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BORDER SECURITY AND ARMS TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF BANDITRY AND KIDNAPPING IN NORTH WEST

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Abstract

The North West region of Nigeria has faced severe insecurity and a surge in kidnapping cases in recent years. Boko Haram insurgents, alongside armed criminal groups, and the presence of displaced populations have created a volatile security environment marked by frequent attacks on civilians, kidnappings, and extortion. While there are many factors responsible for these illegal acts, the issue of porous borders remains a major factor that has enhanced arms trafficking, banditry and kidnapping in the region. This study therefore evaluates border security and arms trafficking in Nigeria by conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the challenges presented by banditry and kidnapping in the North West region through these avenues. Thus, all relevant online sources including journals, articles, newspapers, textbooks, as well as blog posts were extracted in this study. The findings revealed that the borders separating Nigeria from all of its neighbouring countries are highly permeable, and as a result of the inadequate border control measures, illegal individuals, commodities, and services are able to cross through the designated border checkpoints. The paper concluded that, in order to effectively improve border security and reduce the illegal trade of weapons, it is necessary to implement measures that tackle the root causes of socio-economic complaints, reinforce governance systems, and foster equitable development. Based on the findings and conclusion, the paper recommended that government should allocate resources towards enhancing border monitoring capabilities by investing in advanced technology and infrastructure, such as the implementation of surveillance drones, sensors, and border control checkpoints. The paper also recommended that government should enforce stringent arms control measures, such as imposing stronger regulations on the sales and transfers of weapons, in order to limit the spread of illegal firearms.

KEYWORDS: Border control, Insecurity, Arms trafficking, Banditry, Kidnapping, NorthWest Nigeria.

Introduction

Ensuring border security is of utmost importance, not only for individual nations, but also for regions and continents as a whole. The issue of border security in Africa is highly complex due to variables such as permeable borders, inadequate government

frameworks, and the existence of transnational criminal networks (Isoke, 2015). These issues have extensive consequences, such as enabling the illegal transportation of commodities and individuals and intensifying conflicts, therefore endangering stability in the region.

In West Africa, the problem of border security has remained a major concern, since many countries are struggling with the effects of easily crossed borders and insufficient security measures. The underlying reasons for the lack of security along the border in this area are complex and varied. They include historical factors, such as the borders established during the colonial era, which often do not correspond to ethnic or tribal boundaries (Mobolaji, 2017). However, the situations are exacerbated by contemporary issues such as political instability, corruption, and inadequate law enforcement capabilities. These factors provide favourable conditions for numerous illicit operations, such as arms trafficking, drug smuggling, and people trafficking.

Nigeria, being the most populous nation in West Africa and a significant regional actor, encounters significant obstacles in terms of border security. Nigeria's borders, especially in the northern region, are extensive and permeable, which poses substantial challenges in efficiently overseeing and regulating the movement of individuals and commodities (Nosiri&Ohazurike, 2016). This has led to several security issues, such as the widespread distribution of firearms and explosives, acts of terrorism, and organised criminal activities.

Furthermore, a prominent security issue in Nigeria, particularly in the North West region, is the widespread problem of kidnapping. The long-standing conflict carried out by Boko Haram in the region has resulted in not only loss of lives and displacement of communities, but has also fostered an atmosphere that is favourable for other criminal activities, such as the abduction or kidnapping of individuals in exchange for money (Brenchenmacher, 2019). Thus, the absence of efficient border controls and the permeable characteristics of Nigeria's borders with neighbouringnations intensify these challenges, enabling criminal elements to operate without significant consequences across borders.

In recent years, the North West area of Nigeria, which includes states like Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara has experienced a significant amount of insecurity and cases of kidnapping. The actions of Boko Haram insurgents, along with the spread of armed criminal organisations and the existence of displaced populations, have resulted in an unstable security situation marked by regular assaults on civilians, kidnappings, and extortion (Ibrahim & Mukhtar, 2017). However, despite the efforts of the Nigerian government and security agencies to tackle these challenges, the situation remains extremely serious, with people still enduring the majority of the violence and lack of safety.

