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Multilevel Security Governance and Counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin: Coordination Challenges at Local, National and Regional Levels

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Abstract

The persistence of terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin despite the presence of local security actors, national security institutions and regional cooperation arrangements raises questions about the conditions under which these actors coordinate their counterterrorism activities. Existing studies have examined the roles of individual security institutions and the operational challenges confronting regional cooperation, but less attention has been given to how relationships across governance levels shape counterterrorism outcomes. This study examines the mechanisms and conditions through which multilevel security governance influences counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin. Drawing on multilevel governance theory, it adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary sources. The findings indicate that the existence of multiple security institutions and formal cooperation arrangements does not automatically translate into coordinated action. Unclear responsibilities, institutional fragmentation, competing political interests, operational and resource constraints, and weak accountability undermine the effective integration of security capabilities across local, national and regional levels. However, coordination is not the sole determinant of counterterrorism outcomes, which are also shaped by insurgent adaptation, geographical conditions and differences in military capacity. The study argues that counterterrorism effectiveness depends partly on how institutional mandates, information, resources and responsibilities are coordinated across governance levels. It contributes an explanatory framework linking local security participation, national counterterrorism institutions and regional security cooperation, with implications for clearer mandates, reliable intelligence sharing, compatible operational planning and stronger accountability mechanisms.

Keywords: *Multilevel security governance; Counterterrorism; Coordination; Lake Chad Basin; Multinational Joint Task Force; Multilevel Governance Theory.*

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Background of the Study

In the recent decade, the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) has been an epicentre of transnational terrorism. This has resulted in escalating levels of insecurity, economic losses, political and regional instability, and humanitarian crisis, among other challenges affect communities, locals and nations that live and share their borders (Nyelade, 2025; Tayimlong, 2021; Shulika & Shafiei, 2024). As a result, there has been an increase in counter-terrorism efforts and interventions to curtail, mitigate and effectively stamp out these terrorist groups operating, setting camps, and recruiting new members (Aniekwe & Brooks, 2023; Mahmood & Ani, 2018). However, terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin remains a complex security challenge despite the presence of local security actors, state security institutions and regional cooperation arrangements (Dingji Maza et al., 2020; Obamamoye, 2017). Yet terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continues to sustain its insurgent activities across parts of Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon (Barkindo, 2023; Ukaeje, 2025).

Transnational terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin has placed significant pressure on local security architecture, undermined the capacity of community security institutions to protect local communities and consequently exposing the limitations of the current security responses to a phenomenon that transcend local actors (Lambe, 2025; Ajala & Murphy, 2025). At the national level, various countries' armed forces and security agencies provide command structures, personnel and operational resources, while local actors, including Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), contribute community knowledge and intelligence (Oyewole, 2015). Despite these mechanisms, the transnational nature of terrorism in the region ensures that this approach failed. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was established to address the challenges of existing national framework driven by the recognition that cross-border insurgency in the Lake Chad Bain requires cooperation among affected states and not isolated approach (Tar et al., 2019). However, the continued difficulty of achieving durable security raises questions about how effectively these different actors work together.

The challenges of the existing multilevel security framework and the persistence of counterterrorism challenges in the Lake Chad Basin cannot be explained simply by the presence or absence of security institutions or the existence of formal security cooperation arrangements (Adela 2023). Rather, there is a need to examine the nature and character of the relationships connecting the actors involved. For instance, local security actors may possess information about community dynamics, suspicious movements and the terrain in which insurgents operate, but the value of this knowledge depends on whether it reaches institutions with the authority and capacity to act on it. On the other hand, while state security agencies may have the resources to respond, yet their activities are either constrained by institutional rivalry, limited interoperability or unclear operational responsibilities. Similarly, regional cooperation like Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) may provide a framework for cross-border operations without necessarily ensuring that national priorities, command arrangements and operational practices are sufficiently coordinated (Dieng,

2019). As a result, the mere existence of institutions at different levels does not automatically guarantee that their capabilities will be combined effectively.

