

## Porous borders and banditry in the North-West Zone of Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*Border porousness and its attendant negative impacts on nation's security and territorial integrity is increasingly becoming a serious concern for third world countries, especially third world countries of Africa. This review paper assesses the relationship between porous borders and banditry in the North-West zone of Nigeria. The paper is anchored on the weak state theory as its analytical foundation. The historical descriptive approach was adopted as a design for generating and analyzing data for the paper. As such the paper relied mainly on qualitative data which were gleaned from Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) and Observations. This was complimented with information gotten from secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles and periodicals from agencies of government, as well as newspapers. Generated data were analyzed by the use of the qualitative content analysis method. The paper revealed among others; that the porosity of borders along the northwest zone of Nigeria make it possible for arms and criminal elements to be smuggled into the country; and these does not only lead to banditry but it also sustains the act of banditry in this part of the country. Accordingly, the paper recommends that there should be inter-agency collaboration, increased community engagement, regular border patrols, security re-enforcement and international cooperation in other to foster collaborative and coordinated border surveillance with the view to enhancing mutual border security.*

**Keywords:** *Borders, Banditry, Security, North West, Nigeria*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Nations around the world have continued to witness different dynamics of conflicts and threats to security which has remained either persistent or protracted based on certain factors. Some of them portrays an outlook of peaceful agitations, while others are diffused protests and yet others armed and violent leading to destruction of properties, wanton killings, assassinations, murder. The situation calls for persistent demands to ensure the return of peace, tranquility in the affected nations or zones.

Since the return to democratic rule, Nigeria has faced serious internal security challenges – the most critical ones currently being those posed Jama'a Ahl as-Sunna Li-da'wa waal-Jihad,

popularly known as Boko Haram, the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS); and the Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslim (JNIM) insurgency, predominantly in the North-East states; the “Fulani Herdsmen” attacks in states like Benue, Plateau, Zamfara, Taraba and Kaduna; Niger-Delta militancy and spates of kidnappings all over the country (Okoli and Ugwu, 2019). There are also security challenges posed by ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based conflicts, violent crimes, and election related violence, including the secessionists struggles in the South-East part of the country (Adebakun, 2019).

Another crisis that recently became noticeable in Nigeria's Northwest is the ongoing activities of armed groups referred locally as 'banditry which has affected most of the population living in Kaduna, Katsina, and Zamfara States. Largely unconnected to the terrorist activities in the Northeast, banditry became noticeable in 2014 with cattle rustling activity. It became progressively worse in 2016 when the bandits started killing people in the focal states. Obviously, these challenges impede socio-political stability and economic development not only in Nigeria but in the West African sub-region.

Banditry is a violent organized crime carried out by either a person or group of persons who are outlawed, proscribed and marauding elements called bandits. They move from place to place, town to town (trans-locational) and across nations (transnational) causing mayhem, destroying properties, farmlands, looting and carrying out heinous crimes such as kidnapping, rape, killings, arson and so on. They would often commit these acts with the use of machetes, bows and arrows, fabricated rifles, axe and in this present time automatic sophisticated weapons such as rifles and guns. They carry out these acts while operating from government unoccupied spaces often called ungoverned spaces which include forests, mountainous regions, highlands and gullies of difficult terrain as well as invaded empty villages whose citizens have migrated to safe havens and possibly remain displaced due to the presence of these bandits/outlaws.

Banditry in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon. It had existed prior to the 1980s in various forms across the country. It is a violent crime whose lethality has evolved from an old practice into organised crime conducted with immense sophistication and efficiency. It is now characterised by the use of modern weapons, accompanied by rape, armed robbery, kidnapping activities, cattle rustling, as well as organised attacks on villages and communities in Nigeria's west zone. The bandits in this zone tend to use the existing large forests area extending and connecting through the states to execute violent acts. They use the expansive and dense forests to disrupt rural areas and attack commuters on the highway. The pervasive banditry and its associated threats to security have enveloped the Northwest zone of Nigeria, particularly, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto and States and have become a worrisome national security issue of public concern (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016).

Reports indicate the flourishing of bandits groups, whose members were seen displaying automatic weapons which they deploy in killing people, kidnapping and pillaging cows (Olaniyan, 2018). It was reported that between October, 2013 and March, 2014, 7,000 cattle were rustled from commercial livestock farms and traditional herders in Northern Nigeria (Bashir, 2014; Tauna, 2016) while about 330 attacks were made by bandits and 1,460

deaths were recorded between January and July, 2019 (Abdullahi, 2019). In most cases, the bandits killed and maimed the people and raped the women before dispossessing them of their cows (Akowe & Kayode, 2014) while in some instances, they also kidnapped girls or women in the process (Adeniyi, 2015; Yusuf, 2015).

Suffice to say that the northwestern zone of Nigeria encompasses seven states namely Kano, Jigawa, Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi. Five of these states, which are Katsina, Kaduna, Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi have been mostly affected by the scourge of banditry. Of these five states, Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara have been the most critical hot spots. It is however, pertinent to note that the incidences of banditry are not limited to northwestern Nigeria. In fact, it is also prevalent in some parts of the north-central zone in states like Niger, Nasarawa, Benue and Plateau which are equally regarded as hotbeds (Kuna & Jibrin 2016).

Scholars like Gaye (2018), Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016), Suleiman (2017) and Mustapha (2019) have advanced several factors for the cause and prevalence of banditry in Nigeria. Some of the factors they argued include the fragility of Nigerian state, weak state institutions, especially the security agencies, arms proliferation, weak leadership, corruption, unemployment and mass poverty. Others believe that environmental degradation caused by pressures of climate change and rapid population growth has aggravated resource competition between predominantly Fulani herders and mostly Hausa farmers, both of whom have over time mobilised armed groups in the form of bandits for protection.

The facts are scary. While about “1,100 people were murdered in 2018 in the six states of North west Nigeria in 2018, over 2,200 were killed in 2019 and 1,600 killed between January and June 2020”. ACAPS (2020), about 247,000 people have been displaced while their activities alone have led to the production of more than 41,000 refugees. In Niger alone, over 8000 people have been murdered in the last decade, 200,000 displaced internally and others fleeing to neighbouring states. ICGP Report (2020) The situation is so porous already that the religious leader and Sultan of Sokoto, Muhammadu Saad Abubakar opined that “Bandits now move in the North from house to house with AK47 and lamented that the zone had become the worst place to live in Nigeria...” Onyebuchi (2020), in Sokoto, more than 250 people have been killed in about 20 attacks, Rakiya (2020).