Thus, this study aims to enhance the current understanding of border security and arms trafficking in Nigeria by conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the challenges presented by banditry and kidnapping in the North West region. Furthermore, this study seeks to analyse the underlying causes of insecurity, the impacts on the people, the strategies used by these criminal organisations, and the efficacy of existing countermeasures. The research seeks to provide insights into the potential methods for improving border security and reducing arms trafficking to avoid the negative effects of kidnapping on peace and stability in Nigeria and the broader West African region.

Conceptual Clarification

This section provides a conceptual clarification of the key terms used in this paper. It draws on scholarly arguments and perspectives to thoroughly explain the meanings and nuances of these concepts, ensuring a clear and precise understanding for the reader.

Border and Cross Border

Various scholars have provided diverse perspectives on the concept of borders, using comparable words to convey their meanings and concepts. Basically, a border refers to a margin that surrounds the perimeter of an object, such as a lawn, garden image, sheet of paper, or even a country. The Concise English dictionary (2014) defines a border as a delineation or small region that separates two countries or areas, including the surrounding lands. Borders, in a general sense, establish the geographical limits of political bodies or legal jurisdictions, such as governments, sovereign states, federated states, and other subnational entities (Edward 2012).

However, Meagher (2003) contended that according to international law, each nation is generally authorised to establish the requirements that must be fulfilled by an individual to legally enter its borders based on its own laws. Additionally, a country has the right to prevent individuals from crossing its borders and impose appropriate penalties when these laws are violated. Immigration authorities mandate the submission of passports, visas, or other valid forms of identification for anyone seeking to cross international borders. In order to live or work in a country, aliens may be required to possess specific immigration documents or licences that grant them authorization to do so (Malechi & Matthias, 2021).

On the other hand, cross border pertains to occurrences or interactions that involve multiple countries, or encompass individuals or enterprises from diverse countries. Cross border refers to activities that occur across state borders, including those that take place within the boundaries of a state but include subnational borders (Folami & Naylor, 2017). Cross-border data transfer refers to the movement of data across State borders. This can happen when data is sent from a sender in one State to a recipient in the same State, but the data is routed through another State. It can also occur when one or more individuals have, or may have under specific circumstances, remote access to the data from a different State. Thus, cross-border crimes can be seen as encompassing both transnational crimes, which have a real or potential impact across national borders, and intrastate crimes that violate fundamental values of the international community (Boister, 2003).

Cross Border Crimes

Cross-border crimes refer to criminal activities that either cross national borders or have the potential to do so. They also include intra-state crimes that violate the fundamental principles of the international community. The terms "cross-border, transnational, or trans-border" are frequently employed in law enforcement agencies and academic circles nowadays. As to the Concise English dictionary (2014), cross border refers to something that extends or operates across borders or boundaries. Also, cross crime refers to illegal activities that not only occur across international borders but also entail the transfer of goods, money, or people across these borders as a crucial aspect of the illicit operation. It encompass offences that occur within one nation but have substantial repercussions on another nation, potentially including transit countries as well. Instances of transnational criminal activities encompass people trafficking, the illicit transportation of items (such as weaponry, drugs, and contraband animal and plant products), as well as other environmentally forbidden commodities (Malechi & Matthias, 2021).

However, crimes that occur beyond borders can also be considered as customary international law violations or international crimes, depending on specific circumstances. For instance, in specific circumstances, they might be seen as acts that qualify as crimes against humanity. As per the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2005), cross-border crime refers to illegal activities that involve individuals in multiple countries. These individuals establish a well-functioning system of operation and communication to carry out criminal transactions, often on a recurring basis (De Coning, &Stølsvik, 2013).

Furthermore, cross border crimes refer to the movement of individuals, goods, and services across national borders in a way that disregards accepted norms and standards (Ngboawaji, 2011). However, the vulnerability of nations in West Africa, along with the ineffectiveness of government institutions responsible for addressing criminal activity, has led to a significant increase in the problem of cross-border crimes in recent years.