Existing studies have examined and identified several dimensions of this problem. On the regional level, studies on the MNJTF have considered the challenges confronting regional security cooperation, its operational constraints and the difficulties of coordinating military responses across national boundaries (Bala & Tar, 2021; Maza et al., 2020). Others have examined the contribution of community-based security actors such as the CJTF on intelligence gathering and counterinsurgency, in addition to concerns about misconduct and accountability in the activities of vigilante groups (Agbiboa, 2020; Ashindorbe et al., 2021). Furthermore, there has been studies have connected the challenges of counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin to governance, public service provision and relationships between security institutions and affected communities (Sempijja et al., 2023). Therefore, what is clear is that these studies establish the significance of regional security cooperation, national security intervention and local participation as relevant to addressing the complex problem of terrorism in the region. However, understanding their individual roles does not fully explain how the relationships between them could influence and transform counterterrorism outcomes in the Lake Chad Basin. The need to understand the contributions of local security actors, national security institutions and regional cooperation arrangements is only an aspect of the study. More so, there is a need to carefully examine how these actors interact, how their respective responsibilities and capabilities are coordinated, and how these relationships shape counterterrorism efforts in the Lake Chad Basin.

Statement of the Problem

A major gap that the existing research fails to address is not the challenges with the contributions of the existing layers of security frameworks that exist in the Basin; but its inability to sufficiently explain how current security framework facilitate effective coordination between local, national and regional institutions, and how the interaction affects institutional authority, information-sharing and political incentives that could facilitate or undermine counterterrorism (Olawoyin et al., 2021; Akinola & Magam-Chaka, 2025; Abada et al., 2020). The aim of this study is to address that explanatory gap by critically interrogating the mechanisms and conditions through which multilevel security governance shapes counterterrorism outcomes. Therefore, the primary concern of this study is not simply the need to identify whether coordination exists, rather it focuses on how coordination operates and under what conditions can it contributes to effective counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin.

In doing the above, the study examines coordination mechanisms such as information-sharing,that may be limited when institutions distrust one another or lack reliable communication channels. For instance, at the local level, conditions such as weak accountability or harmful security practices may undermine community confidence and reduce the willingness of residents to provide information. These mechanisms may interact, preventing the resources and knowledge available across different levels from producing

coordinated action. Nevertheless, coordination should not be treated as the sole explanation for continuing insecurity. Insurgent adaptation, geographical conditions, resource limitations and differences in national military capacity may also influence counterterrorism outcomes.

The study contributes to the literature by developing an explanatory framework that connects and unravels the relationship between the existing multilevel frameworks, such as regional security cooperation, local security actors and national counterterrorism institutions, and grounds them on coordination. Drawing on multilevel governance theory, coordination is treated as a mechanism that links institutional relationships within the levels of security governance such that it influences counterterrorism outcomes. Thus, the study's contribution moves beyond describing the role that each institution performs to examining the conditions under which their different capabilities reinforce or obstruct one another. This approach provides a basis for assessing counterterrorism effectiveness without assuming that more institutions, joint operations or formal agreements necessarily produce durable security.

Multilevel Governance Theory

The paper adopted the Multilevel Governance Theory. This theory was developed by Hooghe and Marks (2003) and was later elaborated by Piattoni (2010) and its theoretical assumptions provides useful analytical framework for analysing counterterrorism coordination in the Lake Chad Basin. The Multilevel Governance Theory challenges state-centred explanations of governance by recognising that authority is distributed across interconnected territorial levels and institutional actors. Consequently, Hooghe and Marks (2003) noted that there is a difference between governance that is organised around relatively stable territorial jurisdictions and those established for specific policy tasks (Piattoni, 2009). This distinction is relevant to counterterrorism because the transnational character of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) requires cooperation among institutions whose jurisdictions, responsibilities and operational priorities differ. The central analytical concern is therefore how these institutions coordinate their activities and how their relationships influence counterterrorism outcomes.

