Investigating the intersections between counter-terrorism and NGOs in Nigeria: development practice in conflict-affected areas

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the factors that influence the Nigerian government’s constraints of NGOs in counter-terrorism context, analysing whether NGO type, nature, areas of operation and size were determinant factors. Drawing from mixed-methods design, it argues that NGOs’ political advocacy, reporting of human rights abuses and monitoring the use of security funds were key factors that attract government restrictions. Women, youth, children, and faith-based NGOs experienced more government constraints than human rights NGOs. Advocacy and international NGOs also suffered more restrictions. The findings contribute to generalisable knowledge by demonstrating the link between counter-terrorism and NGOs in Nigeria.

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Introduction
Between December 2018 and September 2019 the Nigeria military suspended the activities of United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Mercy Corps, and Action Against Hunger in north-eastern Nigeria, where counter-terrorism operations are ongoing. The military stated that it had credible evidence that UNICEF, Mercy Corps, and Action Against Hunger had abandoned their roles of providing humanitarian services, and accused them of engaging in training people for clandestine activities to undermine the counter-terrorism operations. However, the military later reversed the suspension (Premium Times 2018; Quartz Africa 2019; Punch 2019).

The military also called for the closure of Amnesty International offices in Nigeria, claiming that Amnesty International was trying to destabilise the country through false allegations of human rights abuses in counter-terrorism operations in the north-east (Vanguard 2018). These cases highlight the challenges international and local NGOs face in mitigating the effects of terrorism and counter-terrorism operations in Nigeria, and the complicated relations between the government, security agencies and NGOs.

There has been renewed interest in the effects of counter-terrorism measures (CTMs) on NGOs (Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopol’skaya 2018; Watson and Burles 2018). Sidel (2010) argued that the effects of CTMs on NGOs vary across types of NGOs, with faith-based and human rights NGOs most affected. The advocacy activities of most human rights NGOs and governments’ belief that Muslim NGOs are more susceptible to terrorist influences are the rationale for the intensity of regulation of these types of NGOs (Sidel 2010). Furthermore, Howell and Lind (2010) postulated that mainstream NGOs face fewer government restrictions in the initial phases of CTMs than minority or smaller groups.1 In Nigeria, Njoku (2017a, 2018) highlighted that the government excluded NGOs in the framing of CTMs because of their perceived advocacy qualities. Njoku also revealed a convivial relation where the state strategically co-opts some NGOs solely as service providers and represses those that are critical.
However, there is a dearth of systematic studies on the factors that influence state restrictions and threats in the context of CTMs, and which NGOs might be more affected by CTMs and why. This article contributes to existing knowledge on increased state regulations of NGOs in Nigeria and other counter-terrorism contexts. Importantly, it highlights the nuances of the effects of CTMs by providing empirical evidence that advances earlier assumptions on the variations on the intensity of the effects of government CTMs across NGO types.

The securitisation of NGOs in the enforcement of counter-terrorism measures

The securitisation of NGOs has been traced to policies formed after 9/11 to curb terrorism globally (Dupuy and Prakash 2018). The belief that terrorists used NGOs as a means for routing funds contributed to influencing the post-9/11 global counter-terrorism policy (Watson and Burles 2018). As a result, the mandate of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an agency created at the 1989 G-7 summit to address financial crimes, was expanded to address terrorist financing. FATF established legal instruments aimed at tackling terrorists’ use of NGOs as a source of financing. Consequently, despite a lack of credible evidence on the collusion of NGOs (Sidel 2010), FATF with the support of the International Monetary Funds and World Bank instituted Recommendation 8. This legal instrument directs states and private organisations to establish laws that regulate the activities of NGOs (Bayas and Shanon 2018; Brechenmacher 2017).

In many political contexts, such as Australia, US, UK, Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, India, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Uganda, the enforcement of CTMs has closed civic space and made it impossible for NGOs to operate. Bayas and Green (2018, 5) argued that FATF works on the premise that all NGOs are at high risk of been used as a means to finance terrorism. However, this notion of extreme risk in the sector has done incalculable damage to civil society. In addition to giving governments an excuse to crack down on peaceful, legitimate organisations that are a thorn in their side, many countries have directly or indirectly used FATF compliance as a justification to pass restrictive laws in the name of countering terrorism.