Arms Trafficking

Arms trafficking is a multifaceted and unlawful commerce that entails the unauthorised transportation and commercialization of weapons, ammunition, explosives, and other resources across national boundaries. This phenomenon not only presents substantial obstacles to the security of nations and regions but also weakens efforts to establish peace and intensifies conflicts on a global scale. Diverse entities, including as criminal syndicates, rebels, terrorist organisations, and governmental bodies, partake in the illicit trade of firearms to procure armaments for their unlawful endeavours (Phillips &Ogwu, 2020). However, the ramifications of arms trafficking are severe, as it contributes to the widespread distribution of small arms and light weapons, exacerbates armed violence, and enables human rights violations in impacted areas (Babaita, 2020).

Arms trafficking in Nigeria poses a significant security dilemma, especially in conflict- affected and unstable regions like the North West. Nigeria's open borders, coupled with inadequate law enforcement capabilities and corruption, facilitate the activities of arms traffickers who operate without fear of punishment (Thompson & Adams, 2021). Thus, the widespread distribution of small firearms and lightweight weaponry intensifies preexisting security risks, such as terrorism, communal disputes, and organised crime, hence increasing the instability of both the nation and the surrounding area. However, to effectively address arms trafficking, it is necessary to have a thorough and synchronised strategy that encompasses national, regional, and international efforts.

Banditry

Banditry is the term used to describe the organised criminal operations carried out by armed groups or individuals. These actions usually involve acts of robbery, extortion, and assault. In Nigeria, banditry has emerged as a major security concern, especially in rural regions with low government presence. Armed crime syndicates, frequently operating in isolated areas with easily crossed borders, take advantage of the weaknesses of communities to conduct their illegal operations (Abdulrasheed, 2021). It poses a dual threat to the well-being of people, as it not only jeopardises their safety and security but also hampers economic progress and social unity. This, in turn, perpetuates a cycle of violence and instability.

The escalation of banditry in Nigeria is driven by multiple factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate governance systems. Communities that are marginalised and have limited access to essential services and economic opportunities are especially susceptible to being exploited by criminal groups (Akinyetun, 2021). Furthermore, the

permeable borders and inadequate law enforcement intensify the issue, enabling criminal syndicates to act without fear of punishment and avoid being identified. Again, bandits pose a serious threat to public safety and security due to the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons, which are typically obtained illegally (Abdullahi & Mukhtar, 2022).

Kidnapping

Kidnapping, within the realm of security and criminology, refers to the illegal act of forcibly taking and holding persons against their will for different reasons, such as demanding money, advancing political agendas, or pursuing other unlawful goals (Chinwokwu& Micheal, 2019). Kidnapping has become a widespread security concern in Nigeria, presenting considerable obstacles to public safety and stability, especially in areas impacted by war and instability (Dami, 2021). The phenomenon of abduction for ransom, whereby individuals are forcibly detained until a financial sum is paid, has proliferated extensively, with criminal syndicates operating nationwide engaging in this highly profitable illicit enterprise (Ohazuruike, 2020). Furthermore, in Nigeria, there is a significant occurrence of political kidnapping, which is carried out with the intention of pressuring the government or promoting ideological objectives.

The high incidence of kidnapping in Nigeria can however be attributed to multiple factors, such as economic deprivation, social inequality, and a lack of effective law enforcement capabilities. The presence of elevated rates of unemployment and poverty, particularly among marginalised populations, provides an advantageous environment for criminal elements to manipulate vulnerable individuals for monetary benefit (Akanji, 2015). Furthermore, the permeable borders and insufficient border security measures worsen the issue, enabling kidnappers to transport their victims over international borders with considerable ease, posing a challenge for law enforcement authorities to capture culprits and free hostages.

