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SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS SMUGGLING AND BOKO HARAM CHALLENGE TO NIGERIAN SECURITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE BENIN-NIGERIAN POROUS BORDER

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Abstract: *Porous borders continue to be the principal source and conduit for small arms and light weapons (SALWs) throughout Africa, particularly Nigeria. Presently, Nigeria's security environment is severely endangered by the operations of the Boko Haram insurgent group, which often uses smuggled firearms and ammunition. Scholars have paid little attention to analyzing the smuggling problem in SALWs and their threat to Nigeria's internal security amid the Boko Haram menace. This study addresses the SALWs smuggling, and Boko Haram challenges to Nigerian security by using the Benin-Nigerian Porous Border as a case study. This paper discovers that the porous Nigeria-Benin border and the lackadaisical attitude of both governments have enabled transnational crime of the Boko-Haram sect. The paper recommends adequate coordination between security services and residents to battle the scourge of cross-border proliferation of small guns and light weapons between Benin and Nigeria. This study recommends a West African regional security network structure to regulate borders and coordinate security to curb SALWs and other criminal activities.*

Keywords: *Boko Haram; Nigeria; Insecurity; Borders; Small Arms and Light Weapons*

INTRODUCTION

Security has long been an international issue. Current security issues, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria, show the limitations of authorities in various ways. Nigeria is plagued by ethnoreligious conflicts and militancy, political disagreements, terrorism, assassinations, and abductions (Komolafe and Adeyemi 2020). Insurgents from Boko Haram have also threatened Nigeria's security in the northeast. Disagreement, conflict, and crime are as old as human settlements, yet the most pressing issue is their expansion and development. In his works, Eric Hobsbawm (1969) connected 'social banditry' to the class struggle. Hobsbawm claimed that a social bandit is a group of less fortunate individuals that oppose and rebel against their rulers. Hobsbawm saw societal banditry in the peasant-lord relationship, in which

the peasant complained, agitated, and robbed the wealthy to repay the impoverished. He characterized societal banditry as a global crime involving actors and non-actors. Banditry is not a new phenomenon but rather an old aberrant behavior that spreads via multidimensional strategies such as those used in the current study.

Since the chaos and lawlessness of the 1990s in Liberia, small arms and armed groups have flourished, and their criminal activities have extended across West Africa (De Andres 2008). Current Small arms and light weapons (SALWs) proliferation is crucial to the emergence and continuation of ethnoreligious disputes, insurgency, and political violence in several West African countries (Onuoha 2011; Adejumo *et al.* 2021). The UN Panel of Government Experts described SALWs in 1997 as "Small arms range from clubs, knives, and machetes to those weapons just below those covered by United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, for example, Mortars below the caliber of 100mm" (Di Chiaro 1998, 31). This group would also include automatic assault weapons, rifles such as the AK-series Kalashnikovs, the USM-16, and the Israeli Uzi; PPGs; machine and sub-machine guns; shoulder-fire surface-air missiles (SAMs); and personal weapons. Even though certain illegally aggressive behaviors have a historical background, the continual availability of SALWs is a significant influence. Many state and non-state actors in West Africa illegally obtained SALWs through smuggling. The deaths from violent wars hindered the work of international humanitarian organizations, causing millions of innocent people to migrate, and overstretched the peacemaking and peacebuilding capacity of organizations like ECOMOG, the African Union, and the United Nations (Aluko 2012).

Nigeria's closeness to West African conflict zones has historically facilitated the entry of weapons into the country. Thus, security became a significant issue in Nigeria's foreign policy. The government had to re-strategize, collaborate, and share intelligence with its immediate neighbors (Benin, Cameroon, Niger Republic, and Togo) to manage and preserve territorial security (Omotuyi 2012). The Nigeria and Benin Republic border is a strategic site between Lagos and Ogun State of Nigeria. The border involves the Badagry-Cotonou (Seme Border) and Idi-Iroko-Porto Novo (Idi-Iroko Border). Within this border, transnational crime is prevalent. Such activities include the smuggling of SALWs and other illicit items, human trespass, and cross-border crimes, which pose a severe security threat since criminals use the region as a hidden location that allows them to move swiftly between border regions. The porous Nigeria-Benin land border and the indifference of both governments have also facilitated another transnational crime (Human Trafficking, Drugs). In recent years, crime has gotten worse in some places near the border, which has led to more gun sales (Dadur and Aliyu 2021; Bassey and Asira 2022). For the reasons stated above, this study examines the problem of SALWs smuggling and the threat to Nigeria's internal security amid the Boko Haram menace.

