram's insurgency. It aims to evaluate how HUMINT can mitigate these drivers and assess its implications for fostering sustainable peace and development in Northeastern Nigeria.

### **Human Intelligence (HUMINT)**

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) is a cornerstone of intelligence operations, focusing on the collection and analysis of information through direct human interaction. NATO defines HUMINT as intelligence acquired via interpersonal engagement, emphasizing its reliance on communication to gather critical insights (Koivula, 2024). Activities within HUMINT include interviewing detainees, collaborating with defectors, and developing informants, often integrating with other intelligence domains such as Signals Intelligence (SIGINT), Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT), Measurement and Signature Intelligence (MASINT), and Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT) to provide a multidimensional approach to intelligence operations (Brantly, 2024).

HUMINT stands apart from technical intelligence by its focus on trust-building, personal communication, and the socio-cultural context of information. It is indispensable in conflict zones, where understanding local motivations, networks, and grievances offers a nuanced perspective often missing in purely technological intelligence (Gberinjer et al., 2024). Recent research underscores its continued relevance in addressing complex security threats, despite advancements in technology. For instance, Omand (2022) and Herman (2023) highlight HUMINT's unique ability to navigate nuanced socio-political dynamics.

Similarly, Gill (2021) and Andrew (2020) emphasize the importance of contextualizing intelligence within cultural frameworks for a comprehensive analysis.

HUMINT plays a vital role in global peacekeeping and counterterrorism efforts. Aning (2024) underscores its utility in navigating the socio-political complexities of conflict zones, while Apaloo (2020) highlights its operational value in tackling transnational crime and bolstering border security. Region-specific studies illustrate its impact; for example, Karsh (2023) and Peled (2021) emphasize HUMINT's efficacy in understanding adversarial intentions and socio-political landscapes in the Middle East. Abdel Rahman (2022) and Shoukry (2024) explore its integration with other intelligence methods in North Africa, demonstrating its contribution to counterterrorism and crisis management.

In West Africa, HUMINT demonstrates adaptability in addressing diverse security challenges. Osagie (2023) emphasizes the role of local informants in counterterrorism, particularly in identifying and disrupting extremist cells in Nigeria. Olukoshi (2022) highlights the broader application of community-based HUMINT in enhancing national security frameworks and threat assessments. Adibe (2021) further underscores the significance of HUMINT in understanding political and social dynamics, thereby informing strategic decision-making.

In Nigeria, HUMINT has proven instrumental in combating insurgency, terrorism, and political instability. Agbonifo (2023) highlights its role in actionable intelligence through direct human interaction, while Bello (2022) and Mohammed (2021) emphasize its relevance in military and law enforcement operations. Okwara (2020) expands the concept to include community-based intelligence, stressing the importance of local relationships in gathering critical information. Ojo (2024) underscores HUMINT's tactical significance in counterterrorism, particularly in disrupting networks such as Boko Haram, thereby reinforcing its indispensable role in contemporary intelligence frameworks within complex security environments.

### Sources of Human Intelligence (HUMINT)

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) plays a pivotal role in counterterrorism, especially in areas plagued by insurgency and terrorism. Unlike technical intelligence such as Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) or Imagery Intelligence (IMINT), HUMINT provides unique, actionable insights through sources like informants, defectors, and prisoner interrogations (Kangdim et al., 2022; Maza et al., 2020).

### Informants

Informants are embedded within local communities, offering crucial intelligence on insurgent operations, including recruitment, logistics, and supply routes. In Iraq and Afghanistan, informants significantly disrupted insurgent strategies by providing intelligence on movements and attack plans (Kangdim et al., 2022). Similarly, in Nigeria, informants from marginalized groups revealed Boko Haram's recruitment centers, hidden weapon caches, and operational hubs, demonstrating the critical role of community-based intelligence (Maza et al., 2020). However, informants face considerable risks of retaliation, highlighting the need for robust protective protocols (Koyuncu et al., 2023).

### Defectors

Defectors, often driven by ideological shifts or fear, offer detailed insights into insurgent hierarchies, recruitment, and logistics. Intelligence from defectors has exposed critical operational weaknesses, such as Boko Haram's safe houses and recruitment strategies (Adamu, 2022; Banham, 2021). Additionally, defectors can undermine insurgent morale by revealing internal conflicts and vulnerabilities (Hansen, 2022). Nevertheless, verifying defector intelligence is challenging, requiring thorough vetting and corroboration to mitigate the risk of false information (Zwet et al., 2022; Ibrahim, 2022).

### Prisoner Interrogations

Prisoner interrogations yield valuable intelligence on insurgent strategies, structures, and plans. For example, detainees in Afghanistan identified Taliban commanders and attack methods, while interrogations in Iraq exposed ISIS recruitment and territorial control strategies (Rothschild, 2020; Zarif, 2023). In Nigeria, interrogations of Boko Haram operatives have uncovered recruitment methods, bomb-making facilities, and ideological frameworks, aiding counter-radicalization initiatives (Kamara & Kone, 2022; Sadio, 2021). Despite their effectiveness, ethical concerns about mistreatment during interrogations pose challenges to the legitimacy of intelligence operations (Adebayo, 2021; Bello & Ugwu, 2022). Ensuring compliance with international standards and corroborating prisoner-derived intelligence with other sources such as SIGINT and IMINT is essential to maintain operational integrity (Hoffman & Rosenau, 2022; Barnes, 2023).

