



BORDER POROSITY AND NATIONAL SECURITY: A STUDY OF STRATEGIES AND PERFORMANCE OF BORDER MANAGEMENT AGENCIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The persistent challenge of border porosity in Nigeria poses a significant threat to national security, enabling transnational crimes, illegal migration, arms trafficking, and insurgent infiltration. This study critically examines the strategies and operational effectiveness of Nigeria's border management agencies, including the Nigeria Immigration Service, Nigeria Customs Service, and other security outfits tasked with safeguarding territorial integrity. The paper employs a qualitative case study approach, drawing on triangulated data sources including policy documents, operational field reports, and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders across border communities and security institutions. Content analysis is used to interpret institutional narratives, while thematic coding identifies patterns in inter-agency coordination, technological deployment, and policy implementation. The study is anchored in the Securitization Theory, which frames border governance as a process through which state actors construct and respond to perceived threats. This theoretical lens allows for a critical examination of how security discourses shape institutional responses and justify exceptional measures in border control. The findings reveal systemic weaknesses, including inadequate surveillance infrastructure, corruption, and fragmented command structures, which undermine the agencies' performance. The study concludes by proposing a multi-layered approach to border governance emphasizing regional cooperation, intelligence-led operations, and investment in smart border technologies as essential to mitigating the risks posed by porous borders and enhancing Nigeria's national security architecture.

Key Words: *Immigration, Immigration, Border, Security, Regional Security.*



Introduction

People live in an increasingly borderless world where funds can be transferred across borders with a swipe on a smartphone, where automobiles and computers are made up of parts produced in many countries, and where music can be streamed and cyber-attacks launched with no impediments from national borders (Martin and Ferris, 2017). Countries across the globe and particularly in Africa today are facing the serious challenge of managing their borders to the extent that their territorial sovereignty is in danger. This is because interdependence between states today has become something inevitable and beyond individual state's control, as Aristotle stated “no country is an island of its own”, therefore, states need one another to survive and conduct a relationship with one another. All matters in their relations are to protect and promote their national interests by displaying their domestic politics at the international level. Among the national interests' border protection happened to be the most important factor because among the qualities of the state it is permanent territory. So, therefore, borders happened to be a strong component that the state has to protect (Abdullahi and Gawi, 2021).

Since the beginning of human history, there has been the need for self and group preservation which has made people to carve out empires and dominate their environment. Prior to the advent of modern state systems in the 17th century, people were organised into political units such as clans, chiefdoms, empires and states. One means of security of these political units was the construction of city walls, such as the walls of Jericho in 1400 BC and the great walls of China built in 221 BC. These walls served as borders and as barriers to ward off invaders. Borders are intrinsic elements of human life and are elements of the relations between individuals and society. The realisation that borders represent complex social and territorial phenomena has had a profound impact on the study of borders. At one level, borders serve to satisfy two basic needs of the people and that is: being protected from external and internal threats and determining the territories which belong to particular political, cultural and social groups (Kolossoff, 2012, cited Mutfwang, 2024). The concept of national security has evolved beyond traditional military defense to encompass a wide range of threats, including terrorism, transnational crime, illegal migration, and arms trafficking. In Nigeria, the porous nature of its borders has emerged as a critical vulnerability, undermining efforts to safeguard territorial integrity and internal stability. Nigeria shares land borders with four countries Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon spanning over 4,477 kilometers.



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These borders are characterized by vast, rugged terrain, limited surveillance infrastructure, and deeply interconnected communities divided by colonial-era boundaries. This geographical and historical complexity has made effective border management a persistent challenge.

For many years, Nigeria witnessed a surge in security threats linked to border porosity. These include among others, the infiltration of Boko Haram and other insurgent groups through the northeastern borders, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, often trafficked across borders, increased incidents of banditry, kidnapping, and smuggling in border communities of the northwest. Despite the establishment of multiple border management agencies such as the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), and the Nigerian Army, their performance has been hampered by several factors, such as insufficient manpower and poor funding, corruption and lack of inter-agency coordination, inadequate surveillance technology and logistics and abuse of ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol. The strategic response to these challenges has included initiatives like the e-border surveillance system, joint border patrols, and bilateral security agreements. However, the effectiveness of these strategies remains contested, with many scholars and practitioners questioning their sustainability and impact. It is against this bedrock however, this study critically analyzes the impact of border porosity on national security with particular attention to strategies and performance of border management agencies in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023.

Literature Review

Conceptual Definitions

Border

Border is used interchangeably with a boundary, border is a region or area straddling a boundary or the area adjacent to a boundary and may or may not be located exactly on a country's boundary. Also, countries do not have single borders, particularly those with maritime boundaries that are variously defined from 12 nautical miles to over 200 nautical miles, depending on the limit of the continental shelf. Borders are one of the defining characteristics of a state, they define the extent to which an authority within a given political entity called a state may exercise exclusive jurisdiction over peoples and resources (Wafula, 2016, cited Ezeabasili, & Nwanolue, 2021).