SMALL AND LIGHT WEAPONS (SALWs) TRADE

Small and light weapons (SALWs) are commerce that generates and emerges from crises, creating possibilities and wealth for those who want to cause chaos. The world has transitioned from centuries-old symmetric conflict to asymmetric warfare, in which small and light weapons (SALWs) have destroyed lives and property (Awaru *et al.* 2022). Due to the clandestine nature of the weapons trade, economic considerations such as commerce, profitability, and employment

connect directly with foreign policy problems such as human rights, international order, and security. Many of these weapons trades include a spectrum of legality and civility, ranging from the official or formal trade to the black and grey markets (Eyo *et al.* 2022). Weapons transactions on the black market are unlawful in execution and conception, whereas the grey market refers to arms transactions made through legal channels but handled secretly. Nonetheless, these two marketplaces violate global accords, national laws, and weapons embargoes (Pérez *et al.* 2021). From a pragmatic standpoint, it is difficult to distinguish between the legal, black, and grey markets.

Global military expenditures are projected to have totaled $20 trillion in 2020 (over the preceding decade) (Erdogan *et al.* 2022). This is a significant growth since 2000 and accounts for 8.6% of the international gross domestic product (Elveren 2022). The annual value of the trade-in of conventional armaments, both large and small, is around $690 billion (Abramson 2021). The United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, Israel, and China are often cited as the world's foremost makers and dealers of weapons and materials (materials refers to the equipment, apparatus, and supplies of a military force). An estimated 700 million SALWs exist around the globe, often destabilizing countries' tranquility and causing international law problems (Abramson 2021).

The unregulated international trade in conventional arms, especially in small arms and light weapons, has become an exacerbating factor in armed conflict, violent crime, and internal repression (Adejumo *et al.* 2022). The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council dominate the arms trade: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, along with Germany and, increasingly, Israel. The arms industry and its powerful political friends have forged a parallel political universe that largely insulates itself against the influence or judgment of others by invoking national security, also known as the 'shadow world'. This 'shadow world' is always shrouded in secrecy (Simon 2012). Arms deals are often concluded between governments who turn to manufacturers (many of which are now privately owned) to fulfill them. In some instances, governments enter into contracts directly with commercial suppliers, and companies do business with each other or third parties, some of whom are not even legal entities, which includes non-state actors - from armed militias, insurgent groups, informal clusters of terrorists, and pariah states. The sale and supply of weapons often involve murky intermediaries (known as arms dealers or brokers).

The arms trade accounts for more than 40% of all global trade corruption. The sheer magnitude of the contracts, the small number of people who make purchasing decisions, and the cloak of national security lend themselves to massive bribery and corruption (Feinstein and Choonara 2020). Many states across the globe have been actively participating in the illegality of the arms trade, while many more have been quite content to countenance the behavior.

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THE PROGRESSIVE MARCH OF ARMS: AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY

Weapons have been essential to the development of every civilization. It is often believed that only humans are capable of murdering another species at a distance, making them superior to all other living things on earth. From the ancient past to the present, weaponry has undergone significant changes and improvements.

The throwing spear was the oldest weapon used by humans (Schoch *et al.* 2005). In 6000 BC, the bow and arrow entered the history of weapons. This was the first weapon of its kind where the projectile motion played a role in hunting and killing (Speth 2012). The bow and arrow were the weapons of choice for quite a long time. However, by the end of the middle ages, edged weapons with metalworking emerged (where the arrow tips were made of bronze). In 2000 BC, iron replaced bronze weapons due to its simplicity in manufacturing, lower price, and easy availability (Ferrill 2018). Gradually, iron weaponry started to get sophisticated. During this period, history witnessed an escalation in large-scale warfare. The rise in warfare was responsible for the demand for more sophisticated projectile-throwing weapons. The next paradigm shift in weaponry was gunpowder (also known as black powder). It is believed that gunpowder in cannons was first used in the battle of Crecy in 1346 (Ferrill 2018).

In 1380, the same was introduced, commonly named 'handgonne'. Later, the handgonne was replaced by the 'arquebus' (Flatnes 2013). After that, the ignition system of the firearms was developed, which in furtherance gave birth to the 'serpentine' firearms (Heard 2011). However, there were quite a few disadvantages *vis-à-vis* these weapons, because of which the XVI century saw a relative change in the mechanism of the ignition system with the invention of wheel lock firearms. The next generation of firearms was the 'snapback'. It is believed to have appeared first in 1570 (Hutson 2012). The mechanism in the 'snaphance' was comparatively cheaper (Pegler 2011). Next in the line of arm tech was the 'flintlock'. The ignition system, which superseded the wheel lock, was a simple mechanism that provided a spark by striking a piece of flint against a steel plate. In this regime, three varieties of flintlock were manufactured: snaphance, miquelet, and true flintlock (Pegler 2011). The flintlock dictated the arms market for almost two centuries until Alexander Forsyth discovered Mercury fulminate (Heard 2011). This mechanism of ignition was named 'percussion priming'. The percussion priming system was popular from 1807 to 1814 (Thomson 2009). Joshua Shaw further improvised this mechanism (Moon 2012).