HUMINT remains indispensable in counterinsurgency, providing intelligence often inaccessible through other means. However, its reliance on human sources necessitates careful handling to address ethical, security, and reliability challenges effectively.

### The Socio-Economic Landscape of Northeastern

## Nigeria

Northeastern Nigeria is characterized by profound socio-economic disparities, exacerbated by environmental challenges, governance failures, and systemic neglect. These issues are evident in widespread poverty, high unemployment, and limited access to education and healthcare. Historically, the region has lagged due to colonial neglect and post-independence misallocation of resources (Kamta et al., 2020). Its agricultural reliance is undermined by climate variability, land degradation, and minimal technological advancement, perpetuating poverty cycles (Kayode et al., 2021).

Income inequality is pronounced, with rural populations, particularly in remote areas, facing greater economic challenges compared to urban centers. Disparities in property ownership, educational opportunities, and infrastructure access deepen these inequalities. Structural inequities have heightened vulnerability to insurgencies, such as the Boko Haram crisis, which leverages socio-economic grievances to recruit marginalized individuals (Njoku & Akintayo, 2021).

Demographic pressures, including high fertility rates and a youthful population, further strain limited resources and social services. Northeastern Nigeria exhibits some of the nation's highest rates of child stunting and wasting, reflecting persistent food insecurity and inadequate health systems (Nwosu & Ataguba, 2020). These metrics highlight the region's entrenched socio-economic marginalization and the urgent need for targeted interventions.

Political marginalization has exacerbated the divide, as Northeastern communities remain underrepresented in federal decision-making, fostering perceptions of neglect and discrimination. This dynamic has contributed to the emergence of a "war economy," where insurgents and criminal groups exploit local disenfranchisement to recruit and sustain operations (Avis, 2020).

Economic deprivation, political marginalization, and social inequality intersect to produce severe outcomes, including insurgency and transnational criminal activities such as arms trafficking and terrorism. The region's disproportionately low GDP contribution underscores the neglect of critical sectors like agriculture, which employs the majority of its population (Raheem & Oyeleye, 2020). These structural disparities perpetuate cycles of violence, as marginalized groups see few viable avenues for resolving their grievances (Chidi et al., 2023).

## Socio-Economic Drivers of Insurgency

- Widespread poverty and lack of economic opportunities.

Pervasive poverty and restricted economic opportunities are critical socio-economic factors contributing to insurgency, especially in areas such as Northeastern Nigeria. Poverty fosters an environment conducive to extremist ideologies by intensifying feelings of neglect, frustration, and desperation within the population (Eneji & Agri, 2020). In environments characterised by systemic economic deprivation, insurgent groups like Boko Haram capitalise on these weaknesses to recruit individuals by offering financial incentives, social integration, and resource access (Aruofor & Ogbeide, 2022).

The absence of viable economic opportunities intensifies unemployment and exacerbates socio-economic disparities, which are significant contributors to grievances against the state. This grievance frequently appears as an endorsement of insurgency or direct involvement in violent movements (Adamu, Jibril, & Jirah, 2023). The lack of stable livelihoods compels individuals, especially youth, to pursue alternative survival strategies, rendering them vulnerable to the ideological narratives promoted by insurgent groups (Alkali & Sharma, 2023).

Boko Haram's recruitment strategy is particularly effective in impoverished regions characterised by limited educational and economic opportunities. Recruitment is notably effective among unemployed youths, who perceive membership as a pathway to economic security or a means to address perceived injustices (Apikins, 2023). Insurgent activities, including targeted attacks on infrastructure and agriculture, contribute to a cycle of economic stagnation and poverty, worsening the conditions that foster ongoing insurgency (Ibrahim, 2021).

The socio-economic implications of this dynamic are severe, as regions impacted by insurgency experience diminished investments, decreased commercial activities, and increased food insecurity, which collectively exacerbate poverty (Adebayo, 2022).

- Poor Access to Education

Limited access to education is acknowledged as a critical socio-economic factor contributing to insurgency and youth radicalization. Insufficient educational opportunities restrict socio-economic mobility, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement. In conflict zones, such conditions frequently increase youth vulnerability to recruitment by insurgent groups that capitalise on their grievances and provide a sense of purpose, belonging, or financial incentives (Farhiya, 2020; Nawaz, 2024). Radical groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria specifically target

communities with inadequate educational infrastructures, portraying Western-style education as a threat to cultural and religious identity, thereby further alienating at-risk youth (Abubakar, 2022).

The vulnerability is intensified in areas with limited economic opportunities, fostering an environment conducive to extremist ideologies (Nganga, 2020). In Northeastern Nigeria, the destruction of schools by insurgent groups and the systemic neglect of educational investment have resulted in millions of children being out of school, thereby perpetuating cycles of illiteracy and economic stagnation (Ramasamy, 2023).

The lack of education leads to social exclusion and restricts access to avenues for constructive engagement, rendering disenfranchised youth vulnerable to radicalization (Sas et al., 2020). Radical groups exploit these circumstances by offering alternative educational or training programs that indoctrinate young individuals into extremist ideologies (Ocheli, 2022).