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Borders globally, are actually fundamental elements of human lives and at the same time elements of relations between individuals and society. From the time immemorial, ingredients of humanity have always been separated and also connected by a network of borders at all territorial levels. Therefore, the realization that borders characterize complex social and territorial phenomena has definitely had a profound impact on the study of borders. Trans-border commerce between Nigeria and her neighbouring states usually remains mutually beneficial (Kolossoff, 2012 cited in Oladopo, Aladejebi & Ayeni, 2021). Scholars like Mailabari & Hamidu (2015), assert that modern borders are no longer just geopolitical markers they are complex, evolving instruments of power, identity, and control. They further observed that security studies now treat borders as dynamic spaces where sovereignty, surveillance, and human rights intersect. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for crafting effective and humane border policies and national security.

Essentially, a border is an international line or a region encompassing both sides of a political boundary. Borders are artificially constructed, geographic or astronomic lines that form the boundary of a nation. They are integral components of human activity and organization. Daily, controversies concerning the political, cultural, and economic borders that traverse the Earth's surface abound. Borders are central features in current international disputes relating to security, migration, trade, and natural resources. They also factor prominently into local debates over land use and property rights. They are increasingly complex human responses and social constructions in a world where the globalizing forces of instant communication, expedited travel and enhanced economic flows, confront the basic human concerns for security and certainty (Diener and Hagen, 2012 cited Adesina, 2019).

Balibar (2004) argues that borders have become omnipresent, extending into the interior of states through mechanisms of surveillance and control. He introduces the concept of polysomic borders, which are simultaneously symbolic, legal, and practical. This view reflects the deterritorialization of border functions. But in a contrary view Bigo focuses on the role of security professionals in shaping border practices. He conceptualizes borders as zones of exception, where legal norms are suspended in favor of discretionary power. His notion of the Ban-opticon describes a surveillance regime that governs mobility and exclusion. Similarly, Donnan and Wilson (1999) adopted an anthropological lens, viewing borders as social and cultural constructs. They emphasize how borders shape identity, belonging, and everyday life, particularly in borderland communities. Their



work highlights the agency of individuals who navigate and resist border regimes. Côté-Boucher and colleagues argue that borders are enacted through everyday bureaucratic practices. They emphasize the role of non-state actors such as private contractors and NGOs in border governance. This approach treats borders as performed rather than merely drawn. Focusing on Nigeria and West Africa, Eselebor and Okunade (2020) describe borders as strategic zones critical to national security and development. They highlight the challenges of porous borders, weak state presence, and the need for community-based border management.

Borders are thus central to urban culture and a necessary tool for building identity and community in the complex landscape of cities. As sites of rationality, they connect and separate, unite and differentiate, offering analytical and empirical categories for studying human participation in urban cultures (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015). Furthermore, the different dimensions of borders, which comprises a nexus of symbolic, social and physical elements, underscores the importance of treating context beyond a single one-dimensional homogenous ‘variable’ shaping human psychology. The distinctiveness of a socio cultural approach to the study of urban culture is precisely the careful unpacking of context as a site of socio-institutional, physical/spatial and symbolic determinants that humans co-construct and participate as they develop themselves and their life trajectories (Pierce, Martin & Murphy, 2011). Three types of borderlands were identified by Momoh (1989) and Afolayan (2000), based on the level and pattern of movement and trading activities within each of the borderlands. These are: i). Closed, inert or zero borderlands. ii). Open, transit or minimal borderlands. iii). Porous ‘nation-peripheral’ or maximal borderlands (Udo, 2024).

Security

Robert S. McNamara, former U.S. Secretary of Defense, offered a compelling and multidimensional definition of security in his 1968 book *The Essence of Security: Reflections in Office*. His perspective marked a shift from traditional military-centric views to a broader, more human-focused understanding. *Beyond Military Strength*. McNamara argued that security is not just about military power or defense capabilities. He emphasized that true security must include economic development, social justice, and political stability. *Human-Centered Approach*: He believed that security should be measured by the well-being of people, not just the survival of the



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state. This includes access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for personal growth. Global Interdependence: McNamara stressed that no nation can be secure in isolation. Security must be understood in a global context, where the instability of one region can affect others. Preventive Strategy: Rather than relying solely on deterrence or retaliation, he advocated for addressing root causes of conflict poverty, inequality, and lack of governance as a way to build lasting peace. In the contemporary world that is facing climate change, pandemics, and cyber threats, McNamara's vision feels more relevant than ever. Security is not just about borders it is about people, systems, and shared futures. This why McNamara concluded that "security is not about the traditional military exercise, even though it encompasses it, security is not about military hardware even though it encompasses it, security is development, without development there can never be security".

