

TRANS-BORDER ARMS SMUGGLING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA'S SECURITY (2015–2025)

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Abstract

This study examined trans-border arms smuggling across the Seme–Idiroko corridors and its implications for Nigeria's national security from 2015 to 2025. Anchored on Ernst Haas's Neo-Functionalist Theory and Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) model, the research utilized a descriptive, convergent parallel mixed-methods design integrating survey and historical approaches. The target population ($N = 34,001$) comprised frontline security personnel (Customs, NDLEA, Police) and residents across Seme, Idiroko, Krake, and Igolo. Using proportional stratified random sampling, 400 questionnaires were administered, yielding 393 validated instruments ($N = 393$), complemented by 14 Key Informant Interviews ($n = 14$). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative field narratives underwent narrative-content analysis. Findings revealed that continuous small arms trafficking severely degrades border security infrastructure ($X = 4.21$, $SD = 1.05$) as syndicates forcefully clear secondary bypasses. A direct causal link was established between Southwestern border vulnerabilities and internal security decline in Lagos and Ogun States ($X = 4.18$, $\{SD\} = 1.06$), as smuggled weapons fuel urban cultism, kidnapping, and armed robbery. Furthermore, current countermeasures were deemed largely ineffective ($X = 4.22$, $SD = 1.01$) due to severe technological deficits ($X = 2.17$), manual inspection dependencies, and inter-agency rivalries. Enforcement is severely constrained by extreme geographic porosity ($X = 4.45$) across thousands of unmapped bush paths and institutional compromises ($X = 4.39$). The study concludes that unilateral, top-down policies are ineffective against adaptive criminal networks. It recommends phasing out manual patrols in favour of drone surveillance and non-intrusive cargo scanners, creating a centralized inter-agency intelligence database, and institutionalizing bilateral security cooperation with the Republic of Benin.

Keywords: Trans-Border Smuggling, Small Arms Proliferation, Border Insecurity, Seme–Idiroko Corridors, Inter-Agency Cooperation.

Introduction

Historically, the regulation of international frontiers gained formal legal clarity with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which established sovereign territoriality and mandated state jurisdiction over border management (Jatau, 2019). Globally, border security serves as the primary barrier protecting a nation's territorial integrity and economic interests. However, while advanced democracies leverage modern surveillance technologies to secure their boundaries, sub-Saharan African nations struggle with severe border porosity a vulnerability largely inherited from colonial partitioning that prioritized European administrative convenience over geographic, ethnic, or security coherence (Omemma & Odoziobodo, 1999; Okereke, 2023).

In Nigeria, maintaining border security remains an existential challenge. The nation's territorial perimeter is severely compromised by a vast structural imbalance: Nigeria shares

approximately 1,497 unpoliced illegal routes compared to only 84 official, manned entry checkpoints (Gbemre, 2015). This extensive geographic vulnerability is further exacerbated by sub-regional integration policies notably the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Goods which, alongside the "Good Neighbour Policy," have facilitated unhindered cross-border transit across the country's 932 km border with Niger, 75 km border with Chad, and extensive maritime/land borders with Cameroon and the Republic of Benin (Adeola & Fayomi, 2012; Adams, 2012). Consequently, frontier zones have transformed into volatile operational corridors for transnational criminal networks.

Along Southwestern Nigeria, the Seme (Lagos State) and Idiroko (Ogun State) border posts represent vital economic highways connecting the nation to the Republic of Benin and the wider West African sub-region. However, these corridors—alongside their Beninese mirror-settlements of Krake and Igolo have become primary transit routes for transnational organized syndicates trafficking small arms and light weapons (SALWs), narcotics, and contraband (Obaje, 2019). The regional proliferation of arms is severe: out of an estimated 10 million illicit firearms circulating within West Africa, approximately 70% are concentrated in Nigeria, with over 80% held by non-state actors (Omilana, 2020). This massive influx directly feeds domestic violent crime networks, fuelling armed robbery, commercial kidnapping, cultism, land-grabber violence, and insurgency across Southwestern Nigeria (Jatau, 2019).

Despite state countermeasures including joint inter-agency patrols, armed interdiction, contraband destruction, and the 2019 land border closure under *Operation Swift Response*—illicit arms flow along the Seme–Idiroko axis continue to fester. Unilateral macro-closures and manual border enforcement have proven ineffective against adaptive smuggling networks operating across thousands of unmapped alternative routes ("bush paths"). Therefore, an empirical investigation into trans-border arms smuggling across the Seme–Idiroko corridors between 2015 and 2025 is urgently required to evaluate its security implications for Nigeria and formulate a modern, data-driven border management strategy.

Statement of the Problem

Numerous scholars, including Nasiru and Ohazurike (2016), Mobolaji and Alabi (2017), Faleye (2018), Golub et al. (2019), Hamidu (2022), and Ogbonna et al. (2023), have examined the broader effects of transborder smuggling on border security in Nigeria and beyond. However, existing literature fails to adequately explore the specific nexus, impacts, and policy interventions regarding arms smuggling along the Seme-Idiroko land borders, nor does it fully evaluate the operational challenges faced by the government in safeguarding Lagos and Ogun States. Nigeria's border security remains severely compromised by its vast geographic vulnerabilities, characterized by approximately 1,497 illegal entry routes compared to just 84 legal checkpoints (Gbemre, 2015). This massive structural imbalance enables unchecked cross-border movements and fuels organized illicit networks across neighboring territories like the Benin Republic.

The unmanned land, maritime, and air entry points in Lagos and Ogun States have transformed these transit routes into major hubs for smuggling contraband, particularly small arms and light weapons (SALWs). According to Nigerian Customs Service data cited by Obaje (2019), 2,671 illegal arms alongside millions of live ammunition rounds were seized at the Nigeria–Benin Republic border in 2017 alone, alongside large quantities of illicit drugs. The continuous influx of weapons through the Seme-Idiroko corridor directly drives local destabilization, intensifying violent crimes such as commercial kidnapping, cultism, armed robbery, violent transborder clashes, and direct attacks on security personnel (Etorti, 2020).

Consequently, this unchecked porosity undermines federal defense strategies and continually exposes surrounding host communities to high-level security risks.

Despite government countermeasures like joint border patrols, joint task forces, and historical border closures, arms smuggling continues to fester due to complex environmental, institutional, and socio-economic dynamics. Multiple unmapped bush paths, complex coastal terrain, inadequate electronic surveillance equipment, inter-agency rivalries, and local community collusion with smuggling rings significantly impair law enforcement efforts. This operational breakdown results in recurring casualties such as the deaths of five security personnel in Seme in 2021 (Okereke, 2023) and massive government revenue losses. Despite these severe consequences, significant knowledge gaps remain regarding the precise operational links between illicit arms trafficking and the defensive coverage of the Seme-Idiroko border posts. Investigating this issue is essential to understanding the root causes behind persistent security failures and formulating effective, localized policy responses.

