

POROUS BORDERS AND INSECURITY: A STUDY OF NIGERIA-NIGER BORDER

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ABSTRACT

Borders remain a vital component of a nation's security architecture, serving as both the first line of defence and the final safeguard of territorial integrity. In many developing countries, particularly in Africa, borders are problematic due to their porosity and inadequate demarcation. This paper examines the factors contributing to the porous nature of the Nigeria–Niger border. It employs a desk review research method and draws on structural–functional theory as its analytical framework. It argues that the Nigeria–Niger border is porous not only because of its vast expanse but also due to unprofessional and corrupt practices among border officials, which are consistently exploited by non-state actors such as bandits and terrorists. These vulnerabilities have enabled widespread insecurity affecting both nations. The paper further contends that the porous border has facilitated significant economic sabotage and a breakdown of law and order, posing serious threats to the territorial sovereignty of Nigeria and Niger. The study concludes that the Nigeria–Niger border is inadequately secured, allowing armed non-state actors to operate with impunity and potentially contributing to state fragility. It therefore recommends that both governments invest in advanced technological surveillance tools, including drones and sensors, and address the underlying drivers of crime, such as poverty and unemployment, through robust economic and developmental policies.

Keywords: Borders, demarcation, insecurity, Nigeria-Niger border, porous

INTRODUCTION

A 'borderless world' remains a core aspiration of globalisation; however, borders continue to serve as enduring structures that demarcate states and shape social, economic, and political relations. In developed countries, border security is a critical component of national security. The degree to which a nation protects and manages its borders, ensuring territorial integrity, sovereign authority, and internal socio-economic development, significantly influences the strength and effectiveness of its overall security architecture. Effective border management constitutes a nation's first line of defence and last frontier of territorial integrity, as no country can function in isolation from the movement of people

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and goods across its borders. Conversely, the failure to police and secure borders often results in heightened insecurity (Adewoyin, 2019; Oladotun & Ferim, 2024).

In many developing countries, particularly in Africa, borders are frequently depicted as impediments to political and economic progress. This perception is reflected in the numerous challenges threatening the stability of many African states (Nasiru et al., 2023; Dera & Chinedu, 2022). Kenwick and Simmons (2022) argue that African borders are generally porous, with most countries except South Africa maintaining some of the world's most lenient border-crossing regimes. Beth (2023) attributes this to two major factors. The first is the colonial legacy of border demarcation. Colonial powers partitioned Africa to consolidate spheres of influence based on economic and political interests, creating arbitrary boundaries that cut across cultural and ethnic groups. This has made it difficult for many African states to effectively manage their long, cross-cultural borderlines. The second factor is the inability of African governments to adequately police their borders, especially in contexts where internal security threats persist. As a result, borders are easily traversed, increasing exposure to risks such as trafficking, smuggling, and other transnational crimes. Consequently, terrorists, armed bandits, militias, herders, and other non-state actors move freely across borders, inflicting violence and posing significant threats to continental security (Abdulkarim & Yesmin, 2021).

Porous borders have long undermined Nigeria's efforts to combat insecurity. Nigeria's borders with neighbouring states are considered among the most porous in Africa (Risk Control, 2023). According to Abdulkarim and Yesmin (2021), the persistent porosity of Nigeria's borders facilitates the smuggling of illegal goods such as firearms and narcotics while also enabling the unchecked entry of drug traffickers, bandits, terrorists, refugees, hardened criminals, and other anonymous groups. The continued infiltration of Nigeria's borders, particularly in the North-East, by terrorist organisations, armed herders, and bandits notorious for criminal violence, has resulted in extensive loss of life, destruction of property, humanitarian crises, and severe security and economic threats to both Nigeria and Niger (Hassene, 2021). Chinedu and Omolehin (2021) note that eyewitness accounts and victim testimonies frequently suggest that malevolent non-state actors enjoy unrestricted movement across the poorly policed Nigeria–Niger border. Border states such as Kebbi, Katsina, and Sokoto, which share boundaries with the Niger Republic regions, particularly the Maradi, have become hotspots for banditry and terrorism, with armed groups crossing the border to attack vulnerable communities in both countries.

Despite the efforts of various stakeholders, the Nigeria–Niger border remains highly porous, posing substantial risks not only to Nigeria but also to the Niger Republic. Given the persistent and escalating threats associated with border insecurity, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on borders and national security. While several scholars such as Ogbe and Onyemekiahian (2021) and Ogbonna (2023) have examined porous borders and their security implications for Nigeria, few studies have focused specifically on the Nigeria–Niger border. Moreover, existing research predominantly emphasises the impact on Nigeria, with limited attention to the consequences for the Niger Republic. This paper addresses this gap by analysing the Nigeria–Niger border and its security implications for both countries.