Redefining the concept of 'security' has recently become something of a hot industry. Most such efforts, however, are more concerned with redefining the policy agendas of nation-states than with the concept of security itself. Often, this takes the form of proposals for giving high priority to such issues as human rights, economics, the environment, drug traffic, epidemics, crime, or social injustice, in addition to the traditional concern with security from external military threats. Such proposals are usually buttressed with a mixture of normative arguments about which values of which people or groups of people should be protected, and empirical arguments as to the nature and magnitude of threats to those values. Relatively little attention is devoted to conceptual issues as such. This article seeks to disentangle the concept of security from these normative and empirical concerns, however legitimate they may be (Baldwin, 1997). In a contrary opinion on the idea and concept of security, Barry Buzan (1991) expands the concept beyond military threats to include political, economic, societal, and environmental dimensions, laying the foundation for securitization theory.

During most part of the Cold War, security studies were basically focused on issues revolving around the control, threat or use of force (Nye & Lynn-Jones, 1988). Consequently, the international system was considered inherently state-centric, since states were seen as both the main users of force and the main targets of the use of force. The acclaimed article of Arnold Wolfers 'National Security' as an Ambiguous Symbol provided a clear overview of the most important competing definitions of security during the Cold War. According to Wolfers (1952),



security is a crucial concept in International Relations, but it can also be extremely subjective in nature.

The traditional security paradigm refers to a realist construct of security in which the referent object of security is the state. The Realism school in International Relations theory deals with macro issues such as political and militaristic ones in a context where security and power, measured in terms of military capabilities, are the driving forces in the international system. Security, then, means national security. Other goals are secondary. National security is synonymous with national interest, which emphasizes that the security policy subordinates any other interests to those of the nation (Wolfer, 1952). As a consequence, the stability of both the domestic and the international system was based on the premise that if state security is maintained, then the security of citizens will naturally follow. The underlying assumption is that the domestic political order here was stable and essentially peaceful.

Hans Morgenthau laid out the main tenets of Classical Realism in the classic book *Politics Among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace*, where he insisted on the rationality of statesmen and their actions in terms of national interest, defined as the pursuit of power. To Morgenthau, security is a derivative of power since it was assumed that statesmen think and act in terms of interests defined as power, and the evidence of history bears that assumption out (Morgenthau, 1993), while it might be argued that actually it does not. Realism gave anarchy a privileged position in explaining international relations. Anarchy should be understood as the absence of a central authority that could enforce agreements or prevent the use of force. It is the nature of the international system that explains why states behave the way they do as they seek security in an anarchic international environment. Wideners, in opposition to the traditionalists. These Wideners propose a radical reform of the field, expanding the focus of Security Studies beyond the realm of military concerns to encompass threats to national survival that derives from environmental, economic, and criminal issues, among others. Baldwin (1995) contends that those who advocate reintegration of the field with the study of foreign policy and international politics are also included in this third group.



National Security

The concept of National Security has evolved over time and has been interpreted differently by scholars depending on historical context, geopolitical realities, and disciplinary focus. Modern concepts of national security arose in the 17th century during the Thirty Years War in Europe and the Civil War in England. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia established the idea that the nation-state had sovereign control not only of domestic affairs such as religion, but also of external security (Holmes, 2015). It was in this direction that Prabhakaran Paleri (2022), posits that the process of governing the human system with a definite target which is to maximise its end objective the human well-being. He emphasizes that national security is not just about military defense but about holistic governance aimed at human welfare.

According to Anand K. Singh (2015), security is the sum total of vital interests of a state for which the state is willing to go to war either immediately or ultimately. He views national security as a multidimensional concept encompassing military, economic, technological, and internal stability aspects (Singh, 2015). According to Morton Berkowitz and P.G. Booke, (2022), National security, is the state of being free from external physical threats. He further asserts that all moral and intellectual dangers should be considered, but it is physical violence that is widely regarded as the ultimate leverage against the state, and thus as a real and tangible threat to its survival. However, if nations were not concerned with the defence of their values other than their survival as sovereign states, they would not have to be concerned about their security as much as they do currently.

However, national security has come to mean different things to different people. Today, there are all kinds of “national securities.” They include economic security; energy security; environmental security; and even health, women’s, and food security. This proliferation of definitions has not always been for the good. In some instances, for example, it is merely a rebranding of domestic agendas to shift resources away from the Pentagon. In other cases, it is adjusting to the complexities of a changing international environment (Holmes, 2015). According to Holmes (2015), the following list provides deferent understandings of the major contending views of non-kinetic meanings of national security, with no analysis of their merits or insufficiencies.