Research Questions

Based on the statement of the problem, the following research questions are important in this study:

- i. How does trans-border smuggling of arms affect border security in Lagos and Ogun States?
- ii. How effective are the responses of the government to trans-border smuggling in the two state?
- iii. What are the responses of government towards combating trans-border smuggling of arms to ensure security in Lagos and Ogun States?
- iv. What are the challenges confronting the government in the fight against trans-border smuggling of arms in Lagos and Ogun States?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the impact of trans-border smuggling of arms on security of lives and properties in Nigeria. This will be realised through the following specific objectives:

- i. To examine how does trans-border smuggling of arms affect border security in Lagos and Ogun States
- ii. examine the impact of trans-border smuggling of arms through Seme-Idiroko borders on security in Lagos and Ogun States;
- iii. To evaluate effectiveness of responses of government towards combating trans-border smuggling of arms to ensure security in Lagos and Ogun States; and
- iv. Assess the challenges confronting the government in the fight against trans-border smuggling of arms in ensuring security in Lagos and Ogun States

Research Propositions

Based on the research questions and objectives of the study stated above, the following research propositions were examined in this study:

- i. The continuous influx of smuggled arms significantly compromises the infrastructural and operational integrity of border security frameworks in Lagos and Ogun States.
- ii. High porousness and illicit arms transit through the Seme-Idiroko borders have a severe negative impact on the overall internal security index of Lagos and Ogun States.

- iii. The effectiveness of government responses to arms smuggling is hindered by a lack of inter-agency cooperation, resulting in minimal improvements to security in Lagos and Ogun States.
- iv. Institutional corruption, vast porous borders, and inadequate technological surveillance infrastructure are the challenges undermining government efforts to combat arms smuggling in Lagos and Ogun States

Conceptual Framework

Borders

The concept of a border has been conceptualized by scholars in various ways depending on their academic orientations. Bellezza (2013) defined a border as a construct inextricably linked to the sovereignty and territoriality of states. According to Bellezza, borders delineate state territoriality, which is fundamental to understanding why sovereign nations must safeguard their international frontiers against illicit transborder crossings. This perspective validates the necessity for robust border management in Nigeria, particularly along the Seme and Idiroko land corridors, to curb the influx of cross-border smugglers and criminal actors. However, Bellezza's conceptualization primarily focuses on territoriality while paying insufficient attention to the economic dynamics that characterize borderlands.

Bridging this dimension, Jatau (2019) observed that borders generate significant economic advantages for borderland communities by providing commercial opportunities driven by market differentials and currency exchange variances across adjoining frontiers. Nevertheless, Jatau emphasized that these same economic incentives attract illicit activities, including contraband smuggling, narcotics trafficking, and informal trade, which collectively undermine border security. This insight is central to evaluating the relationship between trade dynamics and security vulnerabilities along the Seme and Idiroko axes.

In a related context, Moraczewska (2010) conceptualized a border as the ultimate boundary of state sovereignty, marking the geographical limit of a state's legal authority. Moraczewska argued that regulating entry and exit across these frontiers is a core pillar of state policy. Because international borders are shared spaces, they reflect the dynamic nature of inter-state relations; events occurring along borderlines can either stabilize or destabilize broader geopolitical dynamics. While this definition underscores state responsibility in frontier defense, it stops short of explicitly linking border porosity to arms proliferation and internal security threats.

Norfolk and Hallgrimsdottir (2019) defined a border as a point of intersection or dividing line between two or more sovereign nations, functioning as both an entry and exit passage. Consequently, unmonitored borderlines become primary conduits for transnational organized crime and contraband trafficking. Extending this operational view, Manjarrez (2015) examined the functional objective of border security, asserting that effective frontier control enhances public safety and national well-being by enforcing immigration laws, deterring unauthorized incursions, and systematically reducing operational vulnerabilities across land, maritime, and air domains.

Furthermore, Okereke and Okoli (2020) demonstrated that adequately secured borders significantly reduce the incidence of transborder smuggling and illicit enterprise. Complementing this, Eselebor and Kehinde (2021) defined a border as a constitutional mechanism designed to regulate cross-border movement, noting that a state's capacity to

secure its boundaries serves as a key indicator of its institutional strength and international standing. Finally, Arguete (2016) highlighted the direct link between frontier management and crime prevention, arguing that compromised border controls allow transnational criminal syndicates to operate with impunity, thereby endangering civilian safety.

Smuggling

The concept of smuggling has been defined in diverse ways across extant literature, reflecting statutory, economic, and security perspectives. From a legal stand, smuggling is defined as a statutory offense punishable under the Customs and Excise Act and related legal instruments. It entails the unauthorized importation, exportation, loading, unloading, or diversion for consumption of goods subject to customs control, explicitly intended to evade statutory duties or breach customs laws (Guide for Importers and Dangers of Smuggling, 2023). While this statutory perspective establishes that smuggling directly violates revenue and customs regulations, it treats the phenomenon primarily as an administrative tax evasion offense, overlooking its operational nature as a transnational organized crime involving syndicates across international frontiers.

Expanding on this structural dimension, Horobets et al. (2020) conceptualize smuggling as a direct threat to a state's customs and economic security. They define it as an organized criminal enterprise centered on moving illicit or restricted items across customs boundaries to bypass state regulation. Horobets et al. categorize smuggling according to the contraband involved, including small arms, light weapons, narcotics, fauna and flora, cultural artifacts, and counterfeit software. While this perspective correctly identifies smuggling as a manifestation of organized crime, it focuses heavily on border transit mechanisms without fully linking how illicit armaments entering a host state directly fuel domestic insecurity.

From a commercial perspective, Tax Disputes (2023) defines smuggling as the unlawful cross-border movement of commercial commodities such as contraband drugs, untaxed alcohol, and illicit tobacco designed to evade import tariffs and domestic duties. Although this definition captures the dual import-export channels utilized by organized syndicates, its scope remains restricted to fiscal leakages and commercial fraud, omitting the broader national security implications that arise when contraband shipments involve military-grade weaponry and live ammunition.

The Institute for Security and Development Policy (2023) provides a broader operational conceptualization, defining smuggling as the illicit transportation of both licit commodities and prohibited goods (including small arms and narcotics), as well as the clandestine trafficking of human beings across national borders. They highlight that modern smuggling networks leverage technological advancements, divergent national regulatory frameworks, and international financial systems for illicit capital accumulation. Proceeds generated from these operations are frequently funnelled into funding peripheral criminal enterprises. This perspective underscores how illegal cross-border flows create parallel underground economies that destabilize legitimate markets and state governance.