Thus, the FATF directive provided governments with the opportunity to establish state-level counter-terrorism laws that frustrate civic engagement.

The repression of NGOs is more glaring in new democracies or authoritarian governments, particularly in countries such as Egypt, China, Russia, Kenya and Uganda. CTMs became a welcomed excuse for illiberal political leaders to consolidate their hold on power or enforced policies that served their interest. These governments used the narrative of counter-terrorism to target and repress key opposition groups and leaders, activists and other groups that were critical to state policies (Howell et al. 2008). Due to increased subjugation of NGOs by state actors, many NGOs have either closed down or operate skeletally (Fowler and Sen 2010; Njoku 2017a). It is important to determine which NGOs are more likely to report more pressures than others or close down operations due to CTMs.

Variations of threats across NGOs types

There has been much debate on how CTMs affect various types of NGOs differently. Howell (2014), and Howell and Lind (2010) argue that mainstream NGOs did not feel the effects of CTMs in the early stages of enforcement. Fowler and Sen (2010) state that mainstream NGOs did not lose compared to other organisations, but benefited due to their close affiliation and financial support from the government. Sidel (2010) and Howell (2014) argue that in the US and UK mainstream NGOs overlooked the repressive nature of the government CTMs and largely ignored the suffering of minority groups such as the challenges Muslim communities and charities were facing. Mainstream organisations only opposed the government when they felt threatened by counter-terrorism laws. In Kenya, most mainstream Christian organisations
with strong links to the government were oblivious of the challenges of CTMs, since they only affect Muslim groups (Lind and Howell 2010).

Scholars such as Fowler and Sen (2010) and Sidel (2010) theorised that while all organisations have faced restrictions from governments, faith-based and human rights NGOs were more affected by CTMs than other organisations. Howell and Lind (2010) and Sidel (2010) maintained that Muslim organisations in the US and UK were more affected in the enforcement of CTMs, with many claiming that the governments treated them with suspicion, negatively influencing their capacity to operate. In India, Hindu nationalists, who controlled the government, used the post-9/11 global counter-terrorism campaigns to securitise the Muslim communities by constructing false narratives that equate Islam with terrorism or that Muslims are disloyal to the Indian state and thus pose a national security risk (Howell and Lind 2010). In Kenya, the 2012 Terrorism Prevention Act and related counter-terrorism laws were used to target and repress Muslim groups, such as local chapters of Middle Eastern charities, Muslim communities, madrassas, and Muslim philanthropists (Lind and Howell 2010).

Human rights groups have also come under increasing government repression in the wake of the establishment of CTMs. This was evident in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Egypt and Ethiopia. Brechenmacher (2017, 2) reported that Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s government in Egypt used anti-terrorism measures to institutionalise previously extrajudicial practices. Egyptian authorities targeted human rights groups with travel bans, asset freezes, and legal harassment, while local development and civic initiatives struggle to access resources for their work.

Similarly, in Russia, human rights and political advocacy organisations were disproportionately affected by counter-terrorism legislation: “the new legal framework hit human rights and political advocacy organisations the hardest. Many experienced repeated harassment by state officials and found that some of their activities were suddenly blocked or delayed” (Brechenmacher 2017, 9).

While the above advances our understanding of government-NGO relations in the context of counter-terrorism operations globally, there is a dearth of systematic research on the nuances of the effects of CTMs. This study examines previously disparately considered factors in a systematic and holistic fashion, explores the effect of these factors quantitatively, and articulates explanations for how and why each of these factors affects different NGOs.

Counter-terrorism and NGOs in Nigeria

Since 2002 Nigeria has been plagued with a significant security challenge due to the violent acts of terrorist groups. The birth of Boko Haram and its affiliate Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP) influenced the government’s aggressive counter-terrorism responses. In order to limit the capacities of Boko Haram and ISWAP, the government established the Terrorism Prevention Act of 2011 (as amended) and the 2011 Money Laundering Prohibition Act (as amended). It also established policies such as Countering Violent Extremism and the National Counterterrorism Strategy, which are critical parts of its soft measures. Hard measures include the declaration of a state of emergency in north-eastern Nigeria, and establishment of a Joint Military Taskforce on Boko Haram, the Civilian Joint Task Force – a vigilante group. The government also facilitated the expansion of the Multinational Joint Task Force to tackle Boko Haram across the region.