In this study, multilevel governance is operationalised across three levels of security authority that have been identified as interconnected (Dragomir & Berindea, 2026). The local level comprises community-based security actors, including the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), local authorities and community structures involved in intelligence gathering and civilian protection. The national level comprises the military, police, intelligence agencies and relevant civilian authorities responsible for security policy and implementation. The regional level comprises the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the intergovernmental arrangements through which participating states coordinate cross-border operations. These levels possess different resources and responsibilities, but none can independently address all dimensions of the insurgency. Local actors may identify emerging threats through their knowledge of communities, national institutions possess formal coercive authority and

operational resources, while regional arrangements facilitate responses to insurgent activities across national boundaries. Counterterrorism consequently depends partly on how effectively these distinct capabilities are connected.

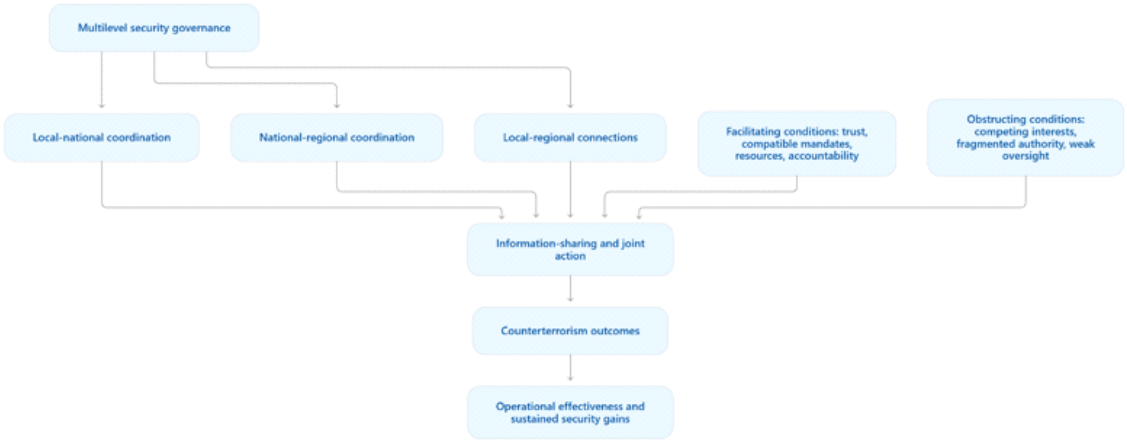

Figure 1: Analytical Relationship between Multilevel Security Governance and Counterterrorism outcomes

One of the principal explanatory variables within the Multilevel Governance Theory is the presence of cross-level coordination in security governance. Cross-level coordination can be understood as the extent to which local, national and regional security actors cooperate to ensure security governance by exchanging relevant information, clarifying responsibilities, organising complementary activities and maintaining accountability across institutional boundaries (Hooghe & Marks, 2021). Also, key explanatory factor is the counterterrorism outcomes that is a product of the effectiveness of cross-level security coordination. Therefore, counter-terrorism outcome refers to the effectiveness of collective efforts needed in detecting and disrupting insurgent activities, conducting coordinated operations, protecting civilians and sustaining security gains.

The distinction between cross-level coordination and counterterrorism is important to make because the presence of several security institutions does not necessarily indicate effective security coordination. Also, the existence of formal cooperation agreements between multilevel security actors does not necessarily produce effective operational results. However, in achieving effective counter-terrorism outcomes we must first critically explain how the presence coordination, or its absence, affects the translation of institutional capabilities into security outcomes. To do so, four salient mechanisms can be used to critically examine this relationship (Heng & McDonagh, 2009).

These mechanisms include authority and mandate alignment which is focused on establishing clarity of responsibilities and compatibility of operational objectives among

security actors. Where responsibilities are clearly allocated and decision-making authority is understood, actors are better positioned to coordinate their activities without unnecessary duplication or jurisdictional disputes. On the other hand, when responsibility overlaps and there are competing claims to authority it delays security responses, weakens cooperation and creates operational gaps that insurgent groups can exploit. Ultimately, affecting efforts at ensuring effective counter-terrorism outcomes (Den Boer & Wiegand, 2015).