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- a. **Political security**; this refers to protecting the sovereignty of the government and political system and the safety of society from unlawful internal threats and external threats or pressures. It involves both national and homeland security and law enforcement.
- b. **Economic Security**; this involve not only protecting the capacity of the economy to provide for the people, but also the degree to which the government and the people are free to control their economic and financial decisions. It also entails the ability to protect a nation's wealth and economic freedom from outside threats and coercion. Thus, it comprises economic policy and some law enforcement agencies but also international agreements on commerce, finance, and trade. Recently, it has been defined by some in a human security context to mean eradicating poverty and eliminating income inequality.
- c. **Energy and Natural Resources Security**; this is most often viewed as the degree to which a nation or people have access to such energy resources as oil, gas, water, and minerals. It would be more accurate to describe it as access freely determined by the market without interference from other nations or political or military entities for non-market, political purposes.
- d. **Homeland Security**; this is a set of domestic security functions that since 9/11 have been organized in a single agency, the Department of Homeland Security. It includes airport and port security, border security, transportation security, immigration enforcement, and other related matters.
- e. **Cyber Security**; this also, refers to protection of the government's and the peoples' computer and data processing infrastructure and operating systems from harmful interference, whether from outside or inside the country. It thus involves not only national defense and homeland security, but also law enforcement.
- f. **Human Security**; this refers to a concept largely developed at the United Nations after the end of the Cold War. It defines security broadly as encompassing peoples' safety from hunger, dis ease, and repression, including harmful disruptions of daily life. Over time, the concept has expanded to include economic security, environ mental security, food security, health security, personal security, community security, political security, and the protection of women and minorities. Its distinguishing characteristic is to avoid or downplay national security as a military problem between nation-states, focusing instead on social and



economic causes and an assumed international “responsibility to protect” peoples from violence. It is to be determined and administered by the United Nations.

- g. Environmental Security;** environmental security is an idea with multiple meanings. One is the more traditional concept of responding to conflicts caused by environmental problems such as water shortages, energy disruptions, or severe climate changes; it is assumed that these problems are “transnational” and thus can cause conflict between nations. The other, more recent concept is that the environment and the “climate” should be protected as ends in and of themselves; the assumption is that the environmental degradation caused by man is a threat that must be addressed by treaties and international governance as if it were the moral equivalent of a national security threat (Holmes, 2015).

Border Security

Just like many other concepts within the dialect of social and management sciences, border security is also prone to a number of interpretations. Border security metrics and definitions are essential in tackling the persisting security concerns at the border discussions. Border security is of utmost importance when it comes to safeguarding a nation's security and sovereignty against any possible threats. Border Security is the term used to describe the measures taken by governments to enforce their border control policies and prevent the irregular movement of people, goods, weapons, drugs, or other contraband across their borders. Border Security can include controls on the movement of people and goods across land, air, and maritime borders (Karadeli, 2023).

This is why Victor M. Manjarrez (2015), viewed border security as a situational awareness of the border that effectively prevents the ability of the criminal element to operate. The aim is to reduce the vulnerability (chaos and clutter) of an uncontrolled border so as to improve the quality of life for the residents and legitimate businesses and reduce the risk to the nation’s economic vitality. It could be described as the control of trans-border movement of people with a view to reducing the illegal flows without necessarily limiting the flows (Uzoma and Eudora, 2016).

Border security is indeed a complex idea. It incorporates aspects of the military, economy, politics, environment, geography etc. According to Fauzan, Abdallah and Ahmad (2019), border security could generally be understood as the safety of life support systems and the absence of threats to the lives of the people and their activities in the borderlands. Nelson (2010), submits that border



security included in a larger category than the term could often be referred to as homeland security. They further contend that border security includes safeguarding a state's land, water, and water domains; deterring threats along these borders; and securing all points of entry, which are locations such as seaports, airports, and border crossings, where officials are stationed to oversee the legal entry and exit of persons and merchandise (Fauzan, Abdallah & Ahmad, 2019).

According to Keith Cozine (2021) border security is the step that nations take to prevent people or items from entering and departing into their country that may pose a threat or other adverse consequences or otherwise violate that nation's laws. In their attempt to further buttress the above position, Susan Martin and Elizabeth Ferris (2017) observed that border security is increasingly about exerting control over the movement of people across borders, often in response to migration pressures and national security concerns. They highlighted the paradox of globalization while goods and data flow freely, human movement is increasingly restricted. Their view ties border security to migration governance and sovereignty (Shehu & Dalha, 2023).

But for Victor M. Manjarrez Jr. and Jeffrey Rojek (2020), border security is a complex system composed of diverse actors, interests, and actions tied to both legitimate and illicit entities. This model frames border security as an ecosystem, where enforcement must balance economic facilitation with deterrence of illicit activities like smuggling and terrorism. The primary missions of border security according to them evolved to include counterterrorism in addition to stopping both the illegal entry of migrants and the smuggling of illicit contraband. We argue that a demarcated line on a map is not the start nor the end for border security, but rather part of a continuum. Viewing border security as a complex system with disparate variables provides a greater insight into the processes within the system that may expose national vulnerabilities to domestic and foreign threats (Manjarrez & Rojek, 2020).

Border Porosity

The porous borders or border porosity in a country have put nations in a very precarious state. This is because, It is the porosity of the borders that made it possible for contraband items, unwholesome goods, light weapons and criminals from neighboring countries to find their ways into the country. Besides, the ongoing armed attacks in some parts of the country, and some persons possessing AK



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47, automatic and assault rifles, illegally and automatic rifles could have only found their ways into the country through borders. Also, smuggled goods such as rice and vehicles whose importations have since been banned through the land borders, still flood the country through the numerous unapproved land border routes (Ikyase & Beneth, 2019). Border porosity refers to the degree to which borders allow or fail to restrict the movement of people, goods, services, and ideas. A porous border is one that is easily crossed legally or illegally due to weak enforcement, geographic challenges, or socio-political dynamics. According to Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly & Bruno Dupeyron (2007), border porosity is shaped by human agency and socio-economic forces. They also clarified that borders are not fixed barriers but dynamic spaces influenced by trade, migration, and governance.