Theoretical framework

This research adopted the social disorganization theory. The social disorganisation theory originated in the early 20th century as a result of research conducted by sociologists at the University of Chicago, namely Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (Sampson & Groves, 1989). Their studies focused on urban crime and delinquency. Shaw and McKay conducted study in Chicago throughout the 1920s and 1930s, specifically examining the geographical pattern of crime and the attributes of neighbourhoods with elevated crime rates. They saw that specific communities consistently had elevated crime rates, even when there were changes in population demography and economic conditions. This led them to develop the theory of social disorganisation. The theory suggests that crime and delinquency are more common in communities that have social and economic instability, weak social connections, and a lack of collective effectiveness (Sampson & Groves, 1989).

The foundation of social disorganisation theory rests on several fundamental assumptions. Initially, it posits that communities characterised by elevated degrees of poverty, residential instability, and ethnic diversity are prone to encountering social disorganisation. Consequently, this situation heightens the probability of crime and delinquency (Jones, 2020). Furthermore, the theory posits that social institutions, such as family, schools, and communityorganisations are essential in upholding social order and controlling behaviour. In socially disorganised communities, individuals are more prone to participate in criminal activities when the institutions in place are weak or dysfunctional. However, the theory refutes the notion that individuals engage in criminal activities solely

based on their own volition and rational thinking. Instead, it highlights the impact of social and environmental influences on behavior (Lynch &Booggess, 2016).

Furthermore, social disorganisation theory argues that crime and delinquency are not just caused by individual pathology or moral decline, but rather are deeply connected to wider social and structural circumstances. These factors encompass economic disparity, the separation of residential areas based on social groups, and the erosion of conventional mechanisms for maintaining social order (Hallsworth & Young, 2010). Thus, social disorganisation theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the fundamental causes of criminal behaviour and developing successful crime prevention and intervention tactics by examining the social and environmental elements that contribute to crime.

The hallmark of this theory is its focus on the influence of social and environmental factors in creating criminal behaviour and juvenile delinquency. The theory provides valuable insights into the underlying causes of crime and the ways in which social disorganisation contributes to criminal behaviour by emphasising the significance of community-level factors such as poverty, residential instability, and ethnic diversity (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

However, the social disorganisation theory has faced criticism due to its restricted ability to explain and its inability to consider variations in criminal behaviour at the individual level (Bursik Jr., 2014). Critics contend that the theory fails to consider the influence of personal agency and logical decision-making in determining criminal behaviour, instead emphasising structural causes and social processes. In addition, the social disorganisation theory has faced criticism due to its dependence on statistics at an aggregate level and its failure to explain differences in crime rates within specific neighbourhoods (Bellair, 2017).

Utilising social disorganisation theory to analyse the issue of border security and arms trafficking in Nigeria, specifically in the North West region, highlights the significance of socialdisorganisation as a conceptual framework for understanding the complexities of crime and insecurity in this particular setting. The North West region of Nigeria, known for its significant poverty rates, political instability, and diverse ethnic makeup, displays several circumstances that align with social disorganisation theory (Ewalefoh, 2020). These circumstances provide favourable conditions for criminal activities such as the illegal trade of weapons, banditry, and kidnapping, as the absence of strong social connections and a lack of collective effectiveness hinder attempts to uphold law and order.

Furthermore, the porous borders and insufficient law enforcement capabilities in the North West region contribute to social disarray by enabling criminal elements to operate without punishment and avoid being identified. The absence of efficient social regulations and the disintegration of conventional community establishments intensify the issue, fostering an atmosphere that promotes criminal conduct (Okolie, Onyema & Bassey, 2019). Consequently, the North West region of Nigeria has transformed into a hub of illicit activities, such as the illegal trade of weapons and the abduction of individuals, which has substantial consequences for the country's security and stability.

Overall, the social disorganisation theory is unique in this study because it provides excellent insights into the fundamental reasons behind crime and instability in the North

West region of Nigeria. It emphasises the significance of social and environmental factors in influencing criminal behaviour.

