Research Article

The Nigerian Military and the Management of Boko Haram Crisis in Northeastern States of Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa, And Yobe): The Chinese Puzzle Paradigm

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Abstract: This study examines the Nigerian military's management of the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, employing the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP) as the theoretical framework. The study investigates the interplay between military operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement in enhancing counterinsurgency outcomes. Using a mixed-methods design, data were collected from 384 respondents, including military personnel, community leaders, civil society representatives, and members of civilian vigilante groups, through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics—frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—summarized demographic characteristics and perceptions, while inferential statistics, including Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) and multiple regression analysis, examined the relationships and predictive influences of the variables. Findings reveal that intelligence-driven and adaptive military strategies are the most influential factor in counterinsurgency effectiveness, while civil-military relations and community engagement significantly enhance operational outcomes. The three variables are interdependent, confirming the CPP's emphasis on multidimensional, integrative, and adaptive problem-solving. The study concludes that effective management of Boko Haram requires coordinated strategies, strong trust and collaboration with local communities, and active community participation in security initiatives. Policy recommendations include strengthening adaptive military operations, institutionalizing civil-military engagement, promoting community involvement, and establishing continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms to ensure sustainable counterinsurgency outcomes. Thus, the study contributes to the understanding of multidimensional counterinsurgency frameworks and provides actionable insights for policymakers, military strategists, and community stakeholders in Nigeria and similar conflict contexts.

Keywords: Nigerian Military, Boko Haram Insurgency, Civil-Military Relations, Community Engagement, and Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP)

INTRODUCTION

The security challenges posed by Boko Haram in the northeastern states of Nigeria—specifically Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe—represent one of the most persistent and complex internal conflicts in contemporary African security studies. Since its emergence in 2002, Boko Haram has evolved from a localized extremist sect advocating for the imposition of Sharia law into a full-scale insurgency responsible for mass casualties, displacement, and widespread socio-economic disruption (Agbiboa, 2013; Onuoha, 2014). The Nigerian military has been at the forefront of state efforts to contain and neutralize this insurgency, deploying conventional and counterinsurgency strategies, often in collaboration with regional security forces. Despite these interventions, the crisis has persisted, underscoring the structural and operational challenges in Nigeria's military and security apparatus (Adesoji, 2011; Iro, 2018).

The management of Boko Haram not only highlights the conventional challenges of military engagements against non-state actors but also raises questions about the broader strategic and operational paradigms adopted by the Nigerian military. Scholars have noted the military's reliance on kinetic operations and direct confrontation, which, while occasionally tactically successful, often fails to address the socio-political and community-based dynamics that underpin insurgency resilience (Hansen, 2017; Obaji, 2019). This scenario mirrors the complexities encapsulated in the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP), a conceptual framework that emphasizes multi-level problem-solving, adaptive strategies, and the integration of both systemic and localized intelligence to resolve intricate, seemingly intractable challenges (Li, 2015; Wang, 2018). The CPP underscores the need for flexible, iterative, and context-sensitive approaches, offering an analytical lens to assess military strategy in environments marked by insurgency and civilian vulnerability.

By examining the Nigerian military's operational and strategic responses through the lens of the CPP, this study seeks to elucidate the intersections between military efficiency, legitimacy, civil-military relations, and community engagement. Specifically, the research interrogates how military interventions have

succeeded or failed in restoring security, protecting civilian populations, and fostering sustainable peace in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. Understanding these dynamics is crucial, given that the Boko Haram insurgency continues to have far-reaching implications for regional stability, governance, and developmental trajectories (Kukah, 2020; Aghedo and Osumah, 2012). Furthermore, applying the CPP to the Nigerian context provides a comparative theoretical grounding, enabling policymakers and military strategists to identify adaptive strategies that transcend conventional military doctrines.

In summary, the Nigerian military's engagement with Boko Haram exemplifies the multidimensional nature of contemporary insurgencies, where tactical victories may not necessarily translate into strategic success. By situating this analysis within the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm, this research contributes to both theoretical and practical discourses on counterinsurgency, offering insights into how complex, persistent security challenges can be systematically understood and addressed. This framework allows for the integration of military strategy, civil-military relations, and community-oriented interventions, highlighting the need for holistic approaches in managing protracted insurgencies.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Boko Haram insurgency has posed a profound threat to the socio-political stability of Nigeria, particularly in the northeastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. Since 2009, the group has carried out large-scale attacks on civilians, government institutions, and security forces, resulting in thousands of deaths, widespread displacement, and significant infrastructural damage (Agbiboa, 2013; Onuoha, 2014). Despite sustained military interventions, the insurgency has persisted, exposing gaps in Nigeria's security architecture and raising critical questions about the effectiveness of current counterinsurgency strategies (Adesoji, 2011; Iro, 2018).

One of the central problems lies in the predominance of conventional military approaches that focus on kinetic operations rather than integrating political, socio-economic, and community-oriented strategies (Hansen, 2017). These approaches have occasionally achieved tactical victories but have often failed to address the structural conditions that sustain insurgency, such as poverty, weak governance, and limited state presence in affected communities (Obaji, 2019; Kukah, 2020). Moreover, inadequate intelligence, poor civil-military relations, and the lack of adaptive operational frameworks have constrained the military's ability to anticipate, prevent, and neutralize insurgent activities effectively (Aghedo and Osumah, 2012).