In 1851, Lefaucheux developed an accurate breech-loading weapon that contained a cartridge in which the missile and primer were held together in a case made of brass. This 'pinfire' system of firearms was very popular between 1890 and 1910 (Souter *et al.* 2014). The same was available until the Second World War. The next in the line of progressive marches was the 'rimfire' system. To eliminate the drawback of the pinfire mechanism, the rimfire system introduced a thin-walled cartridge with a hollow flanged rim (Souter *et al.* 2014). Based on this system, Smith and Wesson introduced the first revolver. However, just like all its predecessors, this was also not immune from any drawbacks. This system was further replaced by a groundbreaking 'center fire' system.

Hiram Maxim developed the first machine gun in 1884 (Shain 1998). The pivotal factor in any battle was the ability to fire more projectiles in a short time. At the same time, from smoked gunpowder to smokeless gunpowder, the machine gun became an efficient and practical

weapon. These two were so related that the production of machine guns escalated with the invention of smokeless powder. The late XIX century witnessed the development of semi-automatic pistols. Terrible confusion exists about what a pistol, revolvers, self-loading pistols, and automatics are (Shain 1998). In every period of history, the sophistication of firearms and weapons has evolved. As regards automatic firearms, the 'repeater' was one of the popular firearms that could hold more than one cartridge. Without charging, the repeater could fire one after the other. The American Springfield Model 1892-99 is one of the early repeater firearms (Poli 2010). This firearm was very popular during the Spanish-American War (Lienesch 1980). Later, the revolver made an entry with a unique feature of a rotating cylinder, which could hold even more cartridges. After that, the first rapid-fire gun came into existence. Richard Gatling invented the first rapid-fire gun in the 1860s, but it needed four men for its operation. Then came the age of self-loading firearms (1884), the 'Maxim Guns' (named after their inventor, Sir Hiram Maxim) (Willbanks 2004). The Maxim guns paved the way for self-loading rifles in 1908. Manuel Mondragon invented the first self-loading rifle (the Mondragon rifle) (Johnson and Haven 2015).

After a decade, Theodor Bergmann invented the world's first submachine gun in the Second World War. Germany developed the first successful assault rifle (StG 44) (De Quesada 2014). This firearm was a paradigm shift because it bridged the gap between pre-existing machine guns, short-range submachine guns, and long-range rifles. Later, during the Vietnam War, sophisticated arms like the M16 came into existence. After that, Russian-made Kalashnikov (commonly known as AK 47) assault rifles became the most popular and globally used rifles of all time (Pyadushkin 2013). High-tech conventional weapons have brought with them new challenges. Today's world has a high potential for significant casualties and the illegal trade of rifles to criminals.

BOKO HARAM: ORIGIN AND IDEOLOGY

Since the early 2000s, the militant Islamist organization 'Ahl al Sunna li al Da'wa wa al Jihad' has been active in northern Nigeria under the alias Boko Haram. Boko Haram roughly translates to "Western education/civilization is forbidden" (Onapajo and Uzodike 2012). Due to its preaching against Western influence, attendance at government institutions and colleges, and employment in government positions, the organization unwittingly earned this moniker (Hentz and Solomon, 2017). Boko Haram's beginnings are traced to the northern Nigerian city of Maiduguri. In 2002, a group of radical youths who had previously worshipped at a local mosque led by Alhaji Muhammadu Indimi proclaimed the Nigerian Islamic establishment to be intolerably corrupt and left the mosque. They established a strict Islamic separatist community in Kanama, close to the Niger border. They advocated an anti-state worldview and urged Muslims to retreat from society and return to a life governed by 'authentic' Islamic law. Some consider this to be the commencement of Boko Haram, even though the term 'Boko Haram' was not in use (Amaechi 2019).

There is little proof that the organization had any ties to the Taliban or other foreign jihadists, despite being called the 'Nigerian Taliban' by locals (Onuoha 2012). In December 2003, the gang allegedly clashed with the police over a community disagreement about fishing rights.

Either the group assaulted local police stations (Agbiboa 2017). Most of the group's members, including the commander, were slain during the conflict. In 2004, the survivors returned to Maiduguri. They rejoined the Alhaji Muhammadu Mosque-affiliated youth organization directed by the Islamic preacher Mohammed Yusuf. They continued to fight for the Islamist cause, and the organization was ultimately dubbed Boko Haram (Uzodikeand Maiangwa 2012). Initially, Boko Haram was primarily concerned with isolating itself from society. The leader, Mohammed Yusuf, preached against what he considered the inability of contemporary Nigerian Muslim lives to be Islamic. In addition, he criticized the 12 northern states that had lately accepted Sharia for improper implementation (last year). On a property owned by his father-in-law, he built a mosque for a group that promoted a purer form of Islam outside of civilization. The mosque was called Ibn Taymiyyah Masjid, after an Islamic scholar from the XIV century (Talmon-Heller 2018). Gradually, a community with a cabinet, a religious police unit, and a vast farm emerged around the mosque. After things settled down for a while, the gang focused on bringing in new members and getting supplies.