But for Abayomi (2024), Porosity arises from colonial borders that ignore ethnic and cultural realities, leading to transnational crime and insecurity. Borders fail to meet functional prerequisites of regulation and control, reflecting systemic governance failure. Porous borders facilitate terrorism and arms trafficking, especially in the Sahel, due to weak state institutions and regional instability (Ibrahim, 2021). Porous borders are also known as permeable borders. Border porosity is viewed as a state of border permeability. A permeable border is an international borderline characterized by multiple unpoliced illegal entry/routes that enable various forms of trans-border crimes to flourish. Border porosity is defined as the border condition that results in the failure of the surveillance method adopted by nation-states to provide border security against trans-border arms trafficking on their borders (Mills, 1998 cited Idris, 2021).

Border Management

Border management concerns the administration of borders. While its precise meaning may vary according to the national context, it usually relates to the rules, techniques and procedures regulating activities and traffic across defined border areas or zones. Borders are diverse, ranging from those handling thousands of people and tons of freight daily, to isolated stretches. Border management reform, as part of security sector reform processes, presents a unique challenge, not least because it must strike an appropriate balance between preventing illegal entry and remaining open to legal trade and labour. However, operational effectiveness of border management is



strengthened by ensuring that institutions are representative and mirror the society they serve in terms of sex, ethnicity, language and religion (Mackay, 2019).

Such idea was attributed to Keith Cozine (2021) where he submitted that transnational movements of people, goods, and capital have become important security policy items on national and global agendas, and the control of such movements is focused largely on efforts at borders. The powers and reach of border control systems have been enhanced by changes in law, increased political attention, an influx of resources, the utilisation of technological detection and control devices and systems, and a security discourse which stresses border management as crucial element in ensuring the stability of states and the well-being of citizens. Border management both facilitates legal activities and detects, identifies and combats illegal activities, in co-ordination with other law enforcement institutions and agencies. Border management functions should be carried out in accordance with international and national frameworks (laws, conventions and principles). Border security relies heavily on risk assessment, and border management strategies reflect how countries address the challenges these assessments identify.

Effective border management strategies acknowledge the importance of a gender perspective and integrate gender equality mechanisms into all border security functions. Border security relies heavily on risk assessment, and border management strategies reflect how countries address the challenges these assessments identify (Mackay, 2019). Hills examines the conceptual and empirical parameters of border management, as the rules, techniques and procedures regulating activities and traffic across defined border areas or zones, and emphasises that the specific political and historical context and multiple rationalities will play a determining role in shaping the border policing approach of any state (Hills, 2002). Border management requires giving controllers sufficient authorities, resources and discretion to do their job, yet without abandoning the oversight necessary to ensure that agents do not misuse their powers. Border controllers, as is true of all who have powers to enforce social control, may be tempted by situational or personal reasons to misuse their powers. In short, as border guards and other state authorities have been given more authority and as their capacity to coercively control people has been magnified, the perennial question of how to control and hold accountable agencies and agents who exercise that power, often within wide margins of discretion, has risen to greater salience (Shehu & Dalha, 2023).



Border Protection

Border Protection refers to measures taken by a country to regulate and monitor its borders to prevent irregular immigration, smuggling, and other criminal activities. In the United States, for example, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is the agency responsible for border security. It uses a variety of techniques to assure that global tourism remains safe and strong. Beth A. Simmons (2019), emphasizes that borders are no longer just lines of territorial jurisdiction but active sites of governance. She further argues that border protection now involves managing human mobility, economic interdependence, and non-state threats, while balancing security enforcement with human rights norms.

Dera Nnadi and Chinedu Okoye (2022), define border protection as a strategic component of national security, deeply tied to the governance of border communities. Their work highlights how ungoverned spaces (spaces governed by non-state actors), at borders can become breeding grounds for criminal activities, undermining territorial integrity and socio-economic development. Anthony Cooper and Soren Tinning (2019), take a philosophical approach and view borders as multifaceted constructs not just physical barriers but intersections of political, social, and cultural interests. Border protection, in their view, is about negotiating identity, ideology, and sovereignty in an increasingly globalized world. Border protection should not be principally viewed as a literal defense of the nation's perimeter. It is not synonymous to the creation of a moat around country's borders. Somewhat, it is a set of efforts that exploits the fact that people and goods are relatively easily monitored when they arrive at checkpoints (Nunez-Neto, 2005). The current framework for providing border protection embraces many lessons learned through historical responses to threats and executed activities. Border policy dilemmas, however, are not unique to the current framework, but would be true of any border protection strategy. Thus, in broad terms the dilemmas of formulating a border protection policy can be specified as follows:

- The law of diminishing returns at some point, for each additional unit of any single border protection measure that is added, the additional security provided by that unit becomes less relative to the previous unit. Therefore, the return on the investment security decreases.