The second mechanism is intelligence and information sharing. Local knowledge can help identify suspected insurgent activities, while national and regional institutions can verify, integrate and act on information across wider operational areas. When information is withheld, transmitted late or inadequately verified, opportunities for preventive action may be lost and operations may be poorly targeted. The presence of operational and resource coordination is considered the third mechanism. Operational and resource coordination refers to the alignment of planning, personnel, logistics and joint activities. Effective coordination therefore requires actors to synchronise their activities and ensure that operational responsibilities and available resources support common objectives.

Furthermore, effective coordination will ensure that fragmented planning, incompatible procedures and competition over resources that may result in inconsistencies in operational efforts and ensure that counter-terrorism issues are unaddressed are handled. The fourth mechanism is accountability, and oversight concerns itself with how institutions monitor conduct, establish responsibility and respond to misconduct or operational failures. Accountability matters because coordination achieved at the expense of civilian protection can undermine public trust, discourage community cooperation and weaken the legitimacy of counterterrorism interventions. It also helps establish whether institutions fulfil their responsibilities and whether failures are corrected.

Multilevel Governance Theory helps identify how authority is distributed and how institutional relationships are organised among actors with formally shared objectives. These conditions must therefore be examined empirically rather than assumed from the theory. The framework advances three propositions. First, cross-level coordination is more likely to facilitate counterterrorism when mandates are clear and participating institutions recognise complementary responsibilities. Second, coordination is more likely to improve operational effectiveness when information sharing is reliable and joint activities are supported by compatible planning and resources; political rivalry and institutional fragmentation are expected to weaken this relationship. Third, coordination is more likely to produce sustained security gains when accountability mechanisms protect civilians, clarify institutional responsibility and connect security operations with legitimate civilian governance.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary sources to examine cross-level counterterrorism coordination in the Lake Chad Basin. The region is selected because the transnational activities of Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province

(ISWAP) have necessitated cooperation among local security actors, national security institutions and regional arrangements, particularly the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, academic research reports and publicly available institutional documents. The study employs qualitative thematic analysis to present evidence on the coordination challenges facing the multilevel security framework.

Historical dynamics and the character of terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin

Terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin is complex and constantly evolving phenomenon. Historically, terrorism in the region is shaped by religious mobilisation, political exclusion, state repression, local grievances and the transnational expansion of armed groups (Berebon, 2024). The evolving nature of terrorism in the region is exemplified by the origin and transformation of Boko Haram which emerged as a religious sect in northeastern Nigeria, contending with the Nigerian state but has subsequently developed into a regional security crisis affecting Cameroon, Chad and Niger (Omenma, 2020). Consequently, the group's evolution demonstrates that terrorism in the Basin cannot be explained in narrow terms either as religious extremism or treated as a domestic Nigerian security problem. This phenomenon as currently experienced in the region involves several intertwining layers such as extremist ideologies and movements, local socioeconomic and political conditions in affected countries, state responses and the nature and porousness of cross-border environments within which armed groups operate.

Boko Haram's emergence is commonly associated with the religious movement founded by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Borno State, during the early 2000s. At the core of the sect's belief was a strong ideological opposition to Western-style education, culture and the Nigerian political order. Also, Boko Haram was driven a wider context of religious activism, economic hardship and dissatisfaction with state institutions. According to Thurston (2017), a careful historical analysis of Boko Haram establishes the fact that the movement was borne and developed out of Salafi activism, and the religious competition for political authority and dominance in northern Nigeria.

While socioeconomic deprivation constitutes a major driver of Boko Haram, Thurston points that the movement's ideological formation and organisational development explain more its nature of violent extremism. Aghedo and Osumah (2012) confirms this perspective, highlighted that Boko Haram indicates the consequences of religious extremism, political violence, weaknesses in Nigeria's security and the crisis of political and economic governance. However, scholars such as Pérouse de Montclos (2014) have situated the formation Boko Haram and its survival to factors such as the broader political and security dynamics of northern Nigeria.