It is important to note that the newest Northwest conflict started because of fight over depleting lands and water resources between the farmers and the herdsmen with the farmers belonging mostly to the Hausa people and the herdsmen being predominantly Fulani. ICG Report (2020), as a consequence, there has been massive deforestation because of the impact of the Sahara Desert spreading south. Also in an area where poverty is deeply rooted and illiteracy extremely high, rearing cattle is the preoccupation of many Fulanis’. Thus, whenever this source of livelihood is threatened, whether by nature or human intervention, they are willing to do anything to survive. In addition, there is the problem of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the area, inequality and as John Campbell puts it, “weakened, stretched and demoralized security services (Campbell, 2020). There are also problems of

failure of local justice and ethnic division Emmanuel (2020) as well as uncoordinated and under policed borders. Indeed, in recent history, banditry also became the order of the day because of government's inability to protect lives and property as well as failure to put the welfare of the people first.

The paper is instituted on the objective of assessing the relationship between porous borders and banditry in the Northwest zone of Nigeria. Accordingly, the paper raises the question; what is the relationship between porous borders and banditry in the Northwest Nigeria? This review paper is structurally divided into four interrelated parts. Part one is the introduction which we just conclude. Part two covers the theoretical foundation of the paper and a brief explanation of relevant concepts to the paper. Part three is a brief insight on the method which the paper employed to generate data and the presentation and analysis of generated data; while part four is the conclusion/recommendation of the paper.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

#### **The Weak State Theory**

The proponents of the weak state theory are: Gros (1996), Rotberg (2000), Jackson (2000) and Krasner (2004). The term 'weak state' has been used in international relations to describe a state that lacks the capacity to effectively govern and provide for its citizens. This can be due to factors such as poor governance, lack of resources or mismanagement of resources, or instability. The theory suggests that weak states can be vulnerable to internal conflict, external intervention, and other threats.

According to Gros (1996), in weak states, there is an absence of public coercive forces to uphold law and order and police their territory effectively. He further postulated that in such states, the ruling elite tend to privatize state institutions by using them for their own personal security and to promote and protect their business interests. Rotberg (2000), noted that weak states include abroad continuum of states that are inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; basically strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attacks; and a mixture of the two. Weak states typically harbor ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other inter-communal tensions that have not yet, or not yet thoroughly, become overtly violent. Urban crime rates tend to be higher and increasing. In weak states, the ability to provide adequate measures of other political goods is diminished or diminishing. Physical infrastructural networks have deteriorated. Schools and hospitals show signs of neglect, particularly outside the main cities. GDP per capita and other critical economic indicators have fallen or are falling, some-times dramatically; levels of venal corruption are embarrassingly high and escalating. Weak states usually honor rule of law precepts in the breach. They harass civil society. Weak states are often ruled by despots, elected or not. Robert Jackson argues that a weak state is not necessarily underdeveloped, undemocratic or destroyed by international war. Their adverse condition is self-inflicted, they are political failures (Jackson, 2000) Jackson concludes that weak states are:

States that cannot or will not safeguard minimal civic conditions for their population: domestic peace, law and order, and good governance, juridical shells that shroud an insecure and even dangerous condition domestically, a state of nature. Such states have an international legal existence but very little domestic political existence. (Jackson, 2000)

Krasner also leaves a striking example of the domestic situation in a weak state: In such states, infrastructure deteriorates; corruption is widespread; borders are unregulated; gross domestic product is declining or stagnant; crime is rampant; and the national currency is not widely accepted. Armed groups operate within the state's boundaries but outside the control of the government. The writ of the central government may not extend to the whole country; in some cases, it may not extend beyond the capital. Authority may be exercised by local entities in other parts of the country, or by no one at all. (Krasner, 2004).

In sum, a weak state has the following characteristics. First, weak states typically have limited capacity to provide public goods and services, such as security, healthcare, and education. Second, they often have poor governance, with high levels of corruption and limited rule of law. Third, they may have a lack of legitimacy, with citizens feeling disconnected from the state and its institutions. Finally, they may have weak control over their territory with the presence of armed non-state actors.

Weak states are unable to adequately project power. According to Weber (1921), an effective state is an organization which claims a monopoly of violence within its borders in order to maintain order. He posited that; a state must make sure to “successfully claim the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (p1). Herbst (2000), argues that the inability of African states to project power through a strong presence contributes to their weakness. Many African states are weak in the Weberian sense and as result they are, in some cases, unable to prevent violent conflict internally and externally.

Some of the characteristics of weak states are lack of a command over sufficient resources, dependency on external funds, no concrete plan of development, lack of territorial control and lack of support and legitimacy with the population and the international community. It is difficult to disentangle the inherently weak nature of African states from the outbreak of violent conflict. In fact it can be argued that the attributes of a weak state not only fail to prevent violent conflict but that they also contribute to outbreaks of violence.

The weak state theory can be useful for understanding the proliferation of arms and insecurity in Nigeria. Nigeria has been described as a weak state due to factors such as corruption, poor governance, armed conflict by insurgents and lack of control over its territory (Mailafia, 2001). This has contributed to an upsurge of trans-borders smuggling activities, and human trafficking which have led to the proliferation of arms and banditry in the country. The weak state theory exposes the lack of capacity of the Nigerian government in effectively governing its citizens and providing the needed internal and external security of its populace. The weak state theory is suitable as the foundation for this paper because it systematically provides an in-depth understanding of the prevailing situation of the Nigerian state, with regard to its (Nigerian state) inability to decisively curtail and stop incidences of banditry resulting from border porosity.

### **Concept of Banditry**

Conceptually, banditry is a derivative of the term bandit meaning an unlawful armed group

terrorizing people and confiscating their properties. It is synonymous with the establishment of gang groups who use small and light weapons to carry out attacks against people. In this regard, banditry could mean a set-up criminal activity deliberately designed and carried out for personal gains. A bandit might be alluded to as an opportunity warrior, within the setting of the 19th century Americas and Europe, whose obligation was to battle for the liberation of the colonized. Within the 21st-century African setting, a bandit may be seen as one who commits the wrong doing of equipped theft, slaughtering, and annihilation of properties, especially, of herders, vendors, and commerce proprietors (Olapeju and Peter, 2021).

Due to the complex nature of bandits' activities, Egwu (2016), in a restricted manner, described banditry as a practice of stealing cattle and animals from herders or raiding of cattle from their ranches. In the same vein, banditry is reflected in criminal escapades like cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug abuse, arson, rape and the brazen and gruesome massacre of people of agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen and reprisal attacks from surviving victims, a development that has been brought to the front burner of national security (Uche and Iwuamadi, 2018). In his perception, Shalangwa (2013) regards banditry as the practice of raiding and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not premeditated, using weapons of offence or defense, especially in semi-organised groups for the purpose of over powering the victim and obtaining loot or achieving some political goals. Such bandits are usually perceived as outlaws, desperate and lawless marauders who do not have a definite residence or destination but roam around the forest and mountains to avoid being identified, detected and arrested.