Nature and Overview of the Nigerian Border

Nigeria spans across 923,768 square kilometres of territory, extending from the southern Gulf of Guinea coastline to the northWestern Lake Chad region (Ndabula, Terdoo&Jiduana, 2021). The West African nations have borders with four neighbouring nations, specifically the Republic of Benin to the southwest, Cameroon to the southWest, Chad to the northWest, and Niger to the north. Four of Nigeria's 36 states, specifically Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, and Kwara States, are located along the Nigeria-Benin borders (Okorie &Enwere, 2020).

The Nigeria-Cameroon borders in the Western region extend from the southern to the northern part of Nigeria, encompassing six states: Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Benue, Taraba, Adamawa, and Borno States. The border between Nigeria and Chad encompasses various towns

in Borno State, such as Monguno, Ngala, Bama, and Gwoza, and extends towards the Lake Chad region. The fourth borderland, which delineates the boundary between Nigeria and Niger Republic, extends throughout the whole northern periphery of Nigeria, intersecting with seven distinct Nigerian States: Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina, Jigawa, Yobe, and Borno States (Okojie &Enwere, 2020).

However, the borders separating Nigeria from all of its neighbouring countries are highly permeable. As a result of the inadequate border control measures, only a restricted number of individuals, commodities, and services are able to cross through the designated border checkpoints. The permeable nature of the Nigerian borders facilitates extensive illicit trafficking of individuals, currencies, and commodities, such as rice, pre-owned vehicles, second-hand garments, and counterfeit pharmaceuticals.

Additionally, there have been documented instances of a thriving illicit trade in narcotics, firearms, and lightweight weaponry, along with virtually unrestricted movement of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram across national boundaries (Eselebor, 2020).

Overview of Border Security and Arms Trafficking in Nigeria (2010-2023)

In Nigeria, border security and arms trafficking have emerged as major concerns in the last few years, posing threats to both national security and regional stability. Nigeria is next to multiple nations, namely Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, covering a distance of more than 4,000 kilometres. However, these boundaries frequently lack strict control, rendering them susceptible to illegal activities such as the trafficking of weapons, smuggling, and cross-border criminal operations (Soetan, 2017).

Furthermore, the issue of arms trafficking has consistently plagued Nigeria, leading to the widespread distribution of small arms and light weapons and exacerbating tensions and violence in different regions of the country. As a result, Nigeria has been identified as a major hub for illegal weapons trade in West Africa, as per a report published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The country's porous borders facilitate the entry of substantial amounts of firearms (Ogunniyi &Akpu, 2019).

Again, the issues of border security and arms trafficking are especially prominent in the North West region of Nigeria, which has been heavily affected by insurgency, terrorism, and armed conflict in recent times. The actions of organisations like Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have worsened the lack of

security in the area, resulting in extensive displacement, loss of lives, and human distress (Badewa, 2022).

However, it is important to note that the progress in strengthening border security and addressing arms trafficking in Nigeria has been hindered by a range of obstacles, such as inadequate institutional capability, corruption, and limited resources. Although the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), and the Nigerian Navy (NN) have been established, border security remains a significant problem due to deficiencies in surveillance, intelligence collecting, and law enforcement.

Summarily, Nigeria is currently facing tremendous issues in terms of border security and arms trafficking. These challenges have important consequences for national security, regional stability, and human security. The porous nature of Nigeria's borders, combined with inadequate institutional capacity and governance difficulties, has enabled the unlawful transportation of weapons and other prohibited goods, leading to insecurity and violence in different regions of the country.

Assessment of Banditry and Kidnapping in North West Nigeria (2010-2023)

Over the past decade, the region of North West Nigeria has been consistently afflicted by the problems of banditry and kidnapping, which have had a detrimental impact on security and impeded socioeconomic progress. The rise in these illicit activities can be attributed to multiple factors, such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate law enforcement, and the widespread availability of small firearms and light weaponry. However, between 2010 and 2023, the frequency and intensity of these catastrophes have varied, but in general, they have continued to be a significant concern for the region (Usman & Singh, 2021).