However, there have been allegations of violations of human rights and civil liberties by security agents in counter-terrorism operations (Njoku 2017b, 2019a), and claims that CTMs are affecting the operational capacities of NGOs carrying out aid delivery and advocacy projects in the north-east (Njoku 2017a). NGOs have been known to resist government dictatorial tendencies during Nigeria’s military and civilian regimes (Aiyede 2004). Therefore, it is important to examine factors that determine the government’s increasing pressure on NGOs, and to analyse the nuances of counter-terrorism, mainly how different types of NGOs are affected by CTMs in Nigeria.
Measurements and methods

The study was based on a mixed-methods design that included a survey conducted between January 2015 and May 2018 with 445 programme officers of 26 NGOs working in four broad areas: women, faith-based, children/youths and human rights. It also included seven executives of the 26 NGOs and six counter-terrorism security agents. The NGOs were chosen based on their engagement in peace-building, development, human rights advocacy and humanitarian activities in north-eastern Nigeria.3

The research sites (Abuja, Lagos, Oyo, Ogun states) were purposively selected based on the locations of the NGOs’ operational headquarters and on their involvement in capacity building, technical assistance and advocacy in the North-east. All the NGOs are actively engaged in Adamawa, Borno, Gombe and Yobe states in north-eastern Nigeria. Moreover, Plateau state was also selected due to the involvement of the selected NGOs in aid delivery in internally displaced person camps.

Out of the 445 programme officers, stratified random sampling was used in selecting 211 programme officers across the four categories as a representative population. Random sampling was then used to ascertain the number of respondents to administer the questionnaire to in proportion to their population in each of the NGO categories. In total, 205 questionnaires were successfully retrieved and used for the analysis. Purposive sampling was used in selecting seven NGO executive and six counter-terrorism officials, due to their active involvement in counter-terrorism operations in north-eastern Nigeria.

In presenting the findings, “nature” and “type” of NGOs are used as central analytical categories. “Nature” refers to the general characteristics of NGOs – for instance, to distinguish between international and domestic – while “type” means the differences in the principal orientation or demographic focus of the selected NGOs. In all, 83.9% were domestic NGOs, while 16.1% were international NGOs. Also, 33 NGOs (16.1%) were youth/children NGOs, 39 (19%) were women’s NGOs, 69 (33.7%) were human rights NGOs, while 64 (31.2%) were faith-based NGOs. However, the study did not analyse the effects of CTMs on different faith-based NGOs (Muslims and Christians) separately. Hence, future research could focus on understanding if Muslim groups were more impacted by CTMs.

The data collection instrument was formed to include current questions on counter-terrorism and NGOs from a review of relevant literature and the Charity and Security Network 2013 instruments. Using in a nominal scale of yes = 1 and no = 2, respondents were asked to rank the effects of the following independent variables: (a) You have been threatened by security agents involved in counter-terrorism operations in north-eastern Nigeria; and (b) The government CTMs affected your ability to work in north-eastern Nigeria. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts and simple percentages. The study used Chi-Square and logistic regression analyses to examine the effects of NGO nature (international and domestic), types (women, faith-based, youth/children and human rights groups), areas of operations (human rights advocacy, peacebuilding, development and humanitarianism), sizes (measured by number of branches), maturity (measured by year of establishment), and sources of finance on the level of threats and hindrances from counter-terrorism agencies. Alpha values of less than 0.05 were considered to be statistically significant. All analyses were performed using SPSS. Secondary sources and key literature were content analysed and used to validate the findings.