The persistence of Boko Haram highlights a broader challenge in contemporary counterinsurgency; the need for multidimensional and adaptive strategies that combine military efficiency with legitimacy, community engagement, and long-term stabilization efforts. Applying the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP), which emphasizes context-sensitive, iterative, and systemic problem-solving approaches, provides a potential framework for understanding and addressing this complexity (Li, 2015; Wang, 2018). Failure to integrate such holistic strategies not only prolongs insecurity but also undermines public confidence in the state's capacity to protect its citizens, with significant implications for regional stability and development.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of the Nigerian military in managing the Boko Haram crisis through the lens of the CPP, aiming to identify the operational, structural, and strategic factors that hinder or enhance counterinsurgency outcomes in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states.

In order to achieve the above, the specific objectives of the study include - to assess the effectiveness of the Nigerian military's operational strategies in managing the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states; to examine the role of civil-military relations and community engagement in enhancing counterinsurgency outcomes in the affected northeastern states; and to explore the applicability of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP) in improving adaptive and multidimensional strategies for managing Boko Haram crises. The specific objectives were guided by the following research questions - how effective are the Nigerian military's operational strategies in mitigating the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states? What is the impact of civil-military relations and community engagement on the success of counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram? And to what extent can the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm inform adaptive strategies for enhancing the Nigerian military's response to Boko Haram? The null and alternate research hypotheses include - H_{01}: The Nigerian military's operational strategies have no significant effect on managing the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states (H_{11}: The Nigerian military's operational strategies significantly influence the management of the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states); H_{02}: Civil-military relations and community engagement do not significantly impact the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram (H_{12}: Civil-military relations and community engagement significantly enhance the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram); and H_{03}: The Chinese Puzzle Paradigm does not significantly contribute to improving adaptive strategies for managing Boko Haram crises (H_{13}: The Chinese Puzzle Paradigm significantly contributes to improving adaptive strategies for managing Boko Haram crises).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Expositions of Key Variables

Nigerian Military and Operational Strategies: The Nigerian military plays a pivotal role in safeguarding national security and managing internal conflicts, particularly in counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram. Military strategy is generally defined as the systematic planning and execution of actions to achieve specific security objectives (Iro, 2018). In the Nigerian context, operational strategies against Boko Haram have included conventional military offensives, intelligence-led operations, joint task force deployments, and coordination with regional security actors (Adesoji, 2011; Hansen, 2017). Scholars have emphasized that while these strategies can yield short-term tactical successes, their long-term effectiveness is constrained by issues such as inadequate logistics, poor intelligence, corruption, and limited understanding of local socio-cultural dynamics (Obaji, 2019; Onuoha, 2014).

Boko Haram Insurgency: Boko Haram, officially known as Jamāʻat Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Daʻwah wa'l-Jihād, emerged in northeastern Nigeria as an Islamist extremist group advocating for the imposition of Sharia law (Agbiboa, 2013). The insurgency has evolved into a complex armed conflict involving suicide bombings, abductions, and attacks on civilian and state institutions (Aghedo and Osumah, 2012). Conceptually, insurgency is understood as an organized movement aimed at overthrowing a state or authority through protracted irregular warfare, often exploiting socio-economic grievances and weak state structures (Kukah, 2020). Boko Haram's resilience is partly attributable to the inability of conventional military approaches to integrate political, social, and community dimensions into counterinsurgency efforts (Hansen, 2017).

Civil-Military Relations and Community Engagement:
Civil-military relations and community engagement are critical in modern counterinsurgency frameworks. Civil-military relations refer to the interaction between the armed forces and the civilian population, encompassing trust, legitimacy, cooperation, and adherence to the rule of law (Obaji, 2019). Effective engagement with local communities enables intelligence gathering, early warning mechanisms, and cooperation in dissuading insurgent recruitment (Iro, 2018). Studies suggest that counterinsurgency strategies that prioritize community-centered approaches often achieve greater success than purely kinetic operations, as they address the underlying drivers of insurgency and enhance state legitimacy (Kukah, 2020; Aghedo and Osumah, 2012).

Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP): The Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP) is a conceptual framework that emphasizes adaptive, context-sensitive problem-solving in complex environments (Li, 2015). The paradigm suggests that multi-level challenges require iterative, systemic approaches that integrate intelligence, operational flexibility, and stakeholder engagement (Wang, 2018). In the context of counterinsurgency, CPP offers a lens to analyze the Nigerian military's operations, highlighting the need for a holistic integration of military tactics, socio-political considerations, and community involvement. It underscores that solutions to complex insurgencies are not linear and require continuous feedback, adaptation, and strategic foresight (Li, 2015; Wang, 2018).

Thus, synthesizing these conceptual expositions, it becomes evident that the effectiveness of the Nigerian military against Boko Haram is contingent on a multidimensional approach. Operational strategies must be complemented by robust civil-military relations, community engagement, and adaptive frameworks such as the CPP. This integrated approach aligns military efficiency with legitimacy and sustainable peacebuilding, offering a more comprehensive solution to the protracted insurgency in northeastern Nigeria (Obaji, 2019; Li, 2015).

Effectiveness of the Nigerian Military's Operational Strategies in Managing the Boko Haram Insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States

The Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria remains one of the most enduring and complex internal security challenges confronting the Nigerian state. Since its escalation in 2009, successive Nigerian governments have deployed a range of military operational strategies aimed at degrading the operational capacity of Boko Haram, recovering territorial control, and restoring state authority in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states. This literature review examines the scholarly and policy-focused assessments of these operational strategies and evaluates their effectiveness in countering the insurgency.