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- Heightened goal conflict with increasing numbers of border protection measures, the tightened security begins to impede the legitimate flow of desired people and goods (as well as resulting in possible incursions on privacy and civil liberties).
- The opportunistic nature of border incursions the more hardened one aspect of the border becomes, the more likely that attention will shift to a softer target and/or use different means. To reduce cost and risk of operations, border violators desire to use targets and methods that have been used successfully before, can be easily taught and replicated, and have a high probability of success and impact. Frustrating any or all of these goals could lead the violator to abandon the operation. While border agencies constantly strive to achieve a balance that mitigates these dilemmas, these fundamental problems lie at the heart of many border protection debates and the efforts to develop a comprehensive border protection approach (Congressional Research Service, 2010).

Border Porosity and Nigeria's National Security Nexus

The issue of border porosity in Nigeria has attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly in relation to its implications for national security. Scholars generally agreed that Nigeria's extensive and poorly monitored borders spanning over 4,000 kilometers and shared with countries such as Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin have become conduits for transnational threats including terrorism, banditry, arms trafficking, smuggling, and irregular migration among others. The porous nature of these borders is widely viewed as a structural vulnerability that undermines the state's capacity to maintain territorial integrity and protect its citizens. Abdulkarim and Gawi (2021) argued that the northeastern and northwest borders with Cameroon and Niger Republic have exemplified the security risks posed by porous borders. Their study, grounded in securitization and other relevant theories, demonstrate how weak border controls have facilitated the movement of Boko Haram insurgents, exacerbating insecurity in Borno, Adamawa and other states within the region, while banditry in Katsina, Sokoto and other states within the region. They contended that lack of effective surveillance and enforcement mechanisms has allowed not only militants but also illicit goods and undocumented persons to flow freely across borders, thereby overwhelming local (internal) security structures and contributing to food scarcity and displacement among others. Similarly, Ikyase and Beneth (2019) adopt a failed state framework to analyze Nigeria's border



crisis. They posit that the inability of the Nigerian state to control its borders reflects deeper institutional decay and governance failure. Their work highlights how porous borders have enabled the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which in turn fuels terrorism, communal violence, banditry, and kidnapping across northern Nigeria. They further emphasize that border insecurity is not merely a logistical challenge but a symptom of broader state fragility. Other scholars, such as Adetula, Babatola, and Okunade, approach the issue from a historical and postcolonial perspective. They argue that the artificial borders imposed during colonial rule ignored ethnic and cultural continuities, thereby creating long-term governance challenges. These scholars suggest that the legacy of colonial border demarcation has contributed to the persistence of informal cross-border networks that operate beyond the reach of state authority. In their view, effective border management in Nigeria requires not only technological upgrades and increased manpower but also a rethinking of the state's relationship with border communities and neighboring countries as well as multi-agencies collaborations.

Awosusi and Valery (2020), offer a more nuanced interpretation by challenging the dominant narrative that border porosity alone explains Nigeria's security woes. While acknowledging the role of porous borders in facilitating transnational threats, they argue that internal factors such as elite complicity, corruption, and weak institutions play a more decisive role in shaping the country's security landscape. Their work calls for a shift from border-centric solutions to holistic governance reforms that address the root causes of insecurity in Nigeria. Across these diverse perspectives, a common thread emerges. Nigeria's border porosity is both a cause and consequence of its national security challenges. While some scholars emphasize external threats and the need for stronger border enforcement, others highlight internal governance failures and historical legacies as key drivers of insecurity. The literature suggests that addressing border porosity requires a multi-pronged approach that combines technological innovation, regional cooperation, community engagement, and institutional reform.

Border Porosity and National Security

Nigeria's northern borders with Niger and Chad remain critically porous, facilitating the unchecked movement of arms, insurgents, contraband, and displaced populations. This brief focuses on three strategic corridors Babura (Jigawa), Bakori (Katsina), and Isa/Sabon Birni



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(Sokoto) to examine how border porosity undermines national security and to propose actionable governance solutions. Drawing on recent field studies, security reports, and academic research, we argue that a multi-layered approach combining surveillance, community intelligence, and bilateral coordination is essential to mitigate the risks posed by porous borders (Omengala, 2020).