- Weak Governance and Inadequate Public Service Delivery

Insufficient governance and poor public service delivery are significant socio-economic factors contributing to insurgency, especially in areas affected by conflict and socio-political instability. Governance failures marked by corruption, inadequate institutional capacity, and ineffective resource allocation foster conditions favourable to insurgency (Okonkwo & Idigo, 2022). These failures intensify socio-economic disparities, diminish public trust, and promote disenfranchisement among impacted populations, creating an environment conducive to insurgent groups that exploit grievances and recruit marginalized individuals.

Inadequate public service delivery exacerbates the problem by failing to meet essential needs, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Studies indicate that communities lacking these services exhibit increased susceptibility to radicalization and violence (Hassan, 2021). The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's northeast is associated with insufficient educational opportunities and systemic neglect, which has driven numerous young individuals towards extremist ideologies (Ighoshemu & Ogidiagba, 2022).

Governance deficits are evident in the failure to ensure security and uphold law and order, resulting in populations being vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Research demonstrates that insurgent groups frequently fill this void, positioning themselves as alternative governance entities that can address grievances and provide "justice" (Tarawallie, 2023).

This legitimises their activities and exacerbates the cycle of insurgency and underdevelopment.

In areas like the Lake Chad Basin, poor governance has led to considerable socio-economic deprivation, facilitating the emergence and continuation of groups such as Boko Haram (Tayimlong, 2021). The absence of focused public interventions in education and employment exacerbates economic difficulties, facilitating recruitment into insurgent groups (Eneji & Agri, 2020).

- Influence of external funding and ideological indoctrination.

The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria illustrates the intricate connection between external funding and ideological indoctrination as pivotal socio-economic drivers of conflict. External funding facilitates the acquisition of advanced weaponry, logistical support, and the sustenance of insurgent networks. Studies indicate that Boko Haram receives financial support from international extremist networks and engages in illicit activities such as smuggling and ransom demands to sustain operations (Tayimlong, 2021). This external financial backing enhances the group's capacity to challenge state authority and perpetuate violence.

Ideological indoctrination reinforces the insurgency by recruiting and radicalizing vulnerable individuals, often exploiting poverty and illiteracy. Boko Haram leverages religious rhetoric to influence disenfranchised youth, promising salvation and material rewards. Evidence suggests the group employs coercion alongside religious persuasion to secure recruits, ensuring loyalty and perpetuating its ideological narrative (Alimba & Salihu, 2020). This indoctrination extends to entire communities, cultivating environments conducive to insurgent objectives.

A striking example is the use of Quranic schools (Almajiri system) in Northern Nigeria, where disadvantaged children are exposed to extremist ideologies (Anugwom, 2018). The absence of formal education and pervasive poverty renders these children particularly susceptible to recruitment. Boko Haram capitalizes on socio-economic grievances, such as government neglect and unemployment, to enhance its appeal and expand its recruitment efforts (Bello, 2022).

The interplay between external funding and ideological indoctrination creates a reinforcing cycle. Financial resources support the dissemination of radical ideologies through propaganda and operational activities. Access to such resources allows Boko Haram to produce materials glorifying violence and vilifying state actors, thus perpetuating its narrative among local populations (Joseph, 2023).

## Integrating HUMINT to Address Boko Haram's Socio-Economic Drivers

### Role of HUMINT in Uncovering Root Causes

- Identifying Socio-Economic Grievances through Field Intelligence

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) plays a pivotal role in uncovering the socio-economic grievances that often underpin terrorism and insurgency. By leveraging field intelligence, HUMINT provides critical insights into the structural drivers of radicalization and violence, enabling the formulation of proactive and effective counter-terrorism strategies.

HUMINT offers a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic dynamics fueling discontent and extremism. Hunt and Zimmerman (2022) emphasize that counter-terrorism efforts must shift from reactive responses to proactive strategies addressing the socio-economic grievances of affected communities. Hunt and Zimmerman (2022) further highlight the necessity of integrating HUMINT into peace operations. They argue that effective counter-terrorism requires a thorough understanding of local socio-economic conditions, as neglecting these realities risks perpetuating cycles of violence and instability. By using HUMINT to identify specific community concerns, military and peacekeeping forces can adapt their strategies to meet the needs of local populations, fostering trust and cooperation.

The importance of HUMINT is particularly evident in regions experiencing prolonged conflict. Koyuncu et al. (2023) demonstrate that socio-economic issues, such as poverty and unemployment, exacerbate tensions and contribute to violent conflict.

The integration of HUMINT with other intelligence disciplines, such as open-source intelligence (OSINT), enhances the analysis of socio-economic issues.

- Assessing Recruitment Strategies and Vulnerabilities Exploited by Boko Haram

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) is critical for analyzing the recruitment strategies and vulnerabilities exploited by Boko Haram, a terrorist group that has significantly destabilized Nigeria and its neighboring regions. Through intelligence gathered from local informants, defectors, and community members, security agencies can uncover the socio-economic and ideological factors sustaining the insurgency's growth and resilience.