Studies indicate that the Nigerian military's operational strategies have had mixed outcomes, reflecting both tactical successes and strategic shortcomings. On one hand, research suggests that intensified military operations, particularly since 2015, have contributed to degradation in Boko Haram's activities in the northeast (Akinbile, Momodu & Owonikoko, 2025). Empirical findings in one recent analysis reveal a statistically significant relationship between the degradation of Boko Haram operations and the counterinsurgency strategies employed by Nigerian security forces, underscoring that specific military tactics have curbed insurgent activities in certain theatres of operation. Complementary literature highlights notable territorial recoveries and elimination of key insurgent bases through coordinated ground offensives and airstrikes, evidencing operational-level impact (Authority News, 2025)

However, the overall strategic effectiveness of military operations remains contested. Some scholars argue that while Nigerian military forces have regained control of major towns and disrupted Boko Haram's

conventional capabilities, the insurgency persists through asymmetrical tactics, including suicide bombings, ambushes, and decentralized operations (Nosiri & Ibekwe, 2025). These persistent insurgent capabilities suggest that military gains have not translated into enduring stability or elimination of the insurgent threat. Moreover, critics note that operational improvements have lagged behind resource and capacity constraints within the military. Problems such as insufficient logistics, outdated hardware, and inadequate communication systems have undermined rapid and flexible responses to insurgent tactics, especially in complex terrains like the Sambisa Forest and remote border regions. Equally, the attendant problems of corruption and accountability among the military and government officials had crippled the fight against Boko Haram and other security threats in the country. This has resulted in the failure of the Nigerian government to set in place transparent and accountable institutions capable of securing economic progress, promoting good governance, and protecting the citizenry (Nwambuko, 2021).

Airpower, as a key component of military operations, offers additional insights into effectiveness. Analyses of the Nigerian Air Force's engagement in counter insurgency show that aerial campaigns have supplemented ground operations, offering critical support for troop movements and enabling precision strikes against insurgent strongholds. Nevertheless, logistical challenges such as shortages of precision-guided munitions and trained personnel diminish the full potential of air operations in sustaining long-term impact. Recent reports from military spokespersons confirm ongoing use of precision airstrikes that have killed suspected militants and stabilized localized battlefronts in Borno, illustrating operational gains at the tactical level but not necessarily strategic resolution of the broader conflict.

Beyond tactical performance, strategic evaluation highlights a critical disconnect between military successes and broader political-security outcomes. Critics contend that exclusive reliance on kinetic operations (focused on killing or capturing insurgents) has inadvertently fueled local grievances and weakened civilian trust in the military. Accounts of human rights abuses and excessive force in early counterinsurgency campaigns illustrate how such approaches can undercut legitimacy and hinder intelligence cooperation essential for effective operations (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Complementary studies argue that while military capacity has grown, the absence of integrated non-military elements such as socio-economic development, governance reforms, and community-centered intelligence, limits the sustainability of gains achieved through force alone (Nosiri & Ibekwe, 2025).

In summary, the literature suggests that the Nigerian military's operational strategies have yielded measurable tactical successes and contributed to periodic reductions in Boko Haram's offensive capacity in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. These include degradation of insurgent operational networks, territorial recoveries, and targeted air operations. However, long-term strategic effectiveness remains constrained by systemic challenges such as logistical limitations, inadequate integration with non-kinetic elements, and persistent insurgent adaptation. This underscores that while military operations are necessary components of the counterinsurgency effort, their effectiveness is conditional upon complementary political, socio-economic, and institutional reforms that address the root causes and resilience of the insurgency and the attendants security challenges faced by the country as a result of their nefarious activities. This no doubt, have a negative effect not only on the national security of the country but also on its image in the international system (Nwambuko & Iloh, 2021).

The Role of Civil-Military Relations and Community Engagement in Enhancing Counterinsurgency Outcomes in Northeastern Nigeria

The nexus between civil-military relations and community engagement has emerged as a critical dimension in contemporary counterinsurgency scholarship, particularly in protracted conflicts such as the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's northeast. Traditional military-centric approaches, while indispensable for confronting violent non-state actors, have often been criticized for neglecting the socio-political terrain in which insurgencies thrive (Salihu, 2021). In the context of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, the interplay between the Nigerian military and local communities has profound implications for operational legitimacy, intelligence effectiveness, and long-term stability.

A central theme in the literature is that effective civil-military relations can enhance trust between security forces and civilian populations, which is fundamental for successful counterinsurgency outcomes. Obasi *et al.* (2022) empirical study demonstrates that collaboration between community leaders and the Nigerian Army significantly bolsters community trust, participation, and knowledge sharing remain key elements that enrich local intelligence and support security operations. The authors find that when local leaders are actively involved in military strategies, there is a positive correlation between community trust and operational cooperation, suggesting that engagement at the grassroots level helps mitigate fear, suspicion, and alienation among residents affected by insurgency.