However, where the term banditry is connected to rural, it implies a group of rural out laws involved in illicit activities such as raiding of villages, kidnappings and cattle rustling for primitive accumulation of wealth. Thus, bandits are gang groups terrorising and dispossessing local people or travellers of their valuable items or properties such as merchandise, money, cattle, camel, and sheep, among others. They operate within and along rural borders with the assistance of their local collaborators including in some cases, state agents deployed to work for the safety and security of the people (Abdullahi, 2019).

### **Concept of National Security**

The term “national security” does not appear to lend itself to any precise definition. This is partly because; the nature and concept of national security may vary from one state to the other. Like other contested concepts, the term contains ideological element that renders empirical evidence irrelevant as a means of resolving the debate. It is a very complex issue that is all encompassing and means different things to different people. However, it seems a wholesome wide umbrella under which lie various forms of security like human security, economic security, financial security, institutional security, educational security, food (agricultural) security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, political security and the security of all aspects of human living and endeavour. Before conceptualizing national security, a definite and clear knowledge of what security is, will be sought. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), security means protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the pattern of daily life in homes, offices or communities. It further defines

it as the state of being or making safe, secure from danger. According to Adebakin (2012), "security is the activities that ensure the protection of a country, person, properties of the community against future threats, danger, mishaps and all other forms of perils. Otto and Ukpere (2012) and Adebakin (2012:9) assert that" security means protection from hidden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life in homes, offices or communities. Also, Nwagboso (2012) viewed security as the act of being safe from harm or danger, the defence, protection, and preservation of values, and the absence of threats to acquired values.

In the same vein, King (2016), cited in Gubak and Bulus (2018) described security as stability and continuity of livelihood, predictability of daily life, protection from crime, and freedom from psychological harm. Security is related to the presence of peace, safety, happiness, and the protection of human and physical resources or the absence of crisis, and threats to human injury among others.

Wehmeier and Ashby (2002) however define security as protection against something that might happen in the future or as the activities involved in protecting a country, a building or persons against threats or danger. Essentially, security must be related to the presence of peace, safety and happiness; and the protection of human and physical resources as well as the absence of crisis, threats or human injury amongst others as the presence of peace could facilitate progress. According to Francis (2005) security is a state of being safe and the absence of fear, anxiety, danger, poverty and oppression. It is the preservation of core values and the absence of threats to these values. Imobighe (1990), however opines that security is the freedom from threats to a nation's capability to defend and develop itself, promote its values and lawful interest (Zabadi, 2005) on the other hand posits that:

Security is a state in which people or things are not exposed to danger of physical or moral aggression, accident, theft or decline. This view is associated with the survival of the state and the preservation of its citizens. In other words, the state has the responsibility of the use of force and power for the safety of its territory and its people (p18)

Ibeanu (2000), maintained that security means the capacity of groups (and individuals as their agents) to provide their physical and psychological needs and livelihoods. This means a progressive elimination of objective conditions that limit this capacity as well as reduction of fears and anxieties about their abilities to meet these needs. In this sense, Ibeanu further argued that security has to do with protection from poverty, exploitation, disease, bio-chemical contamination, injustice and the like. An assessment of the views of Ibeanu shows that emphasis was laid on human aspects of security which emphasized poverty reduction, equitable distribution of resources and entrenchment of justice. Igbuzor (2011) and Oche (2001), while conceptualizing security placed emphasis on the absence of threats to peace, stability, national cohesion, political and socio-economic objectives of a country. It is conceived as to be secure and free from both fear of physical, psychological abuse, violence, persecution, or death and from want such as food, health and good job (Asmau and Abdulrasheed, 2020). Also, Omede (2012) sees security as a dynamic condition which involves the relative ability of a state to counter threats to its core values and interests.

Security can further be described as stability and continuity of livelihood (stable and steady income), predictability of daily life (knowing what to expect), protection from crime (feeling safe), and freedom from psychological harm (safety or protection from emotional stress which results from the assurance or knowing that one is wanted, accepted, loved and protected in the society. It focuses one motional and psychological sense of belonging to a social group which can offer one protection. This description of the foregoing structured the concept to security into four dimensions. These dimensions can be woven together to give a composite definition of security as the protection against all forms of harm whether physical, economic or psychological (Olabanji and Ese, 2014).

It is, however, contended that security is not the absence of threats or security issues, but the ability to rise to the challenges posed by these threats with expediency and expertise. It demands safety from chronic threats and protection from harmful disruption (Igbuzor, 2011). Security embraces all measures designed to protect and safeguard the citizenry and there sources of individuals, groups, businesses and the nation against sabotage or violent occurrence (Ogunleye, Adewale, Alese, and Ogunde, 2013).

The above definitions of security by different scholars are a constituent element of the concept of human security or internal security, with a fundamental difference from what is often termed as national security, where the focus is on the survival of the state against threats possessed by internal and/or external elements (Buzan, 2003, Stephen, 2006). The United Nations Development Programme (1994:229) posits that human security (an aspect of national security) refers to "freedom from fear and freedom from want" and "safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression as well as protection from sudden and harmful disruptions in the patterns of daily life whether in homes, in jobs or communities" (UNDP, 2006).

This paper adopted the historical and descriptive research approach. The descriptive study proves the 'what' question. The descriptive research approach leads to theory building which begins with observations it uses inductive reasoning to derive a theory from these observations.

Data for the paper is qualitative as such normative in nature. Sources were from primary and secondary sources. Primary source is through the use of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews. While the secondary sources are from books, journal and other research materials.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

#### **Relationship between Nigeria's Porous Borders and Banditry in the North-West Zone.**

When a country's border(s) are porous, it creates a safe passage for trans-border criminals, including bandits and terrorist who in turn capitalize on its weak and porous state to smuggle illegal goods including SALW into the country. Thus, Nigeria's porous borders have aided banditry in two significant ways: by making smuggling of arms possible and easy, and by making infiltration of criminal elements from neighbouring countries easy. This is further compounded by the fact that neighboring African states; such as Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger Republic are also struggling within effective border control thus making smuggling of



illicit goods between states in the axis and beyond relatively easy (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013). For instance on the Nigeria/Benin border (prominent among which is the Seme-Idiroko border) a World Bank study on the volume of illegal imports-including SALW-into Nigeria, revealed that, on the average, an estimated 750 billion naira (USD 5 billion) worth of goods are smuggled into the country through the borders of the Republic of Benin annually (Raballand & Mjekiqi, 2010). In the same way, a study conducted on behalf of the British research institute Chatham House on the level of unrecorded trade between Nigeria and her African trade partners also revealed that over 70 percent of virtually all trade between Nigeria and its African neighbours goes unrecorded (Melly & Hoffman, 2015).