This qualitative paper adopts a desk review method, drawing on scholarly works, journal articles, conference papers, reports, newspapers, official documents, archival sources, and other relevant materials on porous borders and insecurity. The paper is organised into four sections. The first provides the introduction, conceptual clarification, and theoretical framework. The second examines the Nigeria–Niger border situation, associated security challenges, and the drivers of persistent porosity. The third discusses the effects of border porosity on Nigeria and Niger. The final section presents the conclusion and recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Porous Border

States are defined by their borders, which constitute the essential elements that give them form. Borders are crucial in delineating a nation’s territorial extent and are established to protect the resources, natural or human, contained within. They carry strategic significance, serve as markers of a state’s sovereign domain, reflect the nature of relations with neighbouring countries, and act as reminders of historical or ongoing animosities between states (Simmons, 2019). A border is a relatively static model of territorial demarcation that may be physically represented by man-made structures such as walls, fences, or boundary stones, or by natural features such as rivers, mountain ranges, or trees, which may acquire symbolic meaning as boundary markers (Lee & North, 2016).

Adeshina (2019) states that borders are lines, either natural or artificial, that divide geographic territories, countries, states, and cities politically. Borders delineate the territorial jurisdiction of a governing authority and limit its capacity to enact and enforce laws beyond those boundaries. They are primarily used to define and distinguish places geographically and to demarcate the social, political, economic, and cultural attributes associated with distinct topographical areas (Diener & Hagen, 2012). Borders function as institutions that organise political and economic activities for individuals and governments. They facilitate cooperation between states and their citizens by regulating the movement of people and goods. They also establish distinctions between citizens and non-citizens, thereby determining eligibility for welfare benefits and other forms of state-provided social assistance (Carter & Goemans, 2014; Gibler, 2012).

The purpose of borders is to prevent unauthorised individuals and goods from entering a territory, thereby promoting social cohesion, security, and the well-being of citizens. Borders are intended to be securely guarded, and when they are not, they become porous. Asiimwe (2023) defines a porous border as one that is insufficiently guarded to prevent the uncontrolled entry and exit of persons and commodities, thereby jeopardising the security, peace, stability, and development of a state and its people. A porous border involves more than an absence of physical barriers; it also reflects deficiencies in the

systems, structures, laws, and technologies required to prevent the movement of dangerous or illicit goods and individuals.

A border that is inadequately regulated or secured, allowing the easy and unauthorised movement of people and items such as weapons and drugs, is therefore considered porous. In such areas, cross-border activities often occur unnoticed due to limited physical barriers, low surveillance, or weak enforcement (Nasiru et al., 2023). For this paper, a porous border is understood as a national boundary that is difficult to police and permits the unchecked movement of illegal individuals and items.

Insecurity

Extant literature has linked insecurity to a state's inability to deploy its security apparatuses effectively to preserve territorial integrity and protect lives and property from threats. The powerlessness of a nation to defend its resources and population against dangers, whether originating internally or externally, constitutes insecurity (Achumba et al., 2013; Okonkwo & Anigbogu, 2019). Insecurity refers to the incapacity of state security mechanisms to prevent or control harm, uncertainty, and fear, all of which can hinder peace and national development (Nkwatcho & Nathaniel, 2018). Ikehukwu (2019) argues that insecurity does not arise merely from the existence of vulnerabilities or potential dangers, but from the absence of a comprehensive strategy capable of addressing emerging threats swiftly, professionally, and effectively. Saleh (2021) similarly conceives insecurity as a nation's susceptibility to threats or harm against which it is unable to defend itself.

Insecurity may therefore be understood as a condition in which a nation is vulnerable to threats or danger, characterised by exposure to violence, hostility, and extremism. A state's relative incapacity to repel such challenges to its core interests and values constitutes insecurity (Augustine, 2022; Omede, 2012). Yusuf and Mohd (2023) conceptualise insecurity as a collapse of progress and prosperity, driven by civic, social, political, religious, historical, or ethno-regional factors that fuel recurrent conflict and the loss of life and property. Under conditions of insecurity, people, information, and assets are unsafe and exposed to adversarial individuals, influences, and actions. According to Hadiza (2022), citizens are unable to carry out their daily activities due to persistent threats and disruptions to their lives and possessions. For this paper, insecurity is conceptualised as the potential danger, threats, and vulnerabilities experienced by people and property as a result of the government's inability to protect and secure its territory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts structural functional theory, which originated in the writings of Herbert Spencer and was later developed by scholars such as Durkheim (1895) and Almond and Powell (1966). The central assumption of the theory is that society is understood as a complex system composed of interdependent institutions, each performing specific functions that collectively contribute to the stability and equilibrium of the whole. The theory posits that societies inherently seek to maintain order and stability; thus, when

disruptions or dysfunctions occur, mechanisms of social control or adaptation are employed to restore balance. Within political systems, an integral part of society, political institutions play essential roles and are expected to adapt to evolving demands (Almond & Powell, 1966). When dysfunctions arise, political institutions may be altered or replaced by structures better suited to fulfilling societal needs (Mahner & Mario, 2001).