The organization sometimes attacked activities and locations it deemed immoral, such as gambling spots and bars. According to reports, the Boko Haram group members on their way to a funeral were stopped by police for not wearing motorcycle helmets. Violence erupted, and several individuals were injured (Agbiboa 2017). Several police officers were then killed in attacks on police stations and other government institutions in the northeastern states of Yobe and Bauchi. They also attacked mosques and churches (Agbiboa 2017).

The military retaliated, and five days of battle resulted in over 800 fatalities, most of whom were Boko Haram fighters (Comolli 2015). Mohammed Yusuf, the head of Boko Haram, was apprehended on the fourth day of the crackdown. He passed away in captivity soon afterward. The police stated that security agents killed Yusuf after a gunfight as he attempted to flee. However, Human Rights Watch in Nigeria has demanded an urgent inquiry into the incident, calling it 'extrajudicial' and 'illegal' (Comolli 2015). The death of Yusuf signified the end of the first reasonably tranquil stage in the formation of Boko Haram. The police resumed their search for Boko Haram members and supporters, arresting those who had left and seized their belongings. According to a local journalist, more than 100 people suspected of aiding Boko Haram vanished around this time, although the police denied any role in this (Bamidele 2015). The remaining militants of Boko Haram departed the region. In January 2012, Nigerian security officials informed Reuters that they had tracked the number of Nigerians to militant training camps in Algeria from September 2009 to September 2010. According to more unnamed sources, members of Boko Haram were trained in the Mail, Somalia, and Cameroon (Bamidele 2015).

In September 2010, however, Boko Haram was back in Nigeria under a new commander, Yusuf's former second-in-command Abubakar Mohammad Shekau. In September 2010, the group raided a jail in Bauchi State and liberated over 700 prisoners, including approximately 100 Boko Haram militants (Pantucciand Jesperson 2015). This incident marked the beginning of a new era in Boko Haram's development, during which the group's attacks have grown more regular and sophisticated. Before 2009, Boko Haram conducted just a few assaults per year using tiny hand weapons and knives. However, in this second phase, the group began executing attacks almost weekly. Since 2011, it has used explosives and suicide bombers. The number of

people killed in Boko Haram attacks went from more than 100 in 2010 to almost 800 in 2012, which is in line with the attacks getting more complicated and happening more often (Pantucci and Jesperson, 2015).

According to Mahmood and Ani (2018), although Boko Haram's first phase "was centered on a mix of preaching, recruiting, and violent resistance against the state", Boko Haram's second phase "focuses on the spectacular drama of hyper-violence" (p. 49). This move seems to have been precipitated by the assassination of Mohammed Yusuf and the rise of a new, more extreme leadership. Boko Haram's persistence and radicalization are also linked to poverty, inequality, and the political marginalization of the North. Dissatisfied politicians who want to undermine the current government's legitimacy also support Boko Haram, as do security forces that use too much force and religious fundamentalist traditions.

It is unclear what Boko Haram hopes to accomplish with its assaults. The organization does not seem to have produced a powerful ideological statement outlining its goals or purpose. Based on several brief comments issued by the organization, media interviews with some senior leaders, and the selection of targets, it is feasible to identify some of Boko Haram's primary objectives. The group's goals and worldview tend to center on three primary concerns. First, Boko Haram seeks the imposition of Sharia in Nigeria and harsher enforcement in the 12 northern states that have already accepted it. Second, Boko Haram is concerned with more significant concerns about governance, including overthrowing the Nigerian government, abolishing democracy, and establishing Muslim rule in Nigeria. Third, Boko Haram wants revenge, especially on the security forces for killing Muhammad Yusuf, its former leader, and on the Nigerian government, which Boko Haram says is corrupt. Boko Haram murdered 6,600 Nigerians in 2014 (O'Doherty 2017).

The organization burned 59 schoolboys in February 2014 and abducted 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, in April 2014 (O'Doherty 2017). According to Olarewaju (2021), the Boko Haram threat has resulted in the deaths of over 314,000 people in Nigeria's Northeastern area alone. Furthermore, suicide bombings and the detonation of many explosive devices in public locations have resulted in many victims and devastating effects. According to Bello (2021), since 2009, Boko Haram has killed more than 30,000 people and displaced more than two million. It indicates that the organization no longer cares about the vulnerable in crisis circumstances, such as women and children. In addition to being victims of the group's cruelty, women and children are now involved in committing mass crimes (Bello 2021). This is shown by cases where innocent women and children have been seen wearing bomb vests to harm the public's trust. Mickler *et al.* (2019) stress that between 2011 and 2015, Boko Haram seized a region about the size of Belgium.