Reports indicate that the decisive turning point of the Boko Haram could be traced to July 2009 confrontation with Nigerian security. Acts of state repression particularly the suppression of the movement and the extrajudicial killing of Yusuf, the movement's leader in

police custody, contributed to the violent approach and insurgency under Abubakar Shekau. As a result, subsequent campaign involved attacks on security installations, government institutions, religious sites and civilian populations became the group's operational strategy. Aghedo and Osumah (2012) examine Boko Haram through the relationship between religious extremism, political violence and weaknesses in Nigeria's security and governance arrangements. Their analysis illustrates how the insurgency developed in a setting where grievances against political authority interacted with the state's coercive response.

However, Boko Haram expanded its operations beyond northeastern Nigeria into one that became increasingly regional. Geographically, the Lake Chad Basin is a region characterised by shared waterways, border communities and interconnected traditional livelihood systems that has existed for several years that have created a transnational environment for the movement of goods, cattle and other essential economic activities. This existing historically dominant condition also revealed exploitable gaps in the countries and communities enabling terrorism while undermining national security jurisdictions of constituent states in the Basin. Increasingly, the movement's attacks shifted from northeast Nigeria to communities in Cameroon, Chad and Niger demonstrating the geographical spread of violence was connected to the transnational nature of group as well as the mobility of fighters, the displacement of civilians and the interdependence of borderland communities.

Furthermore, the fragmentation of Boko Haram and the emergence of competing factions highlighted another key transformation in the complexity of terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin. In 2016, a dispute over leadership and strategy resulted in the formation of the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) under the control of Abu Musab al-Barnawi, while Shekau retained leadership control of Boko Haram. The emergence of ISWAP increased the challenges of addressing terrorism in the region such that both factions continued to employ violence against civilian populations worsening the security and the humanitarian crisis that the Basin has previously suffered under Boko Haram (Stoddard, 2023). Also, ISWAP relationship with wider jihadist networks, while exploiting local conditions contributed to the recognition for the need to employ local, national and regional strategies as these groups' organisation and operations continue to expand.

Consequently, terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin has been known to be characterised by organisational fragmentation among terrorist groups, cross-border mobility, attacks on civilians and security forces, and the interaction of insurgent violence with local political and social environments. The nature and character of terrorism in the Basin have become more transnational than it has become local, thus complicating counterterrorism efforts and security governance. This is because military pressure and success against one faction do not necessarily eliminate the wider networks, grievances or institutional weaknesses through which armed groups operate. Additionally, the transnational nature of terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin also reveals that security threats from terrorists cannot be addressed effectively through isolated national responses alone with effective coordination from local and regional forces and institutions.

As a result, the historical basis for regional counterterrorism cooperation becomes an evident manifestation of the character of the insurgency in the Basin. Yet the reasons for the multilevel security framework for counterterrorism extend beyond the need to defeat armed groups. Governments seek to protect territorial integrity, restore public authority, secure border communities and limit the humanitarian and economic consequences of violence. Communities, meanwhile, seek protection from insurgent attacks and the effects of insecurity, including displacement, disrupted livelihoods and restrictions on movement. These objectives overlap, but they do not necessarily produce identical priorities or approaches. Counterterrorism therefore involves a political and institutional problem as well as a military one: how to organise the different actors responsible for responding to a threat that crosses borders and affects multiple dimensions of public life.

Regional counterterrorism cooperation and the MNJTF

The transnational nature and transformation of terrorism provides the principal rationale for regional counterterrorism cooperation (Mutah, 2021). The formation of MNJTF, initially established as a regional security arrangement before being reactivated and expanded for counterinsurgency in 2015 (Lenshie et al., 2023). The MNJTF became the main framework for regional cooperation and coordinated joint military action between Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, with Benin Republic as a participating nature due to the activities of terrorism and spread of terrorist groups (Atangana, 2018). Additionally, the development of MNJTF as regional security framework reflected the recognition that national forces and security architecture operating independently cannot on its own defeat the increasingly adaptive insurgents who have continued to find new ways able to exploit the porous nature of cross-border movement and poor territorial policing among countries in the Lake Chad Basin (Ọsanubi, 2022).