Despite its usefulness, the theory has been widely criticised. Scholars such as Gouldner (1972) and Homans (1964) argue that it underestimates the impact of external shocks on social systems. Such shocks can alter the interactions among a system's components, disrupt stability, and potentially lead to significant reorganisation or outright collapse. Critics further contend that the theory's ambitious aim of providing a comprehensive account of society relies heavily on theoretical speculation with limited empirical substantiation.

Nonetheless, structural functional theory is valuable in the context of this study for several reasons. First, the Nigeria–Niger border performs a critical function by regulating the movement of people, goods, and resources between the two countries. Through border governance, both Nigeria and the Niger Republic control entry and exit, manage migration, facilitate trade, uphold security, and enforce economic policies. However, the failure of key institutions, particularly security agencies, to effectively enforce border regulations has created significant vulnerabilities. These institutional failures have allowed criminal and armed non-state actors to infiltrate and inflict harm on both nations (Chukwurah, 2022). Poor funding, inadequate personnel, and weak operational capacity have further impeded security agencies, enabling illicit trade and cross-border crimes. As a result, criminal groups continue to operate with impunity, leading to loss of lives and destruction of property. Adegboye and Dube (2024) similarly found that the Nigeria–Niger border has become a conduit for the smuggling of contraband and arms used by armed groups to terrorise border communities.

Second, borders help preserve national identity and social cohesion. Third, they safeguard public health and serve as expressions of legal sovereignty. Borders mediate the interaction between internal and external forces, acting not only as physical divides but also as dynamic instruments of state regulation. A secure and well-managed border contributes to social order, economic stability, and national security, key conditions for the smooth functioning of society. Given the persistent porosity of the Nigeria–Niger border, the territorial integrity and security of both countries are continually compromised. Border communities remain exposed to constant threats that undermine peace and development. The porosity of this border has hindered progress in many affected communities, as development cannot flourish in the absence of security. Abubakar (2024) affirms that the Nigeria–Niger border, expected to serve as the first line of defence and the last bastion of territorial integrity, has been severely compromised due to dysfunctions in border security governance, creating vulnerabilities that armed groups exploit to threaten peace, security, and development in both nations.

NIGERIA-NIGER BORDER: SITUATIONAL REVIEW

The evolution of the Nigeria–Niger border can be traced to the colonial legacy and the partitioning of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885. The border was described as unmarked, difficult to identify in many areas, and largely unmanned, which made it highly permeable (Afaha & Ani, 2022). It stretches across several communities in the northern Nigerian states of Sokoto, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Borno, Yobe, and Zamfara, as well as the Nigerien regions of Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder. It remains an important transit corridor for both countries. The terrain consists of sparse vegetation and becomes increasingly arid as it extends northward into the Niger Republic, where it gradually merges with the Sahara Desert. Its vastness and harsh climatic conditions make effective monitoring extremely challenging, and the desert environment presents significant difficulties for border patrols. Although much of the region is dry, certain areas near the Komadugu Yobe River serve as more clearly defined natural boundaries; however, these features are seasonal and subject to fluctuations in water levels (Idrissa, 2020; Hassane, 2021). There are approximately 37 major and minor points of entry from Nigeria into Niger, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: States and Communities in Nigeria along the Nigeria-Niger Border

S/N	State in Nigeria	Border Communities	Number of Borders
1.	Borno	Gashagar, Damasak, Malam Fatori, Baga doro (Doron Baga), Wulgo, Gamboru-Ngala, Rigal, Jilbe, Kumshe, Banki, Kukawa and Ashiga Shiya.	12
2.	Jigawa	Maigatari	1
3.	Katsina	Ibiya-Magama, Jibiya Maje, Mai-Adua, Yar daji, Kongolom, Babban Mutum, Zango, Birnin Kukaand Dankama	9
4.	Kebbi	Bagudo, Maje, Lolo, Dole-Kaina, Kamba, Kangiwa and Bachaka.	7
5.	Sokoto	Illela, Gada and Sabon Birni.	3
6.	Yobe	Nguru, Machina, Telo Tulao, and Geidam	4
7.	Zamfara	Gurbin Bore	1

Source: Nigeria Customs Service (2019)

Table 1 shows that the Nigeria–Niger border is extensive, spanning seven states in northern Nigeria and comprising 37 major and minor crossing points. Table 2 further

illustrates the major border crossings that the Niger Republic shares with Nigeria from its side.