Border porosity in Nigeria's northern corridors is not merely a logistical challenge it is a national security threat with cascading effects on lives, livelihoods, and state legitimacy. Babura, Bakori, and Isa/Sabon Birni represent strategic entry points for reform. By combining smart surveillance, coordinated enforcement, empowered communities, and bilateral diplomacy, Nigeria can transform its porous borders into resilient frontlines of security. Border porosity refers to the permeability of national boundaries, allowing for unauthorized or uncontrolled movement of people and goods. In Nigeria, this phenomenon is exacerbated by inadequate surveillance infrastructure, corruption among border enforcement agencies, and weak inter-agency coordination (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

National security encompasses the protection of a state's citizens, institutions, and territorial integrity from internal and external threats. In Nigeria, national security is threatened by armed insurgency (e.g., Boko Haram, ISWAP), banditry, kidnapping, and ethno-religious violence. The porous borders of northeastern Nigeria have facilitated the operations of Boko Haram and ISWAP. These groups exploit transnational routes across Cameroon, Chad, and Niger to smuggle arms, recruit fighters, and evade military pursuit. The Lake Chad Basin, in particular, has become a hub for insurgent activity due to its complex geography and weak border enforcement. Nigeria's borders are conduits for illicit trade, including arms trafficking, drug smuggling, and human trafficking. The Nigeria-Benin and Nigeria-Niger borders are particularly vulnerable to contraband movement, which fuels criminal networks and undermines state authority. Unregulated migration from neighboring countries contribute to demographic pressure and resource competition in Nigeria's northern states. Refugee influxes from conflict zones in Chad and Cameroon strain local governance structures and exacerbate humanitarian challenges. Border porosity remains a critical threat to Nigeria's national security. Addressing this challenge requires a multidimensional approach that integrates technology, diplomacy, and community engagement. By strengthening institutional capacity and fostering regional cooperation, Nigeria can mitigate the risks associated with porous borders and safeguard its territorial integrity (Abdullahi & Abubakar, 2021).



Methodology

However, this study largely depends on the use primary sources through the conduct of oral interviews with various leaders in Katsina, Jigawa and Sokoto State respectively. Oral data acquired was however supported through information gathered from secondary sources. This include among others, journal of border security from across field of studies with key informants to interrogate the resilience of the criminals who were involved in cross border criminality including some repented bandits within the identified areas in Nigeria. Other categories of respondents are independent security consultants with expertise on Nigerian porous borders, renowned academics on security and migration studies from the Nigerian universities, religious and border community leaders. The respondents were selected based on their role, expertise, knowledge of border criminality. For ethical reasons, the identity and rights of the respondents are unrevealed for clarity.

Theoretical Consideration

There are different contending theoretical perspectives on the border and bordering process. One perspective which is perhaps the dominant notions are The Social Disorganisation Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942), the push-pull theories (Lee, 1966), and the neo-classical migration theory (Castle and Miller, 2009) are the theoretical frameworks used to describe this paper. The theory views border porosity on national security along strategies and performance of border management agencies in Nigeria.

Shaw and McKay (1942) were among the first to proponents of the Social Disorganization Theory. The central assumption of this theory (Worrad, 2000), is that crime arises when social control systems are undermined and rendered ineffective. According to the hypothesis, disorganised societies are typified by social instability, decreased economic stability, and racial and ethnic diversity. The decisions a person will make about their conduct are mostly influenced by their physical and social settings (socio-economic status). Area with weak social structures in particular is more likely to have high crime rates (and immigration and emigration). Social disorganisation is the breakdown of a person's typical and routine manner of living. According to Igbo (2007), this is often a moment of perplexity, disorientation, and disappointment. When the social link that binds a people and their society together weakens or is shattered by new ideas and practices.



Theorists of social disorganisation contend that crime and other deviant conduct always rise whenever and wherever there is social disorganization (Prejudice). For the purposes of this paper, Lee's "Push-Pull" theory of migration (1966) and Castle and Miller's (2009) neo-classical migration theory were taken into account. According to Lee, the push and pull forces are two primary elements that cause migrations. Push factors are aspects that make one's current location undesirable, while pull factors are those that make one want to move to a different geographical location. Some of the push factors include: a lack of jobs, limited opportunities, primitive living conditions, desertification, famine or drought, political fear or persecution, slavery or forced labour, loss of wealth, natural disasters, death threats, lack of political or religious freedom, pollution, poor housing, landlord/tenant problems, bullying, discrimination, low chances of getting married, condemned housing, and war. The pull factors include: job opportunities, befriending others, and peace and harmony.

Similar to this, Castle and Miller's (2009) Neo-classical migratory Theory makes the same assumption about a push-pull paradigm to explain migratory variables. Neo-classical theories assign the reason for migration to the push forces. This refers to the immigrant's reason for leaving their own nation. The appeal to certain destination nations is referred to as the pull factors. The common consensus is that pull forces are related to labour needs, land availability, improved economic prospects, and political freedom, whereas push factors are influenced by population growth, poor living standards, a lack of economic opportunities, and political repression. The neo-classical theory made the broad assumption that regional differences in the supply and demand for labour would lead to migration flows, and that these flows would gradually equalise conditions and wages between developing and underdeveloped nations, eventually bringing about economic equilibrium. They also argue that migrants from transitional nations, which are experiencing economic and social development, are often persons of intermediate social standing rather than the lowest residents of emerging countries

Results and Discussions

The escalating rate of insecurity in Nigeria has reached deeply concerning levels. It has become a daily reality for many citizens, who face a wide spectrum of threats ranging from terrorism by Boko Haram, kidnapping for ransom, and armed robbery, to banditry and persistent clashes



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between farmers and herders, proliferation of small arms and light weapons. These incidents have grown so frequent and widespread that they defy precise quantification. As a result, numerous scholars have examined the phenomenon from various perspectives. What began as localized tensions over land access between pastoralists and farmers has evolved into a complex and deeply rooted crisis, now posing a significant danger to both national and regional stability.