Similarly, on the Nigerian/Chadian coast, the leaky nature of both state frontiers has in no little way provided the Nigerian state with links through Chad to hot beds such as Central African Republic, Libya, Sudan, and South Sudan. No doubt, with a measure of instability engendered mostly by armed militias in these states currently struggling with the control of not only their porous borders but also to establish significant state presence on existing 'ungoverned spaces' in their territories. By implication, they have all become convey or belts for illicit trafficking of goods such as people, narcotics, arms and ammunition among others into and out of Nigeria. For example, aside past claims that weapons are usually smuggled from Mali and other states into Nigeria, more recently, the commander of the United States military's special operations in Africa Brigadier General Donald Bolduc, also revealed that a significant number of different types of weapons alleged to have been sent by the dreaded Islamic State (IS) terrorist group in Libya to the Nigerian based Boko Haram insurgents in the Lake Chad region, were intercepted by security agents in Chad (Dearden, 2016).

The critical point here is that when the border(s) of a country as well as that of her neighbours are porous, it makes it much easier for non-state actors like bandits to avail themselves of illicit weapons which they use to engender insecurity in their operational base. Thus, the advance of non-state actors in terms of military capability or weaponry in Nigeria has been closely bound with the porosity of the country's borders primarily because they allow the free entry of illicit SALWs. Available data on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) show that out of the 640 million circulating globally, it is estimated that 100million are found in Africa, about 30 million in sub-Saharan Africa and eight million in West Africa, alone. The majority of these SALW, about 59% are in the hands of civilians, 38% are owned by government armed forces, 2.8% by police and 0.2% by armed groups, like bandits and terrorists (SALW Survey, 2016). The leading traffickers of these weapons are cross-border terrorists and bandits, and since most of these arms are trafficked through the land borders and traded at the borders, particularly in the Sahel, a state like Nigeria with many un-policed illegal routes is both a lucrative market and a victim (UNODC 2013). For instance, on 31 July 2013, a petrol tanker was intercepted at Daban Masara border town between Nigeria and the Republic of Chad with three RPG chargers, three AK47 rifles, nine AK47 magazines, two bombs and 790 rounds of 7.62 special ammunitions suspected to be for the Boko Haram (Audu, 2019). Similarly, on 25 September 2019, the Nigerian troops arrested eight illegal immigrants along the Yola road alleged to be members of the Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP) fighting for Boko Haram (Aluko 2019). On 25 March 2018 Cameroon's security forces arrested several Boko Haram fighters including women and children attempting to smuggle

arms and explosives into Nigeria through the Nigeria- Cameroun border (Kindzega, 2018).

Idowu (2023) narrated that the Nigeria Customs Service said it intercepted 203 bags of imported rice, five vehicles, and 1,245 rounds of live ammunition worth N17million abandoned in a bush path in the Yewa-North Local Government Area of Ogun State. The state's Area Comptroller, Bamidele Makinde, disclosed this to newsmen in Abeokuta on Monday. He said:

At about 0024 hours on Friday, 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2023, the Roving B Team of the Command intercepted five old vehicles, Toyota Camry with Chassis No. 4TIBG22KIWU312145, Toyota Camry with Chassis No. 4TIXK1263NU108237 and three Mazda 626 cars with Chassis Nos. JM2GD14H201568566, JMZGF14F201173029, and JMZGF14P20141862 respectively), loaded with 203 bags of foreign parboiled rice of 50kg each abandoned in a bush path at Tobolo Junction, close to an exit point to the Republic of Benin, and near Ijoun, Yewa North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria (NCS Comptroller, Ogun state).

Odeniyi (2023) reported that the Armed Forces of Nigeria has recovered no fewer than 5,154 arms and rounds of ammunition from non-state actors across the various theatres of operations in the country. The arms and ammunition were recovered between June and September 2023. A document from the Defence Headquarters stated that between June and August, a total of 501 arms and 3,269 rounds of ammunition were recovered, while in September a total of 293 arms and 1091 rounds of ammunition have so far been recovered. The PUNCH reports that worsening insecurity in many parts of the country has been attributed to the proliferation of arms and ammunition. Military report read: Troops recovered a total number of 501 weapons, 3,269 assorted kinds of ammunition and 674 other equipment. The breakdown of these arms and ammunition is as follows; 117 AK-47 rifles, one AK-49 rifle, five revolvers, 28 fabricated rifles, 11 fabricated pistols, 57 Daneguns, 23 pistols, 24 pump-action guns, three FN rifles, three GPMGs, one double-barrel gun, one Berreta pistol, one G3 rifle, two HK21 rifles one IED, 123 rounds of 7.62mm NATO, 2,008 rounds of 7.62mm special, 30 rounds of 7.62mm x 39mm, 512 rounds of 7.62mm x 54mm, 190 rounds of 5.5mm, 39 rounds of 9mm, 29 rounds of PKM, and 19 cartridges (Odeniyi, 2023).

Troops equally recovered one RPG tube, three hand grenades, one locally-made hand grenade, one locally-made bomb, two rifle butts, one AK47 barrel, one GMPG barre 1,2MG links, 98 AK-47 magazines, two G3 magazines, two FN magazines, two PKT magazines, two LMG magazines, two tear gas launchers among others (Odeniyi, 2023).

In September, troops recovered 216 assorted weapons and 443 assorted ammunition. The breakdown is as follows: 62 AK-47 rifles, seven pump-action guns, 19 Daneguns, 3 Berreta pistols, 10 locally-fabricated rifles, five locally-made pistols, 399 IED detonator primers, 225 rounds of 7.62mm special ammo, 10 rounds of 7.62mm NATO, 13 round of 9mm ammo, 20 rounds of 7.62mm x 54mm, 57 cartridges, 49 magazines. Troops recovered a total number of 77 weapons and 658 assorted kinds of ammunition. The breakdown is as follows: 53 AK47

rifles, two AK-47 rifles loaded with eight rounds of 7.62mm special ammo, 18 locally-fabricated rifles, one Beretta pistol, three pump-action guns, 650 rounds of 7.62mm special ammo, 50 AK-47 magazines, two rounds of 9mm ammo, six rounds of 7.62 NATO, among others (Odeniyi, 2023).