Nevertheless, the literature differs in its explanations of the limitations and challenges of regional cooperation towards counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin. Adela (2023) examines the institutional relationship between the MNJTF and the counterinsurgency frameworks especially from regional and sub-regional bodies such as the African Union, ECOWAS and ECCAS. However, Adela argues that the participating states and their affiliations with different regional organisations have posed serious challenges that have undermined their capacity for military coordination and intelligence cooperation. As a result, one of the challenges that has affect regional security cooperation against counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin has been institutional fragmentation that emerges out of this regional differences. Thus, what accounts for this situation is not a lack a common security objective among the regional and sub-regional bodies, but the fact that these bodies too often operate within institutional frameworks that are overlapping and that do not necessarily facilitate coordinated action needed to effectively adapt and counter the evolving but persist threat of terrorism.

Despite having a common security challenge of terrorist-driven insecurity and humanitarian crises, regional security cooperation in the Lake Chad Basin is still undermined by the

presence of conflicting national interests among countries in the region. The argument posited by Abada et al. (2020) suggests that the national interest differences among participating states is a critical factor affecting the performance of the MNJTF and the ability for them to coordinate effectively. Accordingly, Abada et al. noted that the presence of regional institutions cannot automatically eliminate or erase the fact that each state has its own political calculations and interest despite the framework for cooperation. This will mean that for regional security cooperation such as the MNJTF to be effective, a lot will be dependent on the extent to which states participating states in the framework are willing to coordinate their decisions and resources beyond formal commitments but to actual practice in operations.

However, Dauda and Ukaeje (2024) argue that the problem of MNJTF's counterinsurgency mandate and operational constraints are as a result of inadequate funding, equipment deficiencies, interoperability problems and limited policing capacity. This argument significantly differs from the emphasis that Adela (2023) places on institutional factors that is responsible for the failure of regional security cooperation towards counterterrorism or Abada et al.'s (2020) political explanation, particularly on state sincerity to pursue a common security interest committedly. Thus, while these studies highlight the practical requirements of implementing joint operations, the other studies focus more directly on the institutional and political conditions under which cooperation occurs. As the regional security cooperation literature indicates, addressing terrorism requires both institutional design, political commitment and operational capacity, yet all of these if not properly coordinated will fail to adequately result in an effective counterterrorism framework needed for the putting an end to terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin. Therefore, existing studies often analyse regional security cooperation through relations among states and the performance of the MNJTF. However, it has become evident that less attention is given to how regional military arrangements connect with community-based security actors, national civilian institutions and local stabilisation efforts. This leaves open the question of whether coordination at the regional level produces corresponding coordination within the national and local security systems.

Local security actors and national institutions

The complexity of terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin requires the intervention of different stakeholders to effectively address it. As such, local security actors have been identified as key players in the efforts of states in strengthening counterterrorism by extending the reach of the state or creating opportunity where local intelligence can be harnessed in security governance to address the adaptive dynamics of terrorism (Curri, 2025). The emergence of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in northeastern Nigeria became an opportunity to instrumentalise this security mechanism. Consequently, the CJTF developed and mobilised in 2013, as local residents sought to protect their communities and provide assistance to the military in identifying suspected Boko Haram members. A key part of its role and contributions of CJTF were local intelligence, surveillance, knowledge of terrain and the identification of individuals whose activities might be difficult for external security personnel to assess.