BOKO HARAM ATTACKS: A TRANSNATIONAL PHENOMENON

Nigeria borders Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Benin. It has several border entry routes from these four countries, most of which are unmanned and uncontrolled (Abegunde and Fabiyi 2020). The porous nature of these borders heightens the potential for transnational transactions. Boko Haram's origin in Maiduguri, a city located in the Northeastern corner of Nigeria, bordered by Niger, and Cameroon, situates itself within a predominantly Hausa-speaking population with

linguistic, cultural, and ethnic ties to its neighbors – increasing the risk of conflict spillover. This, therefore, means that the area affected by Boko Haram comprises people who speak the same language and have a common mode of life. Additionally, a small portion of Boko Haram's leadership is foreign-born or has traveled outside Nigeria for extended periods (Eveslage 2013).

According to Umar (2013), Boko Haram has also embedded in what international security agencies term the 'arc of instability', spreading across Saharan and Sahelian Africa from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. It is feared that this area of unsafe borders and general governability will become a breeding ground for the Sahel and Sahara-based Salafi-jihadi groups. Due to the proximity of some extremist groups in this region and their similar ideology, it is feared that their collaboration would result in the ability to launch globally aggressive terrorist attacks. Adding to this 'perfect storm' was the fall of Gaddafi's Libya, unleashing a catalyzing regional arms trade and the vacuum of governance in northern Mali. This is not to mention the low level of economic development, higher incidence of famine, and desertification in many areas of western Africa that may sway local populations to support radical groups who claim to support their interests.

Boko Haram attacks took a cross-border dimension on July 27, 2014; over 200 militants stormed Kolofata, a town in Cameroon's extreme north region, targeting the residence of the Vice Prime Minister, Amadou Ali (Waddington 2014, 49). During that attack, the wife and sister-in-law of the Vice Prime Minister, as well as the Mayor and Seini Lamine, a senior religious leader, were kidnapped to an unknown destination. The night before, Boko Haram had attacked the Cameroon military in the extreme north region, resulting in four Cameroonian soldiers' deaths and the kidnapping of thirteen (13) others. The abduction of the Cameroonian soldiers marked the Spread of Boko Haram attacks in Cameroon. Additionally, two sons of Bieshair Mohaman, a traditional Cameroonian leader in Limani, were kidnapped on 15 July 2014 (Tar and Bala 2013).

In Chad, border security was expanded on 6 August 2014, when Boko Haram militants crossed into the country and gunned down six persons in Dubuwa village. In a more brazen attempt to enter Chadian territory, on August 16, 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped 97 people, including boys and several women, from the Doron Baga fishing village in Lake Chad (Antimbom 2016). In March 2020, over one hundred Chadian soldiers were killed in a nocturnal assault on the Bohoma peninsula of Lake Chad, precipitating an offensive headed by Chad's then-president, Idriss DebyItno. President Deby was killed during a battle against Boko Haram in northern Chad in April 2021 (Scheele 2022). His son, MahamatIdriss DebyItno, replaced him as the head of a military junta.

Walker (2012) notes that some factors, including the following, facilitate the transnational characteristics of Boko Haram operations:

1. Firstly, the borders of the affected countries are long and porous, with little security, immigration or control checkpoints. The vast 'ungoverned spaces' allow Boko Haram and other criminal gangs easy passage into the various countries and ready space to create safe heaven where attacks and training of new members are carried out. Nigeria shares a soft border of 2,000 miles with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon and has almost 1,500 illegal or unmonitored crossing routes.

2. Secondly, the concerned countries lack the expertise to combat terrorism and insurgency, mainly because the warfare is non-conventional, except the Chadian military that has engaged terrorist groups from Mali and North Africa, the army of the other countries are poorly trained for the asymmetric warfare waged by Boko Haram.
3. Thirdly, Nigeria's slow and weak response to initial attacks by Boko Haram and the absence of an early regional counter-terrorism initiative allowed the terrorist crises of the region to grow out of proportion (Brantly 2014).

Today, the economic needs of the big cities of Porto Novo, Cotonou, and Lagos, which are linked through the border corridor in the South, are constitutive of this cross-border vitality.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS OF THE BENINESE-NIGERIAN BORDER

The boundary between the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin is about 700 kilometers in length (Okoi and Offor 2020). The existing boundary corresponds to the 1889 inter-colonial line established between the British and French colonies. Since there are few natural borders between these two nations, their precise delineation is uncertain in some regions. It is difficult for immigration and customs officers to handle and monitor the vast expanse of lagoons and marshlands in the Ouémé valley, which have traditionally acted as transit and trade conduits. The many small markets along the border, from the North to the South, constitute the backbone of the bustling trade network between the two nations. These marketplaces also serve as the primary points of interaction and trade between rural and urban residents. The border area has historically been the epicenter of commercial activity between the two nations. Since colonial times, the Southeast, with its various local marketplaces, notably Lagos and Badagry, has been the epicenter of commercial activity.