Punch Editorial, October, 2023 reported the recovery of thousands of arms and ammunition by the military from non-state actors across the country in just four months. And most of these weapons find their way into the hands of criminal groups like bandits. A report found that 17 per cent of the weapons seized from Boko Haram and bandits-linked rebels were diverted from the stockpiles in Chad, Niger and Nigeria. These weapons add to the caches illegally trafficked into, or through Libya, Burkina Faso, and Mali; smuggled hand guns and shot guns sold on the black market, and diversion of legally imported firearms and explosives within the sub-Saharan Africa region. The Russian war on Ukraine also aids the dispersal of dangerous weapons from the conflict zone to various parts of the continent, further stoking insecurity occasioned by banditry and other insurgents, criminality, and displacements (Punch Editorial Board, 2023).

The volume of illicit weapons in Nigeria is frightening and exposes Nigeria's weak centralized security system. Lack of state and local level policing, and the absence of adequate punishment for the traffickers hinder interdiction. The situation is not helped by the large swathes of unmanned, illegal and porous borders. The National Centre for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons in February said it recovered over 10,000 SALWs from non-state actors. Tougher measures, including going after the arms barons, the corrupt security operatives aiding them, and improving border security are required (Punch Editorial Board, 2023).

Nigeria has 147 irregular and 84 regular routes as movement were done through irregular routes (Olabanji *et al*, 2014). Adams (2012) reported the existence of 1475 official border sites and estimate of 2000 un-official border sites across Nigeria borders. Adeola, et al. (2012) identified the presence of 250 foot prints from Damaturu/Maiduguri axis that link the Cameroon, Chad and Niger that are not known to Nigerian Security Agencies. The existence of large number of illegal routes have made it easy for all sorts of transnational crimes like movement or smuggling of illegal goods (including arms), trafficking of persons, theft, banditry, terrorism and other violent activities etc. Many of Nigeria's borders are characterized by hundreds of foot paths and illegal routes linking the country with other neighbouring West and North African countries such as Niger, Chad, Cameroun, Libya, Algeria, and Mali. For instance, over 250 unpoliced foot paths are linking Damaturu/Maiduguri in Nigeria and the Republic of Cameroun and Chad for the fact that small and light arms are collapsible, they can simply be concealed and conveyed into Nigeria through the foot path using camels, donkeys, and motorcycles (Osimenetal. 2017). Olabanji et al, (2014) averred that the Nigeria-Benin Republic border, which is approximately 800kilometres, has become a route for smuggling of arms into Nigeria. From South Western Nigeria, a significant number of weapons cross into the Nigerian territory from other West African states like Liberia and Sierra Leone through the Nigeria-Benin border aided by cross border arms traffickers and military cartel.

In other words, it seems the Nigeria government has neglected border security, this is evident

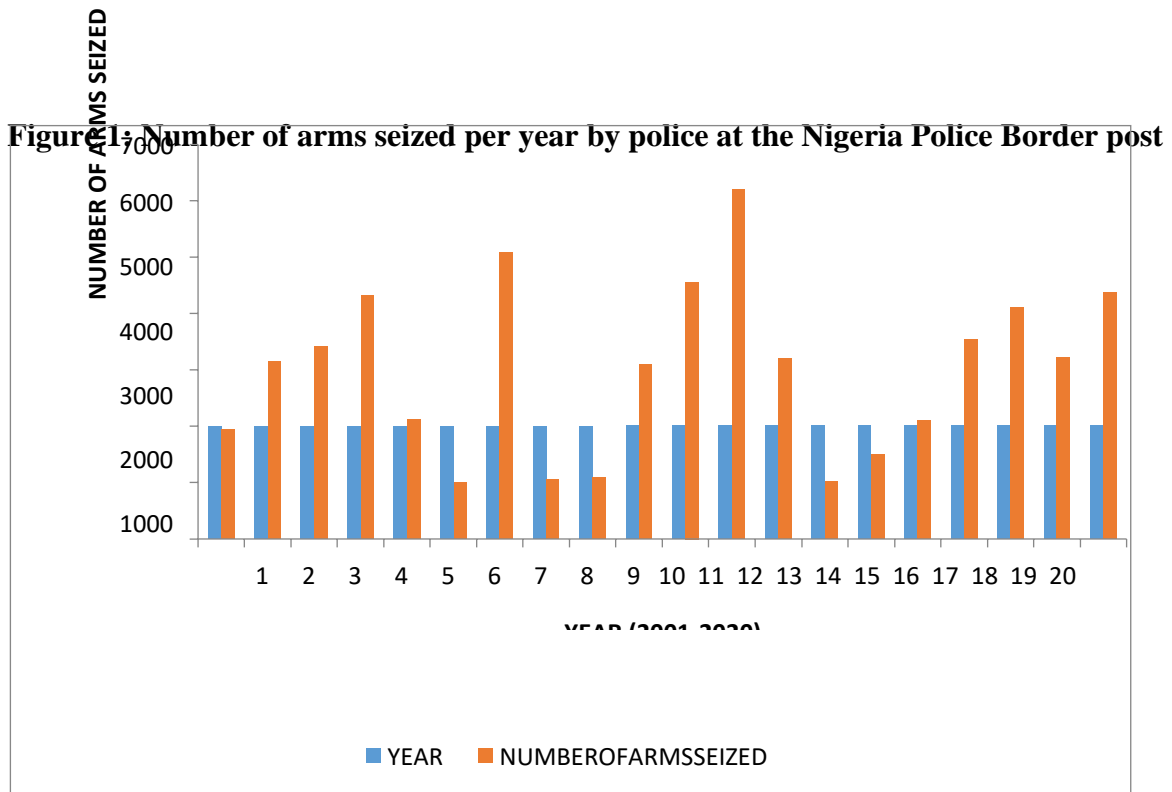
considering the risen number of sophisticated weapons seized in the country from armed groups and other unauthorized persons by security forces at different locations.

Below is a table that depicts SALW seized by police.