Findings

Determinants of the levels of threats and constraints of NGOs operating in North-eastern Nigeria

In developing and advanced democracies, advocacy NGOs are often key targets of government repression (Green 2018; Njoku 2018; Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolayskaia 2018; Watson and Burles 2018). The interviews with NGO executives showed similar trends. Factors that attract government
threats and constraints include: (1) NGO’s advocacy efforts for vulnerable women and girls who alleged that counter-terrorism security agents sexually assaulted them; (2) reporting of cases of sexual violence and other human rights violations by NGOs engaged in humanitarian services to international governmental organisations; (3) NGOs’ monitoring the use of defence budgets or security funds in the north-east to ensure its judicious use.

Njoku (2017a) postulated that state-NGOs relations around CTMs in Nigeria are skewed in favour of service delivery and the rejection of advocacy for terrorist suspects. This influenced the framing of CTMs in Nigeria (Njoku 2018). The interviews of NGOs executives highlighted advocacy efforts for suspected individuals in counter-terrorism operations as one area that often attracts government threats and constraints. One stated that part of their advocacy efforts is to investigate cases of sexual violations and other rights violations, and then report their findings to the appropriate authorities. However, security agents involved in counter-terrorism operations in the north-east often frustrate these efforts by preventing NGOs from accessing women and girl victims of sexual violence in detention camps, or by threatening both the victims and the NGO worker involved. For instance, an NGO executive working on women’s issues reported experiencing constraints during her efforts to interview women and children in detention facilities:

In going to the north-east, … the military ask you what is your mission, what is your purpose. But you don’t really tell them your mission; you tell them you are going to University of Maiduguri for research because if you tell them you are going to see victims to interview, they will not even allow it.

International and local NGOs engaged in humanitarian services provide Medicare, psycho-social counselling to victims of sexual violence and other challenges in counter-terrorism operations in the north-east. Executives of these NGOs also stated that they report these cases to the international governmental organisations that fund their programmes, which then use this information as evidence to challenge the government or restrict foreign aid. This is a significant source of antagonism by the government towards NGOs. The government, including its security agencies, routinely accuse NGOs of fabricating spurious claims of human right violations in counter-terrorism operations. Many of these NGOs reported being constrained and threatened by the government’s security agents on many occasions. This also provides practical proof of the rationale given by the state for restraining the operations of NGOs in Nigeria Njoku (2017a).

Another factor that attracts government threats and restrictions is government agencies’ resentment of NGOs that monitor the utilisation of budgeted counter-terrorism funds. There have been complaints that despite huge budgetary allocations to the defence sector and specific counter-terrorism allocations, Boko Haram and ISWAP are yet to be defeated or curbed. There were claims of dubious utilisation of funds in procuring adequate weapons (Financial Times 2018). Many political leaders, including top security agents, were accused of syphoning counter-terrorism funds, leading to poor remuneration, demoralisation of ground troops or security operatives, and insufficient weapons to curb Boko Haram (BBC 2015). Security agents in the north-east decried government neglect in providing an adequate weapons to match Boko Haram’s sophisticated weapons. A counter-terrorism operative in the National Security and Civil Defence Corp recounted the rationing of bullets and how they were not allowed to return fire when attacked by Boko Haram terrorists until their commander gives them the order, not necessarily due to tactics but due to insufficient weaponry.

Reports of embezzlement of security funds are a result of investigations by NGOs. NGOs have been monitoring the judicious use of funds allocated in procuring adequate military hardware needed to curb terrorism and ensuring that security personnel involved in counter-terrorism operations in the north-east are well remunerated. These NGOs try to ensure transparency and accountability and thus prevent political leaders in collaboration with senior security agents embezzling funds meant for curbing terrorism. However, many NGOs have faced resistance and threats from government security agents as a result. One executive of a peacebuilding NGO explained:
We work a lot; track budgets and try to reconcile what was proposed and what is spent. Increasingly, some amount of money is being used under security vote, which we cannot monitor, so limiting your ability to hold government officials accountable. [Typically,] government agencies responded to questions that they don’t want to answer with a blanket ‘security’ or ‘national interest’. The fight against terrorism is providing opportunities for government agencies to put a lot of things under cover of ‘national interest’, which we cannot check.11

Having established some factors that spur government constraints and threats on NGOs, it is important to understand the variations of these effects across the four categories of NGOs, and to ascertain which of the four types of NGOs are likely to report more threats or constraints.