Similarly, Salihu (2021) asserts that the relevance of community involvement goes beyond mere support; it is a structural necessity for counterinsurgency effectiveness. His analysis highlights how heavily militarized responses without meaningful civilian participation fail to address the underlying conditions

enabling insurgent resilience. This study argues for a community-centric, bottom-up approach that integrates local needs—security, reconstruction, and reintegration—into broader strategies aimed at weakening Boko Haram influences. Salihu contends that embedding community voices in decision-making fosters mutual assistance between military and civilians, thereby strengthening social cohesion and undermining insurgent narratives predicated on state neglect.

Community engagement also operates as a form of "soft power" in conflict environments, complementing kinetic operations with legitimacy building and social resilience. Kulungu's (2021) exploration of community engagement strategies underscores the significance of inclusive, participatory approaches that extend beyond force deployment. Such engagement can leverage local cultural norms, traditional leadership structures, and civil society networks to counter extremist ideologies and reduce insurgent recruitment by addressing socio-economic grievances that fuel unrest. Although focused on a broader Sub-Saharan context, Kulungu's insights are relevant to northeastern Nigeria, where insurgent support often stems from perceived marginalization and lack of state presence.

Moreover, literature on community participation underscores the value of informal security actors such as civilian vigilante groups and local task forces. While this review primarily focuses on structured civil-military relations, research on groups like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) reveals that community-sourced defenders have played instrumental roles in early warning, local security patrols, and collaboration with formal forces—especially where state presence is weak (Gana, 2020; *see also* Salihu, 2021). These groups, by virtue of their embeddedness in local contexts, enhance the situational awareness of military operations and bridge gaps in formal security provision.

However, the literature also highlights limitations and challenges in civil-military engagement. Deep-seated trust deficits, often exacerbated by past military abuses and perceptions of high-handedness, can undermine community willingness to engage with state forces. Historical incidents, such as alleged civilian casualties during counterinsurgency operations, have complicated efforts to build positive relations, suggesting that civil-military initiatives must be accompanied by accountability and human-rights adherence to be effective (Salihu, 2021).

In summation, the literature strongly suggests that civil-military relations and community engagement are pivotal determinants of counterinsurgency outcomes in northeastern Nigeria. When security operations are integrated with participatory community strategies, there is greater potential for trust, shared intelligence, and localized support that disrupt insurgent footholds. This body of research collectively underscores the need to transcend purely militarized approaches by embedding community agency and cooperative security frameworks into counterinsurgency policy and practice.

Applicability of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm in Enhancing Adaptive and Multidimensional Strategies for Managing Boko Haram Crises

The Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP) is conceptualised as an analytical framework for understanding and solving complex, multifaceted problems by emphasising systemic integration, adaptive approaches, and iterative problem-solving processes. Although the CPP has not been extensively applied in mainstream security studies, its foundational principles draw from broader literature on complex problem solving (CPS) and adaptive strategy design, which are highly relevant to counterinsurgency contexts such as the Boko Haram crises in northeastern Nigeria.

At its core, the CPP reflects the dynamics of complex problem environments, where the interconnected nature of variables and uncertainty of outcomes require flexible strategic responses. Complex problem solving involves interacting with dynamic scenarios where 'the exact properties of the given state, goal state, and barriers' are initially unclear, demanding iterative exploration, information integration, and flexible action plans to reach effective solutions. This understanding highlights the cognitive and procedural requirements for handling multi-layered challenges that mirror real-world security crises (Frensch and Funke, cited in OAPUB, 2025).

The CPP's emphasis on adaptation and iterative feedback is particularly salient for insurgency management. Counterinsurgency (COIN) literature underscores that insurgent warfare, characterised by asymmetric tactics and non-linear conflict trajectories, resists reductionist solutions and demands both military and non-military dimensions of response (Counterinsurgency explanation, 2025). The pattern of Boko Haram's operations — blending guerrilla tactics with community influence and ideological outreach — aligns with the kind of dynamic complexity that CPS paradigms address, thereby reinforcing the conceptual link between CPP and effective insurgency strategy.

Adaptive strategies in conflict management require not only responsiveness to changes on the ground but also contextual intelligence, multi-stakeholder engagement, and recursive learning from prior outcomes. In this regard, the CPP's utility lies in combining multiple strategic pieces — akin to a puzzle — where success depends on integrating diverse elements of security, governance, and community dynamics into coherent policy responses. This aligns with broader scholarly advocacy for holistic counterinsurgency frameworks that move beyond kinetic methods to include socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions of conflict environments. Such holistic approaches are well

recognised in counterinsurgency theory as vital for undermining insurgent appeal and consolidating peace (Counterinsurgency overview, 2025).

The literature on strategic adaptation also emphasises the importance of planning and flexibility in complex settings. Research on CPS underscores the role of goal-directed planning and behavioural adjustments in achieving successful problem resolution, suggesting that adaptive strategic cycles—plan, act, reflect, adjust—are essential components of effective policy responses to intricate problems (Zhang and Gao, 2025). Applying this within the CPP lens implies that Nigerian security strategies must be structured to accommodate feedback loops and real-time reassessment, rather than rigidly adhering to conventional operational doctrines.

Beyond cognitive parallels, the CPP metaphor resonates with practical demands for multidimensional conflict management. Hybrid warfare and asymmetric conflicts similarly require states to deploy coordinated strategies that combine military, political, and socio-economic tools, integrating intelligence, diplomatic engagement, and community resilience initiatives. Although hybrid warfare literature does not explicitly invoke the CPP, it reflects the same principle that complex threats cannot be effectively addressed through singular tactical responses alone (Conflict complexity literature, 2025).