Table 2: Regions and Departments in Niger along the Nigeria-Niger Border

S/N	Region in Niger	Border Departments with Major Crossing	Number of Borders
1.	Diffa	Bosso, Diffa and Maine-Soroa	3
2.	Dosso	Dogondoutchi and Gaya	2
3.	Maradi	Gazaoua, Guidan Roundji and Madarounfa	3
4.	Tahoua	Birni N’Konni, Illela and Madaoua	3
5.	Zinder	Dungass, Magaria, Matameye and Mirriah	4

Source: Hassane (2021), Logistic Cluster (2025)

It also shows that the Niger Republic has five regions that share borders with Nigeria, comprising 15 departments and 15 major border crossings.

Figure 1 further illustrates the major and minor points of entry and exit along the Nigeria–Niger border.

Figure I: Map of States and Regions along the Nigeria-Niger Border.



Source: Hassane (2021)

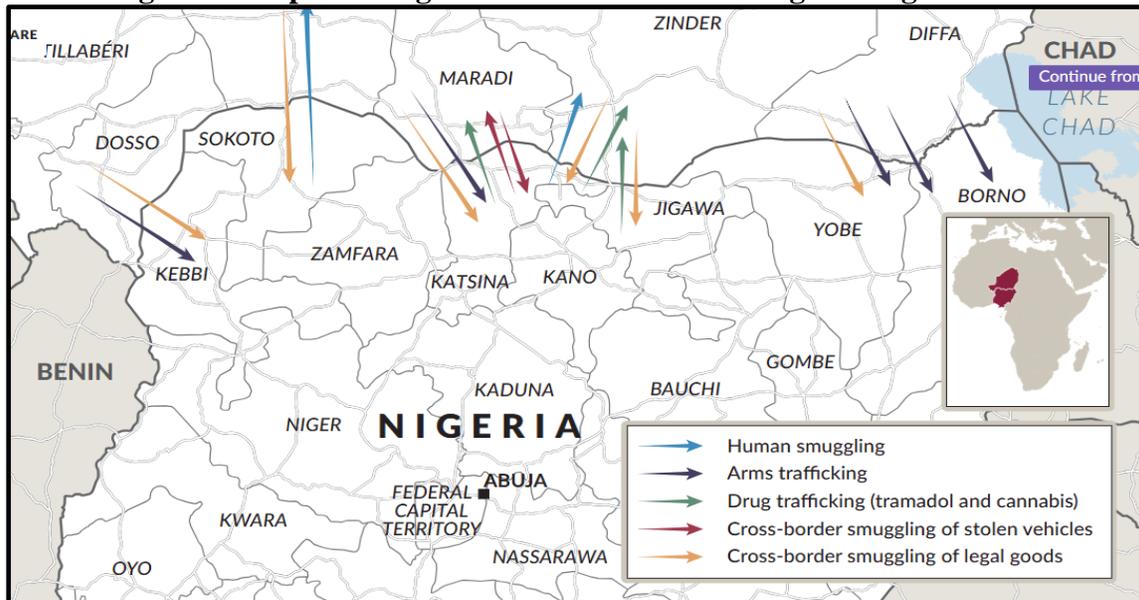
The Hausa-Fulani, Kanuri, Tuareg, Tubu, and Zarma constitute the major ethnic groups residing in the border communities of both countries. These communities engage in cross-border trade, cattle herding, and various forms of cross-cultural interaction, often traversing the border without realising they have crossed an international boundary. The Fulani, who are predominantly pastoralists, migrate seasonally with their livestock in search of pasture and water, a long-standing tradition sustained across generations. Due to the porous nature of the border, livestock frequently move freely between both territories (Dahiru, 2023; Idrissa, 2020).

The region also hosts several border markets, notably the Konni market in Birni N’Konni in Niger’s Tahoua region, which draws buyers and sellers from both countries and beyond. These markets reinforce not only economic exchange but also cultural and social ties between border communities (Garba et al., 2019). According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity (2024), the Nigeria–Niger border is economically strategic, recording official annual cross-border trade volumes of approximately USD 278 million in exports and USD 91.6 million in imports.