Boko Haram's recruitment strategies are deeply rooted in socio-economic vulnerabilities. The high poverty rates, unemployment, and limited educational opportunities prevalent in northeastern Nigeria render many young individuals susceptible to radicalization.

Alimba and Salihu (2020) identify socio-economic deprivation as a fundamental driver of the insurgency, highlighting the need to address issues such as illiteracy and economic hardship to counter recruitment. Complementing this, Sinkó (2021) underscores the role of modern communication tools, particularly social media, in targeting disillusioned youth. This dual approach—leveraging local vulnerabilities alongside digital platforms—illustrates the complexity of Boko Haram's recruitment methodologies.

HUMINT operations have been instrumental in identifying these vulnerabilities. Community informants provide critical insights into grievances exploited by insurgents to build support. Research shows that political instability and poor governance create conditions conducive to extremism, as marginalized populations often seek protection or support from insurgent groups (Susan et al., 2020). By understanding these dynamics, intelligence and military agencies can design targeted interventions addressing recruitment drivers, such as improving governance and economic opportunities (Alimba & Salihu, 2020; Adam, 2020).

HUMINT also plays a vital role in uncovering the ideological underpinnings of Boko Haram's recruitment efforts. The group often frames its narrative around religious extremism and anti-government sentiment, targeting those who feel disenfranchised. Alimba and Salihu (2020) assert that these ideological motivations are intricately tied to cultural practices and historical grievances, which can be illuminated through effective HUMINT. Engaging with communities to understand their perspectives allows security forces to counteract the narratives Boko Haram employs for recruitment.

Despite extensive counter-terrorism measures, Boko Haram continues to expand, highlighting shortcomings in current strategies. Maza et al. (2020) argue that these approaches often fail to address underlying socio-economic and ideological issues.

### Community Engagement Strategies

- Role of Community Leaders and Influencers in Intelligence Gathering

Community engagement strategies are increasingly recognized as vital in intelligence collection, particularly for counterterrorism and crime prevention. Community leaders and influencers play a pivotal role in enhancing human intelligence (HUMINT) operations by fostering trust and facilitating information exchange between law enforcement and local populations. This collaborative approach not only improves intelligence gathering but also strengthens community resilience against extremism and criminality.

Community leaders act as key intermediaries,

leveraging their credibility and established relationships to bridge the trust gap often present between residents and authorities. Nunan et al. (2020) underscore the importance of rapport-building in police interactions with covert human intelligence sources (CHIS), noting that trust and cooperation are essential for effective intelligence collection.

Engaging local influencers generates more nuanced, context-specific intelligence. Ali et al. (2023) demonstrate that police agencies employing culturally tailored community engagement strategies achieve greater trust and legitimacy. By involving community leaders in intelligence efforts, law enforcement gains deeper insights into local dynamics, threats, and concerns that traditional methods might overlook.

Community leaders fulfil diverse roles beyond facilitation, actively promoting safety and encouraging public reporting of suspicious activities. Syukur (2024) highlights their role in counterterrorism efforts in Indonesia, emphasizing their capacity to mobilize communities in identifying and addressing potential threats.

Training in structured interviewing techniques, such as the PEACE model, further enhances the quality and reliability of information collected. Equipping community leaders with these skills ensures ethical and effective intelligence gathering, reduces misinformation, and bolsters credibility (Nunan et al., 2020). Ibrahim et al. (2024) argue that collaboration with community leaders and integration of culturally sensitive practices lead to improved operational outcomes.

### **Case Studies of Successful Grassroots Initiatives Leveraging HUMINT**

Strategies for community engagement leveraging Human Intelligence (HUMINT) are pivotal in fostering trust, promoting sustainable solutions, and gathering critical intelligence within counterinsurgency and development frameworks.

### **Community Vigilante Groups (The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)).**

Community vigilante groups have become essential to counterinsurgency initiatives in Northeastern Nigeria, especially in combating Boko Haram. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is a significant grassroots organization that has been instrumental in collecting actionable intelligence and aiding military operations. The CJTF consists of residents who possess a detailed understanding of the region's geography and cultural dynamics, effectively connecting community members with security forces. This collaboration has played a crucial role in identifying insurgent hideouts,

recruitment centres, and operational strategies, thereby significantly diminishing Boko Haram's influence (Maza et al., 2024).

The effectiveness of the CJTF is attributed to its capacity to utilise local knowledge, which has proven crucial in dismantling significant insurgent cells and disrupting logistical networks. Intelligence from CJTF operatives has enabled the capture of Boko Haram commanders and thwarted planned attacks, highlighting the essential role of community participation in improving security measures (Akinteye et al., 2024). The group's efforts have enhanced trust between the military and local populations, thereby improving cooperation in counterterrorism initiatives (Iwuoha et al., 2024).

Despite these achievements, challenges remain, including risks to CJTF members and concerns regarding the sustainability of their operations. The CJTF exemplifies grassroots engagement in counterinsurgency, highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating community-based strategies into national security frameworks (Bamidele, 2024).

