Impact of border security measures on cross-border criminal activities in Nigeria northwestern states

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Abstract: This study examines the effectiveness of border security measures in combating cross-border criminal activities across Nigeria's northwestern states, where porous borders have fostered transnational crimes and regional instability. The research aims to evaluate existing border security measures and identify actionable strategies for enhancing border protection. Underpinned by Routine Activity Theory, which posits that crimes occur at the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and absence of capable guardians, the study employed a quantitative approach using semi-structured questionnaires administered to 200 security personnel across five northwestern states. Regression analysis reveals that inter-agency coordination has the strongest impact on reducing cross-border crimes (β = -0.40, p = 0.001), followed by personnel deployment (β = -0.35, p = 0.004). At the same time, surveillance technology shows limited effectiveness (β = -0.25, p = 0.075). While current measures have reduced arms smuggling from 80% to 50%, human trafficking and terrorism remain persistent challenges, highlighting the limitations of existing strategies. The study concludes that a multi-dimensional approach integrating technological, institutional, and socio-economic interventions is

crucial. These findings have significant implications for policy reform, emphasizing the need for enhanced surveillance technology, strengthened regional cooperation, and community engagement to build a more resilient border security framework.

Keywords: Border Security Measures, Cross-Border Criminal Activities, Northwestern states, Nigeria.

Introduction: The northwestern region of Nigeria has emerged as a hotspot for cross-border criminal activities, exacerbating socio-economic instability, threatening national security, and undermining governance structures. As one of Africa's most populous nations and a key economic player in West Africa, Nigeria's porous borders present a significant challenge in maintaining territorial sovereignty and addressing transnational crimes such as arms trafficking, smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism. In recent years, border security threats have escalated, posing severe consequences for the lives and livelihoods of millions of people living in the region. This paper critically examines the impact of border security measures on cross-border criminal activities in Nigeria's northwestern states, addressing the underlying challenges and proposing actionable solutions.

Nigeria's northwestern states of Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Kaduna share borders with neighbouring Niger and Benin Republics. These international boundaries, spanning thousands of kilometres, are characterized by vast unregulated areas and poorly manned border posts. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2021), approximately 80% of Nigeria's borders are either inadequately monitored or completely porous, providing unhindered access for illicit actors. In 2022 alone, the Nigeria Immigration Service reported over 100 cases of illegal border crossings daily in the northwestern region (NIS, 2022). This porous nature of Nigeria's borders has contributed to the proliferation of cross-border criminal activities. These include arms trafficking, which fuels banditry and terrorism; cattle rustling, which disrupts rural livelihoods; and drug trafficking, which undermines community stability.

Armed bandits operating across Nigeria's borders with Niger have killed over 4,000 people and displaced more than 200,000 in the past three years (ACLED, 2023). Furthermore, a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report highlighted that the northwestern region has become a major transit point for illicit drugs, including heroin and methamphetamine, destined for Europe and North America (UNODC, 2022). The consequences of inadequate border security measures in the northwestern region extend far beyond criminal activities. These threats exacerbate poverty, displace populations, disrupt trade, and strain local governance structures. Rural communities, particularly farmers and herders, bear the brunt of these insecurities. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021), over 70% of rural households in northwestern Nigeria depend on agriculture, which has been significantly disrupted by banditry and cross-border cattle rustling. The loss of livestock and farmlands to cross-border criminal networks has led to food insecurity, with more than 3.4 million people in the region classified as food-insecure in 2022 (World Food Programme, 2022).

The economic implications of border insecurity also manifest in reduced cross-border trade. The northwestern region, historically a hub for regional trade with Niger and Benin, has seen a decline in economic activities due to insecurity. The Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC, 2022) reported a 40% reduction in cross-border trade from the region between 2019 and 2022. This decline has impoverished border communities that rely heavily on trading activities and increased unemployment rates among youth, fuelling a vicious cycle of crime and instability.