NIGERIA-NIGER BORDER AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

The Nigeria–Niger border has long created significant vulnerabilities due to its permeability, exposing both countries to numerous national security threats. These include terrorism, banditry, herder–farmer conflicts, and various forms of trafficking. The border also serves as a major conduit for illicit trade, particularly in communities such as Illela in Sokoto State, Dole-Kaina in Kebbi State, and the Maradi region in the Niger Republic, which are well known for the smuggling of contraband goods. These activities involve paddy rice, petroleum products, especially petrol and diesel, as well as the trafficking of humans, drugs, and arms (Animashaun, 2023; Shehu & Dalha, 2023; Zachariah & Ngwu, 2023). Figure 2 illustrates these dynamics by depicting the illicit flow of goods and people across the Nigeria–Niger border.

Figure 2: Map Showing Illicit Flows Across the Nigeria-Niger border



Source: *Global Initiative (2023)*

Figure 2 also shows the directional patterns of human, arms, stolen vehicles, and drug smuggling from the Niger Republic into Nigeria. Human smuggling largely occurs along the Sokoto–Tahoua corridor, with individuals transported from Sokoto State in Nigeria to Tahoua in the Niger Republic. Arms trafficking, by contrast, primarily flows from Maradi and Diffa in the Niger Republic into Borno and Katsina States in Nigeria. Drug trafficking, particularly involving tramadol and cannabis, as well as the movement of stolen vehicles, takes place mainly between Katsina State in Nigeria and Maradi in the Niger Republic. These activities reflect the movement of illicit goods across the shared border. However, the same border is also used to smuggle legal goods in both directions, underscoring its dual role as a route for both legitimate and illegitimate cross-border exchanges.

Furthermore, Kyari (2020) argues that armed groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State’s West Africa Province (ISWAP), the latter being an offshoot of the former, have consistently taken advantage of the permeability of the Nigeria–Niger border to carry out cross-border attacks in both countries. Nigerian and Nigérien insurgent groups exploit border communities such as Damasak, Malam Fatori, Baga and Metele in Borno State, as well as Diffa and Bosso in the Niger Republic, conducting frequent and well-planned raids. Boko Haram and ISWAP have occupied the vast ungoverned spaces along the Yobe River between Damasak and Malam Fatori, which have become operational hubs and flashpoints for violence. They also maintain operational bases in Kanamma and Geidam; the selection of these locations appears to be linked to their remoteness, distance from urban distractions, and reduced visibility to security agencies. These areas are bordered by bodies of water and forested terrain, making them easier for insurgents to defend (Kyari, 2020). Between 2011 and 2023, Boko Haram, taking advantage of the porosity of the border, was

responsible for approximately 66,768 deaths across six northern Nigerian states, particularly in communities situated along the Nigeria–Niger border (Statista, 2023). In March 2021 alone, terrorists attacked the Tahoua region in Niger, near the Nigeria–Niger border, killing around 137 people, one of the deadliest incidents in the country’s history (Al Jazeera, 2021). These terrorist groups move freely across the border, perpetuating violence without restraint or fear of apprehension.

Cross-border banditry is also a persistent phenomenon along the Nigeria–Niger border. These bandits operate from multiple bases on both sides of the frontier, although several studies argue that the majority of them originate from Nigeria (Kars & Clara, 2024). They can access large woodland areas such as Baban Raffi, which straddles the border between Nigeria and the Nigerien departments of Guidan-Roundji and Madarounfa, as well as the extensive forest zones of Gandou and Rugu in Nigeria, which border the Nigerien departments of Doutchi and Konni. These terrains provide natural cover, making it difficult for security forces to apprehend or dislodge them.

Bandits also maintain camps in forested areas within the Niger Republic, including Bangi, Dankano, Galmi, Masallata and Yar Basira. Criminal gangs, particularly those from the Asbinawa and Fulani groups, frequently traverse the border to collaborate with other bandits operating in Illela, Isa, Gada, Gudu, Goronyo and Sabon Birni in Sokoto State, where they have carried out repeated attacks (International Crisis Group, 2021; The Cable, 2021). Adeyemi (2024) argues that the wave of terror experienced in communities along the Nigeria–Niger border is largely facilitated by the porous nature of the frontier, which enables bandits to strike defenceless populations without hindrance.

Many of these bandits are heavily armed and travel in groups on motorbikes with the intention to kill, rustle livestock, rape and kidnap for ransom. The scourge has resulted in the deaths of more than 6,600 people in Nigerian border communities, and around 80,000 individuals fled to neighbouring countries for safety between 2020 and 2024 (Zubaida, 2024). Although there are no official records on deaths caused by banditry in Niger, approximately 20,000 Nigeriens were internally displaced in the Maradi region in 2021 due to related violence (ICG, 2021).