Furthermore, application of CPP in crisis management suggests an emphasis on systems thinking, whereby security challenges are viewed as parts of broader socio-political ecosystems rather than isolated military problems. This perspective encourages policymakers to consider how insurgent actions interlock with local governance deficits, economic marginalisation, and social grievances. In the Nigerian context, such integrative thinking could help bridge the gap between military operations and civil-military collaboration, ensuring that tactical operations feed into long-term stabilisation efforts.

In summary, while the explicit use of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm in security studies remains limited**,** the underlying concepts of complex problem solving, adaptive strategy, and multidimensional integration provide a valuable theoretical lens for analysing and improving counterinsurgency strategies against Boko Haram. These principles suggest that managing deeply entrenched insurgencies requires continuous learning, flexible planning, and the integration of military and non-military approaches — all core to the CPP framework. Thus, the paradigm offers a promising conceptual tool for understanding how nuanced adaptive strategies can enhance the Nigerian military's effectiveness in managing protracted crises in the northeast.

Theoretical Framework: Application of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP)

The Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP) is adopted in this study as the theoretical lens for understanding the complexity inherent in the Nigerian military's management of the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states. The CPP, rooted in complex problem-solving and systems thinking, conceptualizes challenges as multi-layered puzzles where outcomes are contingent upon the integration of diverse components and adaptive responses (Li, 2015; Wang, 2018). Unlike linear problem-solving models, which assume predictable cause-effect relationships, the CPP emphasizes iterative learning, feedback loops, and the interdependence of multiple variables, making it particularly suitable for examining protracted insurgencies characterized by fluid dynamics, asymmetrical tactics, and socio-political complexities.

Applying the CPP to the Nigerian context provides a conceptual tool for analyzing how operational, institutional, and social factors intersect to influence counterinsurgency outcomes. At the operational level, the Nigerian military's strategies (including conventional offensives, intelligence-driven operations, and air-ground coordination) can be seen as individual "pieces" of the broader puzzle. The CPP underscores that while these tactical measures are necessary, they are insufficient in isolation; their effectiveness depends on how well they integrate with other components, such as civil-military relations, community engagement, and socio-political interventions (Obaji, 2019; Salihu, 2021). In essence, military success against Boko Haram is not merely a function of firepower or troop deployment but hinges on systemic coordination, flexibility, and responsiveness to the evolving threat environment.

The CPP also highlights the importance of adaptive strategy in complex environments. Boko Haram's resilience stems from its ability to exploit state weaknesses, employ asymmetric tactics, and manipulate local grievances for recruitment. In line with CPP principles, the Nigerian military must adopt an iterative approach—assessing the outcomes of operations, learning from successes and failures, and adjusting strategies in real time (Li, 2015). For example, feedback from local communities regarding insurgent movements or vulnerabilities can inform tactical decisions, ensuring that military interventions are context-sensitive and proactive rather than purely reactive. Similarly, intelligence gathered through civil-military collaboration represents a critical puzzle piece that enhances the precision and relevance of operational planning.

Furthermore, the CPP framework emphasizes multi-dimensional problem-solving, where non-military factors are integrated into strategic responses. In the Nigerian insurgency context, this entails aligning military action with socio-economic development initiatives, governance reforms, and community

resilience programs (Kulungu, 2021). By treating these dimensions as interconnected components of the puzzle, the CPP enables a holistic analysis of counterinsurgency effectiveness, allowing policymakers and military planners to evaluate how operational strategies influence, and are influenced by, civil-military relations and community dynamics.

Finally, the CPP provides a lens for evaluating outcomes in terms of both immediate and long-term objectives. Tactical victories, such as recapturing towns or eliminating insurgent cells, represent short-term successes. However, sustained security requires integrating these outcomes with measures that enhance state legitimacy, strengthen local institutions, and reduce conditions conducive to insurgency (Hansen, 2017). The CPP thus facilitates a strategic perspective that balances operational effectiveness with societal and political considerations, recognizing that counterinsurgency is an ongoing, adaptive process rather than a one-time solution.
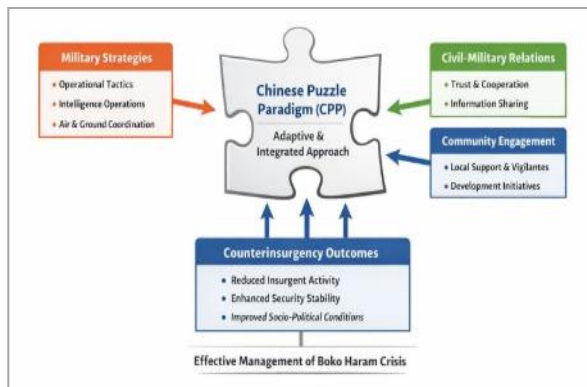

Figure 1: A Conceptual Framework Diagram, Visually Showing How CPP Integrates Military Strategies, Civil-Military Relations, Community Engagement, and Counterinsurgency Outcomes

In conclusion, the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm offers a robust theoretical framework for this study by framing the Boko Haram insurgency as a complex, multi-layered problem. Its principles of systemic integration, iterative adaptation, and multi-dimensional analysis enable a nuanced understanding of how the Nigerian military's strategies interact with socio-political and community factors. Applying the CPP illuminates both the strengths and limitations of current counterinsurgency efforts and provides insights into how adaptive, coordinated, and context-sensitive strategies can enhance the management of insurgent crises in northeastern Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive and explanatory research design. The descriptive aspect enables the study to systematically document and analyze the operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement efforts implemented by the military. At the same time, the explanatory component investigates the causal relationships between these variables and counterinsurgency outcomes, assessing the extent to which operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement contribute to reducing insurgent activities and enhancing regional stability. Additionally, a survey-cum-case study approach was employed, involving primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to military personnel, local community leaders, and members of civil society in the affected states, alongside in-depth interviews with security analysts and policymakers. Secondary data were drawn from official military reports, government publications, academic literature, and reputable news sources documenting the conduct and outcomes of counterinsurgency operations. This mixed-methods design facilitated triangulation, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings. The research design is informed by the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP), which emphasizes complex, adaptive, and multidimensional problem-solving.