Despite efforts by the Nigerian government to address border security challenges, existing measures have proven insufficient in curbing the surge in cross-border criminal activities. Key interventions such as deploying additional border patrol units, constructing physical barriers, and implementing joint security operations with neighboring countries have faced logistical and operational challenges. For instance, the Joint Border Patrol Agreement signed between Nigeria and Niger in 2020 has been hampered by inadequate funding, lack of coordination, and limited technological infrastructure (ECOWAS, 2022). Moreover, the reliance on outdated security measures such as manual inspections and insufficient personnel at border posts has allowed criminal networks to adapt and exploit vulnerabilities. According to the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS, 2021), over 60% of illicit goods seized in the region were smuggled through unmanned border points. This underscores the need for a strategic overhaul of border security mechanisms to address emerging threats effectively.

The humanitarian consequences of border insecurity in northwestern Nigeria are alarming. The displacement of populations due to violence and cross-border criminal activities has created a crisis for internally displaced persons (IDPs). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2023), over 350,000 people have been displaced in Katsina and Zamfara states

alone. Displaced families face inadequate shelter, limited access to healthcare, and chronic food shortages, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

Additionally, women and children disproportionately bear the burden of border insecurity. Human trafficking networks exploit porous borders to smuggle women and children into forced labor or sexual exploitation. A report by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP, 2022) revealed that over 5,000 cases of cross-border trafficking were recorded in northwestern Nigeria between 2020 and 2022, with 80% of victims being women and girls. In light of the multifaceted challenges posed by border security threats, this paper aims to address two critical objectives. First, it seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of existing border security measures in reducing cross-border criminal activities in Nigeria's northwestern states. This involves analyzing the strengths and limitations of current policies, technologies, and bilateral agreements. Second, it aims to identify actionable strategies for enhancing border security and mitigating the socio-economic and humanitarian consequences of cross-border criminal activities. These strategies will emphasize the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, capacity-building, and the integration of modern technologies.

The urgency of addressing border security challenges in northwestern Nigeria cannot be overstated. The persistence of these threats undermines national security, economic development, and the well-being of millions of Nigerians. Furthermore, the region's strategic location makes it a critical gateway for regional integration within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Failure to address border security issues not only compromises Nigeria's stability but also jeopardizes regional security and economic cooperation. This paper seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of border security measures on cross-border criminal activities in the northwestern region. By shedding light on the gaps in current approaches and proposing evidence-based solutions, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on improving border management and fostering sustainable development in Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning

Border security and its impact on cross-border criminal activities have been extensively studied globally, regionally within Africa, and nationally in Nigeria. These studies provide insights into the causes, challenges, and effectiveness of various border security measures while laying the groundwork for theoretical explanations of these dynamics.

Global Empirical Evidence on Border Security and Cross-Border Crimes

Globally, the issue of porous borders and their role in fostering transnational criminal activities has been well-documented. In the United States, for instance, the porous border with Mexico has been a hotspot for drug trafficking, human smuggling, and arms trade. According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2021), approximately 1.7 million migrants were apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2021 alone, highlighting the scale of illegal activities. Studies by Jones and Johnson (2020) emphasize that despite technological advancements such as surveillance drones and biometric systems, the adaptability of criminal networks has undermined the efficacy of border control measures. Similarly, in Europe, the Schengen Agreement's open-border policy has facilitated free movement but also heightened the risk of transnational crimes, such as drug trafficking and human trafficking. Europol's 2022 report on organized crime underscores that while advanced technology has improved border surveillance, coordination challenges between member states remain a significant obstacle (Europol, 2022). These global examples highlight the need for an integrated approach that combines technological innovation, international cooperation, and local community engagement in border security.

Regional Evidence from Africa

Within Africa, porous borders have similarly fuelled criminal activities, exacerbating insecurity and economic instability. The Sahel region, in particular, has become a haven for arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and terrorism due to poorly secured borders. According to the African Union (2020), over 40% of weapons used by terrorist groups in West Africa are smuggled through unregulated border points. In Mali and Burkina Faso, transnational criminal networks exploit the lack of border patrols to finance insurgencies, further destabilizing the region (Raineri, 2021). In East Africa, the Kenya-Somalia border has witnessed significant cross-border crimes, including human trafficking and wildlife poaching. A study by Menkhaus (2020) reveals that despite Kenya's investment in physical barriers and increased military presence along its border, the high level of corruption among border officials continues to undermine these efforts. This finding underscores the importance of addressing systemic issues within security agencies as part of any border security strategy.