Apart from this, conflicts between pastoralists and farmers have become increasingly brutal in recent years due to the proliferation of arms. Seasonal migrations by herders in search of suitable grazing areas, such as grass savannahs, deciduous woodland and water sources, are very common along the Nigeria–Niger border (Onyekachi, 2018). These movements typically involve travelling into northern Nigeria or the southern part of the Niger Republic, following routes along rivers and stream valleys. Over time, these migrations have created cross-border transhumance corridors consisting of vaccination points, resting areas and other pastoral infrastructure, many of which are found along the Nigeria–Niger frontier.

During these seasonal movements, pastoralists are often forced to compete with farmers for increasingly scarce land and water, resulting in frequent clashes that have escalated in recent years into what some scholars describe as pastoral terrorism (Ejiofor,

2022). Although some studies have found that Nigerien pastoralists are generally law-abiding and non-violent (Higazi, 2022), Shuaibu and Abubakar (2023) observed that occasional confrontations occur with farmers whose lands lie along established transhumance routes, particularly when herders' cattle are rustled by bandits. Nevertheless, the majority of cross-border conflicts involve herders from Nigeria who clash with Nigerien farmers during their seasonal migrations. Insecurity Insight (2023) corroborates this trend, reporting clashes in November 2022 between both groups in Birni N'Konni, a border community along the Nigeria–Niger border, which resulted in the deaths of six farmers.

Moreover, the recent surge in attacks by the Lakurawa jihadist group has become increasingly worrying for both Nigeria and Niger. The origins of the group remain controversial. Some historians contend that Lakurawa is an offshoot of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahel (ISGS) that infiltrated Sokoto and Kebbi states along the Nigeria–Niger border; others argue that Lakurawa entered Nigeria at the invitation of communities in Sokoto and Kebbi states, seeking assistance from Mali to combat bandits and cattle rustlers (Onibiyo & Kefas, 2024; Yakubu, 2024). Regardless of their origins, Lakurawa has significantly exacerbated insecurity in border communities. According to *The Guardian* (2025), an attack attributed to Lakurawa in Kebbi State resulted in the death of 11 people. The group has also established camps in these communities, imposed its ideology, and extorted vulnerable populations. As a result, the Nigeria–Niger border has become a conduit for threats and violence that destabilise borderland communities (Jamiu, 2024).

DRIVERS OF PERSISTENT POROSITY OF NIGERIA-NIGER BORDER

Several driving factors are responsible for the persistent porosity of the Nigeria-Niger, some of which are discussed hereunder:

Large Expanse of the Border

The Nigeria–Niger border stretches approximately 1,497 kilometres and comprises forests, rivers, and rugged terrain, making effective patrolling and monitoring extremely challenging (Adeyemi & Abubakar, 2024; Idrissa, 2020). The difficult landscape and remote locations, which limit the reach of law enforcement, increase the likelihood of unauthorised crossings. A recent analysis by the Nigerian Institute for Security Studies (2024) confirmed that the Nigeria–Niger border region is highly vulnerable to exploitation by traffickers due to its vastness, complexity, and inadequate infrastructure. The expansive terrain allows armed groups to conceal themselves easily and to launch surprise attacks or ambushes on security personnel who lack comprehensive knowledge of the area. The border is also poorly demarcated; in many places, it has no physical markers, with only border names such as Kongolom, Jibia and Magama in Katsina State; Illela in Sokoto State; and Ruwawuri and Kamba in Kebbi State (Daily Trust, 2021).

Poverty and Unemployment in the Region

Residents in many communities along the Nigeria–Niger border face high levels of unemployment and poverty, and often survive by smuggling illegal items, particularly rice and petroleum products. Dange (2024) contends that communities along the Illela–Konni axis depend heavily on cross-border illegal activities due to widespread deprivation and joblessness. As a result, many residents have turned to smuggling as a means of livelihood.

Aminu (2021) similarly argued that the residents of Jibia, a border community, are among the most impoverished and marginalised in Nigeria, with little meaningful development, leaving them with no alternative but to rely on trafficking for survival. Likewise, the southern regions of the Niger Republic, particularly Maradi, suffer from acute poverty, drought, and famine, compelling residents to engage in smuggling as a coping strategy.