- **Women's Peacebuilding Initiatives in Nigeria**

Grassroots organizations for women in Nigeria, such as the Network of Nigerian Women Peacebuilders (NNWP), play a pivotal role in leveraging Human Intelligence (HUMINT) for counter-insurgency and peacebuilding efforts. Their strategies have effectively countered Boko Haram's recruitment tactics, particularly among vulnerable groups like women and children. By working closely with affected communities, these organizations provide actionable intelligence that disrupts insurgent networks while strengthening the socio-political resilience of the region (Mobisa, 2023).

NNWP's partnerships with local communities have uncovered trafficking routes and recruitment mechanisms, enabling security forces to intercept trafficking operations and dismantle recruitment networks in Maiduguri and surrounding areas. These collaborations not only address immediate threats but also empower women as leaders, fostering trust and resilience within communities (Bøås, 2022).

In Borno State, initiatives like the "Safe Haven Project" illustrate the integration of HUMINT with rehabilitation strategies. Insights from interviews with escapees and returnees from Boko Haram camps have shed light on insurgent recruitment and indoctrination methods. This intelligence has informed counter-radicalization programs that target extremist ideologies. Moreover, these rehabilitation efforts have facilitated the reintegration of survivors, reduced stigma, and fostered societal cohesion (Ogo et al., 2024).

Gender-sensitive counter-insurgency approaches have further enhanced security measures. In Yobe State, women's groups and faith-based organizations have identified at-risk individuals, particularly adolescent girls targeted for forced marriages to insurgents. Intelligence from these groups has enabled timely interventions by security forces, averting abductions and forced unions. These efforts weaken Boko Haram's operational capacity and empower communities to resist radicalization, contributing to long-term stability (Waringa, 2021).

The contributions of women-led grassroots initiatives in Nigeria underscore their critical role in strengthening security and advancing peacebuilding. By dismantling recruitment networks, enhancing community resilience, and guiding counter-radicalization efforts, these initiatives have achieved significant success despite challenges such as limited funding, societal resistance to women's leadership, and threats from insurgent groups.

- Community Policing and HUMINT in Urban Centers

Community policing initiatives incorporating Human Intelligence (HUMINT) have emerged as critical tools for combating insurgency and organized crime in Nigeria's urban centers. These approaches emphasize collaboration between law enforcement and local communities to build trust and enhance intelligence gathering. By leveraging residents' local knowledge, these initiatives strengthen urban security frameworks, enabling more effective counterinsurgency and crime prevention efforts.

In the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), community policing units actively engage local leaders and residents to report suspicious activities. This model has successfully dismantled insurgent cells and reduced crime rates by fostering cooperation. Notably, in 2023, actionable intelligence from AMAC units prevented a planned insurgent attack by identifying criminal hideouts and coordinating with security forces. These efforts demonstrate the vital role of HUMINT in urban counterterrorism, especially in high-risk areas like Abuja, where federal initiatives such as dismantling shanties under FCT Minister Barr. Nyesom Wike has complemented grassroots strategies in recent times (Tijani et al., 2024).

Similarly, Lagos State's Neighbourhood Safety Corps (LNSC) exemplifies the integration of grassroots intelligence into crime prevention. Through training programs, community members are equipped to observe and report unusual activities. In 2022, intelligence from local informants enabled the LNSC to dismantle a robbery syndicate operating across

multiple districts, illustrating how community-driven HUMINT can identify criminal networks, disrupt illegal activities, and restore public confidence in law enforcement (Ezeji, 2024).

Kano offers another success story, where community vigilance teams collaborate with residents to address urban crime and insurgency. In 2024, HUMINT from these teams facilitated the dismantling of a drug trafficking network in Kano's urban districts. This underscores the transformative potential of grassroots initiatives when aligned with national security strategies (Iwuoha et al., 2024).

Despite these achievements, community policing initiatives face significant challenges, including limited resources, inadequate training, and risks to informants, which threaten their sustainability.

### **Collaboration with Development Agencies**

- HUMINT as a bridge between military operations and development programs.

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) plays a pivotal role in fostering cooperation between military operations and development initiatives, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings. By emphasizing grassroots intelligence collection and local engagement, HUMINT serves as a critical bridge aligning security efforts with socio-economic development objectives. Its integration into development programs enables stakeholders to address the root causes of conflict—such as poverty, unemployment, and governance deficits—that insurgent groups often exploit to sustain their activities (Shepherd, 2020).

A key strength of HUMINT lies in its ability to provide real-time, context-specific insights into community dynamics and socio-economic grievances. These insights equip development agencies to design interventions that resonate with local populations, while simultaneously complementing military efforts to stabilize conflict zones. Research highlights that successful counterinsurgency strategies in Nigeria leveraged HUMINT-driven collaboration between intelligence services and development organizations to rebuild infrastructure, improve education, and restore public trust (Olowonihu & Musa, 2024).

Furthermore, HUMINT fosters trust among communities, military entities, and development practitioners by employing culturally sensitive approaches to intelligence gathering. This actionable intelligence supports conflict-sensitive programming, such as vocational training for at-risk youth and agricultural initiatives aimed at revitalizing conflict-affected economies (Udochukwu & Uchenna, 2024).

Despite its potential, integrating HUMINT into

development programs faces persistent challenges, including inter-agency coordination difficulties and ethical concerns surrounding the misuse of intelligence.