Nigeria's border management is primarily coordinated by the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), alongside other agencies such as the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), Department of State Services (DSS), National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA). These agencies operate under the framework of the National Border Management Strategy (NBMS) 2019-2023, which emphasizes integrated border governance, national security enhancement, and the protection of vulnerable migrants. Despite the strategic intent, implementation has been uneven. The NBMS outlines goals such as enhancing surveillance and patrol capabilities, promoting inter-agency coordination, fulfilling international obligations on migration and human rights. However, field assessments reveal gaps in execution due to limited funding, poor infrastructure, and bureaucratic fragmentation.

The deployment of the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) at 30 official Points of Entry (POEs) and 34 mobile units for patrol across the states under study has improved biometric registration and data collection, particularly in Jigawa, Katsin and Sokoto State respectively. These systems are critical for tracking cross-border movements and identifying high-risk individuals. The study also revealed that the vast number of unmanned and informal border crossings estimated to be over 1,400 in the areas under study renders these technological interventions insufficient. Many border communities remain disconnected from formal surveillance networks, allowing insurgents, smugglers, and traffickers to exploit these blind spots.

Border porosity remains a critical threat to Nigeria's national security. While agencies like NIS and NCS play vital roles, their effectiveness is hampered by structural, financial, and governance challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multi-pronged approach involving technology, policy reform, community engagement, and regional cooperation. Strengthening border security is not just a matter of national defense it is essential for economic stability and social cohesion. According to some scholars like Edwin D (2022), border security is a cornerstone of national



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sovereignty and internal stability. He observed that in Nigeria, the porous nature of its borders has become a conduit for criminal activities, insurgency, and illegal migration. Despite the presence of agencies such as the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) and Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), the country continues to grapple with border-related threats. This paper explores the extent of border porosity, its implications for national security, and evaluates the effectiveness of current border management strategies.

Border management is fragmented, with overlapping mandates and poor coordination, lack of real-time surveillance tools such as drones and biometric systems. ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol complicates enforcement due to weak monitoring. Political interference and lack of continuity in leadership hinder reforms, corruption undermines operational effectiveness, and legislative gaps exist in harmonizing national and regional security policies.

Some respondents from Jigawa State who have vast experience in trading and conducting businesses between Nigeria-Niger Republic particularly from Babura LGA and communities like Kanya Babba, Kanya Arewa, Daha and Kargo admit that, border security is the major driver of development and national security. This is because, most people from these communities are suffering from insecurity which is affecting their livelihood.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The persistent porosity of Nigeria's borders has emerged as a critical threat to national security, undermining efforts to combat terrorism, transnational crime, and illegal migration. Despite the strategic importance of border management, agencies such as the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), and other security outfits continue to face systemic challenges including underfunding, inadequate manpower, poor inter-agency coordination, and endemic corruption. This study has shown that porous borders facilitate the unchecked movement of insurgents, arms, and illicit goods, thereby exacerbating insecurity in border communities and across the country. The failure to implement modern surveillance technologies and the lack of a unified border management framework have further weakened Nigeria's ability to secure its territorial boundaries. Moreover, the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, while promoting regional integration, has inadvertently complicated enforcement due to weak regulatory oversight.



In sum, Nigeria's border management strategy remains reactive and fragmented, requiring urgent reform to address the multidimensional threats posed by border porosity. Without decisive action, the country risks continued erosion of its sovereignty, economic stability, and internal cohesion. However, the paper recommends that establish an Integrated Border Management System (IBM), create a centralized command structure that harmonizes the operations of NIS, NCS, NDLEA, and other relevant agencies, and develop a national border security policy with clear mandates, performance metrics, and accountability mechanisms. Deploy Advanced Surveillance Technologies, invest in drones, satellite monitoring, biometric scanners, and geofencing systems to monitor border activities in real time, establish data-sharing platforms for intelligence coordination among agencies and with neighboring countries, strengthen Human Capacity and Infrastructure. Recruit and train more border personnel, especially in remote and vulnerable areas. Upgrade border posts with modern facilities, communication tools, and rapid response capabilities. Promote Community-Based Security Initiatives, engage local communities in border areas through sensitization programs and community policing. Support the formation of vigilante groups and neighborhood watch networks to enhance grassroots intelligence. Implement Anti-Corruption Reforms, introduce strict oversight mechanisms to monitor the conduct of border officials, enforce disciplinary measures and whistleblower protections to deter bribery and collusion. Reassess Nigeria's implementation of ECOWAS Free Movement policies to balance regional integration with national security. Advocate for joint border patrols and intelligence-sharing agreements with neighboring countries, increase funding for border security operations and ensure transparent utilization of resources. Establish independent audit bodies to track spending and evaluate project outcomes.

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