**Table 1: Data on SALW seized by police at the Nigeria Police Border post 2000-2020**

S/N	Year	No. of arms seized
1	2000-01	1,941
2	2002	3150
3	2003	3,415
4	2004	4321
5	2005	2120
6	2006	1003
7	2007	5087
8	2008	1065
9	2009	1097
10	2010	3098
11	2011	4563
12	2012	6213
13	2013	3212
14	2014	1023
15	2015	1507
16	2016	2097
17	2017	3542
18	2018	4102
19	2019	3218
20	2020	4376

*Source: Source: Dambatta (2020)*

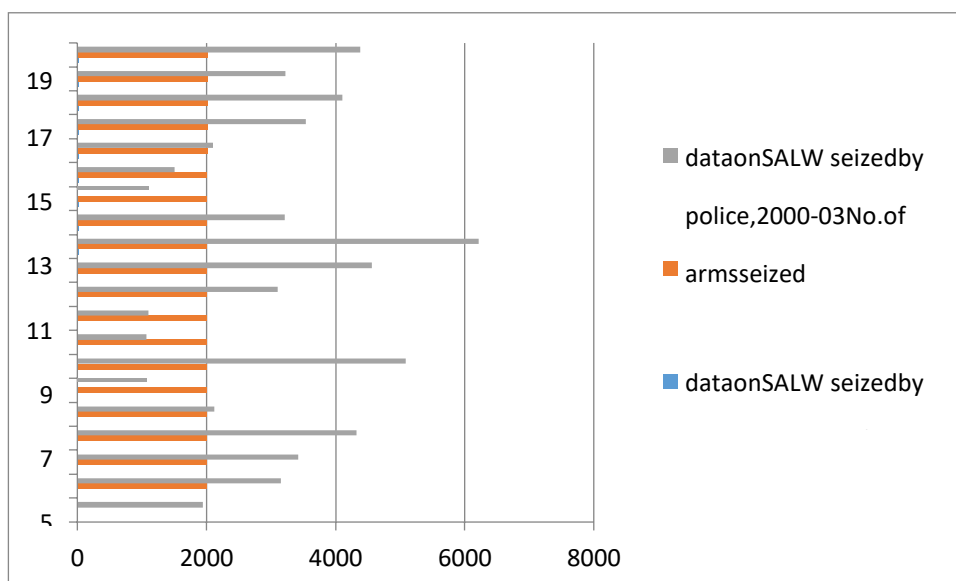


**Source: Researcher's Field work, 2024**

Figure 1 is a graphical representation of SALW seized by the Nigerian Police Force between 2001 and 2020. The Seme/Badagry border is a popular border that promotes illegal smuggling of SALW and other contrabands. Recently, at the Nigerian Shippers' Council, members of the ECOWAS Commission said they counted over 57 such illegal checkpoints along the Seme-Badagry corridor. Infact, earlier in September 2023, the authority in-charge of the Seme Command of the Nigeria Customs Services aid it intercepted about 13 tankers load of petrol allegedly being smuggled to the Benin Republic by criminal gangs. Former Controller in charge of Seme Command of the Nigeria Customs Service, Dera Nnadi, while displaying some of the seized petrol stored in jerry cans, said the die-hard criminals are never tired but that officers of the Service will continue to deal fatal blow to their finances (NCS, 2023).

Below is a barch at that depict SALW seized by police, 2000-2020

**Figure 2: SALW seized by police, 2000-2020**



Source: *Crime Fighter Magazine, 2020*

**Table 2: Table Showing Seizures by Security Agencies at the Border as compiled by the Researcher**

S/No.	Date	Items Seized	Location	Agency	Destination of Origin
1	Feb. 2019	2 containers containing military-grade weapons	Apapa Lagos	Nigerian Customs Service (NCS)	Turkey
2	May 2019	661 pumpaction Rifles	Tincan Island Port, Lagos	NCS	Turkey
3	Aug. 2019	Military weapons, including machine guns and ammunition	Apapa Lagos	NCS	Turkey
4	Dec. 2019	Containers containing 20,000 rounds of live ammunition	Apapa Port, Lagos	NCS	--
5	Jan. 2020	Over 1000 pump Action rifles	Sokoto state	NCS	Benin Republic

6	May 2020	Military grade weapons, including rocket	Lagos	NCS	
7	March 2014	A Container of 1000 rifles, machines guns and rounds of ammunition	Idiroko, Ogun state	NCS	
8	June 2015	A Container containing 1000 rifles, rocket launchers, anti-aircraft missiles and more than 2000 rounds of ammunition	Lagos	NCS	
9	April 2017	A Truck containing 1500 AK-47 rifles and rounds of ammunition	Kaduna state	NCS	
10	Jan.2018	A Container of 1000 rifles, machine guns and rounds of ammunition	Tin Can Port, Lagos	NCS	
11	May 2014	A truck Containing over over 100 AK-47 rifles and ammunitions	Ibadan, Oyo state	NCS	Benin Republic
12	July 2016	A truck of 100AK-47 rifles and ammunition	Oyo town	NCS	BeninRepublic
13	Jan.2015	A Container containing 200AK-47 rifles and ammunition	Calabar, Cross River state	NCS	Cameroon
14	June2018	A truck carrying 500 AK-47 Rifles and ammunition	Calabar	NCS	Cameroon

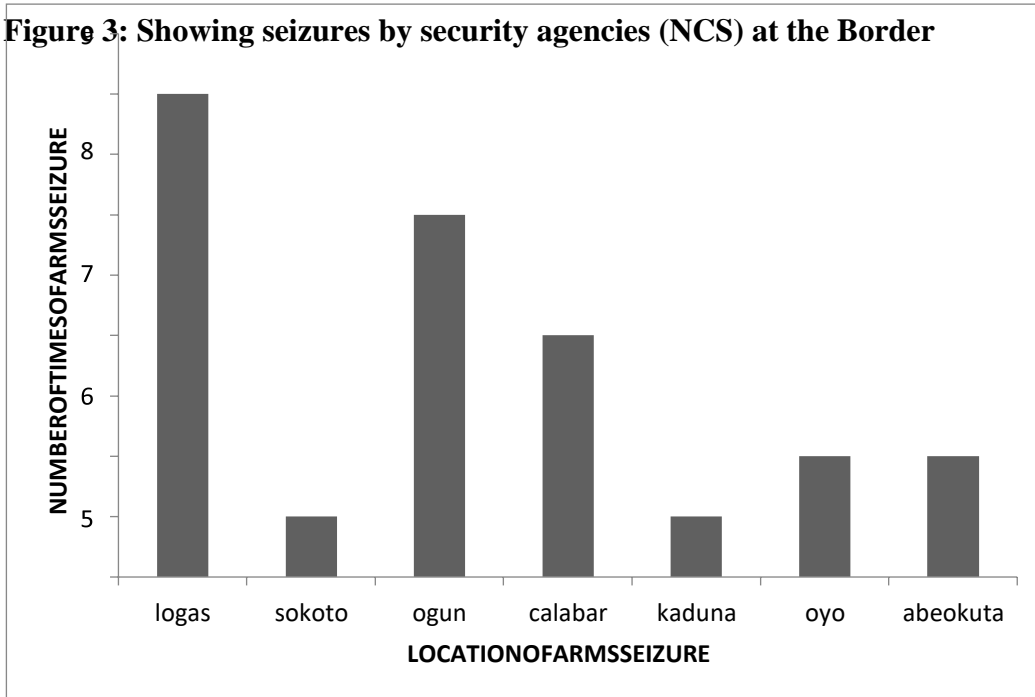
15	Nov.2017	Over 1000 AK-47 rifles and ammunition	Abeokuta	NCS	Benin Republic
16	Feb.2018	A truck containing over 2000 AK-47 rifles and rounds of ammunition	Abeokuta	NCS	Cote d'Ivoire
17	March 2022	Two containers of assault rifles and ammunition	Ipokia, Ogun state	NCS	
18	April 2020	AK-47 rifles and Ammunition	Idiroko, Ogun State	NCS	
19	July 2020	A container of AK-47 and rifles	Idiroko Ogun State	NCS	
20	April 2022	Dozens of AK-47 rifles and ammunition	Idiroko Ogun state	Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS)	
21	June 2022	Dozens of AK-47 rifles ammunition and drugs	Lagos	NIS	
22	Dec.2022	A container of AK 47 rifles, ammunition and military hardware	Calabar	NIS	
23	March 2022	A truck load of weapons containing AK-47 rifles and Machine guns	Oyo state	Nigerian Police Force (NPF)	
24	June 2022	A cache of weapons including AK-47 rifles and ammunition	Ogun state	NPF	
25	Sept.2022	A large shipment of Weapons and ammunition	Calabar	NPF	