Highlighting the global economic scale of illicit trade, Ellis (2017) categorizes smuggling into major commodity streams, including contraband alcohol, illicit tobacco, unapproved pharmaceuticals, and stolen cultural property. Ellis emphasizes that contraband trafficking distorts legitimate markets, drains public revenues, and generates billions of dollars annually in black-market capital. While Ellis thoroughly documents the economic damages of illicit trade, this commodity-focused approach omits the specific tactical interactions between

organized smuggling syndicates, compromised state border security personnel, and host communities along contiguous frontiers.

Addressing these operational channels, Heidari and Shafian (2015) demonstrate that smuggling occurs across official ports of entry via fraudulent declarations and compromised border personnel, as well as along unmonitored land, maritime, and air corridors bypass routes. This highlights the vulnerability of physical border enforcement architectures to both stealth evasion and institutional compromise.

Security

The concept of security has been conceptualized in diverse ways across scholarly literature, reflecting varying theoretical paradigms, referent objects, and operational contexts. Etymologically, Bien-Kacala and Serowaniel (2016) trace the origin of "security" to the Latin roots *sine* (without) and *cura* (fear or anxiety). This fundamental framing posits security as a condition characterized by freedom from fear, establishing it as an essential prerequisite for human survival and sustainable development. Within borderlands, the absence of basic security creates permissive conditions for illicit transborder enterprises—such as arms trafficking—to flourish, directly threatening lives and livelihoods.

In classic international relations literature, Baldwin (1997) defines security as the "absence of threat to acquired values" or, more precisely, a low probability of damage to values cherished by a referent object. Baldwin acknowledges the conceptual complexity of defining both "threats" and "acquired values," noting that security remains an essentially contested concept. Expanding on everyday usage, Mobolaji and Alabi (2017) categorize security into three distinct analytical dimensions: general well-being in daily life, political stability of state institutions, and an analytical construct used to describe, explain, and predict socio-political phenomena.

Addressing the domestic domain, Nwankwo et al. (2014) define internal security as the protection of citizens, territorial integrity, and public property within a state's borders. Modern scholarship increasingly equates true security with sustainable human development, asserting that physical state defense and military hardware alone cannot guarantee public safety if underlying socio-economic drivers remain unaddressed. Following the post-Cold War expansion of global relations, Blum (2014) highlights how globalization shifted the security paradigm from traditional territorial defense to managing transnational risks, defining security in both objective terms (absence of material threats) and subjective terms (absence of fear).

Taking a dynamic perspective, Degaut (2015) contrasts institutionalist views—which see security as a product of nation-building and inter-state cooperation—with constructivist views, which treat security as a socially constructed phenomenon shaped by perceived threats, shared interests, and state capabilities. From a securitization perspective, Eroukmanoff (2018) argues that security issues are contextual and subject-specific, categorizing security into military, political, societal, economic, and environmental sectors, each with distinct referent objects and threat profiles.

Akbar (2015) contrasts the realist paradigm where the state is the primary referent object and security is measured via military capabilities and sovereign boundary defense—with the idealist/human security paradigm introduced by the UNDP (1994), which elevates the individual human being as the primary referent object needing protection from hunger, disease, crime, and environmental degradation. Ema and Onyishi (2014) further extend this framework to include legal and collective security mechanisms enforced by state authority.

In globalized political economy, Ballin et al. (2020) emphasize the interplay between military and economic security, noting that transnational illicit trade flows operate on supply-and-demand dynamics across borders. Hussein et al. (2004) elaborate on human security, emphasizing that true protection encompasses both freedom from fear and freedom from want. Distinguishing state-centric defense from broader societal protection, Iglesias (2011) differentiates traditional national security (focused on state apparatuses and military deterrence) from extended security (encompassing civil society and human safety). Finally, Brauch (2005) provides a multi-sectoral matrix answering the fundamental questions: security for whom? (referent objects), security for what? (values at risk), and security from what? (sources of threat) across state, societal, human, and environmental domains.

For the purpose of this study, security is operationally defined as the capacity of the state to defend its sovereign frontiers specifically the Seme and Idiroko corridors against illicit incursions by transnational arms trafficking syndicates, while ensuring public safety and territorial integrity. Operationally, it is measured by the structural integrity of border control frameworks, the reduction of weapon-enabled violent crime (such as kidnapping, armed robbery, and communal clashes), and the physical protection of borderland communities and law enforcement personnel across Lagos and Ogun States.

Empirical Review of Related Literature

Trans-Border Arms Smuggling and Border Security in Nigeria

Adeola and Fayomi (2012) explored cross-border migration between Nigeria and its Francophone neighbours to assess its foreign policy and security implications. Utilizing secondary data and content analysis, they found that trans-border crimes increased criminality and turned Nigeria into a dumping ground for illicit goods routed through Benin Republic. They recommended a Memorandum of Understanding on person movements; however, their study predates the 2015–2025 timeframe and omits empirical data on arms smuggling along the Lagos-Ogun axis.

In a qualitative study, Blum (2014) examined Nigeria–Benin cross-border flows, attributing West African transnational crime to underdevelopment and structural poverty, and recommending cross-border infrastructure cooperation. Yet, Blum focused broadly on human security rather than arms trafficking dynamics. Similarly, Afolayan (2017) analyzed Southwestern borderland movement and trade, establishing that price and exchange rate differentials drive cross-border commerce. While recommending bilateral trade regulation, Afolayan focused strictly on commercial goods, omitting arms proliferation.

Osimen et al. (2017) investigated national "borderless-border" challenges, using secondary content analysis to identify contraband, narcotics, and small arms trafficking across Nigerian boundaries. They advocated for institutional capacity building, but provided only a macro-level overview without localized empirical data on the Seme-Idiroko corridor. Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020) analyzed the Nigeria–Benin border closure via secondary content analysis, noting that arms, drugs, and fuel smuggling persist despite physical closures. While identifying arms trade as a security threat, their evaluation centered on macroeconomic trade impacts rather than localized border defense.

Examining Northeastern border insecurity, Hamidu (2022) applied Randolph Bourne's theory of transnationalism to show how boundary porosity impairs counter-terrorism operations. Although Hamidu recommended advanced aerial surveillance, the study was geographically restricted to Northeastern Nigeria. Finally, Ogbonna et al. (2023) qualitatively evaluated border governance and migration securitization, finding that elite-driven policies fail to address root crime drivers. However, their inquiry omitted empirical metrics on arms trafficking within Lagos and Ogun States.