Evidence from Nigeria

In Nigeria, the northwestern states have emerged as a focal point for cross-border criminal activities due to their extensive and poorly monitored borders. Studies by Adebayo (2021) reveal that the proliferation of small

arms and light weapons (SALWs) in the region is directly linked to cross-border smuggling networks. These arms fuel violent crimes, including banditry, terrorism, and cattle rustling, which have claimed thousands of lives and displaced entire communities. According to Okeke and Eze (2022), efforts by the Nigerian government to address border security challenges such as the establishment of joint task forces and the deployment of advanced surveillance technologies have been hampered by inadequate funding, lack of inter-agency coordination, and corruption. Their study emphasizes that without addressing these structural challenges, border security measures are unlikely to yield significant results.

Theoretical Underpinning: Routine Activity Theory

The Routine Activity Theory (RAT), developed by Cohen and Felson (1979), provides a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of cross-border criminal activities. The theory posits that crimes occur when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardians. In the context of Nigeria's northwestern states, porous borders create an environment where these three elements are present:

1. **Motivated Offenders:** Transnational criminal networks, driven by profit motives, exploit the region's weak border controls to smuggle arms, drugs, and humans.

2. **Suitable Targets:** Rural communities, trade routes, and vulnerable populations (e.g., women and children) provide ample opportunities for exploitation.

3. **Absence of Capable Guardians:** The lack of adequate border patrols, advanced surveillance technology, and effective inter-agency collaboration results in insufficient guardianship against criminal activities.

The Routine Activity Theory highlights the need to strengthen the "capable guardianship" element by enhancing border security measures, fostering community policing, and integrating advanced technologies. Additionally, addressing the socio-economic conditions that create "motivated offenders," such as poverty and unemployment, is crucial for a holistic approach to reducing cross-border crimes. Empirical evidence from global, regional, and national contexts underscores the complexity of addressing border security challenges. While advanced technologies and international cooperation have shown promise, systemic issues such as corruption, inadequate funding, and poor coordination continue to undermine these efforts. The Routine Activity Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding the interplay between offenders, targets, and guardians in the northwestern Nigerian context, emphasizing the need for a multifaceted approach to border security. By integrating empirical insights with theoretical perspectives, this study aims to propose actionable solutions for mitigating cross-border criminal activities

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative approach to investigate the impact of border security measures on cross-border criminal activities in Nigeria's northwestern states. The methodology employed ensures systematic data collection, analysis, and interpretation to address the research objectives comprehensively. The research utilizes a cross-sectional design to capture data at a specific point in time. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires distributed to 200 security personnel stationed at border areas in the northwestern states of Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Kaduna. Equal representation was ensured by distributing 40 questionnaires per state. The inclusion criteria required that participants must have worked at their respective border posts for at least five years, ensuring that they possess adequate experience and knowledge of border security challenges.

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured questionnaire designed using Google Forms. This approach was chosen for its efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and ability to reach respondents electronically. The questionnaire was accessible via smartphones, making it convenient for security personnel to participate without disrupting their daily operations. The instrument comprised three sections: Demographics: Questions to capture participants' age, gender, educational qualifications, and years of service. Perception of Border Security Measures: Items assessing the effectiveness of current security strategies, including surveillance technologies, personnel deployment, and inter-agency coordination. Impact on Cross-Border Crimes: Questions exploring trends in criminal activities, such as arms smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism, before and after implementing specific border measures.

Questionnaires were disseminated electronically through official communication channels within security agencies, ensuring participants received authenticated links to access the survey. Liaison officers at each state facilitated communication and provided technical support to participants unfamiliar with the digital format. The electronic approach minimized logistical challenges associated with physical distribution and allowed real-time monitoring of response rates.

To analyze the collected data, the study employed a multiple regression model to evaluate the relationship

between border security measures and the prevalence of cross-border crimes. The model is represented as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon$$

Y represents the dependent variable, the prevalence of cross-border crimes.

- **X1, X2, X3...Xn** denote independent variables, including surveillance technologies, personnel deployment, inter-agency coordination, and funding adequacy.
- **β0** is the constant term, and **β1, β2, β3... βn** are coefficients indicating the impact of each independent variable.
- **ε** is the error term.

Ethical approval was obtained from relevant authorities, ensuring that the study adhered to principles of confidentiality and informed consent. Participants were assured that their responses would be anonymized and used solely for academic purposes. Data access was restricted to the research team to maintain confidentiality.