Consequently, the southern border zone between Lagos and Sémé-Podji is highly crowded (Ojiakor *et al.* 2021). Today, the economic needs of the big cities of Porto Novo, Cotonou, and Lagos, which are linked through the border corridor in the South, are constitutive of this cross-border vitality. The porous nature of the boundaries exacerbates this. Along the whole border is a maze of small rivers and streams that have never been restricted and are unmonitored by law enforcement and border control. The lagoon between Porto Novo and Lagos, as well as its pirogue traffic, helps transfer agricultural products like rice and cooking oil. Today, the border is crucial for both nations and the subregion. Remarkably, the Beninese economy relies heavily on informal commerce with its more prominent neighbor (Nigeria), especially re-exporting products. These operations are profitable because Nigeria and Benin have not harmonized their economic policies. In addition to having two independent monetary systems, the naira and the CFA franc, the discrepancy in import tolls, which are often higher in Nigeria, have fostered undeclared economic activity and produced profits through re-exportation operations. According to *Laboratoire d'Analyse Régionale et d'Expertise Sociale* (LARES), both Benin and Nigeria have predicated their development agendas on re-exportation: Benin imports goods from Europe and Asia before shipping them to Nigeria (Meyer 2008). According to estimates, informal cross-border commerce accounts for over 75% of the Beninese GDP (Golub 2021, 212). This statistic, which contrasts with the norm of 43 percent for sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrates the Beninese economy's reliance on this sector and its strategic

position as one of *L'Etat- entrepôt.* With its enormous and continuously expanding domestic consumer market, Nigeria is Benin's primary trade partner. On the Nigerian side, informal cross-border commerce accounts for over 20 percent of the country's GDP. It includes transactions with Nigeria's neighbors, particularly Niger and Cameroon. Thus, there is an uneven connection, with Benin being considerably more reliant on Nigeria's (illegal) market's accessibility than vice versa. In the past, Nigeria has taken advantage of this by utilizing its border regulations to demonstrate its authority. In 2003, when Obasanjo closed some of the borders between Nigeria and Benin, the Beninese economy was in dire straits. Gasoline is a crucial product illegally smuggled into Benin. Large volumes of gasoline are smuggled into Benin from Nigeria, which is cheaper (Burgis 2016). This illegal trade is a significant source of income for many residents of the border communities. In 2004, 73 percent of the Beninese market was filled with illegally imported gasoline, which is more accessible in distant areas and less expensive than the gasoline sold by the state-owned SONACOP (Burgis, 2016).

ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES AND CRIMINALITY AT THE BORDER OF BENIN AND NIGERIA

Informal commerce, both legal and criminal, is the most prevalent transnational activity within the Benin-Nigeria border. Despite growing sub-regional and international collaboration, cross-border criminal operations remain a significant factor in sub-regional insecurity. In recent years, the complexity of TOC has expanded dramatically. This development has happened concurrently with a more significant commitment to the free movement of people and products in the ECOWAS area, intended to foster regional progress and stability. TOC has existed in West Africa since the 1960s when individuals and international syndicates operated on a lower scale.

Numerous transnational criminal operations occur over the Nigerian-Beninese border. They include the trafficking of small guns and light weapons, drugs, and human beings, as well as cross-border armed assaults, after which offenders often flee to avoid punishment. Like other border areas in West Africa, the porous border between Nigeria and Benin and poor administration on both sides encourage transnational crime. Recently, crime has surged in and around large cities and border towns. Some communities, such as Djoffin (Bénin, in Médédéjonou), became actual exchange marketplaces for stolen goods and contraband, and they formed part of a larger criminal trade network. In both border towns, informal merchants and criminals find sanctuary and collaboration, making them difficult to apprehend. In 2003, the TOC between Benin and Nigeria rose substantially, including an international robbery network headed by the notorious Hamani Tijani, resulting in repeated Nigerian border closures (Adeola and Oluyemi 2012). Armed assaults, extortion at illegal checkpoints, and criminal activity are common along the corridor between Benin and Nigeria. The most prominent example would be the 2008 double assault on several banks at the Dantokpa market in Cotonou by Nigerian criminals who illegally entered the nation through the lagoon. In addition to the deaths and injuries, a substantial sum of CFA was taken from banks and market merchants (Ojiakor *et al.* 2021). In addition, the Beninese-Nigerian border is notorious for smuggling drugs, small guns, and light ammunition from Benin to Nigeria. Human trafficking is also rampant: 20,000 children in West and Central Africa are subjected to forced labor and trafficking. Many of these children

travel from Burkina Faso, Togo, and Benin to Nigeria and Europe, where they live and work in slave-like conditions (Ayittey 2005).

There is little up-to-date information on illicit small arms and light weapons illegally smuggled into Nigeria through the Benin-Nigeria border. This is partly a result of the illegal nature of the transactions. The lack of information is also due to poor record-keeping. The Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) and the police keep records of arms seizures and arrests, but the data is inconsistent and often incomplete (Babaita 2020).