Impact of Trans-Border Arms Smuggling on Security in Nigeria

Fagge et al. (2021) evaluated trans-border crime and national security using secondary content analysis, concluding that frontier crime severely impairs public safety and recommending a transition to digital e-borders. Nevertheless, they did not isolate the impact of arms inflows on Southwestern host communities. Similarly, Onyekachi (2018) applied migration theory to analyze Boko Haram's cross-border logistics in Northeastern Nigeria from 2009 to 2015, establishing that porous boundaries facilitate insurgent resupply. The study advocated for enhanced frontier policing, but remained contextualized within Northeastern counter-insurgency operations.

Focusing on Southwestern frontiers, Mobolaji and Alabi (2017) applied Rational Choice Theory to secondary data from the Seme border (1999–2017), finding that institutional corruption and border porosity accelerate transnational crime. They recommended staff welfare upgrades and surveillance technology; however, their scope ended in 2017 and excluded Ogun State. In a macro-policy study, Faleye (2018) qualitatively evaluated border securitization (2014–2017), revealing that restrictive trade regulations and counter-terrorism measures were compromised by elite corruption, though the research omitted ground-level safety impacts.

Golub et al. (2019) analyzed the 2019 land border closure using content analysis, discovering that while closures disrupted formal trade, commercial goods were quickly diverted through unpoliced bypasses. They recommended Customs modernization, but focused exclusively on fiscal trade losses rather than arms trafficking. Furthermore, Nosiri and Ohazurike (2016) utilized transnationalism theory to link border insecurity to revenue losses and contraband inflows, citing systemic corruption and technology deficits as key drivers. However, their work remained a high-level overview lacking localized field metrics from the Seme-Idiroko axis.

Responses of Government towards Combating Trans-Border Arms Smuggling

Adetula (2015) evaluated Nigeria's regional counter-crime interventions through World Systems Theory and secondary content analysis. The study showed that legislative, military, and joint border patrol responses were continually hindered by border porosity, corruption, and equipment deficits. Adetula recommended stronger international cooperation, though without assessing inter-agency operations against arms smuggling in Southwestern Nigeria. Achumba and Akpor-Robaro (2013) similarly synthesized national insecurity literature, recommending enhanced operational capacity through intelligence sharing and tactical training, but provided no empirical analysis of Seme-Idiroko counter-smuggling protocols.

Investigating internal security architecture, Ibrahim and Bala (2018) used secondary content analysis to show that police operational capacity had eroded due to budgetary and logistical constraints, recommending upgraded law enforcement infrastructure without evaluating Southwestern border enforcement. Conversely, Mark and Iwebi (2019) applied Structural

Functionalism to analyze border control and arms smuggling, identifying frequent armed confrontations between Customs units and traffickers. They recommended mapping and clearing illegal "bush paths," but offered no empirical field evaluation across Lagos and Ogun States between 2015 and 2025.

Idris and Tutumlu (2021) examined joint border management along the Nigeria–Niger frontier using participant observation and interviews. They established that excluding borderland communities creates information asymmetry that benefits arms traffickers, recommending a community whistleblowing model; however, their empirical focus was restricted to the Northern frontier. Finally, Abegunde and Fabiyi (2020) evaluated Operation Swift Response (the 2019 border closure), finding that trafficking syndicates bypassed joint patrols via unpoliced coastal tracks. While recommending diplomatic re-engagement and Customs modernization, they did not assess how inter-agency friction impacted long-term security in Lagos and Ogun States.

Challenges Confronting Government in the Fight against Trans-Border Arms Smuggling

Bello and Muhammed (2022) applied State Fragility Theory to analyze cross-border crime along the Nigeria–Cameroon border. Using secondary content analysis, they identified terrain difficulties, logistical deficits, and border porosity as major obstacles to interdiction, advocating for technological integration and personnel expansion. However, their inquiry was geographically restricted to the Eastern border. Similarly, Yakubu and Idehen (2021) applied Game Theory and expert interviews to evaluate counter-terrorism along the Nigeria–Niger frontier, finding that long-term interdiction was compromised by vast, unpoliced border stretches and recommending aerial surveillance, though omitting the Nigeria–Benin corridor.

Basu (2022) qualitatively analyzed global customs enforcement challenges, establishing that smuggling syndicates dynamically adapt to state interdiction through altered transit routes, sophisticated concealment, and field bribery. While Basu highlighted administrative friction as a key enforcement barrier, the study lacked empirical data from Nigeria. Ukwaiyi and Anam (2019) utilized Failed State Theory to evaluate national cross-border crime, identifying extreme porosity, field corruption, and local poverty as primary enforcement hurdles, though offering no localized data on Lagos and Ogun States.

Taking a historical approach, Aluede (2017) analyzed Nigeria–Benin foreign policy and trans-border crime (1960–2013), demonstrating that crime fluctuated with border openings and that the ECOWAS free movement protocol was frequently exploited by syndicates. However, the study's timeframe ended in 2013. Lastly, Saka et al. (2023) investigated West African regional integration and trans-border crime using qualitative content analysis, concluding that unchecked frontier crime threatens national security and undermines ECOWAS objectives. While recommending joint border reforms, Saka et al. examined regional integration broadly, leaving an empirical gap regarding the specific operational, logistical, and technological challenges facing law enforcement agencies along the Seme-Idiroko land borders.

Theoretical Framework

This study evaluates three distinct theoretical perspectives—World Systems Theory, the Marxist Political Economy Approach, and Neo-Functionalist Theory—to establish a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding trans-border arms smuggling and Nigeria's national security. Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems Theory (1974) views the global economy through a structural hierarchy of core, semi-periphery, and periphery states,

explaining how structural global market forces and surplus armaments from industrial core nations flow into peripheral regions like West Africa. Complementing this macro-level view, Karl Marx's Political Economy Approach, as articulated by Asobie (2017), prioritizes material conditions and class interests to demonstrate how arms trafficking is fueled by capital accumulation, local elite corruption, rent-seeking behaviors, and deep socio-economic inequality within borderland communities. While these two models effectively illuminate the global structural supply chains and domestic socio-economic vulnerabilities that drive illicit trade, they remain limited in explaining localized policy decision-making and the specific institutional dynamics of border enforcement.

To bridge these institutional and operational gaps, the study adopts Ernst Haas's Neo-Functionalist Theory (1958) as its primary theoretical anchor. Neo-functionalism posits that initial cross-border cooperation between neighboring sovereign states in specific functional or technical domains generates "spillover effects" that necessitate deeper political, institutional, and security integration across regional organizations such as ECOWAS. This model is uniquely suited for analyzing the Seme–Idiroko corridor, as it establishes that border security cannot be achieved through unilateral state action alone, but requires institutionalized multilateral cooperation, real-time intelligence sharing, and joint enforcement protocols between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin such as Operation Fire-For-Fire and joint patrol task forces.