Data from several sources, including government reports and non-governmental groups, have revealed a concerning pattern of banditry and kidnapping in North West Nigeria in recent years. Based on statistics from the Nigeria Security Tracker, which compiles information on violence in Nigeria, there has been a notable rise in cases of kidnapping in the area,particularly in certain years. In 2014, there were more than 1,000 documented cases of kidnapping in the North West, indicating a significant increase compared to prior years. In addition, there has been a significant presence of banditry-related incidents, including armed robberies and assaults on villages, which have further exacerbated the feeling of fear among the local population (Nkemdilim, 2018).

Furthermore, the ramifications of these illicit operations reach beyond the direct victims, amplifying pre-existing vulnerabilities and impacting entire communities. Banditry and kidnapping not only result in casualties and property damage, but also contribute to the displacement of communities, disruption of livelihoods, and erosion of trust in local authorities. The kidnapping of schoolchildren, specifically, has attracted significant attention and provoked strong indignation both in Nigeria and elsewhere. The seriousness of the situation has been emphasized by notable events, such as the kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls from Chibok in 2014 by the Boko Haram insurgency (Nkemdilim, 2018).

However, attempts to tackle the underlying causes of banditry and kidnapping in North West Nigeria have been put in place and they are diverse, but frequently hindered by institutional problems and limitations in resources. The government's efforts to improve security, including as deploying military forces and establishing joint task groups, have had minimal success in controlling the violence. Furthermore, corruption and mismanagement

have impeded the efficiency of socioeconomic initiatives aimed at reducing poverty and empowering young people, therefore hindering their ability to address the root causes of discontent.

In all, the high occurrence of banditry and kidnapping in North West Nigeria between 2010 and 2023 highlights the immediate requirement for comprehensive measures to enhance security and tackle socioeconomic inequalities.

Impact of Arms Trafficking on Banditry and Kidnapping NorthWest Nigeria

The illicit trade of weapons has become a major factor in intensifying the problems of banditry and kidnapping in NorthWest Nigeria. The surge in illegal weaponry, encompassing small arms and light weapons, grants criminal organizations the capability to execute their operations more efficiently and without fear of punishment. However, these weapons not only empower criminals and abductors to instill fear in local populations, but also exacerbate conflicts and fuel the spread of violence (Udosen&Uwak, 2021).

Research has emphasized the cross-border aspect of arms trafficking in the Sahel region, where easily penetrable borders enable the transportation of firearms over national frontiers. The permeable boundaries separating Nigeria from neighboring nations, like Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, function as channels for the illicit trafficking of weapons, enabling criminal syndicates to elude discovery and bypass regulations on weaponry (Aluede, 2017; Idris &tutumlu, 2022)). However, these movement of weapons across borders not only worsens instability in Nigeria but also creates wider regional security problems, as armed groups take advantage of ineffective governance systems and easily crossed borders to maintain their activities.

The impact of arms trafficking on banditry and kidnapping in Northwest Nigeria extends beyond immediate security challenges and has broader socio-economic implications. The proliferation of weapons enables criminal groups to assert control over specific areas, disrupt economic activities, and exploit local populations through extortion and coercion. Also, the widespread availability of firearms contributes to a pervasive culture of violence and impunity, undermining efforts to foster social cohesion, establish a fair legal system, and promote sustainable development in conflict-affected regions.

Furthermore, the adverse effects of armed violence on livelihoods, food security, and fundamental human rights implies the necessity for coordinated efforts to address the root causes of the illicit arms trade and its far-reaching consequences.

Efforts of Stakeholders in enhancing Peace and Stability in Nigeria

Stakeholders in Nigeria have undertaken collaborative endeavors to improve peace and stability in the country, specifically in places such as NorthWest Nigeria, where banditry, kidnapping, and arms trafficking present substantial obstacles (John, 2022). The government, at both the federal and state levels, has introduced multiple initiatives with the objective of tackling the underlying factors contributing to violence and insecurity. These endeavors involve sending security personnel to counteract criminal activity, establishing collaborative task groups to synchronize security operations, and executing socio-economic measures to alleviate poverty and unemployment. However, the efficacy of these endeavors has been impeded by enduring deficiencies in governance, corruption, and inadequate institutional capability

Furthermore, international allies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been crucial in providing support for peacebuilding and stabilization initiatives in Nigeria. International stakeholders have also bolstered the capabilities of Nigerian security forces, improved border control systems, and facilitated discussion and reconciliation among opposing parties through capacity-building initiatives, technical aid, and financial support. In addition, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have developed community-led programs with the objective of tackling the underlying factors contributing to violence, such as reducing poverty, empowering young people, and promoting interaction between different communities (Chris, Victor & Felicia, 2021).