Agbiboa (2018) examines the CJTF's role in surveillance and describes its members as knowledge brokers who help the military interpret local social environments and identify suspected insurgents. His analysis challenges a state-centred account in which security outcomes depend exclusively on formal military capabilities. The effectiveness of security operations depends largely on the information they possess, hence CJTF became an informal institution with information that formal institutions cannot readily obtain or have for effective counterterrorism operations. Agbiboa (2020) also noted that CJTF's mobilisation, relationship with the state security actors and connections with local communities, demonstrates that civilian participation in counterinsurgency can be important building a robust security structure but ultimately, it is shaped by both the need for collective protection and the politics of security provision.

However, the benefits of local participation do not remove questions about legitimacy, authority and accountability. In Nigeria, evidence shows that CJTF complicated and contributed to other forms of security governance challenges. As Njoku (2021) argued, the political economy of the CJTF and its emergence cannot be explained solely through patriotism or collective self-defence. Rather, economic survival, political advancement and the interests of local elites also influence participation in vigilantism. This finding suggests that community-based security groups are not always a politically neutral extensions of the state. In some cases, their interests overlap with those of formal institutions while also reflecting local struggles over recognition, resources and authority.

As such, making this dimension clear because very critical in understanding the challenge of coordination in local level security organisations in countering terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin. Although local actors are useful in providing relevant contextual knowledge to the military, their inclusion into formal operations raises questions about recruitment, training, rules of engagement and the supervision of their conduct. Agbiboa's (2020) critically illustrated the various tensions inherent in civilian defence groups whose members operate alongside state forces while retaining distinctive social relationships and motivations. The problem that often emanates is not one that results from the question around the inclusion of local security actors; however, a major contending point is how their participation can be organised without weakening accountability or community trust, which is very fundamental to ensuring effective coordination.

Furthermore, Ajala and Murphy (2025) extend this debate to counterterrorism across the Lake Chad Basin. They examine the role of vigilantism in Nigeria and the wider region, highlighting its potential contribution to intelligence gathering and community protection alongside concerns about human rights abuses, inconsistent training and unclear operational responsibilities. Their analysis also draws attention to differences in how governments across the region use local security groups. Such variation matters because a local actor's relationship with national institutions may depend on the country's security arrangements, political preferences and willingness to formalise or restrict community participation. Thus, while the literature presents local security actors as both a resource and a governance

challenge. Their local knowledge may improve the quality of intelligence available to formal institutions, but informal authority and weak oversight can generate abuses or undermine civilian protection. Therefore, it is important that there is a clearly established relationship between local security actors, their role in providing local knowledge and regional military decision-making consequently remains an important part of the wider coordination problem.

Conditions shaping coordination across institutional levels in Counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin

Ensuring effective multilevel security governance intervention in the Lake Chad Basin will require more than the activities that each security actor could perform but also in establishing the conditions that will drive the effective coordination local, national and regional security actors (Ologe & Erameh, 2025). As such, the discussion of effective security governance against the complex challenge of terrorism in the Basin must entail developing the conditions that will ensure each actor is effective and also building useful framework for establishing a well-coordinated relationship through which authority, intelligence, resources and responsibilities are distributed (Muntschick & Plank, 2025). Existing literature has highlighted three related conditions under which this mechanism can work, such as the presence of institutional compatibility, the display political incentives and the integration of military operations with civilian governance (Adela, 2023).

The first major condition to establish is in identifying institutional compatibility by indicating security actors sufficiently have clear responsibilities and the modalities in which they work together. As Adela (2023) demonstrated when there is overlapping regional counterinsurgency frameworks, it often results in constraining the capacity cooperation within the MNJTF. Meanwhile Agbiboa (2018), found that while local knowledge can improve military surveillance for counter-terrorism, the availability of useful information does not guarantee that it will be incorporated effectively into wider operational decisions. In other words, effective coordination to happen in multilevel security governance architecture will depend on whether institutions have arrangements for communicating, verifying and acting on information produced at different levels.