By synthesizing these frameworks, the study demonstrates that trans-border arms smuggling along the Southwestern frontier operates as a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon. The structural supply dynamics of global trade (World Systems Theory) and local socio-economic desperation coupled with elite corruption (Marxist Political Economy) create permissive conditions for illicit arms flows, while Neo-Functionalism provides the institutional blueprint for mitigating these threats through sub-regional security integration. Ultimately, adopting neo-functionalism highlights that addressing the porosity of the Seme–Idiroko borders depends on strengthening bilateral security architectures, harmonizing customs protocols, and fostering sub-regional cooperation to effectively neutralize transnational trafficking networks.

Method

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive, convergent parallel mixed-methods design integrating historical and survey research approaches. The historical component systematically reviewed extant literature, archival security records, and past scholarly works to establish the longitudinal context of security challenges across the Lagos–Ogun border corridors from 2015 to 2025. Complementing this, the survey component gathered contemporary primary quantitative data and qualitative field insights using structured questionnaires and Key Informant Interview (KII) guides to assess current trafficking realities and localized vulnerabilities.

Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprised a diverse aggregate of 34,001 individuals, strategically selected to provide a holistic view of the security dynamics within the Lagos and Ogun border axes. Central to this population were 1,127 specialized personnel from key national security agencies, including the Nigerian Customs Service's Operations Departments at the Seme (221) and Idiroko (230) commands, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency

(NDLEA) at Idiroko (119), and the Criminal Investigation Departments of the Nigeria Police Force across both commands (332). The inclusion of these specific cohorts was necessitated by their professional mandates and direct involvement in the front-line combat against trans-border crimes, particularly the smuggling of contraband and prohibited goods. By engaging these practitioners, the study captured technical, institutional, and operational insights into the systemic vulnerabilities of Nigeria's territorial integrity.

In addition to state actors, the study population encompassed 32,874 residents from high-impact border communities across both Nigeria and the Benin Republic to ensure a cross-border perspective. Specifically, this included inhabitants of Igolo (7,503) and Krake (4,160) in the Benin Republic, alongside their counterparts in the Nigerian communities of Idiroko (13,411) and Seme (7,800). These residents were integrated into the study because they functioned as the primary witnesses to and victims of the security threats generated by the illicit arms trade and the smuggling of prohibited goods through highly porous borderlines.

Sample Size

The sample size of the study was gotten through the use of Rakesh sample size formula offered by Attah, Mamman and Baba (2021) as follows:

SS=

Where PE = Precision Error (0.05%)

PS = Population size (34,001)

SS = Sample size

1 = mathematical constant

S =

S =

S = = 399.98 = 400 (approx.)

Sampling Techniques

To capture both broad statistical trends and deep operational insights, this study adopted a dual-sampling framework combining proportional stratified random sampling for the quantitative survey with purposive sampling for the qualitative phase. Proportional stratified random sampling was necessitated by the heterogeneous composition of the target population (N= 34,00), which spanned distinct security commands (Nigeria Customs Service, NDLEA, and Nigeria Police Force across Seme and Idiroko) and cross-border communities (Seme, Idiroko, Krake, and Igolo). Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) allocation framework, questionnaires were systematically distributed across each subgroup in direct proportion to its relative population weight, eliminating selection bias and strengthening statistical validity across the n = 400 sampled units.

Complementing the survey, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was deployed to select key informants possessing specialized institutional and localized expertise along the Seme-Idiroko corridor. This targeted operational heads of frontline security agencies alongside four key community leadership demographics—youth, women, market, and traditional rulers—across the four border towns. Although 22 experts were initially scheduled for Key Informant Interviews (KII), the qualitative field process strictly adhered to the principle of theoretical saturation; data collection was discontinued after 14 interviews (n = 14) as no new operational themes or insights emerged, ensuring an empirically rich yet non-redundant qualitative dataset.

Method of Data Collection

To collect comprehensive empirical data on trans-border smuggling, this study integrated both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary quantitative data were gathered via a face-to-face administered 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (weighted from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) across five structured sections, retrieving 393 fully completed and validated instruments out of the 400 administered following item-discriminatory validation. Complementing the survey, qualitative primary data were retrieved using a standardized Key Informant Interview (KII) guide validated by International Relations and Security Studies scholars, which was administered to 14 purposively selected expert informants across security commands and border host communities until theoretical saturation was reached. Additionally, secondary data were systematically extracted from official operational reports and security archives of the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Nigeria Police Force (NPF), and Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), alongside peer-reviewed academic publications retrieved from digital databases to provide a longitudinal context for the primary field findings.

Technique for Data Analysis

Data analysis was categorized based on the source and nature of the gathered information to provide a comprehensive, multifaceted interpretation of the research findings. For the quantitative component, primary survey data retrieved via the 5-point Likert scale questionnaires were evaluated using descriptive statistics—specifically frequency counts, simple percentages, and itemized mean scores (3.00 benchmark)—ensuring transparent, accessible presentation for policymakers and non-technical stakeholders. Primary qualitative data obtained from Key Informant Interviews (KII) were manually transcribed to preserve statement nuances and processed textually using narrative-analytical methods aligned with the study's core research questions. Complementing these primary streams, secondary data extracted from official security agency reports and academic archives were evaluated using relational-content analysis to establish logical connections between trans-border arms smuggling and regional security threats along the Seme–Idiroko corridors.

RESULT

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

This section presents the descriptive statistical analysis of the socio-demographic variables collected from the primary field survey. A total of 400 questionnaires were administered across state security commands and border communities within the Seme and Idiroko corridors. Of this number, 393 instruments were retrieved fully completed and validated, forming the analytic sample ($N = 393$) for this study. The demographic distributions are analyzed using frequencies and percentage counts to map out the baseline traits of the participants, as summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents ($N = 393$)

Variable Category	Sub-Category / Class	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender Distribution	Male	281	71.50%
	Female	112	28.50%
	Sub-Total	393	100.00%
Age	18 – 30 years	81	20.61%

Distribution			
	31 – 40 years	154	39.19%
	41 – 50 years	118	30.03%
	51 years and above	40	10.17%
	Sub-Total	393	100.00%
Educational Level	Secondary Level (SSCE/WAEC)	92	23.41%
	Tertiary Level (B.Sc., HND, OND, NCE)	268	68.19%
	Postgraduate Level (M.Sc., Ph.D.)	33	8.40%
	Sub-Total	393	100.00%
Cadre / Hierarchical Status	Junior Staff / General Community Members	115	29.26%
	Senior Staff / Community Leaders	278	70.74%
	Sub-Total	393	100.00%
Variable Category	Sub-Category / Class	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender Distribution	Male	281	71.50%
	Female	112	28.50%
	Sub-Total	393	100.00%
Age Distribution	18 – 30 years	81	20.61%
	31 – 40 years	154	39.19%
	41 – 50 years	118	30.03%
	51 years and above	40	10.17%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The socio-demographic analysis of the sample (n = 393) reveals an empirically balanced and highly qualified cohort that strengthens the data reliability of this longitudinal study (2015–2025). Male respondents constitute the majority (71.50%), mirroring the operational composition of frontline security agencies such as the Nigeria Customs Service, NDLEA, and Nigeria Police Force while the female representation (28.50%) captures essential community-level perspectives, particularly among women heavily involved in cross-border market trade.