**Source: Researcher's field, 2024**



The above table 4.2 shows seizures by security agencies at the border communities.

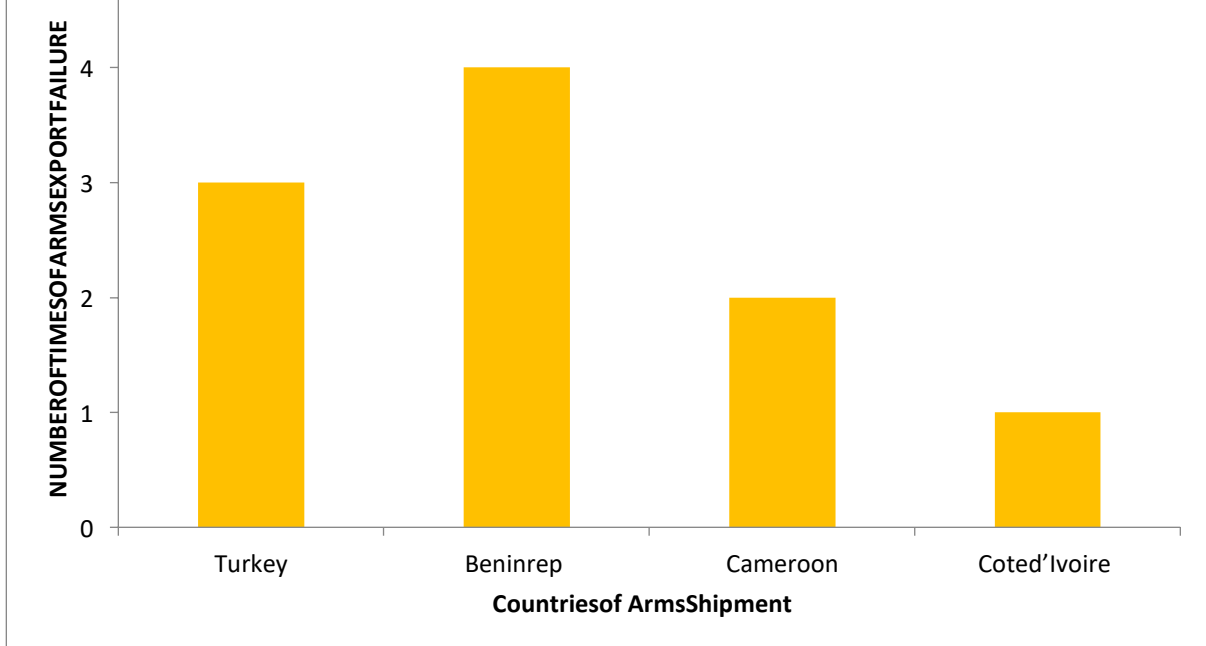
**Figure 3: Showing seizures by security agencies (NCS) at the Border**



**Source: Researcher's Fieldwork**

Figure 3 is a graphical representation of arms seized by the Nigerian Customs Service as compiled by the researcher.

**Figure 4; Graphical representation showing countries of arms shipment before seizures by security agencies (NCS) at the Border**



*Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2024*

The fundamental question is – How did these foreign produced weapons find their way into the country, if not for the porosity of our borders.

### **Observations, Excerpts of Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) addressing Research Objective Two**

Also, presented below are excerpts of the Observations, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that were conducted in the four locations of Kachia border community in Kachia Local Government Area of Kaduna State; Jibiya Border Community in Jibiya Local Government Area of Katsina State; and Maradun Border Community in Maradun Local Government Area of Zamfara State and Argungu border town of Kebbi state between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of January, 2024. The observations and excerpts of the interviews and FGDs are here summarized, and are to be employed in answering the question and drawing up conclusions for the paper.

### **The FGD participants in Kachia Border Community, Kachia Local Government Area of Cross Kaduna State:**

Participants observed that the nature of the border allowed for the free flow of humans, most of which could be criminal elements that can be easily recruited into banditry, and goods without much scrutiny by the border security agents some of whom have to compromise for a fee to allow people go through the borders with their wares (which most times include arms). This allowed for the easy flow of smuggling activities of all kinds. The discussions revealed

that the smuggling around the area allowed for the items such as food items, banned drugs and substances, Small Arms and Light Weapons, amongst other contrabands (FGD organized on January 10 & 11, 2024).

The participants, also opined that most of these crimes occurred through the bribing of law enforcement agents in-charge of the border line. This confirmed the earlier views of some of the participants that the pattern of criminal activities observed in the border community is through the partnership of these perpetrators with the law enforcement officials. The responses further revealed that these criminal activities, like banditry are carefully crafted and orchestrated activities of syndicates and criminal groups that are well organized (FGD organized on January 10 & 11, 2024).

Supporting this view, a community elder, Alh. Audu Gobi who was interviewed as a Key Informant maintained that:

Even though there are still many forms of crimes that occur through involving both human and drugs trafficking, smuggling of commodities especially food items and other items, including arms and ammunitions are mostly observed within Kachi a border community (KII with a community Elder in Mfum border community, January 10, 2024).