Levels of effects of counter-terrorism measures on NGOs in North-East Nigeria

Chi-square and logistic regression analysis were used to determine which type, nature, and size of NGOs are more likely to report threats and restrictions. Table 1 shows that 186 of the 205 participants said the activities of security agencies affected their ability to work in the north-east. The proportion varies by type of organisations, sources of funding, number of branches and area of operations. For instance, 91.9% of domestic NGO workers compared to 84.8% of international NGO workers reported that their ability to work had been affected. This difference was not statistically significant. Neither was the case when comparing larger NGOs (91.2%) with smaller NGOs (89.7%). However, NGOs within the operational area of peacebuilding (67%) were significantly less likely to report constraints compared to those in human rights advocacy (92.9%) and humanitarian services (96.6%). This can be attributed to peacebuilding NGOs’ service delivery roles, such as post-conflict peacebuilding programmes, specifically getting early warning signs of violence or intelligence gathering needed to curb terrorist recruitment (Njoku 2019b). This advances current discourse on how the government engaged NGOs it views as suitable because of their acceptance to shun advocacy and only carry out social service programmes and intelligence gathering in the context of counter-terrorism. The government repressed

| Variables                      | Have the activities of security agencies affected your ability to work in the North East? | P-value |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
|                               | Yes n (%)                                  | No n (%) |         |
| All participants              | 186 (90.7)                                 | 19 (9.3) |         |
| **Organisation type**         |                                            |          |         |
| Youth/children                | 27 (81.8)                                  | 6 (18.2) | 0.188   |
| Women                         | 35 (89.7)                                  | 4 (10.3) |          |
| Faith-based                   | 61 (95.3)                                  | 3 (4.7)  |          |
| Human rights                  | 63 (91.3)                                  | 6 (8.7)  |          |
| **Nature of organisation**    |                                            |          |         |
| Domestic                      | 158 (91.9)                                 | 14 (8.1) | 0.170   |
| International                 | 28 (84.8)                                  | 5 (15.2) |          |
| **Areas of operation**        |                                            |          | <0.001  |
| Humanitarian                  | 57 (96.6)                                  | 2 (3.4)  |          |
| Peacebuilding                 | 19 (67.9)                                  | 9 (32.1) |          |
| Development                   | 45 (93.8)                                  | 3 (6.3)  |          |
| Human rights advocacy         | 65 (92.9)                                  | 5 (7.1)  |          |
| **Number of branches**        |                                            |          | 0.451   |
| One branch                    | 61 (89.7)                                  | 7 (10.3) |          |
| More than one                 | 125 (91.2)                                 | 12 (8.8) |          |
| **Year established**          |                                            |          | 0.152   |
| 1965–2000                     | 116 (92.8)                                 | 9 (7.2)  |          |
| 2001–2014                     | 70 (87.5)                                  | 10 (12.5)|          |
| **Source of fund**            |                                            |          | 0.169   |
| Foundations                   | 7 (100.0)                                  | 0 (0.0)  |          |
| Grants                        | 68 (93.2)                                  | 5 (6.8)  |          |
| Donations                     | 25 (80.6)                                  | 6 (19.4) |          |
| Others                        | 86 (91.5)                                  | 8 (8.5)  |          |
organisations viewed as activists because of their critical stance on government counter-terrorism policies and advocacy activities (Howell and Lind 2010). The findings confirm previous research, as Fowler and Sen (2010) assert that the government provided suitable NGOs unlimited access to funds, with critical NGOs marginalised and further restricted.

In Table 2, 95 of the 205 respondents reported that security agencies in the north-east had threatened them. There was no statistical difference in exposure to threats from the security agencies based on the size of NGOs, maturity and sources of funds. However, the differences in the responses based on type and nature of NGOs, areas of operations and sex of respondent were statistically significant at the less than 1% (0.001) significance level. Examining these variations in responses using logistic regression (Table 3) shows that NGO workers in youth/children, women and faith-based organisations had higher odds of being threatened by security agents relative to those in human rights organisations. Male NGO workers were 2.6 times more likely to be threatened by security agents compared to female NGO workers. Relative to NGO workers in human rights advocacy, those in humanitarian operations were 71% less likely to be threatened. Interestingly, domestic NGO workers were 87% less likely to be threatened by security agents compared to international NGO workers.