Using a recent demographic projections for the year 2025, the population of the study encompassing diverse stakeholders including military personnel, local community members, traditional leaders, civil society actors, and representatives of community security initiatives was approximately estimated to be 15.83 million people across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states with Borno having 6.65 million; Adamawa - 5.2 million; and Yobe - 3.98 million (Xplorer, 2025). The relatively large and growing populations in these states underscore the significant human dimension of the Boko Haram crisis and the importance of examining how military operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement interact to influence security outcomes. The demographic magnitude further highlighted the urgency of effective policy responses that integrate socio-political, economic, and security considerations in managing this protracted insurgency. Furthermore, to determine the sample size, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula is applied, which is widely used for calculating sample sizes from large populations. The formula is:

$$S = \frac{\chi^2 \cdot N \cdot P \cdot (1-P)}{d^2 \cdot (N-1) + \chi^2 \cdot P \cdot (1-P)}$$

Where: S = required sample size; χ^2 = chi-square value for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841 for 95% confidence), N = population size, P = population proportion (assumed to be 0.5 for maximum sample size), and d = degree of accuracy (margin of error, usually 0.05). Thus, N=15,830,000 (total population of Borno, Adamawa, Yobe), χ^2=3.84, P=0.5, and d=0.05

Appling the formula:

$$S = \frac{3.841 \cdot 15,830,000 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)}{0.05^2 \cdot (15,830,000-1) + 3.841 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1-0.5)}$$

Calculate Numerator: $3.841 \cdot 15,830,000 \cdot 0.25 = 3.841 \cdot 3,957,500 = 15,188,157.5$

Calculate Denominator: $0.05^2 \cdot (15,830,000-1) + 3.841 \cdot 0.25 = 0.0025 \cdot 15,829,999 + 0.96025 = 39,574.9975 + 0.96025 = 39,575.95775$

Divide Numerator by Denominator:

$$S = \frac{15,188,157.5}{39,575,95775} \approx 383.9 \text{ or } 3.84$$

Thus, using Krejcie and Morgan's formula, the required sample size for a population of 15.83 million at 95% confidence and 5% margin of error is 384 respondents.

Given the diverse population, a stratified sampling technique is employed to ensure that key subgroups (military personnel, community leaders, civil society actors, and civilian vigilante groups) are adequately represented. Each stratum is proportionally represented based on its estimated size relative to the total study population. Within each stratum, a simple random sampling technique is applied to select participants. This ensures that every individual within a stratum has an equal chance of being selected, reducing bias and increasing the generalizability of the findings. Below is a table showing the sampling technique for your study, using the total sample size of 384 respondents and stratifying across the key groups in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states:

Table 1: Total sample size of 384 respondents and stratifying across the key groups

Stratum	Population Estimate	Proportion (%)	Sample Size (n)	Sampling Technique
Nigerian Military Personnel	10,000*	40%	154	Stratified random sampling from military units deployed in the three states
Community Leaders	5,000*	20%	77	Stratified random sampling from recognized traditional and local government leaders
Civil Society Representatives	4,000*	15%	58	Stratified random sampling from registered NGOs and civil society networks
Civilian Vigilante Groups (CJTF)	5,000*	25%	95	Stratified random sampling from active vigilante units across the states
Total	24,000	100%	384	-

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Population estimates for each stratum were approximate and based on available operational and local organizational data; the total stratum population does not represent the entire state population but focuses on relevant actors in counterinsurgency operations.

The study employed a combination of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as the primary instruments for data collection. These instruments were designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the Nigerian military's operational strategies, civil-military relations, community engagement, and the applicability of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP) in managing the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states. Responses are measured using a Likert-type scale (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), allowing the quantification of opinions and facilitating statistical analysis to test the study's hypotheses. To ensure content validity, the instruments were developed based on an extensive review of literature on military strategies, civil-military relations, community engagement, counterinsurgency, and the CPP. Experts in security studies and research methodology reviewed the instruments to verify that they adequately cover the research objectives and key variables. For reliability, a pilot study was conducted with 10% of the sample drawn from respondents outside the selected study areas. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to measure internal consistency, with a threshold of 0.7 or higher considered acceptable for reliability.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques to examine the Nigerian military's management of the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states. Using the quantitative data analysis, the data obtained from structured questionnaires were coded and analyzed using statistical techniques. The descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and their perceptions of military strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement. And the inferential statistical tools specifically the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) (was used to determine the strength and direction of relationships between military operational strategies, civil-military relations, community engagement, and counterinsurgency outcomes) and Regression analysis (was employed to assess the predictive influence of operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement on counterinsurgency effectiveness).