Lucrative Nature of Smuggling

Smuggling is a highly profitable enterprise in Nigeria, and the Nigeria–Niger border exemplifies this reality. It involves an extensive network of major criminals and cartels operating across the region. Agence (2023) estimated that informal trade at the Nigeria–Niger border in 2022 amounted to approximately \$683 million. Communities along the border have turned smuggling into a lucrative venture that not only guarantees basic survival but also offers a quick route to wealth. This web of illegal activities has become so entrenched that many residents no longer perceive it as wrongdoing, and it frequently benefits from the cooperation of local transporters and security personnel (Dange, 2024).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2022) reported that criminal syndicates and armed groups smuggle arms, drugs, such as tramadol, and humans into Niger through communities in Sokoto, Katsina, and Jigawa states via the Nigeria–Niger border. Human traffickers have established operational bases along the border, yielding substantial profits, particularly by exploiting currency exchange rate differentials (The Nation, 2024; UNODC, 2022). Aminu (2021) also noted that residents of several border communities in the Niger Republic prefer smuggled petroleum products, as they are cheaper than those produced by Chinese oil firms operating in the country.

Unprofessional and Poor Border Management Practices

Border security personnel frequently engage in bribery and corruption, thereby compromising standard border practices. Qosim (2024) reported that 40 senior Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) officers were arrested for their involvement in a multibillion-naira bribery scandal. Adeyemi (2020) further noted that Nigerian security agencies allow illegal migrants to enter the country through border communities in Sokoto State, adjacent to the Niger Republic, sometimes for as little as ₦200 to ₦3,000. Similarly, Gift et al. (2025) observed that Nigerian border security officials along the Nigeria–Niger frontier demand bribes ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 CFA francs from Nigerian travellers seeking entry

into the Niger Republic. These practices demonstrate that proper border procedures have been subverted; as Adeyemi (2020) succinctly stated, what is “prohibited by law [is] permitted by bribery”.

EFFECTS OF BORDER POROSITY ON NIGERIA AND NIGER REPUBLIC

There are several negative effects that the porous nature of the Nigeria-Niger border has on the two countries. The most significant of these are discussed below.

Economic Sabotage

Smuggling across the porous Nigeria–Niger border has significant economic consequences for both countries. Import taxes and customs duties are evaded when goods are trafficked illegally into Nigeria or Niger, and local industries struggle to compete with the influx of cheap smuggled products (Ibrahim & Singh, 2021). On 24 and 25 February 2024, the Customs Joint Patrol Team and the Nigeria Customs Service intercepted a lorry carrying contraband perfume soap and 15 lorries loaded with subsidised food items along the border in Jigawa and Sokoto States. Such activities constitute serious economic sabotage and pose security risks to both nations by undermining the profitability of local manufacturers. Some smugglers reportedly claim that selling these goods to dealers in the Niger Republic yields higher profit margins due to favourable exchange rates than selling them in the domestic market, for which the goods were originally subsidised (Maduabuchi, 2024; The Nation, 2024).

Increased Insecurity

The porosity of the Nigeria–Niger border has also contributed to rising insecurity in both countries. Over the years, trans-border crimes have increased as criminal syndicates infiltrate communities on either side of the border to perpetrate violence. According to the Global Organised Crime Index (2023), Nigeria’s criminality score rose from 7.15 to 7.28, with a resilience score of 5.79, while the Niger Republic’s score increased from 5.70 to 6.01 within just two years. Trans-border crimes such as human and drug trafficking, illicit arms trading, banditry and terrorism have become persistent security threats, particularly in border communities. Criminal groups can move across the border to attack vulnerable areas without detection due to its porous nature (Adeyemi, 2024). These groups have grown more audacious and increasingly difficult to eliminate because of their continual access to illegal arms. The Global Initiative (2024) reported that between March 2022 and April 2023, more than 10,000 rounds of ammunition were seized from arms dealers and traffickers supplying criminal gangs. In one instance, an individual was arrested in Agadez, the Niger Republic, in possession of large sums of cash intended for the purchase of ammunition for the Nigerian bandit leader Dankarami. Numerous reports also indicate the presence of interconnected trafficking networks operating in Jibiya, a border town straddling the Nigeria–Niger border, which supply illicit arms and weapons to bandits and terrorist groups in both countries. These smuggled arms have fuelled insecurity across northern Nigeria and southern Niger Republic for many years (Global Initiative, 2024).

Breakdown on Law and Order

Law and order are difficult to enforce in communities located near the Nigeria–Niger border. These areas have become increasingly ravaged, with living conditions deteriorating as criminal groups tighten their control. Aminu (2021) argues that the porous border enables the easy movement of illegal arms, which are frequently used by bandits and insurgents to perpetrate armed violence and undermine law and order in many border communities in northern Nigeria and the southern region of the Niger Republic. Ogbonna et al. (2023) note that these communities have become terrifying places to live, as maintaining and enforcing order has become exceedingly difficult. In the southern Niger Republic, numerous communities host terrorist camps involved in recruitment and training. Residents are subjected to extortion, levies, and taxes, and are often indoctrinated into the ideological and religious doctrines of these armed groups. Failure to comply with these dictates can result in severe repercussions for the affected communities. State authorities have repeatedly struggled to restore law and order, as military operations have resulted in high casualties and further devastation in many of these areas (Abubakar, 2024).