Another condition that has been identified is the place of political incentives among states involved in both regional security cooperation framework and multilevel security governance. One of the problems to effective counter-terrorism in the existing frameworks, as Abada et al. (2020) argued is the fact that conflicting national interests often limit regional cooperation. Political incentives also reveal in the form of what economic and political factors are influencing the participation of local security actors in the security framework (Njoku, 2021). The foregoing suggests that ignoring such conditions raise serious concerns for coordination. This is because beyond institutional alignment that are typically the most obvious considerations, security actors tend to cooperate when their objectives align. However, when their interests diverge, formal agreements may coexist within selective or inconsistent cooperation.

In addition, there are concerns around how the military and civilian understand and operationalises security governance. Existing security governance framework for counter-terrorism in the Lake Chad have been heavily militaristic. While the use of kinetic approach remains necessary, it has, however, remained insufficient because without addressing state-community relations and the conditions that enable armed groups to establish influence, terrorism will continue to thrive. The foregoing argument broadens both the meaning and the nature of effective counterterrorism. It suggests that effective counterterrorism must ultimately go beyond the immediate defeat of insurgents to include the restoration of public authority, development and trust (Dan-Azumi, 2025).

However, the security and development nexus in security governance presents another dimension of coordination challenge. Military institutions operate according to operational priorities, while civilian agencies and humanitarian organisations have different mandates and accountability requirements. Local authorities and community organisations may also have limited influence over decisions made at national or regional levels (Imokhai & Momoh, 2025). Coordination therefore requires mechanisms that connect these different responsibilities without assuming that all actors share identical objectives or can be placed under a single command structure. The three conditions examined offers different yet critical understanding of what effective coordination will require in counterterrorism. Thus, a more satisfactory explanation must integrate these dimensions within the praxis of cross-level coordination in such a way that they interact effective in producing better counter-terrorism outcomes.

Conclusion

The complexity of terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin amidst several interventions has raised a critical concern about the challenges affecting security governance in the region. This situation led to the study of multilevel security governance and counterterrorism in the Lake Chad Basin. The paper offers the argument that the persistence of terrorism despite the presence of local security actors, national security institutions and regional cooperation arrangements cannot be adequately explained by an existing framework alone that focuses on either institutional capacity or military intervention and its corresponding challenges. The study argues that there is a need to shift our understanding from the existing framework and focus on the relationships connecting these actors and the conditions under which their respective capabilities are translated into coordinated action.

Drawing on multilevel governance theory, the study identifies the multilevel context for security governance among existing security actors in the Lake Chad Basin, as well as the mechanisms—such as mandate alignment, intelligence and information sharing, operational and resource coordination, and accountability—that serve as critical factors influencing the effectiveness of counterterrorism outcomes. The study reveals that the multilevel security actors in the Lake Chad include local security actors such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and other vigilante groups that provide contextual knowledge and intelligence, while national institutions comprise state military or security architecture that

possesses the formal authority and operational resources to respond to insecurity and terrorism, as well as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the regional security cooperation framework established to respond to the transnational and cross-border nature of terrorist threats. The study's major contribution is that the mere existence of a multilevel security governance framework in addressing terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin does not automatically lead to effective collective responses. A careful analysis of this existing framework reveals that unclear responsibilities, institutional fragmentation, competing political interests, inadequate operational capacity and weak accountability are currently undermining counterterrorism across governance levels.

Therefore, the paper's central argument is that effective counterterrorism depends not merely on the existence of security institutions or formal cooperation agreements across the various levels but on whether their mandates, information, resources and responsibilities are effectively coordinated. Effective coordination is what is responsible for producing improved counterterrorism outcomes. The study therefore contributes an explanatory perspective that connects local participation, national security governance and regional cooperation within a common analytical framework. It suggests that counterterrorism policy should prioritise clearer mandates, reliable intelligence-sharing, compatible operational planning, sustained political commitment and effective oversight across institutional boundaries. As a result, efforts to address terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin require more than just strengthening individual security actors at the local, national, or regional levels; strengthening multilevel security governance will also require coordinating these relationships and partnerships in a manner that results in durable and effective security outcomes.

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