A widely cited estimate by the Small Arms Survey (2003) suggests that there are seven to ten million illicit small arms and light weapons in West Africa. An estimated one million (Babaita 2020) to three million small arms and light weapons are in circulation in Nigeria alone. These are rough estimations based on population size and levels of conflict. Although uncertain and somewhat outdated, they nevertheless indicate the scale of the problem. Civilians are said to hold the majority of weapons in Nigeria. A 2001 estimate claimed that 80 percent of the weapons in civilian possession had been obtained illegally because of strict laws on civilian acquisition and possession (Tella *et al.* 2018). As these laws are still strict, we can assume that the proportion of illegal weapons remains high.

According to the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), a total of 2,294 arms seizures with a value of 1.8 billion nairas (11.4 million USD) were made throughout the country between January and June 2012 (Oftedal 2013). Weapons transit illegally into Nigeria via sea ports and across land boundaries. The transactions are difficult to trace, but many transit countries are often mentioned, including the four neighboring countries Benin, Chad, Niger and Cameroon, and Guinea-Bissau and Gabon. The three main entry areas for arms smugglers are said to be in the South-West (Idi-Iroko in Ogun State and Seme in Lagos State), in the South (the port city of Warri in Delta State), and the North-East at the border with Niger and Cameroon (Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States) (Odoh and Uchenna 2015).

The weapons' origins are uncertain, but weapons seized by the NCS have been traced back to various countries, including Iran and China (Odoh and Uchenna 2015). Weapons have also been recirculated from other conflict zones in the region.

BOKO HARAM CRIMINALITY AND BENIN-NIGERIAN BORDER INFLUENCE

Boko Haram uses various weapons in its attacks, ranging from knives and machetes to machine guns and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Their weapons appear to have become more advanced gradually. In 2010, the group began using explosives for the first time, and in June 2011, the group conducted the first suicide attacks recorded in Nigerian history, using vehicle-borne IEDs. However, the most common method of Boko Haram attacks is still drive-by shootings from motorcycles using small arms. Specifically, Nigeria's internal security is influenced by events in the Benin Republic due to the shared geography and history of the two nations. For instance, the severity of transnational crimes such as smuggling and small-illegal weapons trafficking in Benin has grave implications for the security of Nigeria. As a result, Nigeria enacted various regulations to respond more effectively to security threats emanating from the Republic of Benin. Mohammed *et al.* (2019) produced research that used content analysis to investigate the significance of the Nigeria-Benin land border and how it affects the

interdependence of the two sister states on the border, as well as its progressive implications on Nigeria's internal security. The research discovered that Nigeria-Benin links had existed since before the arrival of colonial overlords, with economic activity and anthropological commonalities between ethnic groups in the two nations. This assured a long-lasting connection, even after the colonial rulers divided the territory. At the same time, symbiotic links between the nations facilitated the occurrences of weapons smuggling and their rivalry with Nigeria's national security. This resulted in various attempts to combat the issue, culminating in the Nigerian government's closing the border entirely. The article discussed Nigeria-Benin border insecurity, which has a strong relationship with the current research, designed to analyze how border instability has influenced insecurity in northwest Nigeria.

According to Blum (2014), the most significant security concern along the Nigeria-Benin border has been the occurrence of small arms smuggling. According to the research findings, the border between the two nations remains the region's most critical economic and strategic location. Blum researched the cultural and physical environment of the Beninese-Nigerian border and clarified the porousness of the border and the growing fear of criminal activity between the two sisters nations over the years. He analyzed the cultural characteristics of the border region, illicit companies over the border, and transnational criminal activities as the most pervasive and significant difficulties in the region, which remain numerous. These areas attracted so many illegal activities, such as smuggling small arms and light weapons (SALWs) and border disputes, because criminals considered the area perfect for their cruel behavior to accomplish their intended aims without trial. The biggest issue with the Nigeria-Benin border is the lethal activity of Boko Haram in the northern portion of the nation, which aids their operational crossing into the Benin Republic. Furthermore, the author discovered that the mobility of people and the trade of products had facilitated global economic events across nations.

Smuggling of arms across the land border of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin has, over time, increased and intensified the number and destructive nature of robberies, the persistent effect of ethnic militias, and their associated conflicts (Eliagwu 2003). It was estimated that by 2002, there had been about fifty violent conflicts in Nigeria, resulting in thousands of deaths and leaving several people dispossessed. The escalation of arms smuggling and their influx into Nigerian societies have added significantly to the country's national security burden, with the attack on former President Obasanjo's daughter falling victim to criminal activities, resulting in the deaths of two innocent children and security personnel (Eliagwu 2003). Another report revealed in 2003 by Benin Republic Television indicated the interception of cargo loaded with SALWs. The cargoes were purportedly transited into the country by Hamani Tijani (Adeolaand Oluyemi 2012).