**Table 2. Relationship between organisation type, areas of operation, sex, nature of organisation and being threatened by security agencies.**

| Variables                            | Have you been threatened by security agencies? |  | P-value |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---|---------|
|                                      | Yes n (%) | No n (%) |               |
| All participants                     | 95 (46.3) | 110 (53.7) |               |
| **Organisation type**                |          |          |               |
| Youth/children                       | 14 (42.4) | 19 (57.6%) | <0.001 |
| Women                                | 29 (74.4) | 10 (25.6)  |               |
| Faith-based                          | 35 (54.7) | 29 (45.3)  |               |
| Human rights                         | 17 (24.6) | 52 (75.4)  |               |
| **Nature of organisation**           |          |          |               |
| Domestic                             | 65 (37.8) | 107 (62.2) | <0.001 |
| International                        | 30 (90.9) | 3 (9.1)    |               |
| **Areas of operation**               |          |          |               |
| Humanitarian                         | 12 (20.3) | 47 (79.7)  | <0.001 |
| Peacebuilding                        | 13 (46.4) | 15 (53.6)  |               |
| Development                          | 22 (45.8) | 26 (54.2)  |               |
| Human rights advocacy                | 48 (68.6) | 22 (31.4)  |               |
| **Sex**                              |          |          |               |
| Male                                 | 66 (56.4) | 51 (43.6)  | 0.001 |
| Female                               | 29 (33.0) | 59 (67.0)  |               |
| **Number of branches**               |          |          |               |
| One branch                           | 30 (44.1) | 38 (55.9)  | 0.382 |
| More than one                        | 65 (47.4) | 72 (52.6)  |               |
| **Year established**                 |          |          |               |
| 1965–2000                            | 53 (42.4) | 72 (57.6)  | 0.102 |
| 2001–2014                            | 42 (52.5) | 38 (47.5)  |               |
| **Source of fund**                   |          |          |               |
| Foundations                          | 6 (85.7)  | 1 (14.3)   | 0.002 |
| Grants                               | 22 (30.1) | 51 (69.9)  |               |
| Donations                            | 15 (48.4) | 16 (51.6)  |               |
| Others                               | 52 (55.3) | 42 (44.7)  |               |

Discussing and conclusion

This article centred on two key objectives: to determine the levels of threats and hindrances that NGOs faced in the context of counter-terrorism, and explain the variations of the effects of threats and hindrances on the NGOs surveyed. First, it found that political advocacy, playing a watchdog role on defence budgets, and reporting by humanitarian NGOs on sexual offences committed by Nigerian security apparatuses were crucial factors that contributed in influencing the government,
including its security agents’ pressures and threats on NGOs in the context of counter-terrorism. This finding advances knowledge on the governments’ increasing targeting of NGOs that engage in political advocacy, which they believe undermines their counter-terrorism objectives (Brechenmacher 2017; Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolskaya 2018; Watson and Burles 2018). It builds on previous claims (Njoku 2019b) that within the context of counter-terrorism, the government restricts NGOs’ access to information and the victims of terrorist attacks and counter-terrorism operations, and forcibly amends NGOs’ programmes to align with state counter-terrorism objectives.

Second, the article demonstrates that: (1) all organisations, irrespective of nature, type, size and maturity have been constrained by government CTMs. However, peacebuilding NGOs did not face the same level of restrictions as others; (2) Women, youth/children and faith-based organisations experienced more threats than human rights NGOs; (3) NGOs that operate in human rights advocacy have faced more threats than others, and; (4) international NGOs have received more threats than domestic NGOs.

It is noteworthy that, in contrast to previous suggestions that NGOs were unevenly affected by CTMs (Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolskaya 2018; Watson and Burles 2018; Howell 2014), human rights and faith-based organisations faced more constraints and threats than other types of NGOs (Howell 2014; Howell and Lind 2010; Sidel 2010). This study advances the discussion by showing that all NGOs in Nigeria experience constraints, irrespective of types. Furthermore, the study shows how mainstream NGOs have also come under considerable threat as CTMs have gained ground. Thus, it builds on Howell and Lind’s (2010) position that mainstream NGOs did not face government constraints when CTMs were introduced and thus were silent on their repressive nature until CTMs affected them. Constraints on mainstream NGOs have arguably grown as a result of increasing terrorist violence and large-scale deployment of CTMs.