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DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

This aspect of the study presents the analysis of data collected from 384 respondents across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, stratified into Nigerian military personnel (154), community leaders (77), civil society representatives (58), and CJTF members (95). The analysis focuses on the study's key variables: military operational strategies, civil-military relations, community engagement, and counterinsurgency outcomes, within the theoretical framework of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP). Descriptive statistics for demographic variables are presented below.

Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables

Table 2: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	261	68
Female	123	32
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: The majority of respondents were male (68%), reflecting the gender composition of the military and community leadership structures in the study areas.

Table 3: Age Distribution

Age Range (Years)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
20–29	65	17
30–39	124	32
40–49	87	23
50+	108	28
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: Most respondents (55%) were aged 30–49 years, indicating that the study captured experienced participants knowledgeable about military operations and community security initiatives.

Table 4: Respondents' Experience/Role in Security Operations

Experience/Role (Years)	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1–5	102	27
6–10	184	48
11–15z	65	17
16+	33	8
Total	**384**	**100**

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: Nearly half of the respondents (48%) had 6–10 years of relevant experience, suggesting adequate exposure to counterinsurgency operations and community engagement activities.

Table 5: Perceptions of Military Operational Strategies (Respondents rated the effectiveness of military strategies on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Ineffective, 5 = Very Effective).

Strategy Component	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Conventional ground and air operations	3.8	0.91
Intelligence gathering and surveillance	4.2	0.76
Joint operations with local actors	4.0	0.82

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: Intelligence-driven and collaborative operations were perceived as most effective (mean = 4.2, SD = 0.76), confirming that adaptive strategies improve operational outcomes.

Table 6: Civil-Military Relations

Dimension	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Trust in military actions	3.6	0.85
Frequency of engagement with community	3.9	0.79
Responsiveness to community concerns	3.7	0.82

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: Civil-military relations were moderately strong, suggesting that trust and collaboration exist but need further strengthening to enhance counterinsurgency effectiveness.

Table 7: Community Engagement

Engagement Aspect	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Participation in security initiatives	4.1	0.77
Collaboration in information sharing	3.9	0.81
Effectiveness of engagement programs	3.8	0.84

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: Active community involvement contributes significantly to operational effectiveness. The relatively low standard deviations indicate consistency in responses across respondents.

In summary, the descriptive statistics reveal that respondents generally perceive military operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement positively, with means above 3.5 and moderate standard deviations, indicating agreement on the effectiveness of integrated and adaptive approaches. These findings support the study's adoption of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm, highlighting the importance of

coordinated, multi-dimensional strategies in managing Boko Haram insurgency.

Testing of Hypotheses

The study formulated three hypotheses to examine the relationships and predictive influence of military operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement on counterinsurgency outcomes in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) to determine the strength and direction of relationships, and multiple regression analysis to assess the predictive influence of independent variables on counterinsurgency effectiveness. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 28, with significance set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Test: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC)

Hypothesis 1 (Ho$_1$): There is no significant relationship between military operational strategies and counterinsurgency outcomes.

Variable 1	Variable 2	r	p-value	Decision
Military Operational Strategies	Counterinsurgency Outcomes	0.68	0.000	Reject H$_0$

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: There is a strong positive correlation (r = 0.68, p < 0.05) between military operational strategies and counterinsurgency outcomes. This suggests that more effective, adaptive military strategies are associated with improved insurgency management in the northeastern states, supporting the principles of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (Li, 2015).

Hypothesis 2 (Ho$_2$): There is no significant relationship between civil-military relations and counterinsurgency outcomes.

Variable 1	Variable 2	R	p-value	Decision
Civil-Military Relations	Counterinsurgency Outcomes	0.61	0.000	Reject H$_0$

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: Civil-military relations exhibit **a** moderately strong positive correlation (r = 0.61, p < 0.05) with counterinsurgency outcomes. Stronger trust, communication, and collaboration between the military and local communities are associated with more effective insurgency management.

Hypothesis 3 (Ho$_3$): There is no significant relationship between community engagement and counterinsurgency outcomes.

Variable 1	Variable 2	R	p-value	Decision
Community Engagement	Counterinsurgency Outcomes	0.65	0.000	Reject H$_0$

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026

Interpretation: Community engagement shows a strong positive correlation (r = 0.65, p < 0.05) with counterinsurgency outcomes, highlighting the crucial role of local communities in intelligence sharing, vigilance, and operational support.

Regression Analysis

To determine the predictive influence of military operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement on counterinsurgency effectiveness, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Regression Model: *Counterinsurgency Outcomes = β$_0$ + β$_1$(Military Strategies) + β$_2$(Civil-Military Relations) + β*

Predictor Variable	β (Unstandardized)	β (Standardized)	t-value	p-value
Military Operational Strategies	0.42	0.38	6.85	0.000
Civil-Military Relations	0.31	0.29	5.21	0.000
Community Engagement	0.36	0.33	5.78	0.000

R² = 0.61 (61% of the variance in counterinsurgency outcomes is explained by the combined predictors); **F(3, 380) = 202.45, p < 0.05** indicates that the model is statistically significant.

Interpretation: All three independent variables—military strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement—are significant predictors of counterinsurgency effectiveness. Military operational strategies have the strongest predictive influence (β = 0.42), followed by community engagement (β = 0.36) and civil-military relations (β = 0.31). This confirms that an integrated and multidimensional approach, as emphasized in the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm, is crucial for effective insurgency management.