Methodologically, the sample is anchored by mature, experienced stakeholders, with nearly 70% of participants aged between 31 and 50 years, ensuring the institutional memory needed to evaluate shifting arms trafficking tactics and policy interventions over the ten-year period under review. Furthermore, the cohort exhibits exceptional intellectual capital, as 76.59% hold tertiary or postgraduate qualifications, drastically minimizing cognitive response bias when evaluating complex sub-regional security protocols like the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Finally, the strategic stratification across institutional and community cadres comprising 70.74% senior staff and community leaders alongside 29.26% junior field operatives and residents successfully synthesizes high-level policy and intelligence insights with the operational realities of enforcing security along the porous Seme–Idiroko.

Analysis of Field Data on Research Propositions

Research Proposition I: The continuous influx of smuggled arms significantly compromises the infrastructural and operational integrity of border security frameworks in Lagos and Ogun States.

To test Proposition I, primary data generated from Items 5 through 9 of the questionnaires were compiled and analysed using descriptive statistics.

Table 2 Descriptive Analysis for Research Proposition I

S/N	Questionnaire (Proposition I)	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
5	Smuggling of arms increases the rate of illicit border crossings through Seme-Idiroko land borders.		211 (53.69%)	134 (34.10%)	12 (3.05%)	21 (5.34%)	15 (3.82%)	4.29	1.01
6	Smuggling of ammunitions into Nigeria hampers effective prevention of illicit crossing of Seme-Idiroko border posts.		184 (46.82%)	148 (37.66%)	15 (3.82%)	31 (7.89%)	15 (3.82%)	4.16	1.05
7	Trans-border clashes between arms smugglers and border security agents in Seme-Idiroko land borders weaken effective protection of the borders.		196 (49.87%)	132 (33.59%)	20 (5.09%)	30 (7.63%)	15 (3.82%)	4.18	1.06
8	Trans-border smuggling of arms increases the rate at which Seme-Idiroko border protection is compromised.		178 (45.29%)	152 (38.68%)	14 (3.56%)	34 (8.65%)	15 (3.82%)	4.13	1.07
9	Trans-border smuggling of arms is largely responsible for border security threats in Lagos and Ogun States.		224 (57.00%)	115 (29.26%)	10 (2.54%)	29 (7.38%)	15 (3.82%)	4.28	1.05
Aggregate Metrics								4.21	1.05

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 2. strongly supports Research Proposition I. Item 5 scored the highest individual mean value ($\bar{X}$ =4.29, SD=1.01), with 53.69% of the respondents strongly agreeing that arms smuggling drives an increase in illicit perimeter breaches along the Seme-Idiroko borders. Item 9 similarly demonstrates strong consensus ($\bar{X}$ =4.28, SD=1.05), with 57.00% of participants confirming that weapon trafficking serves as the primary driver behind broader border security threats in Lagos and Ogun States.

The aggregate mean score of 2 far exceeds the 3.00 cut off point. This demonstrates that the tactical operations of arms trafficking syndicates disrupt defensive perimeters, overextend border law enforcement commands, and weaken the operational control of state institutions along the Southwestern frontier.

Research Proposition II: High porousness and illicit arms transit through the Seme-Idiroko borders have a severe negative impact on the overall internal security index of Lagos and Ogun States.

To evaluate the impact of leaked weapons on domestic peace and public safety within the host states, primary data from Items 10 through 14 were analyzed.

Table 3, Descriptive Analysis for Research Proposition II

S/N	Questionnaire (Proposition II)	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
10	Trans-border smuggling of arms into Nigeria hampers safety of residents of border communities in Seme and Idiroko.		218 (55.47%)	124 (31.55%)	12 (3.05%)	24 (6.11%)	15 (3.82%)	4.29	1.03
11	Transborder smuggling of arms makes Nigerian government to lose huge revenues.		165 (41.98%)	142 (36.13%)	32 (8.14%)	39 (9.92%)	15 (3.82%)	4.03	1.11
12	Organized nature of transborder arms smuggling increases arms proliferation in border communities of Seme and Idiroko.		192 (48.85%)	148 (37.66%)	10 (2.54%)	28 (7.12%)	15 (3.82%)	4.21	1.04
13	The more the increase in trans-border arms smuggling of goods through Seme-Idiroko borders, the more border security in Lagos and Ogun States deteriorates.		204 (51.91%)	131 (33.33%)	14 (3.56%)	29 (7.38%)	15 (3.82%)	4.22	1.05
14	The proliferation of illegal arms from the Seme-Idiroko borders has worsened communal clashes in Lagos and Ogun States.		188 (47.84%)	136 (34.61%)	20 (5.09%)	34 (8.65%)	15 (3.82%)	4.14	1.07
Aggregate Metrics								4.18	1.06

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Table 3. shows that Research Proposition II is fully validated by field data. Item 10 achieved a high mean score of 4.29 (SD=1.03), with 55.47% of respondents strongly agreeing that weapon trafficking directly undermines the safety and daily lives of frontline community residents. Item 13 also indicates strong agreement ($\bar{X}$ =4.22, SD=1.05), demonstrating that the continuous entry of illegal goods leads to a steady decline in regional security across both states.

Furthermore, Item 14 confirms that these smuggled weapons directly fuel local conflicts, such as land disputes and communal clashes ($X=4.14$, $SD=1.07$). An aggregate mean score of 4.18 confirms that the security failures along the Seme-Idiroko border lines have long-term negative effects that severely impact the internal security and stability of both Lagos and Ogun States.

Research Proposition III: The effectiveness of government responses to arms smuggling is hindered by a lack of inter-agency cooperation, resulting in minimal improvements to security in Lagos and Ogun States.

This proposition examined public and professional views on how institutional failures and inter-agency issues impact government anti-smuggling strategies.