In contrast to previous research, the study evidence shows that human rights organisations were less threatened by security agencies compared to youth/children, women’s and faith-based organisations. For domestic human rights NGOs, the fewer threats faced in Nigeria is traced to their inability to do much rights advocacy work that the state considers undermines their counter-terrorism campaigns. This ties into current debates on the dwindling political activism that once characterised human rights NGOs in Nigeria. According to Aiyede (2004), human rights NGOs, in collaboration with labour unions, led the struggle for democratisation during military rule in Nigeria. However, the activism of human rights NGOs has declined significantly in Nigeria’s democracy, which is also reflected in the weak responses of NGOs to repressive

| Variables                      | UOR          | AOR          |
|-------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| **Organisation type**          |              |              |
| Youth/children                | 2.25 (0.93-5.44) | 2.32 (0.82-6.55) |
| Women                         | 8.87 (3.59-21.90)*** | 2.99 (0.99-9.08) |
| Faith-based                   | 3.69 (1.77-7.71)*** | 1.77 (0.73-4.26) |
| Human rights                  | 1            |              |
| **Nature of organisation**    |              |              |
| Domestic                      | 0.06 (0.02-0.21)*** | 0.13 (0.03-0.48)* |
| International                 | 1            |              |
| **Areas of operation**        |              |              |
| Humanitarian                  | 0.17 (0.05-0.26)*** | 0.29 (0.10-0.83)* |
| Peacebuilding                 | 0.40 (0.16-0.98)*** | 0.64 (0.23-1.80) |
| Development                   | 0.39 (0.18-0.83)*** | 1.04 (0.39-2.80) |
| Human rights advocacy         | 1            |              |
| **Sex**                       |              |              |
| Male                          | 2.63 (1.48-4.68)*** | 2.55 (1.21-5.38)* |
| Female                        | 1            |              |

Notes: *** P-values <0.001; * P-values <0.05; AOR: adjusted odds ration; UOR: unadjusted odds ratios
governments CTMs (Njoku 2019b). International human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have been major critics of the Nigerian government counter-terrorism operations, accusing the government of various human rights violations. Moreover, it should be noted that international human rights organisations play vital roles in influencing the decisions of Western states in issuing foreign aid to recipient states (Dietrich and Murdie 2015). This may have contributed to the few threats they faced in the context of counter-terrorism in Nigeria, as the government fears that the actions of these organisations may negatively affect their access to foreign military aid.

The findings also show that NGOs that engage in advocacy have faced more threats than others. This confirms extant perspectives on government practices of repression of NGOs engaged in advocacy programmes and endorsement of those engaged in service delivery such as post-conflict peacebuilding services (Bayas and Shanon 2018). As Hayes (2017, 38) contended: “organisations involved in funding and delivering projects aimed at conflict transformation – whose activities, such as human rights advocacy and support for marginalised groups, often lack legitimacy in the eyes of state parties”.

The findings reveal that international NGOs were more threatened by the government than domestic NGOs. Recent events validate this finding. Mercy Corp and Action Against Hunger were briefly proscribed by the Nigerian military in 2019, and Amnesty International was accused of spurious human rights violation claims. The military believed that Mercy Corps, Action Against Hunger and Amnesty International had engaged in clandestine activities or make false claims that undermine the government’s counter-terrorism objectives. Although Mercy Corps and Action Against Hunger’s prohibition were later reversed, this shows the deep-seated antagonism between the Nigerian government and international organisations in the counter-terrorism context.

The finding is particularly relevant to the debate on the use of CTMs by governments to target international NGOs and those domestic NGOs that have a close association or received funding from international governmental organisations and NGOs in countries such as Australia, Bahrain, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia and Hungary (Bayas and Shanon 2018; Brechenmacher 2017). In Russia, the government established the Foreign Agent Law in 2012, which was used to threaten and repress international NGOs, and domestic organisations receiving funding from international organisations. These organisations were required by law to label themselves as “foreign agents” in every formal and informal communication or engagement, including in their publications and websites. The actions of the Russian government contributed to delegitimising these organisations in the eyes of the Russian people (Skokova, Pape, and Krasnopolskaya 2018).