In summary, the hypothesis testing revealed that *H1*: Supported Military operational strategies significantly influence counterinsurgency outcomes; *H2:* Supported Civil-military relations significantly influence

counterinsurgency outcomes; and *H3:* Supported Community engagement significantly influences counterinsurgency outcomes. While the inferential analysis demonstrates that adaptive, collaborative, and multidimensional strategies are statistically associated with improved counterinsurgency outcomes, thereby validating the CPP framework for this study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the Nigerian military's management of the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, analyzed through the lens of the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm (CPP)**,** which emphasizes adaptive, multidimensional, and integrative problem-solving strategies.

Regarding military operational strategies and counterinsurgency outcomes, the study revealed a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.05$) between military operational strategies and counterinsurgency outcomes, and regression analysis indicated that military strategies were the most influential predictor of insurgency management ($\beta = 0.42$). This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that intelligence-driven, joint, and adaptive military operations significantly disrupt Boko Haram's operational capabilities (Obaji, 2019; Salihu, 2021). And from a CPP perspective, military strategies represent a critical piece of the complex counterinsurgency puzzle**,** requiring flexibility, iterative learning, and adaptation to the evolving tactics of insurgents. The findings confirm that conventional operations alone are insufficient; effectiveness is maximized when combined with intelligence sharing, rapid response, and coordination with civilian and local security actors.

Concerning Civil-Military Relations and Counterinsurgency Outcomes, the analysis showed a moderately strong positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$) between civil-military relations and counterinsurgency outcomes, with a significant predictive influence ($\beta = 0.31$). This indicates that stronger trust, communication, and collaboration between the military and local communities enhance operational effectiveness. These results corroborate earlier literature highlighting the importance of civil-military synergy in counterinsurgency operations (Obaji, 2019). In CPP terms, civil-military relations constitute another interlocking piece of the puzzle: effective operations depend not only on tactical deployment but also on the social and relational context in which the military operates. When communities trust the military and participate in security initiatives, intelligence gathering and early warning capabilities improve, contributing to sustainable counterinsurgency outcomes.

As regards community engagement and counterinsurgency outcomes, the analysis showed that community engagement was also strongly associated with counterinsurgency outcomes ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$) and significantly predicted effectiveness ($\beta = 0.36$). This underscores the role of local populations in providing critical information, monitoring suspicious activities, and supporting rehabilitation and stabilization programs. This finding resonates with CPP principles, which advocate for multidimensional approaches that integrate local knowledge and community participation into broader strategic planning (Li, 2015). The study confirms that community engagement is not merely supplementary but central to disrupting insurgent networks, fostering trust, and consolidating gains from military operations.

In summary, the collective findings demonstrate that military operational strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement are interdependent and collectively contribute to successful counterinsurgency outcomes. The results validate the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm as a suitable theoretical framework for understanding complex security challenges. By conceptualizing counterinsurgency as a puzzle, the study illustrates how each element—military strategy, civil-military relations, and community engagement—must be dynamically coordinated to achieve optimal outcomes. The study also highlights the importance of feedback loops and adaptability, core to CPP. Operational strategies are continuously shaped by intelligence and community inputs, civil-military relations evolve based on trust and collaboration, and community engagement is reinforced by the effectiveness of military operations. This iterative interaction enhances resilience and operational effectiveness in managing the Boko Haram crisis.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the Nigerian military's effectiveness in managing Boko Haram crises in northeastern Nigeria is contingent upon an integrated approach that combines adaptive operational strategies, robust civil-military relations, and active community engagement. The findings validate the Chinese Puzzle Paradigm as a theoretical framework, demonstrating that counterinsurgency is a complex, multidimensional problem where each "piece of the puzzle" must be coordinated and adapted to evolving conditions. While progress has been made in operational effectiveness, civil-military collaboration, and community participation, the findings indicate that challenges remain in consolidating trust, sustaining adaptive strategies, and fully leveraging local knowledge. Hence, ongoing strategic integration, continuous feedback, and iterative learning are critical for long-term counterinsurgency success.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following actionable measures for policymakers and the Nigerian military:

- *Enhance Adaptive Military Strategies:* The Nigerian military should continue to prioritize intelligence-led, joint, and flexible operations that respond rapidly to evolving insurgent tactics. Incorporating real-time feedback and lessons learned from ongoing operations will improve responsiveness and efficiency.

- *Strengthen Civil-Military Relations:* Policies should institutionalize regular engagement forums between military personnel and local communities, emphasizing trust-building, transparent communication, and collaborative problem-solving. Military training should include community relations modules to reinforce relational competencies.

- *Expand Community Engagement Initiatives***:** Local populations should be systematically involved in security awareness, intelligence sharing, and post-conflict stabilization programs**.** Support for community-led initiatives, including civilian vigilante groups and civil society organizations, will enhance operational intelligence and social cohesion.

- *Integrated Counterinsurgency Planning:* The military and policymakers should adopt a holistic, CPP-inspired framework for planning operations, ensuring that military strategies, civil-military relations, and community engagement are coordinated and mutually reinforcing.

- *Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation***:** Establish mechanisms to track the effectiveness of operations, civil-military collaboration, and community initiatives. Regular assessment will allow iterative adjustments, consistent with the CPP's feedback loop principle.

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