RESULTS

The data collected from the 200 semi-structured questionnaires were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The respondents were evenly distributed across the five northwestern states of Nigeria: Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, and Kaduna. This equal representation ensured balanced insights into border security challenges and the effectiveness of current measures. Below is a summary of the key findings based on the data analysis.

Respondent Demographics

Table 1: Overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents:

Demographic Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age Group		
25-34	50	25.0
35-44	90	45.0
45-54	60	30.0
Gender		
Male	180	90.0
Female	20	10.0
Years of Experience		
5-10	120	60.0
11-15	80	40.0

Source: Author's Computation from field survey, 2024

The data reveal that the majority of respondents were aged 35-44 years (45%), predominantly male (90%), and had between 5 and 10 years of experience (60%) working in border security. This demographic composition underscores the high level of expertise and practical knowledge among the respondents.

Perception of Border Security Measures

Respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of border security measures in mitigating cross-border criminal activities.

Table 2: Respondents Perceptions on Border-security

Security Measure	Effective (%)	Ineffective (%)
Deployment of Personnel	60.0	40.0
Surveillance Technology	50.0	50.0
Physical Barriers	45.0	55.0
Joint Operations with Niger	30.0	70.0

Source: Authors' Computation from field survey, 202

The findings reveal mixed perceptions of the effectiveness of current security measures. While 60% of respondents considered personnel deployment effective, only 30% viewed joint operations with Niger positively. Surveillance technology and physical barriers were perceived as moderately effective, with half of the respondents expressing dissatisfaction.

Trends in Cross-Border Crimes

Respondents identified arms smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism as the most prevalent cross-border crimes.

Table 3: Trends in Cross-Border Crimes

Type of Crime	Prevalence Before Measures (%)	Prevalence After Measures (%)
Arms Smuggling	80.0	50.0
Human Trafficking	70.0	55.0
Terrorism	65.0	60.0

Source: Author's Computation from field survey, 2024

The data suggest a decline in arms smuggling (from 80% to 50%) following the implementation of border security measures. However, human trafficking and terrorism showed less significant reductions, highlighting the limitations of existing strategies in addressing these complex crimes.

Regression Results

Table 4: Regression Results

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Deployment of Personnel (X1)	-0.35	0.12	-2.92	0.004
Surveillance Technology (X2)	-0.25	0.14	-1.79	0.075
Inter-Agency Coordination (X3)	-0.40	0.10	-4.00	0.001

Source: Author's Computation from field survey, 2024

The regression model indicates that inter-agency coordination (X3) has the most significant impact on reducing cross-border crimes, with a coefficient of -0.40 (p = 0.001). Deployment of personnel (X1) also significantly reduces crime prevalence (β = -0.35, p = 0.004), while surveillance technology (X2) shows a weaker and marginally significant effect (β = -0.25, p = 0.075).

Tests for Model Robustness

Multicollinearity Test

Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were computed to check for multicollinearity among the independent variables. All VIF values were below 3, indicating no multicollinearity issues.

Variable	VIF
Deployment of Personnel (X1)	1.45
Surveillance Technology (X2)	1.62
Inter-Agency Coordination (X3)	1.38

Source: Author's Computation from field survey, 2024

All VIF values were below 3, indicating no multicollinearity issues.

Goodness-of-Fit

The goodness-of-fit of the regression model is assessed using R-squared and Adjusted R-squared values:

Statistic	Value
R-squared	0.68
Adjusted R-squared	0.65

These values indicate that 68% of the variance in cross-border crime prevalence is explained by the independent variables, demonstrating a good fit for the model.

DISCUSSION

The mixed perceptions of border security effectiveness align with findings in the literature. Adebayo (2021) highlights that while increased personnel deployment has reduced illegal crossings, the lack of advanced surveillance technology and physical infrastructure limits overall success. Similarly, Okeke and Eze (2022) argue that inter-agency coordination remains weak, reducing the impact of joint operations with neighbouring countries. The regression analysis further underscores the importance of inter-agency coordination, which showed the most significant effect in reducing cross-border crimes. This finding is consistent with Menkhaus (2020), who emphasized that collaborative efforts across borders are crucial for combating transnational crimes effectively.