Threat to Sovereignty

Malignant non-state actors have made governance of the Nigeria–Niger border areas extremely challenging, occupying many border communities where the government has been unable to assert authority (Dera & Okoye, 2022). These actors have posed a significant threat to Nigeria’s sovereignty. For instance, at the height of its insurgency in the Northeastern region, Boko Haram exerted substantial influence and control over numerous communities in Borno State, even declaring an Islamic caliphate in Gwoza Local Government Area (Al Jazeera, 2014). This situation has largely been facilitated by the porosity of the Nigeria–Niger border, which has allowed terrorists to infiltrate and exploit these communities over several decades.

EFFORTS AT CURBING INSECURITY IN NIGERIA-NIGER BORDER

Successive governments have, at various times, implemented measures to secure the Nigeria–Niger border and reduce the prevalence of insecurity; however, these efforts have largely proven ineffective. In 2003, following reports by Colonel Hameed Ali (Retd) on the open purchase of firearms along the Nigeria–Niger border, the Nigerian government closed the border for seven days, from 9 to 15 August (Aliome, 2019). Similarly, in 2019, during the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, the Federal Government closed the border in response to widespread smuggling in the area. However, this closure caused significant disruption, exacerbating economic difficulties as prices of staple food items rose sharply and employment levels dropped dramatically (Oyigebe et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the governments of both countries have collaborated to address insecurity along the border. In 2015, the Nigeria–Niger Joint Border Patrol was established to enhance security and coordinate operations against criminal gangs in border

communities. While the initiative disrupted several criminal networks, it faced significant challenges, including resource constraints, personnel shortages, lack of sustained political commitment, and the border closure following the July 2023 coup in the Niger Republic, which rendered the body largely ineffective (Abubakar, 2024). In addition, the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS) in 2019 undertook the closure of stations within 20 kilometres of the international borders in the northwestern states, particularly those implicated in smuggling. For example, in Sokoto State, the NCS shut down Forte stations after discovering they were being used to store petroleum products for illegal transport into the Niger Republic (Adebayo, 2020). Beyond government interventions, religious and traditional leaders on both sides of the border have sought to resolve conflicts, foster social cohesion, and discourage illegal activities through moral suasion. Although these efforts have had some positive impact, they have not been highly effective in deterring impoverished residents from engaging in smuggling (Abubakar, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The porous Nigeria–Niger border poses a serious threat to the national security of both Nigeria and Niger. The continuous infiltration by malevolent non-state actors, particularly bandits and terrorists, has caused havoc in both countries, while trans-border crimes such as smuggling, human trafficking, and drug trafficking have increased significantly. This situation persists due to the border’s vastness, poor and unprofessional management practices, the profitability of smuggling, and the widespread poverty and unemployment in the region. If the Nigeria–Niger border remains largely unsecured, the sovereignty, security, and socio-economic well-being of both countries will be severely compromised.

Policy Recommendations

In light of this, the study recommends that the governments of both nations prioritise border security by properly demarcating the Nigeria–Niger border and introducing automated border barriers. Such measures would help curb smuggling, as authorities could implement vehicle profiling at major border crossings, conducting detailed inspections on high-risk vehicles. Automated border demarcations equipped with X-ray scanners would enable the detection of concealed compartments and facilitate the flagging of suspicious vehicles. Governments should also invest in advanced border technologies, such as drones and sensors, to monitor movements across the border’s difficult and rugged terrain. These systems would alert security personnel to the presence of malignant and malevolent non-state actors attempting to enter border communities via illegal routes. The use of technology allows for the neutralisation of terrorist and armed groups without direct military engagement; for example, armed drones such as the AR-1 and P365 pistol-armed aerial drones can be deployed effectively, even in hostage situations. Given that borders constitute the first line of defence, it is both prudent and necessary to allocate increased funding to strengthen border security.

Furthermore, the MIDAS digital border management system should be improved by addressing its existing technical issues. This would enable real-time data sharing and

extend the system's coverage to the more rugged areas along the Nigeria–Niger border. Additionally, stronger cooperation between Nigeria and the Niger Republic is essential to develop strategic measures for securing the border and combating crime effectively. Finally, both governments must tackle the underlying drivers of crime through improved economic and developmental policies, while concerted efforts should be made to eradicate corruption among border control personnel.

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