Going further, in the Jibiya Border Community in Jibiya Local Government of Katsina State, the participants that took part in the FGDs were of the view that:

The smuggling of illegal migrants was the most human related crime that occurs through the Jibiya border. They also maintained that most of these could be willing recruits into banditry. Accordingly, the findings were corroborated by a KII participant who submitted that cross-border crimes due to the porous border take various forms like human and drug trafficking, smuggling in illicit goods and services, child and arms trafficking etc. These forms of crimes are not new to Jibiya and are so applicable to other borders in Nigeria (FGD with members of Jibiya border community-(January 6 & 7, 2024).

The majority of the participants who took part in the FGDs in the Maradun border community maintained that small arms are smuggled into the community and the country due to the porosity of the borders in Nigeria, Maradun border inclusive. For these participants, the porous borders provided an enabling environment for non-combatants to emerge and become active. Based on the responses of some of the participants who took part in the FGD in the community, the following extract was made:

One of the factors that contributed to the weakness of the Nigerian borders is that the security personnel in charge of the border are so corrupt. Sometimes they seize arms and ammunitions at the border, but the perpetrators of SALW will still smuggle in the arms into the country by bribing the officers in charge. In the same, the security personnel at the borders allow illegal immigrant, mostly youths, which they believe end being recruited as bandits (FGD organized on January 4 & 5, 2024).

One of the participants who participated in the FGD corroborated the above opinion by blaming security agencies for the porosity of Nigerian borders arguing that as a result, the county is vulnerable to all sorts of arms smuggling and human trafficking whose perpetrators bribe the security personnel incharge. Another comment on porous border came from a FGD participant who opined that: many of the arms and ammunitions used by criminal elements like bandits came into the country through the weak border (FGD organized on January 4 & 5, 2024).

However, in addition, a smaller number of participants also expressed a different view, and indicated that the illicit manufacture of SALW within Nigeria also contributes to the widespread of small arms in country, which are used by bandits. An illustrative voice noted as follows: Local arms producers and manufacturers in Nigeria real so responsible for illegal activities of SALW. The results of the above discussion correspond with that of the earlier opinions, as most of the participants indicated that the porosity of the Nigerian border is a great source of small arms and light weapons into Nigeria (FGD organized on January 4 & 5, 2024).

A Senior Customs officer, Zamfara State Command who was a Key Informant pointed out that:

From my experience in the course of my job, I can say there are several sources and causes of small arms proliferation into the country, like other contraband goods. It ranges from smuggling, theft, unscrupulous security agents, and local manufacturers to indeed, the activities of our politicians and religious members. But the ones that pose challenges to all stakeholders are smuggling and local manufacturers, which we think fertilize other sources (KII held at Maradun on January 4 & 5, 2024).

In the same vein, a traditional leader, Mohammad Bako, the Second in Command to the Village Head of Maradun, who participated in the KII observed that:

The sources and effects of small arms and light weapons used by bandits in the country are numerous. But the ones smuggled in through the borders seem to be more sophisticated. What is most worrisome is the involvement of security agents, our brothers in the villages who manufacture and sell arms to criminals and bandits, and the porous nature of our borders due to corruption have even made easier for unscrupulous elements to continue to smuggle arms into the country. Some of these arms are even sourced by politicians to intimidate or eliminate their opponents whom they perceive as threat to their success at polls. These have made it difficult for government to take decisive action since some of these people are also in position of authority (KII held on January 5, 2024).

The observations of these participants (Customs Officer and traditional leader) is true because most of the sophisticated weapons found to be used by bandits and insurgents could not have been manufactured or sourced locally, but smuggled into the country from troubled countries within the sub-region.

While interviewing the Deputy Comptroller of Customs (Administration), Zamfara State Command on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2024, it was observed that a mass movement of vehicles carrying youths in and out of Nigeria-Niger Republic. Upon enquiry, it was disclosed that it was a normal thing in the area, and that the territory of the Nigerian Border Community extends into Niger Republic. They use the opportunity to also smuggle in contra-band goods, including SALWs.

Also, a village leader in Argungu town Mohammad Idriss who participated in the KII observed that: Due to the intense security challenge in the North most security agents vacated their post at the town. This left the border at the mercy of the insurgents, making it a smugglers haven. (KII held on January 5, 2024).

### **Evaluation of the Objective of the Paper**

#### **The Relationship between porous borders and banditry in the North-west**

A content and thematic analysis of the data gotten from Texts, Journals, Articles, Bulletins, Gazettes etc, and from Observation, KIIs and FGDs, confirm that the porous nature of the Nigerian borders is a contributory factor but not the cause of banditry. This is because the reason foregoing into banditry stems from the economic angle. The information gathered from the research participants has revealed that the porosity of the country's border only made this nature of business easy for those who engage in it. As argued by some of the security personnel the people that went into the business of banditry did so because they saw it as a means of survival. These points to the fact that solving the issue that made banditry a lucrative business will be the first step toward providing solution to the menace in the country's North-west region.

Furthermore, the findings agree with Yahaya (2018b) who identified failure of security agencies and porous borders as some of the factors that facilitate availability of small arms and light weapons in Africa. Again, Abiodun, Ayo-Adeyekun, Onafowora and Nwannenaya (2018) opined that most of the Nigerian borders are porous, therefore, giving room for easy influx, movement and exit of arms, human trafficking and drugs. Conclusively, Bukarti (2022), a Fellow of Extremism Policy Unit of Tony Blair Institute for Global Change has opined that what is driving the crisis of banditry in Nigeria is 'drug, guns and Chinese motorcycles coming through the porous borders.'

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

Findings from the paper have shown the nature and forms of banditry to include, kidnapping, cattle rustling, killings and attacks on villages. Again, the paper revealed a significant relationship between porous borders and banditry in the North-west zone. Porous borders make it easier for criminal elements to have easy entry into the country. Not only that, the porosity of our borders makes it possible for smuggled arms to get into the hands of bandits.

From the foregoing findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

Firstly, the government should adopt better and more effective border management strategies. One of which is the use of technology like biometric identification, surveillance systems and automated

border control systems. Another is by building the capacity of trans-border officials to enhance their skills and knowledge in areas like customs procedures, immigration management, and security protocols.

Again, there should be an enhanced inter agency collaboration, increased community engagement, regular border patrols, security enforcement and international cooperation, in other to foster a collaborative and coordinated border surveillance with the view to enhancing mutual border security.

Thirdly, government should stop illegal mining in the North-west. It can do this by licensing and monitoring miners, increasing surveillance, strengthen mining laws, community engagement, finding alternative sources of livelihoods, and forming international collaboration to address the biting issues of poverty issues of poverty and unemployment within the border communities

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