The decline in arms smuggling aligns with previous studies, such as Raineri (2021), which observed that targeted interventions, including stricter checkpoints, effectively disrupt the flow of illicit weapons. However, the limited impact on human trafficking and terrorism underscores the need for more holistic approaches. As noted by UNODC (2022), addressing these crimes requires not only border security measures but also socio-economic development and regional cooperation. The findings align with Routine Activity Theory, which posits that crimes occur when motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians converge (Cohen and Felson, 1979). In the context of Nigeria's northwest, the decline in arms smuggling suggests improved "guardianship" through personnel deployment and checkpoints. However, the persistence of human trafficking and terrorism indicates that "suitable targets" and "motivated offenders" remain prevalent due to systemic issues such as poverty and unemployment.

CONCLUSION

This study critically evaluated the impact of border security measures on cross-border criminal activities in Nigeria's northwestern states. The findings reveal that while some progress has been made in curbing certain crimes, such as arms smuggling, other transnational crimes like human trafficking and terrorism remain pervasive. The study utilized both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, demonstrating that inter-agency coordination is the most effective measure in reducing cross-border crimes, followed by personnel deployment. However, the limited impact of

surveillance technology underscores the need for more targeted investments in advanced monitoring systems.

The challenges identified in this study highlight systemic issues, including inadequate funding, corruption, and the lack of socio-economic development in border communities. These issues not only undermine the effectiveness of security measures but also perpetuate the conditions that facilitate cross-border crimes. The persistence of these challenges emphasizes the necessity of a multi-dimensional approach that addresses technological, institutional, and socio-economic factors. By integrating empirical findings with theoretical insights, particularly the Routine Activity Theory, this study provides a framework for understanding the interplay between motivated offenders, suitable targets, and capable guardians in the context of border security. The theory's emphasis on improving guardianship aligns with the need for enhanced surveillance, personnel training, and community engagement.

Policy Implications

The findings underscore the necessity for a comprehensive policy framework to tackle border security challenges effectively. First, investing in advanced surveillance technology is crucial. Deploying drones, biometric scanners, and automated monitoring systems can improve real-time detection and reduce human errors. These technologies should be implemented in high-crime border regions like Katsina and Zamfara. Enhancing inter-agency coordination emerged as the most impactful strategy in reducing cross-border crimes. Establishing centralized Border Security Coordination Centers equipped with integrated communication systems can facilitate better collaboration among agencies like the Nigeria Immigration Service and Nigerian Customs Service. This approach will ensure that real-time intelligence is shared, improving operational efficiency.

Regional cooperation is essential, given the transnational nature of border security threats. Strengthening bilateral agreements under the ECOWAS framework can promote joint patrols and intelligence sharing. Such initiatives will harmonize border management policies and disrupt criminal networks operating across Nigeria's borders with Niger and Benin. Addressing socio-economic vulnerabilities in border communities is another critical policy implication. Programs focusing on youth empowerment, vocational training, and microfinance can provide alternative livelihoods, reducing the appeal of criminal networks. Furthermore, agricultural development programs can revitalize rural economies and mitigate poverty-driven crimes. Anti-corruption reforms within border security

agencies are vital. Introducing mechanisms such as whistleblower protections, independent oversight committees, and performance-based incentives can enhance accountability and operational integrity. This will ensure that resources allocated to border security are utilized effectively.

Capacity building for border personnel is equally important. Continuous training in advanced surveillance techniques, intelligence analysis, and human rights will equip personnel to address evolving security threats. Collaboration with international security organizations can provide access to global best practices. Finally, community engagement and awareness campaigns should be prioritized. Establishing liaison committees and conducting awareness programs in local languages will foster trust between security agencies and border communities. This collaboration will improve intelligence gathering and create a supportive environment for addressing cross-border crimes. A data-driven approach to policy formulation is essential. Developing a centralized data repository to track crime trends and intervention outcomes will enable evidence-based decision-making. This adaptive strategy will ensure that border security policies remain responsive to emerging challenges.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this study provide a roadmap for enhancing border security in Nigeria's northwestern states. By integrating technological, institutional, and socio-economic strategies, Nigeria can build a resilient framework to address border security challenges comprehensively. Success will depend on political commitment, adequate funding, and active stakeholder participation. As Nigeria confronts the complexities of cross-border criminal activities, this study offers actionable insights for informed policymaking and impactful interventions.

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