Table: Descriptive Analysis for Research Proposition III

S/N	Questionnaire (Proposition III)	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
15	The nature of collaboration between Nigeria and Benin Republic is effective in curbing smuggling of arms through Seme-Idiroko border posts.		38 (9.67%)	54 (13.74%)	41 (10.43%)	182 (46.31%)	78 (19.85%)	2.47	1.21
16	Border patrol by Nigeria border security personnel is adequate in enhancing the safety of Seme-Idiroko borderlines.		35 (8.91%)	42 (10.69%)	28 (7.12%)	192 (48.85%)	96 (24.43%)	2.31	1.17
17	Law enforcement measures by Nigerian government has reduced the spate of trans-border smuggling of arms through Seme-Idiroko land borders.		48 (12.21%)	61 (15.52%)	35 (8.91%)	164 (41.73%)	85 (21.63%)	2.55	1.26
18	Technology has been adequately deployed by Nigerian government in curbing transborder smuggling of arms through Seme-Idiroko land borders.		28 (7.12%)	39 (9.92%)	21 (5.34%)	188 (47.84%)	117 (29.77%)	2.17	1.14
19	The responses of the government towards combating trans-border smuggling of arms have been largely inadequate in reducing security threats in Lagos and Ogun States.		215 (54.71%)	128 (32.57%)	12 (3.05%)	23 (5.85%)	15 (3.82%)	4.28	1.02
Aggregate Metrics (Items 15–18 Reverse Coded)								4.22	1.01

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data presented in Table 4.2.3 confirms Research Proposition III. Items 15 through 18 show widespread disagreement regarding the effectiveness of current government measures,

with Item 18 recording a particularly low mean score ($\bar{X}=2.17$, $SD=1.14$). This reveals that 77.61% of respondents believe modern technology is not being adequately deployed to monitor and secure border crossings.

Conversely, Item 19 which directly states that government responses have been inadequate received overwhelming agreement, earning a mean score of 4.28 ($SD=1.02$). This collective pushback indicates that current state enforcement strategies are struggling. This friction is largely due to weak inter-agency communication, a lack of shared operational intelligence, and under-equipped border patrols, leaving the Seme-Idiroko corridor highly vulnerable to arms trafficking.

Research Proposition IV: Institutional corruption, vast porous borders, and inadequate technological surveillance infrastructure are the challenges undermining government efforts to combat arms smuggling in Lagos and Ogun States.

This proposition looked at the primary structural, geographic, and systemic obstacles that hinder border enforcement teams from intercepting illegal weapons.

Table 5: Systemic and Environmental Challenges Undermining Enforcement

S/N	Questionnaire (Proposition IV)	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	SD
20	Border porosity impedes government efforts in combating transborder smuggling of arms through Seme-Idiroko land borders.		248 (63.10%)	108 (27.48%)	11 (2.80%)	16 (4.07%)	10 (2.54%)	4.45	0.88
21	Massive youth unemployment in Nigeria hampers efforts of government in adequately protecting Seme-Idiroko borderlines from activities of arms smugglers.		168 (42.75%)	144 (36.64%)	32 (8.14%)	34 (8.65%)	15 (3.82%)	4.06	1.09
22	Corruption among border security personnel increases transborder arms smuggling through Seme-Idiroko land borders.		198 (50.38%)	136 (34.61%)	14 (3.56%)	30 (7.63%)	15 (3.82%)	4.20	1.06
23	Inter-agency rivalry among different border security agencies in Seme-Idiroko border posts hampers the ability of government to combat smuggling of arms into and out of Lagos and Ogun States.		174 (44.27%)	152 (38.68%)	18 (4.58%)	34 (8.65%)	15 (3.82%)	4.11	1.07
24	Inadequate cooperation between Nigeria and Benin Republic hampers effective protection of Seme-Idiroko borderlines from activities		162 (41.22%)	158 (40.20%)	22 (5.60%)	36 (9.16%)	15 (3.82%)	4.06	1.07

	of arms traffickers.							
	Border porosity as well as corruption among border security personnel are among the challenges confronting the government in the fight against trans-border arms smuggling for enhanced security in Lagos and Ogun States.	238 (60.56%)	114 (29.01%)	12 (3.05%)	14 (3.56%)	15 (3.82%)	4.39	0.96
25								
Aggregate Metrics							4.21	1.02

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The data in Table 4.2.4 strongly validates Research Proposition IV, showing high agreement across all items. Item 20 recorded the highest score ($\bar{X}=4.45$, $SD=0.88$), with 90.58% of respondents agreeing that extreme border porosity directly undermines state anti-smuggling efforts. Item 25 also shows a high degree of consensus ($\bar{X}=4.39$, $SD=0.96$), proving that the combination of porous geography and compromises in institutional integrity creates an ideal environment for traffickers.

Inter-agency friction among security forces deployed along the border further worsens these vulnerabilities, as illustrated by Item 23 ($\bar{X}=4.11$, $SD=1.07$). With a high aggregate mean score of 4.21, these findings show that border security commands face a complex mix of structural challenges, including difficult geography, institutional corruption, inter-agency friction, and weak cross-border diplomatic cooperation.

Discussion of Findings

First, regarding the continuous influx of illicit weapons and its impact on border infrastructure, the statistical analysis for Research Proposition I provides clear empirical evidence that arms trafficking severely degrades both the physical setup and operational safety of frontline enforcement units along the Seme-Idiroko corridor ($\bar{X} = 4.21$, $SD = 1.05$). Qualitative insights from operational commanders in the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) and Nigeria Police Force (NPF) confirm that contemporary trafficking networks no longer rely on stealth. Instead, syndicates use military-grade weaponry to forcefully clear secondary transit routes, forcing state forces into reactive postures. As a senior Customs Officer observed: "The illicit entry of automated weapons creates an asymmetric threat environment. Traffickers utilize sophisticated weapon networks to forcefully clear paths through secondary routes, directly degrading our static patrol infrastructure and tactical safety."

This assessment validates Item 9 (4.28), identifying arms smuggling as the primary driver of border security vulnerabilities in Lagos and Ogun States. These findings align with African borderland literature (Onuoha, 2013; Obi, 2021), which notes that small arms proliferation shifts operational leverage from formal state institutions to fluid criminal networks, driving severe institutional fatigue ({Item 6}, $\bar{X} = 4.16$). Viewed through Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory, syndicates act as intelligent agents who continually exploit enforcement gaps. Consequently, when state security tightens at official checkpoints like Seme or Idiroko, traffickers map and clear alternative bush bypasses (Item 5), $\bar{X} = 4.29$, $SD = 1.01$), rendering static defense strategies obsolete.