- The "See Something, Say Something" Campaign in Northern Nigeria.

An impactful grassroots initiative in Northern Nigeria is the "See Something, Say Something" campaign, designed to encourage citizens to report suspicious activities related to terrorism and criminal behaviour. This initiative has been particularly effective in fostering community-driven security efforts, with local leaders playing a pivotal role in disseminating information and mobilizing community members to collaborate actively with law enforcement. This program aligns with broader strategies of community-based security, which have demonstrated success in enhancing public vigilance and trust in security frameworks in regions affected by insurgencies (Attuquayefio & Frimpong, 2022).

### Challenges in Leveraging HUMINT in Northeastern Nigeria

- Operational Challenges:

The utilization of Human Intelligence (HUMINT) in northeastern Nigeria is fraught with multifaceted challenges, primarily due to the operational and environmental constraints in this conflict-prone region. The persistent insurgency led by Boko Haram has destabilized the region, undermining intelligence-gathering efforts and complicating counterinsurgency operations.

The geographical landscape of northeastern Nigeria is marked by vast, remote areas with inadequate infrastructure, compounded by ongoing conflict. Kalkowska et al. (2020) highlight that deteriorated transport networks, caused by insurgent activities, limit security forces' access to affected areas, thereby restricting HUMINT collection. The destruction of essential infrastructure further hampers the mobility and operational effectiveness of intelligence personnel, leaving many communities isolated from formal security mechanisms.

The security risks associated with operating in these high-conflict zones are considerable. Insurgent activities, including ambushes, attacks, and kidnappings, foster an environment of fear that discourages personnel from undertaking HUMINT operations. Bello et al. (2023) emphasize that these risks often deter operatives, prompting reliance on less effective methods, such as remote surveillance, which may lack the nuanced information needed for successful counterinsurgency efforts.

Mistrust between local communities and security forces further exacerbates the difficulty of gathering human intelligence. The violent experiences of many residents with both insurgents and state forces have fostered reluctance to cooperate with authorities. Ahmed et al. (2023) underscore the critical role of community engagement in HUMINT operations, yet the pervasive mistrust often results in limited information sharing, undermining efforts to detect insurgent networks and activities.

The internal displacement of populations caused by the conflict poses another significant barrier to HUMINT effectiveness. Yaro et al. (2020) observe that the disruption of traditional community structures and the transient nature of displaced populations hinder the establishment of reliable intelligence networks. These factors complicate efforts to track insurgent movements and identify credible sources of information.

Resource constraints further undermine the capacity of intelligence agencies in the region. Insufficient funding, inadequate logistical support, and outdated technologies constrain the effectiveness of HUMINT operations. Maduabuchi (2023) argues that these limitations impair intelligence agencies' ability to conduct operations in remote and high-risk areas, leaving them reliant on suboptimal methods and exacerbating the challenges of counterinsurgency efforts.

### Policy and Institutional Limitations

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) plays a pivotal role in counterinsurgency efforts, particularly in regions afflicted by violence and instability like Northeastern Nigeria. However, its effectiveness is significantly undermined by a range of policy and institutional limitations. Chief among these is insufficient investment in HUMINT capabilities and pervasive bureaucratic hurdles that impede inter-agency coordination.

- Lack of Investment in HUMINT Capabilities

A key impediment to leveraging HUMINT in Northeastern Nigeria is the inadequate investment in its development. Despite its strategic importance, HUMINT has not received sufficient financial and institutional support. Research by Tahir (2023) underscores that effective intelligence operations require robust funding, advanced training programs, and modern infrastructure. However, in Nigeria, governmental priorities have historically leaned toward militarized responses, often sidelining the development of intelligence-gathering frameworks. This oversight has created a gap in HUMINT capabilities, which adversely affects the recruitment, training, and deployment of skilled personnel.

The absence of technological and infrastructural support compounds the problem. Advanced tools and resources essential for HUMINT operations are often unavailable, forcing security forces to rely on alternative methods such as Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) and Imagery Intelligence (IMINT). While these methods can be valuable, they fail to provide the granular, context-specific insights that HUMINT offers, particularly in understanding local dynamics and cultural nuances. Consequently, the failure to invest in HUMINT undermines the operational effectiveness of counterinsurgency strategies and limits the ability of security forces to pre-empt and respond to threats effectively (Tahir et al., 2023).

- Bureaucratic Hurdles and Inter-Agency Coordination Challenges

Another significant challenge to HUMINT operations in Northeastern Nigeria arises from bureaucratic inefficiencies and a lack of effective inter-agency coordination. The fragmented structure of Nigeria's security apparatus often results in a disjointed approach to intelligence-sharing and operational planning. Berntzen et al. (2023) emphasize the critical need for cohesive strategies and streamlined communication channels among security agencies to address multifaceted threats. However, in Nigeria, entrenched bureaucratic structures and competing institutional priorities impede such collaboration.

Conflicts between the operational cultures and objectives of different agencies exacerbate these coordination challenges. For instance, military forces often prioritize immediate kinetic operations, whereas police and intelligence agencies may adopt longer-term strategies focused on intelligence gathering and community engagement. These divergent approaches can lead to inefficiencies, miscommunication, and even the duplication or mismanagement of critical intelligence (Zain et al., 2023).