It is illegal for anyone to acquire guns in Nigeria. Thus, since Boko Haram cannot lawfully acquire weapons and supplies to improve its planning and attacks, it strongly relies on smuggled items into the country. Onapajo *et al.* (2012) also claim that Boko Haram smuggles most of its weaponry into Nigeria via Nigeria's neighboring nations, Cameroon and the Benin Republic. The smuggling of these weapons has been made possible in part by the porous nature of Nigeria's borders, the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which facilitates migration among western African

states, and the long-standing ethnolinguistic and historical ties between the Benin Republic and northern Nigerians.

In 2010, a shipment of Iranian rocket launchers, grenades, and other explosives was intercepted between the borders of Benin and Nigeria, causing a diplomatic incident between the two nations and later between Iran and Senegal, which accused Iranian security forces of using the route to supply weapons to its Casamance rebels (Akerele 2021). In October 2012, the Nigerian government seized a ship and detained its 15 Russian crew members on suspicion of weapons smuggling after discovering several firearms and around 8,500 rounds of ammunition aboard the vessel between Benin and the Nigerian border (Winter 2013). In 2021, the Nigerian minister of foreign affairs, Geoffrey Onyema, met with his counterpart from the Benin Republic, Aurelien Agbenonci, to discuss the smuggling of small guns, light weapons, and narcotics into the nation, he averred in an interview:

> We will look into all these, and we're going to report to the two presidents. We more or less agree on a mechanism where Nigeria's intelligence security and customs will, together with Beninoise counterparts, be able to monitor the borders and ports in Benin to ensure we don't have smuggling of small arms and light weapons and drugs (Adepegba 2021).

In 2022, the Nigerian Minister of Information, Lai Mohammed, led a team to the Seme border with the Benin Republic. The minister said that the failure of Nigeria's neighbors (Benin Republic) to comply with several MOUs and the ECOWAS transit protocol contributed to the decision of the Nigerian government to consider sealing the borders. He said:

> Unfortunately, experience has shown that our neighbors do not comply with this Protocol. In most cases, five containers are loaded onto one truck and duty is paid as one truck. This improper trans-loading of transit goods makes it impossible to properly examine such goods, resulting in the importation of illicit goods, including arms and ammunition, without being detected (Tunji 2022).

Before using automatic guns, grenades, and explosives against fortified or vulnerable positions, Boko Haram has often begun its operations by striking opportune targets with small arms. Many of the group's first weapons are thought to have been captured by security forces. However, after the 2009 crackdown on the sect by the security services, the group's offensive capabilities, which included the deployment of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), sophisticated grew rapidly due to the smuggling from neighboring countries via porous borders and networks.

CONCLUSION

Although certain illegal, violent acts have historical roots, the continuous availability of SALWs is a pivotal contributor to the rise in such acts. Over time, SALWs have accumulated through smuggling across borders, facilitating their proliferation. As the paper shows, the proximity of Nigeria's borders to Benin has historically facilitated the movement of illegal weaponry into the nation. As a result, smuggling networks and armament transfers have

been equally prevalent. Thus, Boko Haram insurgencies in Nigeria and abroad prompted the fear of allowing the accessibility of weaponry into Nigeria and the prospect that insurgent organizations and other criminals may use these arms to destabilize the government. The occurrence of transnational criminal activities over Nigeria's land boundaries is vital to the country's continued peace. Nigeria's land boundaries with the Republic of Benin are the most significant of all her borders.

Recommendations

In response to the escalating concerns that contribute to the current global security challenges and Nigeria in particular, the research suggests the following policy implications for Nigeria:

1. The border lines must be reversed and redefined: regional organizations such as ECOWAS and concerned states should come to the aid of border insecurity by revisiting and redefining borderlines with anthropological features in mind to prevent claims of dual citizenship and illegal smuggling of SALWs;
2. Government should be able to account for armaments released to security agencies: It is the obligation of the government to be aware of the number of guns released to maintain security and to be able to check for missing arms regularly to regulate the weapons' excessive circulation.
3. Employment opportunities and eradication of poverty: employment opportunities and equal distribution of resources should be encouraged to bridge the existing gap between the haves and the have-nots to reduce the level of poverty and avoid youth recruitment into Boko Haram;
4. An increase in the number of security personnel and the provision of modern working tools are required to match the problematic insecurity situation in the country;
5. Employment and equipping additional security agencies
6. Participation and aid from the community: Different societal segments, including youth associations, should be involved in mobilizing and socializing society regarding the negative repercussions of criminal activities.
7. There is a need for more vital coordination between security services and residents to battle the scourge of cross-border proliferation of small guns and light weapons between Benin and Nigeria.
8. There is a need for a security network structure across West African nations to enable efficient border control and security coordination between the nations to prevent the growth of SALWs and other criminal activities.

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