The government’s strategic engagement of domestic NGOs as service providers in the context of counter-terrorism also explains the fewer threats domestic NGOs faced when compared to international NGOs. This reinforces Njoku’s (2017a, 1) argument that

the capacity of NGOs to operate in the context of counter-terrorism is influenced by the politics that places these organisations in the service of the state. It, therefore, created a convivial relationship in which NGOs advance the interest of the state, while they are in turn endorsed by the government.

Furthermore, the finding is consistent with Howell and Lind (2010), that in the enforcement of CTMs states deployed a two-prong strategy of co-option and containment where they endorsed and engaged those organisations considered as “good” NGOs as service providers, and repressed NGOs that were termed “bad” because of their advocacy efforts.

This study provides valuable evidence to international development agencies and local and international NGOs on government practices that are increasingly affecting the capacity of NGOs to deliver aid services effectively and timely. It also reveals growing government hostility towards political advocacy and other activities of NGOs that advocate for probity in the counter-terrorism activities of the government. It provides empirical evidence on the blurring of the boundaries between freedom, development and security issues. Thus, the study recommends a reconsideration of
current CTMs where NGOs are considered to be partners to the government. Specifically, the government should be more accommodating by establishing forums where NGOs can serve as watchdogs to government CTMs. This would ensure adherence to issues of transparency, accountability, and social justice in the enforcement of CTMs.

Notes

1. Mainstream NGOs are those large organisations that are funded by the government and undertake service delivery. In Nigeria, these NGOs are considered big not only because of the government’s support but their presence in different parts of the country.

2. Securitisation is an articulated assemblage of practices are contextually mobilised by securitising actors, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitising actor’s reason for choices and act by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customised policy must be undertaken immediately to block its development. (Balzacq 2011)

3. Although there is overlap in these areas of activities, NGOs were categorised based on the programmes they implement in the north-east. First, organisations that engage in rights advocacy for victims of terrorism and particularly for victims of counter-terrorism operations. These NGOs ensure they security agents adhere to the rules of engagement that entail respect for human rights. They advocate for the rights of illegally detained men, women, girls and boys suspected of being Boko Haram members. They also advocate for the rights of women and girls that were sexually violated by security agents, civilian joint task force and community members in the north-east. Second, NGOs that engage in development activities such as training youth to learn entrepreneurial skills and providing them with soft loans to start businesses. The provision of educational services to youths and deconstruction of Islamic radicalism in various madrassa in the north-east help to curb terrorist recruitment. Third, peacebuilding NGOs focus on engaging local communities in order to understand various grievances towards the government and resolve them. The seek their cooperation in curbing terrorism through providing intelligence and detecting early signs of conflict or attacks. This information is usually passed to the appropriate government agencies and international governmental organisations, so that mechanisms are put in place to prevent the proliferation of terrorism. Fourth, humanitarian services include the provision of food, temporary shelter, Medicare, psychosocial counselling for victims of terrorism and counter-terrorism operations in the north-east.

4. Interview, NGO executive focused on security and governance issues in northern Nigeria (Abuja, 2 May 2018); interview, executive of an NGO focused on women’s rights and development (Oyo, 23 April 2018).

5. Interview, executive director of a women’s rights group, Oyo, 23 April 2018.

6. Interview, executive director of a women’s group, Lagos, 20 February 2015.

7. Interview, executive director of a women’s group, Lagos, 20 February 2015.

8. Interview, director of an international human rights organisation (Abuja, 25 May 2018); interview, programme officer of international health care services organisation (Borno, 26 May 2018).

9. Interview, four senior military officers in charge of defence planning, Abuja, 9 March 2015; Interview, counter-terrorism officer in the Nigerian Army, Borno, 3 September 2015.

10. Interview, officer of the National Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) (Oyo, 19 February 2015).

11. Interview, executive of peacebuilding NGO, Lagos, 20 February 2015.

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