Furthermore, bureaucratic inertia often delays decision-making and the implementation of intelligence-driven initiatives. Greene et al. (2021) note that clear and responsive governance structures are essential for timely and effective HUMINT operations. In the context of Northeastern Nigeria, delays caused by bureaucratic red tape can reduce the responsiveness of security forces to emerging threats, compromising the effectiveness of counterinsurgency efforts.

## Theoretical Framework

### Social Conflict Theory

This paper employed the Social Conflict Theory, the theory examines the dynamics of power and inequality

within society, focusing on the struggles between different social groups. It posits that societal structures and relationships are shaped by conflicts arising from competing interests and resources. Social Conflict Theory, initially proposed by Karl Marx in 1848, offers a comprehensive framework for analysing the socio-economic factors driving the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria. The theory asserts that societal conflicts emerge from economic disparities and power imbalances, resulting in divisions between dominant and marginalised groups (Marx, 1848; Asoba & Fakunle, 2021). These disparities create systemic grievances within marginalised populations, frequently resulting in social unrest and rebellion. Social Conflict Theory elucidates the role of socio-economic deprivation—such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education—in fuelling the Boko Haram insurgency (Tahir, 2023).

The emergence and resilience of Boko Haram are fundamentally linked to systemic inequalities and the socio-economic marginalisation present in Northeastern Nigeria. Social Conflict Theory highlights how structural issues create grievances that insurgent groups utilise to recruit and radicalise individuals (Joseph, 2023). Boko Haram exploits prevalent poverty and educational deficiencies to disseminate ideological narratives that appeal to disenchanted communities, framing itself as a remedy for the state's systemic neglect of the region. The socio-economic drivers support the theory's claim that unresolved inequalities result in social fragmentation and conflict (Abdullahi & Zakari, 2022).

Social Conflict Theory therefore advocates for structural reforms to address systemic conflicts. HUMINT is essential for guiding reforms by delivering actionable insights regarding the socio-economic needs of impacted communities.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, leveraging secondary data to analyze the role of Human Intelligence (HUMINT) in addressing the socio-economic drivers of Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria. The data collection employed involved a systematic review of peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and international organizational documents, providing comprehensive insights into the socio-economic grievances fuelling insurgency and the strategic application of HUMINT. Case studies from Northeastern Nigeria and comparable conflict zones further support the empirical basis of the research.

## DISCUSSION

The study's findings provide detailed insights into the complex dynamics of insurgency in Northeastern

Nigeria and highlight the essential role of HUMINT in addressing its socio-economic drivers.

It examined the socio-economic factors contributing to the rise and persistence of Boko Haram. Poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to education are significant factors that have rendered the region's youth especially susceptible to recruitment. Boko Haram capitalises on these vulnerabilities by offering financial incentives and a sense of purpose, using systemic neglect and socio-economic disparities to strengthen its narrative (Tahir, 2023; Alimba & Salihu, 2020). The degradation of educational infrastructure and ongoing poverty contribute to the continuation of deprivation cycles, fostering conditions conducive to insurgent activities (Kolawole, 2024).

Furthermore, HUMINT serves as a crucial instrument for identifying the socio-economic grievances and vulnerabilities that Boko Haram exploits. In contrast to technical intelligence, HUMINT offers localised, human-centred insights into community dynamics, grievances, and recruitment strategies. This allows intelligence operatives to pinpoint significant socio-economic grievances that fuel the insurgency, including marginalisation and governance failures, thus guiding targeted interventions (Gberinyer et al., 2024). The research highlights the importance of combining human intelligence with socio-economic policies to connect security and development, targeting the underlying factors of insurgency instead of concentrating exclusively on military solutions.

Additionally, the findings highlight the significance of external funding and ideological indoctrination in the perpetuation of Boko Haram. External financial support, originating from illegal activities such as smuggling and ransom payments, facilitates the group's acquisition of weapons and the maintenance of operations. Ideological indoctrination concurrently targets marginalised youth, exploiting their socioeconomic grievances by offering promises of salvation and material benefits (Tayimlong, 2021). The interplay between funding and indoctrination strengthens Boko Haram's operational and ideological influence, resulting in the group's activities becoming deeply rooted in the region.

However, the research highlights various operational difficulties in utilising HUMINT within Northeastern Nigeria. Geographical and infrastructural barriers, community distrust, and risks to intelligence personnel are included. Inadequate infrastructure and security risks in remote areas hinder the effectiveness of intelligence operations (Ahmed et al., 2023). The displacement of populations and the destruction of traditional community structures complicate the

identification of reliable sources, thereby hindering the effectiveness of HUMINT.

Similarly, the paper identifies notable policy and institutional obstacles to the effective deployment of HUMINT, such as inadequate investment and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The deficiency in resources for HUMINT training and technological assistance has compelled security forces to depend on less sophisticated intelligence methodologies, including Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) and Imagery Intelligence (IMINT). Poor inter-agency coordination exacerbates inefficiencies and delays the implementation of intelligence-driven solutions (Berntzen et al., 2023).