Secondly, with respect to the domestic spillover of weapon trafficking, the empirical metrics gathered for Research Proposition II establish a direct, causal link between Southwestern border vulnerabilities and the deterioration of internal security in Lagos and Ogun States ($X = 4.18$, $SD = 1.06$). Qualitative feedback from community leaders across Seme, Idiroko, Igolo, and Krake emphasizes that international boundaries no longer serve as protective buffers, but rather as open conduits channeling violence inland. A traditional ruler along the Idiroko axis noted:

"The weapons that slip past the official checkpoints do not stay at the border. They flow immediately into the hands of land-grabbers, urban cultists, and highway robbery syndicates operating throughout Ogun and Lagos."

This evidence explains the high scores for Item 10 ($X = 4.29$) and Item 13 ($X = 4.22$), confirming that frontier failures directly compromise public safety and drive regional security decline. In line with Nigerian criminological research (Ehindero et al., 2018; Alao, 2022), smuggled firearms supply urban criminal networks, transforming traditional land disputes and communal disagreements into lethal, militarized clashes ({Item 14}, $X = 4.14$). Furthermore, significant revenue losses ({Item 11}, $X = 4.03$) reflect an expanding black-market economy that deprives the state of public funds while financing organized criminal operations.

Thirdly, evaluating the quality and institutional context of anti-trafficking policy implementation, the empirical data collected for Research Proposition III reveals a marked gap between official state policy and ground-level security improvements ($X = 4.22$, $SD = 1.01$). Respondents expressed strong dissatisfaction with current state countermeasures, citing a critical lack of modern technology ({Item 18}, $X = 2.17$) and inadequate border patrols ({Item 16}, $X = 2.31$), while strongly agreeing that overall government responses remain insufficient ({Item 19}, $X = 4.28$). Qualitative content analysis indicates that these shortcomings stem from institutional silos, inter-agency rivalries, and an over-reliance on manual inspections. An NDLEA operational head highlighted this breakdown:

"We operate on the same strip of land, but inter-agency operations are often fragmented. Without unified data platforms or modern scanning technology, our defensive measures rely on manual tracking, which is easily bypassed by organized networks."

This critique explains the low score for traditional law enforcement measures ({Item 17}, $X = 2.55$). These empirical patterns support regional security studies (Agbibo, 2015; Usman, 2023), which argue that reactive, top-down policies such as temporary border closures provide only brief disruptions. Similarly, low ratings for cross-border collaboration ({Item 15}, $X = 2.47$) mirror ECOWAS assessments emphasizing that unilateral enforcement without joint patrols and shared digital databases cannot secure porous land frontiers.

Fourthly, looking at the environmental, structural, and institutional hurdles hindering law enforcement, the evaluation of Research Proposition IV identifies a complex matrix of constraints restricting anti-smuggling enforcement ($X = 4.21$, $SD = 1.02$). Item 20 ($X = 4.45$) and Item 25 ($X = 4.39$) emerged as the highest points of consensus in the study, proving that extreme border porosity and institutional integrity compromises undermine state enforcement. The thousands of unpoliced bush paths along the Lagos-Ogun border create an environment where field compromise can thrive. As a field security researcher observed:

"The sheer volume of bypasses makes absolute physical control impossible with our current staff numbers. These massive gaps in coverage allow underpaid field operatives to rationalize compromise, creating institutional blind spots that smugglers exploit for a fee."

These insights confirm structural assessments by Garuba (2010) and Imobighe (2019), which demonstrate that traditional physical policing cannot secure Nigeria's border geography. High youth unemployment ({Item 21}, $X = 4.06$) provides syndicates with a steady pool of local guides and informants, while inter-agency friction ({Item 23}, $X = 4.11$) prevents a unified security front.

Ultimately, trans-border arms smuggling along the Seme-Idiroko corridor is a deeply structural issue rather than an isolated enforcement failure. Addressing this crisis requires transitioning from manual, reactive operations to an integrated, data-driven border management architecture combining long-range drone surveillance, non-intrusive cargo scanners, enhanced officer welfare, and institutionalized bilateral intelligence sharing with the Republic of Benin.

Conclusion

Based on these empirical metrics and qualitative insights, this study concludes that trans-border arms smuggling along the Seme-Idiroko corridor is a deeply rooted structural and systemic problem rather than an isolated law enforcement failure. The traditional reliance on manual checking mechanisms, static physical checkpoints, and unilateral top-down macro-policies such as historical border closures or temporary joint task forces has proven ineffective against highly adaptive criminal networks operating as complex adaptive agents.

As long as the state lacks unified technological tracking tools and fails to address internal integrity compromises among field operatives, border security frameworks will remain highly vulnerable to weapon flows. Securing Nigeria's Southwestern frontier requires shifting away from reactive physical force toward a proactive, technologically modern, and sub-regionally integrated border management strategy.

Recommendations

To address these vulnerabilities and optimize counter-trafficking operations along the Seme-Idiroko land borders, the following recommendations are provided:

1. **Technology & Scanning:** Phase out exclusive reliance on manual patrols by deploying long-range surveillance drones and thermal imaging along unmapped bush paths, while equipping Seme and Idiroko border posts with non-intrusive cargo scanners.
2. **Intelligence Integration:** Establish an ONSA-managed, real-time digital intelligence database connecting NCS, NPF, DSS, and NDLEA to eliminate inter-agency silos and facilitate automatic data sharing on arms flows.
3. **Welfare and Accountability:** Address field corruption by reviewing hazard allowances and welfare for border personnel, paired with mandatory body-worn cameras and independent internal affairs units to investigate compromise.
4. **Bilateral Security Cooperation:** Formalize joint border patrol architectures, shared databases, and synchronized sweeps with the Republic of Benin to neutralize cross-border geographic arbitrage.

Implications of the Study

The empirical and qualitative findings of this study carry significant theoretical, policy, methodological, and socio-economic implications for national security, international relations, and borderland management in Nigeria and the wider West African sub-region:

Theoretical: Validates Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory by demonstrating that arms-smuggling networks operate as decentralized, adaptive agents rather than static entities, easily bypassing rigid, traditional border controls.

Policy & Strategic: Proves Nigeria's reactive, top-down border defense model (e.g., closures) is fundamentally flawed without continuous technological surveillance and unified inter-agency coordination.

Methodological: Shows that a convergent parallel mixed-methods design is essential for security research; quantitative data highlights broad trends, while Key Informant Interviews (KII) expose covert issues like systemic corruption, equipment deficits, and grassroots community impacts.

Socio-Economic: Connects border porosity to local economic deprivation, showing that high youth unemployment provides a steady recruitment pool of guides and informants for trafficking syndicates.

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