The Civil society groups (CSOs) have also played a crucial role in promoting peace, safeguarding human rights, and pushing for good governance in Nigeria. CSOs have utilized advocacy campaigns, community mobilization, and monitoring and reporting procedures to increase awareness regarding the consequences of conflict and insecurity on vulnerable populations (Obi, 2018). Additionally, they have worked towards promoting accountability and transparency in government. In addition, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have played a crucial role in facilitating discussions and negotiations, by bringing together various parties with different interests to find solutions to issues, reduce tensions, and foster societal unity. Despite encountering obstacles such as limited financial resources, harassment, and intimidation, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) persist in their crucial function of fostering peace and stability at the local level and ensuring that those in positions of responsibility are held answerable for their conduct (Obi, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evaluation of border security and the illegal trade of weapons in Nigeria, specifically in relation to the rise of banditry and kidnapping in the North West region, emphasizes the immediate requirement for a thorough and synchronized approach to tackle the underlying factors contributing to insecurity. The porous borders of Nigeria with its neighboring nations have enabled the illicit trafficking of weapons, equipping criminal organizations with the resources to carry out acts of violence and create instability. In order to effectively improve border security and reduce the illegal trade of weapons, it is necessary to implement measures that also tackle the root causes of socio-economic complaints, reinforce governance systems, and foster equitable development. Furthermore, it is essential to have regional cooperation and international engagement in order to dismantle transnational criminal networks and promote long-lasting peace and stability in Nigeria and the wider West African region.

Additionally, to effectively address the difficulties of border security and arms trafficking, a comprehensive approach is needed that combines security measures with socio- economic interventions and governance changes. Stakeholders can reduce the impact of banditry and kidnapping on communities in the North West and other areas by addressing the linked causes of conflict and instability. Moreover, it is crucial to maintain ongoing involvement and collaboration between government agencies, international allies, civil society organizations, and local communities in order to forward a comprehensive agenda that fosters peace, security, and prosperity for all Nigerians.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this paper, the following recommendations are put in place:

It is recommended that enhancing border security measures by improving surveillance, intelligence collection, and border patrol operations will help to effectively detect and discourage the illegal trafficking of weapons across Nigeria's borders. Thus, government should allocate resources towards enhancing border monitoring capabilities by investing in advanced technology and infrastructure, such as the implementation of surveillance drones, sensors, and border control checkpoints.

Secondly, government should enforce stringent arms control measures, such as imposing stronger regulations on the sales and transfers of weapons, in order to limit the spread of illegal firearms. They should also enhance the capabilities of law enforcement and judicial systems to effectively investigate and prosecute people engaged in the activities of arms trafficking networks.

Furthermore, the present administration should work towards the alleviation of socio- economic grievances. Addressing the root causes of violence and instability, such as poverty, unemployment, and marginalization should be put in place by implementing specific socio- economic initiatives. Thus, the government should allocate resources towards educational initiatives, vocational training, and job creation endeavors to offer viable employment options for susceptible demographics, such as young individuals who are susceptible to being recruited by criminal organizations.

It is equally recommended to enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of governance structures and the legal systems. Governance frameworks should promote transparency, and ensure accountability to address corruption, enhance the delivery of public services, and rebuild confidence in institutions.

Lastly, efforts should be made to promote and facilitate regional cooperation and collaboration. Enhancing collaborations with neighboring nations and regional entities will help to tackle security challenges that transcend borders and foster stability within the region.

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