The findings indicate that tackling the socio-economic drivers of Boko Haram necessitates a comprehensive strategy that integrates intelligence, community involvement, and socio-economic development. HUMINT offers a means to identify and address these drivers by fostering community trust and revealing actionable intelligence. Grassroots initiatives such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and women-led peacebuilding efforts illustrate the effectiveness of community-driven intelligence in undermining Boko Haram's operations and enhancing resilience (Akinteye et al., 2024; Ogo et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This study elucidates the intricate dynamics between the challenges and transformative potential of Human Intelligence (HUMINT) in countering insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria. By analyzing the socio-economic drivers of Boko Haram's activities—namely poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education—the research highlights systemic neglect and the resulting grievances that create fertile conditions for recruitment and ideological indoctrination. These findings emphasize the necessity of addressing these foundational socio-economic issues as part of a comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy.

A pivotal conclusion of the study is HUMINT's role in bridging military operations and developmental strategies. Localized, human-centred intelligence enables the identification of community-specific grievances, facilitating targeted interventions that address the roots rather than the symptoms of insurgency. Additionally, HUMINT yields critical insights into Boko Haram's recruitment methods, financial networks, and operational structures, underscoring its value in disrupting insurgent activities and countering extremist narratives.

However, the study also identifies substantial challenges to HUMINT deployment, including insufficient investment in training and technology, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and risks faced by operatives

in unstable environments. The findings advocate integrating HUMINT with socio-economic policies and community-driven initiatives to enhance counter-insurgency effectiveness. The successes of grassroots movements, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and women-led peacebuilding initiatives, underscore the importance of community engagement in fostering resilience and reducing insurgent influence.

In conclusion, the research proposes a holistic counter-insurgency framework that integrates HUMINT, socio-economic reforms, and robust community engagement. By addressing the socio-economic conditions fuelling Boko Haram through intelligence-informed strategies and structural reforms, the foundation for sustainable peace and development in Northeastern Nigeria can be established. This integrated approach, targeting immediate security threats and systemic drivers of conflict, offers a valuable model for managing similar insurgencies globally.

### Recommendations

To effectively address the socio-economic conditions fuelling the Boko Haram insurgency, Human Intelligence (HUMINT) must be strategically enhanced and integrated into broader initiatives. This requires tailoring HUMINT frameworks to the socio-political dynamics of Northeastern Nigeria while ensuring alignment with local cultural sensitivities and development needs. The following recommendations outline actionable strategies to achieve these goals.

Enhancing HUMINT Operational Capacity is critical to ensuring intelligence operatives can navigate the unique cultural and socio-political environment of affected regions. Training programs should emphasize cultural sensitivity, local language proficiency, and trust-building techniques. Operatives must also be equipped with actionable intelligence-gathering skills through simulations and case studies based on real-world scenarios. For example, operatives working in Gwoza and Bama could benefit from immersive training in local dialects and simulations involving community engagement during conflict situations. In addition, fostering strategic partnerships with international intelligence agencies and NGOs, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), can provide access to advanced analytical tools, shared intelligence, and insights into local grievances. Collaborative training sessions with these organizations would strengthen the operatives' capacity to address insurgency challenges effectively.

Integrating HUMINT with targeted socio-economic interventions is essential for addressing the root causes of radicalization. HUMINT insights can guide the

design and implementation of localized programs focusing on poverty alleviation, education, and infrastructure development. For instance, vocational training initiatives in Maiduguri tailored to local market demands, such as agriculture and tailoring, could provide economic opportunities for at-risk populations. Similarly, HUMINT can identify viable economic opportunities in underserved regions, enabling public-private partnerships to attract investment. A cassava processing plant in a vulnerable area could generate employment, stimulate local economies, and reduce radicalization incentives by addressing socio-economic grievances.

Building community resilience and trust is another vital component of leveraging HUMINT effectively. Strengthening local governance structures through training programs for community leaders on conflict resolution and grievance redress mechanisms is critical. Regular town hall meetings in villages like Damboa can bridge communication gaps between communities and government representatives, fostering trust and collaboration. Additionally, counter-radicalization strategies should be culturally sensitive, involving respected community and religious leaders to discredit extremist narratives. Programs like Quranic schools that incorporate modern education and peacebuilding components can provide alternative narratives to radical ideologies and promote community cohesion.

A comprehensive implementation and evaluation framework is essential for the effective and sustainable use of HUMINT. Centralized action plans should integrate intelligence insights with development initiatives, supported by robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems employing SMART indicators. For instance, the impact of HUMINT-informed infrastructure projects can be assessed through regular feedback from local communities. Transparent communication channels and feedback mechanisms, such as mobile platforms for anonymous tips, can foster community trust and participation.

The integration of advanced technologies like GIS mapping enhances intelligence analysis, enabling prioritized interventions in high-risk areas. Secure data-sharing platforms among local and international security agencies can further improve operational efficiency. Successful pilot projects, such as infrastructure improvements in Konduga, should be documented and scaled to other regions to ensure long-term sustainability.

Incorporating HUMINT-guided initiatives into national development plans institutionalizes best practices, ensuring benefits extend beyond immediate counterinsurgency efforts. These measures enable

HUMINT to address the socio-economic drivers of the Boko Haram insurgency, promote sustainable development, and mitigate the risks of radicalization over time.

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